

Science fiction and philosophy

Advanced BA course
Eötvös Loránd University, fall 2017/18
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Science fiction is an extremely successful, widely known genre with intimate ties to philosophy. Science fictions stories are often said to be philosophical (think of *2001 Space Odyssey* or the *Black Mirror* series), while philosophers often pepper their arguments with little stories that read like science fiction (e.g. Donald Davidson's Swamp Man, or Putnam's brains in vats).

The course explores connections between philosophy and science fiction. Week by week, we'll contrast a philosophical text with SF movies or short stories, taking on such topics as time travel, free will, the reality of the external world, personal identity, and nonhuman intelligence. The core question is whether SF has anything substantive to say about these issues: whether it challenges, complements, or simply talks past, philosophy.

Requirement: term paper (2000 words).

Weekly schedule:

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Time travel
David Lewis: The paradoxes of time travel*
Isaac Asimov: *The End of Eternity*
- 3 Free will and determinism
Peter van Inwagen: The Consequence Argument
Philip K. Dick: Minority report
- 4 Are we living in a simulation?
David Chalmers: The Matrix as metaphysics*
Dark City (1998), *13th Floor* (1999)
- 5 Artificial intelligence
Howard Robinson: *From the Knowledge Argument to Mental Substance*, ch.1.
Her (2013), *Ex Machina* (2014)
- 6 Personal identity
Daniel Dennett: Where am I?*
Total Recall (1990)
- 7 Alien minds
Susan Schneider: Alien minds*
Ted Chiang: Arrival
- 8 Beyond humanity
George J Annas: The man on the Moon*
Splice (2009)

- 9 Science fiction and social criticism
Adorno/Horkheimer: The concept of enlightenment.
Blade Runner (1984), *Cypher* (2002), *RoboCop* (1987)
- 10 Science fiction vs fantasy
Darko Suvin: *The Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, ch.1.
Star Wars
- 11 Science fiction and the philosophy of religion
Ted Chiang: Hell is the absence of God
Stanislaw Lem: *Solaris*

Papers marked with * can be found in Susan Schneider (ed.): *Science Fiction and Philosophy*.

Recommended:

The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction.

The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction.

Ross Cameron: [Improve your thought experiments overnight with speculative fiction](#)