

Editor's Notes, Vol. 8

New Section: *Charting the Stars*.

A home for your groundwork research.

Alfredo Mac Laughlin

Early in the Journal's short history, two standards were settled for its General and Yearly Theme articles. These standards developed partly from the Journal's Scope & Aim, "to foster the appreciation of science fiction as a medium for philosophical reflection," and partly through our Reviewers' interpretation of this aim. First, an article must advance an original philosophical thesis (thus, not simply "illustrate" a philosophical point, but actually develop a point), and second, the thesis must involve into its argument insights drawn from science fiction narratives – not simply as decoration, but as an integral part of the argument. To these two "intrinsic" standards, of course, one must add the supervening standards of the discipline: clarity, nuance, thoroughness (including an adequate grasp of the current state of the discussion), respect for opposing views, proper citations...

I must here thank our reviewers for their incredible work. You have helped shape a culture of high-quality articles for the Journal. My original vision for the Journal was, to use a technical term, somewhat loosey-goosey by comparison, and I had to quickly adjust it to fit the high standards of our reviewers. But further, you created a culture of collaboration and support, providing amazing levels of commentary and a wealth of suggestions to improve both early drafts and highly polished articles. I can't think of one article we've published that has not been genuinely improved in response to the review. In fact, some of the thanks I am asked to pass forward to our anonymous reviewers sound frankly hyperbolic!

But the two standards left something out, though, as now and then I would receive some very interesting articles gathering a wealth of research – on an author, a tradition, a body of work – yet missing the first standard, an original thesis. In some cases it became possible to rework the article, so that the research would now be at the service of a thesis; in other cases that felt like too much work, or like the thesis would be just "forced" into the manuscript, just to check a requirement when the article was clearly about something else. Thus the need for a new section, housing a different type of article, an article focusing on groundwork research (if I may use "groundwork" as an adjective) which, while still providing an orientation towards its philosophical possibilities, would focus on gathering and organizing useful data, providing prospective authors (and of course, curious, inquiring readers) with a panoramic view of a tradition, a biographical look at an author, or an in-depth exploration of a body of work.

We have called it *Charting the Stars*. It does not aim at the systematic work of the encyclopedist (which can only be planned once the world has been charted), but at the piecemeal work of the explorer, the mapmaker, who take a region of the world and try to make it intelligible. The stars here are the brightest spots in an endless firmament, countless, of course and each one a world; they help us navigate by their light. They represent influential authors with a substantial body of work; series or individual works of particular depth and importance, indicated by copious philosophical literature in their trail; they can represent historical movements or national traditions, so that without being there we can still expand our horizons, learn how big is the world.

So here is my invitation to explorers and mapmakers. If you have particular knowledge (or maybe not “particular” but, say, above-average) of a tradition, an author, an influential work, or a body of scholarly literature in science fiction or fantasy, send us your work! Here are some particulars:

- Works about influential authors should explore their philosophical influences and views to some extent, and how they shape or illuminate their work. (An excellent example is this volume’s [“Jules Verne’s Use of Victorian Scientific Models,”](#) by Quentin R. Skrabec.)
- Works about important works (individual or series) should provide enough information for those unfamiliar with the work; on the other hand, they should not limit themselves to a summary, or to an enumeration of philosophical ideas, but provide insight into the philosophical meaning of structural and symbolic elements, and research influences that may not be evident by reading the text alone.
- Works about a particular tradition, again, should not assume familiarity with works or authors from that tradition, but rather introduce the reader, both as a window and a guide, indicating also shaping forces. (An example of this kind of work is the first half of Lennon Zhang’s work [“The Politics of Truth in China: Ontological-Ethical Dimensions of Science and Science Fiction”](#) in Volume 5 [2022].)
- There are also authors, works and traditions that have attracted a considerable amount of philosophical literature; an article trying to provide some organization into the extant literature can be of enormous use to researchers, saving them from having to research the History of the Invention of the Wheel every single time. An example for this kind of work is found in Stefano Bigliardi’s [““We Don’t Know Exactly How They Work’: Making Sense of Technophobia in 1973 Westworld, Futureworld, and Beyond Westworld”](#) in Volume 2 [2019]).

I look forward to very interesting articles! Please send me your queries to editor.jsfphil@gmail.com.

