

Editor's Notes

The Blue Pill Dilemma

Common sense does not seem to have made up its mind as to whether truth is worth pursuing in every instance. The common saying, "Ignorance is bliss," was to my understanding born in irony, but its ironic edge seems to have grown duller lately. Nor is philosophy of one mind about it: Plato brilliantly sets up the tragic contrast between the one enlightened cave dweller and his still-chained, ignorant folks, but he seems to propose in earnest the utilitarian advantages of a few "noble lies" for the greater good of his ideal republic.

Nor is science fiction, for that matter: on one hand the great dystopian epics extol the bravery of the hero that dares to seek beyond the culturally- and governmentally-endorsed falsehoods, while on the other, tales of catastrophic ruin raise continuous objections against the hubris of scientific projects that risk raining destruction upon humanity.

This tension is so frequently explored in science fiction stories that it can be found already in the source narratives of many contributions in previous volumes: as blissful ignorance in Greg Egan's "Reasons to Be Cheerful" (Taylor W. Cyr), political myths in Plato and Asimov (Nathaniel Goldberg), or questioning the hubris of scientists in Frankenstein (Jerold J. Abrams), Doctor Moreau (Dan Dal Monte) and the Westworld movies (Stefano Bigliardi). It was hardly a surprise that, as we asked our contributors and readers to vote for the theme our third volume should explore, "Is Knowledge a Blessing or a Curse?" came up first.

And so we begin our exploration with two articles. Christopher Ketcham (University of Houston Downtown) has tackled one of the most richly textured examinations of the complex dangers of scientific progress that SF has produced, Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the centuries-long saga of a small abbey where scientific knowledge has been lovingly preserved from ravaging post-apocalyptic hordes. Ketcham's "Towards a Biological Explanation of Sin in Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz*" examines the possibility of applying the rising science of epigenetics to an analysis of original sin—the underlying explanation, in Miller's story, of the recurrent cycles of massive self-destruction. Ketcham's article marks our first directly theological entry, showing that SF can also provide a rich source of reflection for what has been since its origins a sister discipline to Philosophy.

The temptation of blissful ignorance has rarely been explored in such poignant terms as in Charlie Kaufman's 2004 movie *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, depicting the dramatic, partly self-inflicted struggle of an everyday man who has requested, following a painful breakup, the targeted erasure of the painful memories of this past love affair, and too late discovering how those experiences have shaped the person he has become. Giorgina Paiella's (UC Santa Barbara) "*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Memory Erasure, and the Problem of Personal Identity" carefully examines the implications that such a possibility presents to competing views of personal identity and personal continuity, and how such richly crafted SF narratives can raise questions of deep interest to a wide variety of interdisciplinary studies on memory, personality and selfhood.

"Don't look for it, Taylor," tells Dr. Zaius to Charlton Heston's character close to the end of the original *Planet of the Apes*. "You may not like what you find." And to the scientists who ask him "Why must knowledge stand still? What about the future?" the wise orangutan replies "I may just have saved it for you," before ordering the destruction of a cave with invaluable archaeological material. This story and its many sequels are brimming with foundational myths and noble lies, and so it is very fortunate that we can also include in this volume Stefano Bigliardi's (Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco) thoughtful review of *Planet of the Apes and Philosophy: Great Apes Think Alike* (Open Court).

And there is more to come. For now, enjoy, and thank you for reading!

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