Philosophical Ideas in Science Fiction 261— Syllabus

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Generally speaking, science fiction, or, more broadly, speculative fiction of any kind, can be utilized as a vehicle of philosophical exploration in two distinct but interconnected ways. First, its natural accommodation of beings and circumstances of a hitherto unencountered kind permits the postulation of settings and events in which familiar ideas and attitudes can be tested and the limits of their applicability determined. Second, in a manner analogous to mathematics, it can be used to explore what the bounds of coherent speculation are.

Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 Time Travel

H.G. Wells	*The Time Machine* (chapter 1)
Robert A. Heinlein	By His Bootsraps
Donald C. Williams	The Myth of Passage
Michael Dummett	Causal Loops
C.J.S. Clarke	Time in General Relativity
Brian Gerstein	Troud's Plan

Weeks 4, 5, 6 Artificial Intelligence

Isaac Asimov	*I, Robot* ('Reason', 'Runaround')
Olaf Stapledon	*Last And First Men* (ch.XI, sections 1 and 2)
Alan Turing	Computing Machinery and Intelligence
John Searle	Minds, Brains and Programs
Samuel Butler	*Erewhon* (Darwin Among the Machines chs. 23-25)

Weeks 6, 7, 8 The Problem of Other Minds

Lewis Padgett	Private Eye
Edward Bellamy	To Whom This May Come
Ludwig Wittgenstein	*Philosophical Investigations* (sections 239-436)

Weeks 8, 9 Probability and Confirmation

Robert M. Coates	The Law
Antony Ferry, R.C. Dennis	The Mail Order Prophet
J.L. Borges	The Library of Babel
H.G. Wells	The Country of the Blind
W.W. Jacobs	The Monkey's Paw
Bertrand Russell	The Metaphysician's Nightmare

Weeks 9, 10, 11 Personal Identity, Scepticism, and Solipsism

H.G. Wells	The Story of the Late Mr. Elvesham
John Locke	*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (ch. XXVII Identity and Diversity)
Bernard Williams	The Self and the Future
P.F. Strawson	Individuals (ch.2 'Sounds')
Robert A. Heinlein	They
J.L. Borges	Tlön Uqbar, Orbis Tertius
Gene Roddenberry	The Cage (Star Trek first pilot 1965)
O.K. Bouwsma	Descartes' Evil Genius
Ray Bradbury	No Particular Night Or Morning

George Orwell	*Nineteen Eighty-Four* (excerpts (to be specified))
Ludwig Wittgenstein	*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (5.6-5.641)
Bertrand Russell	*Our Knowledge of the External World* (chs. III and IV)
—	*The Analysis of Mind* (Memory)
H.P. Lovecraft	The Shadow Out of Time
Hilary Putnam	Brains in a Vat

Weeks 11, 12, 13, 14 Space, Time, and Mind

Arthur C. Clarke	The Wall of Darkness
Olaf Stapledon	*Star Maker* (chs. XIV and XV)
C.S. Peirce	Abstracts of 8 Lectures (The Topological Basis of the Logic of Continuity)
G.W. Leibniz	Monadology
Immanuel Kant	*Critique of Pure Reason* (The Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection)
Fred Hoyle	*October The First Is Too Late* (ch.7 'Adagio')
Isaac Asimov	The Last Question
Kurt Gödel	A Remark about the Relationship between Relativity Theory and Idealistic Philosophy

There will be a take-home exam. Final grade will be determined by quality of both written work and class participation.

Note: The university has directed that all syllabi make note of the existence of The Rutgers Self-Reporting Absence Website (https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra), as well as of the request that it be utilized by students to indicate the date(s) and reason for their absence from class.