Philosophers Recommend Science Fiction
Eric Schwitzgebel

Consider two possible views of the relationship between philosophy and science fiction.

On the first view, science fiction simply illustrates, or makes more accessible, what could be said as well or better in a discursive philosophical essay. Those who can't stomach purely abstract discussions on the nature of time, for example, might be drawn into an exciting story; but seasoned philosophers can ignore such entertainments and proceed directly to the abstract arguments that are the meat of the philosophical enterprise.

On the second view, science-fictional storytelling has philosophical merit in its own right that is not reducible to abstract argumentation. For at least some philosophical topics, one cannot substitute for the other, and a diet of only one type of writing risks leaving you philosophically malnourished.

One argument for the second view holds that examples and thought experiments play an ineliminable role in philosophical thinking. If so, we might see the miniature examples and thought experiments in philosophical essays as midpoints on a continuum from purely abstract propositions on one end to novel-length narratives on the other. Whatever role short examples play in philosophical thinking, longer narratives might also play a similar role. Perhaps entirely abstract prose leaves the imagination and the emotions hungry; well-drawn thought experiments engage them a bit; and films and novels engage them more fully, bringing along whatever cognitive benefits (and risks) flow from vividly engaging the imagination and emotions. Ordinary literary fiction engages imaginative and emotive cognition about possibilities within the ordinary run of human experience; speculative fiction engages imaginative and emotive cognition about possibilities outside the ordinary run of human experience. Both types of fiction potentially deserve a central role in philosophical reflection about such possibilities.

With these thoughts in mind, I decided to construct a list of philosophically interesting works of science fiction, or "speculative fiction" (SF) more broadly construed. I gathered recommendations from thirty-nine professional philosophers and from two prominent SF authors with graduate training in philosophy. Each contributor recommended ten works of speculative fiction and wrote a brief "pitch" gesturing toward the interest of the work. Not all contributors will share my vision of the value of SF: I asked only that they list ten philosophically interesting "personal favorites".

Listed below are all the writers, directors, and TV series mentioned by at least two contributors, along with the specific recommended works and liberally edited (in a few cases, wholly rewritten) selections from contributors' pitches. I myself have only (so far!) read or seen about half of these works, so to that extent I am relying on the accuracy of the contributors' pitches. The full listings and pitches are available at
http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~eschwitz/SchwitzAbs/PhilosophicalSF.htm.

Novels and Short Stories

An Author Recommended by Eleven Different Contributors

Ursula K. Le Guin

- ***The Left Hand of Darkness*** (1969) First contact story about someone encountering a society with radically different manifestations of gender roles, sexuality, and social norms. (Recommended by De Cruz, Evnine, and Powell)

- **"Nine Lives"** (1969) What is it like to be a clone? And more specifically, what is it like to have one's connection to other clones severed after having been raised together with them? (Kind)

- **"The Word for World is Forest"** (1972) A logging camp on another world uses the native species as slave labor. What is it to be a person? How do (and how should) societies change? (J. Kaplan)

- **"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"** (1973) A purported reductio of utilitarianism. (Blumson, Dever, Weinberg)

- **"The Author of the Acacia Seeds, and Other Extracts from the Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics"** (1974) Always nice when science fiction remembers that linguistics is a science. (Dever)

- ***The Dispossessed*** (1974) Follows a physicist from an "anarchist" society. Reflections on political systems, morality, political organizing. Do all great dreams fail? Is it the nature of all political systems to decay into bureaucracies, or worse? (J. Kaplan, Oppenheimer, Powell)

- ***Always Coming Home*** (1985) A potential human future, set in Northern California, in which humans have returned to a largely primitive and peaceful state of existence, turning their backs on consumerism and, for the most part, technology. (Jollimore)

- ***Changing Planes*** (2003) Airports host people who want to change dimensions in between changing flights; includes a dimension in which everything unnecessary for human life has been removed ("The Nna Mmoy Language"). (Bernstein)

Recommended by Nine

Ted Chiang

- ***Stories of Your Life and Others*** (2002) A collection of short stories on topics such as: What if arithmetic actually was inconsistent; aliens whose language is visual and non-linear instead of linear and temporal; people who disable the part of their brain that makes beauty judgments about other people; what it might be like to develop superintelligence; concrete evidence of the existence of an arbitrary God (various stories recommended by Bein, Keeley, Mandik, Nichols, Powell, Schwitzgebel, Sullivan, Yap).

- **"The Truth of Fact, The Truth of Feeling"** (2013) Examines the unreliability of memory and its social and emotional consequences. (Baker)

Philip K. Dick

- **"The Defenders"** (1953) How might machines placate humans' desire to mindlessly destroy the planet? (Wittkower)

- **"Autofac"** (1955) A short story about the grey goo problem in nanotech, which is, um, a pretty interesting thing to find someone writing about in the '50s. (Wittkower)

- *Time out of Joint* (1959) A neat demonstration of what it would be like to discover that one's entire life and surroundings are fake! (Clark)

- *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) Enslaved androids are biologically almost indistinguishable from human beings but lack instinctive empathy – how much does that matter? (Sullivan, Wittkower)

- *Ubik* (1969) A disturbing world where appearances and reality seem to come apart, and out of multiple potential versions of reality, it's not clear what is real, if anything. (Cameron)

- *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* (1974) If Dick doesn't make you paranoid you're probably not real. Here he explores celebrity and identity via a drug which snatches the targets of a user's thoughts into a parallel reality. (Clarke, J. Kaplan)

- *Radio Free Albemuth* (written 1976, published posthumously in 1985) Time stopped in the first century A.D., and restarted in 1945. Come up with a theory of time to make that consistent! (Dever)

- *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) An undercover drug enforcement agent loses touch with reality. Who are we, when we pretend to be who we are not? (J. Kaplan)

- **"Imposter"** (1986) Dick struggling to understand the self and self-understanding. (Bein)

Recommended by Seven

Greg Egan

- **"Learning to Be Me"** (1990) On consciousness and identity. (Chalmers)

- **"The Infinite Assassin"** (1991) How are we related to our counterparts throughout the multiverse? (Kind)

- *Axiomatic* (1995) Stories on topics such as: a method for sending messages to the past so that everyone learns future history as well as past history; computational alteration or replacement of biological brains and their consequences for moral responsibility and personal survival and identity. (Easwaran)

- *Diaspora* (1997) (also *Permutation City* [1994]) If we could upload our minds into giant computers, including duplicating ourselves, backing ourselves up, radically altering our sensory experiences and personalities, what would be the consequences for personal identity and the meaning of life? (Frankish, Mandik, Schwitzgebel)

- **"Reasons to be Cheerful"** (1997) The protagonist gains the ability to adjust his mental well-being moment by moment. (Nichols)

Recommended by Six

Stanisław Lem

- *The Star Diaries*, **"The Twentieth Voyage"** (1957, trans. 1976) Time travel, fraught with causality problems and problems of self. (Bein)

- *Solaris* (1961, trans. 1970) A massive and inscrutable alien being that may or may not be attempting to communicate with people via reproductions of people from the past. (Jollimore, Oppenheimer)

- *Return from the Stars* (1961, trans. 1980) What is the value of suffering, danger and risk, and what can happen if they are removed? (Fokt)

- *The Cyberiad* (1965, trans. 1974) Philosophically-themed stories about constructor engineers Trurl and Klapaucius trying to outdo one another. (Mag Uidhir)

- *His Master's Voice* (1968, trans. 1983) A "first contact" story exhibiting deep pessimism about the possibility of transcending the conceptual boundaries set by one's species nature. (Jollimore, Palma)

- *The Futurological Congress* (1971, trans. 1974) On distinguishing reality from hallucination. (Fokt, Mag Uidhir)

- *Golem XIV* (1981, trans. 1985) From the point of view of an AI which achieves consciousness, raising issues in philosophy of mind and ethics. (Fokt)

- *Fiasco* (1986, trans. 1987) The linguistic and cognitive limitations on understanding and communicating with alien life forms. (Fokt)

Recommended by Five

Isaac Asimov

- **"Evidence"** (1946) Probes the plausibility of the Turing Test. (Kind)

- *I, Robot* (1950) Classic short stories on the relationship between humans and non-human intelligences, including the Three Laws of Robotics. (Schneider, Yap)

- *The End of Eternity* (1955) A complex time-travel structure with time police hanging out in metatime. (Chalmers)

- *The Gods Themselves* (1972) What is personal identity? (E. Kaplan)

Robert A. Heinlein

- **"Jerry Was a Man"** (1947) What it means for someone to be human, with the protagonist a genetically-modified chimpanzee. (De Cruz)

- **"–All You Zombies–"** (1959) A looping and incestuous time-travel story. (Blumson, Cameron, Campbell)

- *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* (1966) Libertarian lunar society, and there's no such thing as a free lunch (De Cruz)

- *Job: A Comedy of Justice* (1984) A literalist interpretation of the Book of Job playing out across multiple actualized possible worlds. (De Smedt)

China Miéville

- *The City & The City* (2009) A particularly adventurous instance of exploratory metaphysics. (Dever)

- *Embassytown* (2011) An alien society that cannot speak falsely first learns from humans how to make similes, and ultimately learns how to lie, changing them irrevocably. (Cameron, Dever, Oppenheimer, Powell, Weinberg)

Charles Stross

- *Accelerando* (2005) Depicts what living through the technological singularity would be like; "mind-bending future shock" is an insufficiently hyperbolic superlative (Chalmers, Easwaran, Mandik, Oppenheimer, Schwitzgebel)

Recommended by Four

Jorge Luis Borges

- **"On Rigor in Science"** (1946, trans. 1970) Map-making has "advanced" such that the only acceptable map of the empire is one of the exact same scale as the empire itself. (Yap)

- *Labyrinths* (1962 English-language collection of stories mostly published in the 1940s) Every story is philosophically weird and interesting in multiple ways, with repeating themes of infinitude, temporality, repetition, and metaphysical idealism. (Blumson, Kind, Schwitzgebel)

Ray Bradbury

- **"A Sound of Thunder"** (1952) Time travelers on safari change the past by being lazy and straying off the path. (Roy-Faderman, Schneider)

- *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) State-administered book burning, anaesthetised life, an eloquent hymn to the power of the written idea. (Clarke)

- *Dandelion Wine* (1957) A rumination about what it means to really live, love, and be happy, includes an attempt to build a virtual reality "happiness machine", a tragic love story about a reincarnated lover, a ready-to-die great-grandma's thoughts on immortality, and bottling all the joys of a summer day into a bottle of dandelion wine. (Cash)

P. D. James

- *Children of Men* (1992) What would life on Earth be like if human beings suddenly lost the ability to have children? This novel is a compelling and disturbing imagining of the extinction of the human race (De Cruz, Easwaran, Jollimore, Powell)

Neal Stephenson

- *Diamond Age* (1995) A post-scarcity (sort of) world in which any material can be constructed by nanotechnology; explores the role of education, economics, and class structure of a post-scarcity Earth, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality. (Cash)

- *The Baroque Cycle* (2003-2004) Historical novels, developed around interactions between Newton and Leibniz, exploring the origins of modern science and finance in counterpoint with alchemical memes. (Horst)

- *Anathem* (2008) A sci-fi adventure book starring a philosopher-monk-hero, where major plot twists involve the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, and debates over Platonism in metaphysics. No, really. (Cash, Easwaran, Horst, Weinberg)

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

- *Player Piano* (1952) Technology has rendered most humans superfluous. (Jollimore)

- *The Sirens of Titan* (1959) A starkly beautiful spiral through loneliness, omniscience and the meaning of life. (Clarke)

- **"Welcome to the Monkey House"** (1968) Population control, assisted suicide, variable attitudes towards sex and sexuality (Roy-Faderman)

- *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) Festooned with problems of ethics, causality, and free will vs. determinism. (Bein)

Gene Wolfe

- *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* (1972) Addresses the issue of personal identity through the Colonialist lens. (Mag Uidhir)

- **"The Hero as Werwolf"** (1975) What is evil? What is the role of universalizability in ethics? (E. Kaplan)

- *The Book of the New Sun* (1980-1987) A haunting work about the experience of finitude. (Evnine, Mag Uidhir)

Recommended by Three

Edwin Abbott

- *Flatland* (1884) Written from the point of view of 2-dimensional beings in a 2-D world (the "author" of the book is "A Square") upon their interaction with the 3rd dimension. (Blumson, Keeley, Oppenheimer)

Douglas Adams

- *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (five volume "trilogy", 1979-1992) The babel fish disproves god; the cow wants to be eaten; the total perspective vortex; time is an illusion, lunchtime doubly so; and 42. (Cash, Chalmers, Nichols)

Margaret Atwood

- *A Handmaid's Tale* (1985) A theocratic dictatorship has emerged in which women are severely repressed and must struggle to gain agency and community. (Cameron, Roy-Faderman)
- *Oryx and Crake* (2003) Brilliant genetic engineer destroys the human race and creates a superior replacement, as told by the last surviving human. (Briggs)

R. Scott Bakker

- *Prince of Nothing* (trilogy 2003-2006) High fantasy in the spirit, but not the style, of Tolkien, indebted to both Thucydides and Camus. (Wittkower)
- *Neuropath* (2008) Neuroscience horror. Semantic Apocalypse. Your brain is not your friend. (Bakker, Wittkower)
- **"Reinstalling Eden"** (with Eric Schwitzgebel, 2013) On the relationship of human "gods" to the artificial intelligences they create. (Schneider)

Iain M. Banks

- *The State of the Art* **and** *Surface Detail* (1989 and 2010) Broad-ranging explorations of the limits of utopia, the beauty of flawed humanity, the role of scarcity and risk and fragility in human life, virtual paradises and hells and real war, and the possibility that important aspects of life might be lost when one can have and do whatever one likes. (Cash, Nichols)

Octavia E. Butler

- **"Bloodchild"** (1984) Men are forced to bear the progeny of aliens in a gory and powerfully emotional analogy of motherhood, portrayed as a paradoxically enjoyable form of abuse. (Clarke, Kind)
- *Parable of the Sower* (1993) Gender roles, and the significance of empathy in discharging our responsibilities for each other. (Evnine)

Italo Calvino

- *Cosmicomics* (1965, trans. 1968) Old man Qfwfq recounts stories of his youth, when he and his relatives witnessed the Big Bang, the formation of the galaxies, the time when the moon was so close to the earth you could jump from one to the other, the evolution of land animals, and other historic events. (Bernstein, Briggs)
- *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (novel, 1979; trans. 1981) It's hard to get past the beginning of this second-person philosophical metafiction, but you can get to the end (Blumson)

Orson Scott Card

- **"Kingsmeat"** (1978) A classic problem for utilitarianism, with a side order of tasty human steaks. (Bein)

- *Ender's Game* (1985) Kids in military school in space, learning to fight the war to end all alien wars. Totalitarian governments. Xenophobia. Military tactics. Blogging... What more could you want? (Sullivan, Wittkower)

William Gibson

- **"Johnny Mnemonic"** (1981) How to regulate the modification of humans and other intelligent organisms? (Roy-Faderman)

- *Neuromancer* (1984) Watershed novel credited with euthanizing the Myth of Progess in science fiction. (Bakker)

- **"The Winter Market"** (1985) A producer works directly with artists' emotions. On the nature of art, consciousness, and maybe immortality. (J. Kaplan)

Daniel Keyes

- *Flowers for Algernon* (1959/1966) On personal identity, mental disability, and our responsibilities to persons who are not neurotypical (Bein, De Cruz, Roy-Faderman)

George R. R. Martin

- **"With Morning Comes Mistfall**" (1973) A scientific expedition comes to debunk to a local myth. Is there value in remaining willfully ignorant of what we could easily learn? (J. Kaplan)

- *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-present) An extended meditation on the nature of power, set in a mediaeval/magical world. (Cash, Easwaran)

Larry Niven

- *Ringworld* **and sequels** (1970-2004) An enormous engineered world provides a context for exploration of the variability of the human phenotype and three alien species. (Horst)

- *A Hole in Space* (1974) Teleportation acts as social lighter fluid, enabling the formation of dangerously volatile "flash mobs", as well as adding new depths a to murder mystery challenge. (Clarke)

- *The Mote In God's Eye* (with Jerry Pournelle, 1974) First contact, not so much between species, as between technical intelligences (corresponding to the angels and devils of our own scientific natures). (Bakker)

George Orwell (Eric A. Blair)

- *1984* (1949) In a grimy Stalinist state, thought is controlled, history rewritten, and the minds of nonconformists ruthlessly reshaped. (Clarke, Frankish, Palma)

Recommended by Two

J. G. Ballard

- **"The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista"** (1962) A man drives his wife to kill him, also inadvertently (but foreseeably) programming his "psychotropic" house to later attempt to kill its new owners. (Wittkower)

- *The Disaster Area* (1967) Story collection. What happens if we switch off sleep? How does it feel to live in a towerblock of infinite height and breadth? What would life look like in reverse? (Clarke)

David Brin

- *Kiln People* (2002) What if you could temporarily put your consciousness into a disposable, self-destructing copy of yourself, which could then run various errands for you, and whose consciousness would be re-absorbed by yours after 24 hours? (Easwaran, Weinberg)

C. J. Cherryh

- *Chanur sequence* (1981-1992) Biological or cultural roots of behavior, with well-imagined intelligent species in an interstellar, multi-species compact. (Clark)

- *Cyteen* (1988) Issues about identity, cloning, slavery, enacted in part of Cherryh's Alliance/Union universe. (Baker, Clark)

Arthur C. Clarke

- *Childhood's End* (1953) The price of utopia, evolutionary leaps. Could an unchanged humanity be at home in the cosmos? (Clark)

- **"The Nine Billion Names of God"** (1953) Could God's having a purpose for us provide our lives with meaningfulness? (Kind)

Neil Gaiman

- *The Sandman: A Game of You* (1993) A young woman and her female friends on a journey that causes them to examine their identity as friends and as women. (Cameron)

- *Murder Mysteries* (short story 1992, graphic novel 2002) As Heaven enters into late stages of planning for the Creation, an angel is wakened to investigate the very first murder ever. (Weinberg)

Daniel F. Galouye

- *Dark Universe* (1961) Perception in a post-apocalyptic underground world without light (some cultures use echolocation, others have adapted to infrared seeing). (De Cruz, De Smedt)

- *Simulacron-3* (1964) The ultimate brains-in-a-vat / evil demon story, predating *The Matrix*. (De Cruz, De Smedt)

David Gerrold

- ***The Man Who Folded Himself*** (1973) Exhaustive exploration of time-travel enabled narcissistic self-indulgence: meet, greet and *expletive deleted* your temporal counterparts. (Easwaran, Mandik)

Joe Haldeman

- ***The Forever War*** (1974) War against unknowable enemies with an incomprehensible psyche, and soldiers suffering relativistic remoteness (De Smedt, Mag Uidhir)

Russell Hoban

- ***Riddley Walker*** (1980) People trying to make sense of their distant past (us), told in an invented dialect that makes it equally a problem for us to make sense of them. (Dever, Evnine)

Fred Hoyle

- ***The Black Cloud*** (1957) An impending-disaster-for-earth story with a twist: the giant cloud approaching earth is conscious and is surprised to find other conscious beings in the universe. (Bernstein, Horst)

Aldous Huxley

- ***Brave New World*** (1932) Noble savage meets techno-enhanced scientific rational future and comes off badly (Clarke, Roy-Faderman)

Kazuo Ishiguro

- ***Never Let Me Go*** (2005) Chronicles the plight of cloned humans (who do not know they are clones) raised for the sole purpose of donating their organs to "ordinary" humans. (Jollimore, Roy-Faderman)

Ann Leckie

- ***Ancillary Justice*** (2013) Features an AI composed of multiple, spatially distributed, not entirely unified people (Evnine, J. Kaplan)

Doris Lessing

- ***The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*** (1980) Gender essentialism; communication among genders. (Oppenheimer)
- ***The Fifth Child*** (1988) How do we deal with the intolerable when we have an obligation to care for it? (Evnine)

C. S. Lewis

- ***Space Trilogy*** (1938-1945) Explores Christian ideas of the fall, intelligent aliens, angels, celestial intelligences, magic, and the dangers of totalitarianism wrapped in the mantle of science. (Clark, Horst)

Cormac McCarthy

- *The Road* **(2006)** The lengths a father will go to in order to preserve a sense of hope in his young son, even as the world around them crumbles. (Bakker, Sullivan)

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons

- *Watchmen* (1986-87) An almost omnipotent superhero whose perception of time raises questions about free will and evitability, good intentions vs. good consequences. (Bein, Cameron)

Mike Resnick

- **"Kirinyaga"** (1988) Race and gender, justice and moral relativism. (Nichols)

- *Seven Views of Olduvai Gorge* (1994) Humanity, rising and falling, as a ruthless and evil blight upon the universe. (Mag Uidhir)

Joanna Russ

- *The Female Man* (1975) A woman is introduced to her counterparts from three different possible worlds, in which feminism has taken three different historical courses. (Bernstein, Briggs)

Mary Doria Russell

- *The Sparrow* (1996) The Jesuits send a secret mission to an alien civilization before the U.N. can arrive, ending in disaster. (Cash, Sullivan)

Robert J. Sawyer

- *Hominids* (2002) In the parallel universe, Neanderthals became dominant rather than us. Each has two partners, one male and one female. (Yap)

- *Mindscan* (2005) A fellow with an inoperable brain tumor attempts to upload his brain onto a computer and learns the hard way that uploading is no means of survival. (Schneider)

Dan Simmons

- *Phases of Gravity* (1989) An Apollo astronaut who walked on the moon, as he moves through a world that no longer seems to be moving forward (J. Kaplan)

- *Hyperion* (1989) See "The Scholar's Tale" within for some interesting philosophy of religion (Baker)

Olaf Stapledon

- *Star Maker* (1937) The narrator explores the purpose of life and history, through exposure to many kinds of minds across the galaxy. (E. Kaplan)

- *Sirius* (1944) A dog endowed with human intelligence struggles to make sense of love, human irrationality, and the meaning of life. (Schwitzgebel)

Bruce Sterling

- **"Swarm"** (1982) A group of scientists encounter an apparently non-intelligent, superorganism species that resemble earthly social insects. (Keeley)
- *Schismatrix Plus* (1996) Political and economic turmoil in a solar system infested by post human factions (genetically engineered vs cyborgs) and, eventually, extraterrestrial investors. (Mandik)

Theodore Sturgeon

- *Maturity* (stories 1947-1958, collected 1979) Stories exploring the purpose of life and the well-lived life. (E. Kaplan)
- *Venus Plus X* (1960) What is gender, and need it be binary? (Roy-Faderman)

Daniel Suarez (Leinad Zeraus)

- *Daemon*, *FreedomTM,* and *Influx* (2006, 2010, 2014) Cyberpunk thrillers featuring AI, drones, 3D-printing, self-replicating autonomous machine warfare, video games, and virtual reality. (Keeley, Nichols)

James Tiptree Jr., (Alice Bradley Sheldon)

- **"Love is the Plan the Plan is Death"** (1973) A sentient arthropod contemplates free will, but everything he wills happens to match the typical life cycle of his species. (Briggs)
- **"A Momentary Taste of Being"** (1975) Biology and the purpose of life, a planet that might be death or paradise. (E. Kaplan)

Jack Vance

- *The Dying Earth* (1950) Set millions of years in the future where mathematics has become magic and Earth a thing of terrible beauty. (Mag Uidhir)
- *The Languages of Pao* (1957) Sketches a universe in differences in language cause radical differences in cognition. (De Smedt)

Vernor Vinge

- *A Fire Upon the Deep* (1992, also *Children of the Sky,* 2011) A story involving a variety of kinds of minds, including transcendent minds, human minds infused by transcendent minds, and group minds. (Evnine, Schwitzgebel)

Peter Watts

- *Blindsight* (2006) Cogsci savvy tale in which assorted transhumans and extraterrestrials get by just fine without phenomenal consciousness... or do they? (Frankish, Mandik)

H. G. Wells

- **"The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes"** (1895) The definitive counterexample to immunity to error through misidentification of the self. (Dever)

- **"The Country of the Blind"** (1904) How would one go about convincing a group of extremely functional blind people, living in an environment that they have adapted to their needs, of the existence of the visual world? (Keeley)

Connie Willis

- *The Doomsday Book* (1992) How does disease affect our moral and ethical standards? (Roy-Faderman)

- *To Say Nothing of the Dog* (1998) A time-travel romp with a surprisingly philosophically sophisticated ending. (Mag Uidhir)

John C. Wright

- *The Golden Age* **and sequels** (2002-2003) A very far future capitalist utopial; identity, humanity, social control. (Baker, Clark)

Roger Zelazny

- **"For a Breath I Tarry"** (1966) A machine's quest to understand what it's like to be human. (Kind)

- *Lord of Light* (1967) Features naturalistic versions of Hindu gods and reincarnation. Can the status quo be challenged by introducing Buddhism? (De Cruz)

Movies and Television

A TV Series Recommended by Seven Different Contributors

Star Trek: The Next Generation

- **"The Measure of a Man"** (1989) An android is forced to go on trial to prove that he has the right to self-determination and is not merely property. (Recommended by Cameron, Horst, Keeley)

- **"Who Watches the Watchers" / "First Contact" / "Thine Own Self"** (1989, 1991, 1994) The ethics of non-interference in alien civilizations, including the withholding of beneficial advances. (Powell)

- **"Sarek"** (1990) Dementia, social role, telepathy, telempathy, Stoicism, pietas, duty, honor. (Oppenheimer)

- **"The Inner Light"** (1992) An alien probe causes a starship captain to experience life in a long-dead civilization. Identity, memory, survival, and the representation of time. (Frankish)

- **"Ship in a Bottle"** (1993) A sentient holodeck creature demands to be free to live outside of the holodeck and cleverly generates computer simulations within simulations. (Schneider)

Recommended by Five

Christopher Nolan

- *Memento* (2000) The protagonist attempts to overcome drastic amnesia through notes, photos, and tattoos (Chalmers, Palma)

- *The Prestige* (2006) Two different ways of performing the same magic trick raise very different worries about personal identity and one's moral obligations to oneself. (Brophy, Easwaran, Yap)

- *Batman: The Dark Knight* (2008) Classic puzzles from decision theory and ethics are given the twist of unreliability. (Easwaran)

- *Inception* (2010) A con-man transverses through layers of shared dreams in this mind-bending "heist" movie. (Brophy)

Recommended by Four:

Ridley Scott

- *Blade Runner* (1982) Biologically engineered artificial intelligence "replicants" are indistinguishable from humans in almost every way. But they are not seen as "persons". Humans fear them, and use them as off-world slave labor. Loosely based on Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Cash, Easwaran, Schneider, Weinberg)

Recommended by Three

Futurama

- **"Mars University"** (1999) A monkey becomes super-intelligent but can then no longer fit in with his monkey community. (Yap)

- **"Hell is Other Robots"** (1999) Is religion a human creation and if so what purpose does it serve? (E. Kaplan)

- **"Why Must I be a Crustacean in Love?"** (2000) What's the relationship between ethics and sociobiology? (E. Kaplan)

- **"Roswell That Ends Well"** (2001) The grandfather paradox of time travel, with shades of Robert A. Heinlein's "–All You Zombies–" (Campbell)

Duncan Jones

- *Moon* (2009) A solitary moon worker discovers that he is merely a token of a person-type. Or is he the type? (Easwaran, Frankish)

- *Source Code* (2011) A soldier repeatedly awakens on a train, as another man who has mere minutes to find and defuse a time-bomb that will kill them all. (Brophy)

Andrew Niccol

- *Gattaca* (1997) A future society infused with pre-birth genetic engineering stratifies into genetically unlucky and genetically. Bioethics, free will. (Bernstein, Campbell, Palma)

Paul Verhoeven

- *Total Recall* (1990) The protagonist might be a spy who had had his memory erased, mistakenly believing he is an ordinary guy; or is the whole thing taking place in a virtual vacation? Loosely based on Philip K. Dick's "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (Cameron, Cash)

- *Starship Troopers* (1997) The fascistic tropes of American military narratives spoofed too well to be appreciated by American critics or audiences. (Bakker)

Andy & Lana Wachowski

- *The Matrix* **and sequels** (1999-2003) The classic brain-in-vat and virtual reality movie, raising almost every issue in philosophy. (Campbell, Chalmers, Horst)

Recommended by Two

Battlestar Galactica

- Over six seasons (2003-2009), an increasingly complicated dialectic about the original metallic Cylons, the Cylon "skin jobs", and by implication, the nature of humanity and

personhood, reincarnating concurrent clones; also, forays into shared virtual reality. (De Smedt, Horst)

David Cronenberg

- *eXistenZ* (1999) A virtual reality game in which you play a part in a story about a plot to murder the designer of a virtual reality game. (Keeley, Weinberg)

Terry Gilliam

- *Brazil* (1985) A dark, funny dystopian film that explores the individual vs. the state. (Jollimore)

- *Twelve Monkeys* (1995) An example of the no-change view of time travel, where people travel to the past but there are no alterations of past events. (Campbell)

Michael Gondry

- *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) Clementine erases the memories of her relationship with Joel, so Joel tries to have the same procedure. But as his memories begin to disappear, he has a change of heart. (Jollimore, Schneider)

Spike Jonze

- *Being John Malkovich* (1999) The protagonist discovers a portal that lets you experience the world from the perspective of actor John Malkovich. (Keeley)

- *Her* (2013) The single most believable cinematic portrayal of the quotidian consequences of Artificial General Intelligence. (Bakker)

Andrei Tarkovsky

- *Stalker* (1979) People are led to a place in which wishful thinking is successful, guided by the "stalker". (Palma)

- *Sacrifice* (1986) A man makes an irrational personal sacrifice in order to prevent a nuclear war. (Frankish)

Joss Whedon

- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, **Season 5** (2000-2001) Characters grapple with what to do when duty seems to pull you in one direction and acting according to your nature another. (Cameron)

- *Serenity* (2005) How far can a government go to enforce its ideals upon its citizens? (De Smedt)