

PHIL 259: Philosophy and *Star Trek*

Tuesday/Thursday 12:15-1:30 pm
Dr. Eric Vogelstein



Do you like *Star Trek*? Do you like philosophy? Then come nerd-out in PHIL 259: Philosophy and *Star Trek*.

Star Trek episodes raise interesting philosophical questions about morality, politics, the nature of reality, knowledge, and ourselves. In this course, you will watch one or two episodes per week (on your own time) from several different *Star Trek* television series. You will also read contemporary and historical philosophical writings on the issues raised by those episodes. We will then analyze, discuss, and debate those issues in class.

Some (but certainly not all) of the questions we will discuss include:

- Is Data a person? Does he have rights? At what point would a machine have moral standing? What does it take for *anything* to have moral standing?
- Do Vulcans live good lives, despite their lack of emotion? Would it be better for us to be more like them? Are emotions always irrational or “illogical”?
- Is Klingon culture morally bad for promoting violence and war? Or is it just a different, but not immoral, way of life? What is honor, and should we care about it? In general, to what extent is it legitimate to criticize the deeply-held cultural practices of others?
- Is time travel possible? If so, how can we solve the paradoxes of time travel, such as the “grandfather paradox”?
- Would the transporter actually transport *you* across great distances, given that it deconstructs and reassembles your body, or would it kill you and create a perfect replica in your place? What do these sorts of “thought experiments” tell us about what *we* fundamentally are?