

Philosophical Ideas in Science Fiction 261— Syllabus

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Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Fall 2019, 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

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| 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

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| 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

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| 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

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| 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 |

Philosophical Ideas in Science Fiction

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

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| 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

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| 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.