

Science Fiction and Faith: An Exploration of Intersections

CALL – Fall 2016

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Description:

Science fiction has always had many authors that explore theological and biblical topics. Science fiction has imagined the end of faith, the irrelevance of faith, fictional gods, and new kinds of faiths. Science fiction has explored the limits of science, and the ramifications of faith and religious thought for the future. Science fiction also uses metaphor for the theological concepts of good and evil, heaven and hell, etc.

This course will look at science fiction with a theological lens. We'll investigate the relationship of science to faith and religion in science fiction. We'll look at how faith is portrayed in science fiction, and the rich theological landscape that can exist in present in science fiction. We'll explore fictional religions, humans as creator, and the what faith might look like in the future.

The course will include readings from novels and short stories, non-fiction, and include clips of science fiction films and TV.

Course Requirements:

- Listen to audio lectures.
- Readings & Film/TV clips.
- Book Review on *The Sparrow* due week 5.
- 1 short story (2,000 words or more) due at the end.

Books

Mary Doria Russel. *The Sparrow*. Fawcett Columbine. 1996

Stephen J. Gould. *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*. Library of Contemporary Thought. 1999 (Excerpts)

Michelle Murrain. *The Right Asteroid*. Ursa-Minor Publishing. 2012. (Excerpts)

Michelle Murrain. *The Artifact*. Ursa-Minor Publishing. 2016. (Excerpts)

Week 1: Science and its limitations

The name of the genre, "Science Fiction" starts with "Science" and so shall we. What is science exactly? How is science portrayed in science fiction? What are the limitations of science?

Materials for class:

- Bert Thompson, The Limitations of Science and Its Method (<http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=9&article=315>)
- Space.com: Care for Some Science in your Science Fiction? (<http://www.space.com/28225-science-in-fiction-versus-science-fiction.html>)
- Chapters 1-10 of *The Sparrow*

Week 2: Science and Religion

Science and religion have an uneasy history. What does that history look like? How does this potential conflict influence science fiction?

Materials for Class:

- Chapters 10-20 of *The Sparrow*
- Chapter 2 of *Rocks of Ages*
- Fr. Robert Barron: Science and Religion vs. Scientism (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KF8mgwglKGE>)
- Neil DeGrass Tyson on Bill Moyers (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRx6f8lv6qc>)

Week 3: How religion and faith are portrayed in Science Fiction

Because as a genre, science fiction takes and extrapolates our experiences into the future (generally) because faith and religion are a part of our experience, science fiction includes a number of different perspectives on faith and religion.

Materials for class:

- Chapters 20-25 of *The Sparrow*
- Short Story: Nine billion names for God: Arthur C. Clarke
- excerpts from *The Right Asteroid*: Michelle Murrain

Week 4: Science fiction as religious metaphor

What kind of metaphors are used in science fiction for God and religion? How are basic theological concepts (salvation, theodicy) expressed in science fiction?

Materials for class:

- *The Sparrow*, Chapters 25-32
- Clips from "Star Wars"

Week 5: Fictional Religions/Gods

What fictional God(s) exist in science fiction? What kinds of religious practices and organizations have been imagined either for the future, or for alien civilizations

Materials for class:

- The Bajoran Religion on Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bajoran#Religion>)
- Clips from “Star Trek: Deep Space 9”
- The Bene Geserit on Wikipedia: (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bene_Gesserit)
- Clips from “Dune (1984)”

Week 6: Humans as creators

As science becomes more and more advanced, humans become more and more able to be creators – to create new forms of biological and artificial lives and minds. What do we bring into this process? What role does faith play?

Materials for class:

- Clips from “Blade Runner”
- Tim Urban: The AI Revolution: The Road to Super Intelligence (<http://waitbutwhy.com/2015/01/artificial-intelligence-revolution-1.html>)
- Pew Research Center: Human Cloning, Religious Perspectives (<http://www.pewforum.org/2001/05/03/human-cloning-religious-perspectives/>)

Week 7: Future of faith

Since science fiction most often looks to the future – what does the future of faith and religion hold?

Materials for class:

- Pew Research Center: The Future of World Religions (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MF23JLZWDH0>)
- Ed Simon: Predicting the Future of Religion (<http://religiondispatches.org/predicting-the-future-of-religion-a-thought-experiment/>)
- Excerpts from Michelle Murrain: *The Artifact*.