

Philosophical Ideas in Science Fiction 261— Syllabus

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Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Fall 2018, Tue & Thurs 2:50-4:10

Office Hours: By Appointment

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	<i>The Time Machine</i> (chapter 1)
Robert A. Heinlein	By His Bootstraps
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>I, Robot</i> ('Reason', 'Runaround')
Olaf Stapledon	<i>Last And First Men</i> (ch.XI, sections 1 and 2)
Alan Turing	Computing Machinery and Intelligence
John Searle	Minds, Brains and Programs
Samuel Butler	<i>Erewhon</i> (Darwin Among the Machines chs. 23-25)

Weeks 6, 7, 8 The Problem of Other Minds

Lewis Padgett	Private Eye
Adam Smith	<i>The Theory of Moral Sentiments</i> (Part I Section 1 Chapters 1-4)
Edward Bellamy	To Whom This May Come
Ludwig Wittgenstein	<i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (sections 239-436)
Hilary Putnam	Minds and Machines

Weeks 8, 9 Probability and Confirmation

Robert M. Coates	The Law
Antony Ferry, R.C. Dennis	The Mail Order Prophet (episode of the television program Alfred Hitchcock Presents)
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

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Weeks 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 Personal Identity, Scepticism, and Solipsism

H.G. Wells	The Story of the Late Mr. Elvesham
John Locke	<i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> (ch. XXVII Identity and Diversity)
Bernard Williams	The Self and the Future
George Berkeley	<i>A Treatise Concerning The Principles of Human Knowledge</i> (section Of The Principles Of Human Knowledge, paragraphs 1-33)
J.L. Borges	Tlön Uqbar, Orbis Tertius
P.F. Strawson	Individuals (ch.2 'Sounds')
Henri Poincaré	Space and Geometry (in <i>Science and Hypothesis</i>)
Robert A. Heinlein	They
Gene Roddenberry	The Cage (First Star Trek pilot 1965)
O.K. Bouwsma	Descartes' Evil Genius
Ray Bradbury	No Particular Night Or Morning
George Orwell	<i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> (excerpts (to be specified))
Ludwig Wittgenstein	<i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i> (5.6-5.641)
Bertrand Russell	<i>Our Knowledge of the External World</i> (chs. III and IV)
—	<i>The Analysis of Mind</i> (Memory)
H.P. Lovecraft	The Shadow Out of Time
Hilary Putnam	Brains in a Vat

Weeks 13, 14 Space, Time, and Mind

Arthur C. Clarke	The Wall of Darkness
Olaf Stapledon	<i>Star Maker</i> (chs. XIV and XV)
G.W. Leibniz	Monadology
Fred Hoyle	<i>October The First Is Too Late</i> (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, to be submitted either in class or (if e-mailed) either in PDF or plain text format. 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.