Philosophical Ideas in Science Fiction 261—Syllabus

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Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Fall 2014, Tue & Thurs 2:50-4:10

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, it, in a manner analogous to mathematics, 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

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
J.L. Borges
H.G. Wells
The Library of Babel
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)

Philosophical Ideas in Science Fiction

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

Brian Gerstein Troud's Plan

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.