

Introduction to Science Fiction

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

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review

- ▶ Lovecraft's "Colour": outside in, and other reversals
- ▶ Moore's "Shamblau"
 - ▶ Martians are fine, but sexuality is scary
 - ▶ interplanetary rewriting of:
 - ▶ frontier Western
 - ▶ vampire tale
 - ▶ Medusa myth
 - ▶ adventure bracketed
 - ▶ effects of technique: consider point of view

be reasonable

“I accept nothing on authority. A hypothesis must be backed by reason, or else it is worthless.” (165)

- ▶ How does “Reason” represent reason? What can it do, and what can't it do?

“You can prove anything you want by coldly logical reason—if you pick the proper postulates. We have ours and Cutie has his.”

“Then let’s get at those postulates in a hurry. The storm’s due tomorrow.”

Powell sighed wearily. “That’s where everything falls down. Postulates are based on assumption and adhered to by faith. Nothing in the universe can shake them.” (173)

- ▶ the space station becomes a kind of lab for studying “logic”

“I like you two. You’re inferior creatures, with poor reasoning faculties, but I really feel a sort of affection for you.” (169)

- ▶ estrangement by parody of idea of human superiority

allegories of faith

“There is no Master but the Master,” he [the robot] said, “and QT One is his prophet.” (167; cf. the *shahada* in Islam)

“Can he *handle* the station?”

“Yes, but—”

“Then what’s the difference *what* he believes!” (175)

- ▶ estrangement by parody of religious dogma...turns into surprising pragmatism: get the job done
- ▶ not human *superiority* but human *difference* is estranged

science!

A. No, sir. Scientific truth is beyond loyalty or disloyalty.

Q. You are sure that your statement represents scientific truth?

A. I am.

Q. On what basis? (32)

- ▶ How does the first part of *Foundation* represent science? What can it do, and what can't it do?

sheep/goats

The procedure was much longer and at its end, Gaal said humbly, “Yes, I see now.”...

“Surely you can perform a field-differentiation?”

Gaal felt himself under pressure. He was not offered the calculator pad. It was held a foot from his eyes. He calculated furiously and felt his forehead grow slick with sweat.

He said, “About 85%”?

“Not bad,” said Seldon, thrusting out a lower lip, “but not good. The actual figure is 92.5%.” (22)

- ▶ Why does Asimov use specific numbers here? What do they measure?

Q. Can you prove that this mathematics is valid?

A. Only to another mathematician. (32)

- ▶ universalism of scientific “truth” challenged by its exclusivity
- ▶ science simultaneously validated and circumscribed by its competitive aspect

the novum

Implicit in all these definitions is the assumption that the human conglomerate being dealt with is sufficiently **large** for valid statistical treatment. The necessary size of such a conglomerate may be determined by Seldon's First Theorem which . . . (18; ellipsis in original)

- ▶ the possibility of “social physics” is the chief “meta-empirical” element of this text
- ▶ what is the effect of Asimov's “. . .”?

next

- ▶ get as far as you can in the novel