

Religious Studies 2ER3: Religion, the Body and the Machine (Fall 2017)

Instructor: T. Kroeker, UH 117 (x23385); kroekert@mcmaster.ca

Office hours: Tuesday 2:30-3:30 p.m. or by appointment

Class sessions: Mon. & Wed. 10:30 – 11:20 in HSC 1A4

****This is a draft syllabus subject to change****

Course description

Religious conceptions of embodiment are related to a range of ethical issues in technology, health, and the meaning of life: sexuality, food and the culture of eating, bioengineering and eugenics, designer babies, cosmetic enhancement, and artificial intelligence. This course inquires about the religious ethics of embodiment and disembodiment in various technological contexts of contemporary life. This term we will examine the religious roots underlying technological progressivism and transhumanism (the view that machines are the next stage in evolutionary development), as well as religious critiques of those movements in relation to the above ethical issues.

Required texts

Wendell Berry, *Remembering*
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
Ivan Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*
Mark O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*

Other course materials will be made available on Avenue to Learn.

Evaluation

Participation	20%
Term tests 2X25	50%
Final essay	30%

Requirements

- 1) Participation: Students are expected to prepare for weekly classes by carefully and thoroughly reading all assigned materials. Each week students will bring a one page typewritten class preparation which includes: one central issue/problem in the assigned course material that shows why it is an issue or problem in this course, one question for clarification, and one discussion starter related to the course. These will be submitted in person at one of the weekly class sessions for which readings are assigned.
- 2) Term tests: In class tests of 50 minutes covering materials taken up in the lectures and readings to that point (before and between tests) in the term.

- 3) Final essay: Each student will write a short essay of ca. 2000 words (ca. 8 double-spaced typewritten pages), a comparative analysis using the work of Ivan Illich on religion as a source for embodied and disembodied visions of salvation/liberation/human fulfillment. More information on this will be provided, but no secondary sources beyond course texts will be required. Final essays will be submitted at the last class. Late work will be downgraded 1 grade point per day (e.g., A- to B+) unless a prior arrangement has been made with the instructor. All written work must be the student's own and strictly adhere to the guidelines on academic ethics as specified in university policy..

Course Outline:

First class: Syllabus and orientation (Sept. 6)

Week 1: Introduction (Sept. 11 & 13)

Read Mark O'Connell, "the Immortality Bus" (Avenue)
Read Ivan Illich, chps. 1 & 2

Week 2: Origin Stories (Sept. 18 & 20)

Read O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, pp. 1-69
Read Illich, chps. 3, 4 & 7

Week 3: Brave New World (Sept. 25 & 27)

Read Huxley, *Brave New World*
Read Theodore Kaczynski, "Industrial Society and Its Future"

Week 4: Brave New World (Oct. 2 & 4)

Read Huxley, *Brave New World*
Read Samuel Butler, "Darwin Among the Machines"

Week 5: Term break (Oct. 9-15)

Week 6: Recap (Oct. 16); class test on previous materials (Oct. 18)

Week 7: Sexuality and Health (Oct. 23 & 25)

Read Wendell Berry, "Sexuality, Economy, Freedom and Community"
Read Ivan Illich, chps. 7, 8 & 13

Week 8: Sexuality, Animality, Sociality (Oct. 30 & Nov. 1)

Read Wendell Berry, *Remembering*

Week 9: Sexuality, Embodiment, Liberation (Nov. 6 & 8)

Read Wendell Berry, *Remembering*
Read Ivan Illich, chp. 19

Week 10: Technological Salvation (Nov. 13 & 15)

Read O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, remaining chapters

Week 11: No class Nov. 20; class test on materials after week 6 (Nov. 22)

Week 12: Religious reconsiderations: Illich's thesis (Nov. 27 & 29)

Ivan Illich, remaining chapters

Week 13: Conclusion (essays due)

****Please note:** students are expected to attend class and to **bring course materials to class**, as lectures will entail close reading of specific passages/images and class discussion. **Laptops are allowed only for accessing course materials; all other electronic devices are prohibited in class** since they distract from the learning environment this course requires.**

Academic policies:

Departmental

Staff in the office of the Department of Religious Studies will not date-stamp or receive papers and other assignments. Students must submit their assignments in class or to the TAs or professor during their office hours.

University

1. Statement on Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, available at <<http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy>>. The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

(1) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained. (2) Improper collaboration in group work. (3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

2. Note on Changes in the Course

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check her/his McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

3. Social Sciences Faculty E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

4. Use of the MSAF

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work". Please note these regulations have changed beginning Spring/Summer 2015. The timeframe within which the MSAF is valid has been reduced from 5 days to 3 days. The upper limit for which an MSAF can be submitted has been reduced from 'less than 30%' to 'less than 25%' of the course weight. As per the policy, students must immediately follow up with their instructors to request accommodation for any missed academic work. Failure to do so may negate their relief. If you have any questions about the MSAF, please contact your Associate Dean's office.