

7 Times TV's Most Influential Science Fiction Show Upheld the Value of Every Life

While *Star Wars* will rule the galaxy this holiday season, another space-based franchise should not be forgotten. Marking 50 years in 2016, *Star Trek* has since its inception inspired NASA scientists and the invention of gadgets now used every day—notably, the iPad, universal translators and even handheld ultrasound scanners.

Through all its incarnations on TV and the big screen, *Star Trek* skillfully rips from the headlines issues that most popular entertainment wouldn't touch. The science fiction franchise effectively dramatizes social commentary under the guise of a different time, planet or alien culture.

It remains to be seen if the series' emphasis on ethics and conscience will stay intact in next summer's *Star Trek Beyond*. Because a trailer leaked to the Internet—ahead of its scheduled exclusive as pre-roll for *Star Wars* this weekend—the studio went ahead and released it online.

Perhaps the most influential of all *Star Trek* themes is that the future will be better than the present. For those who uphold the value of life, a better future holds the promise of the individual's worth—independent of one's age, race, ability or development.

It's a recurring theme in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, the first widely successful science fiction show in many decades. (Every episode is available on Netflix Streaming, each approximately 45 minutes.) Winner of 17 Emmys over seven seasons, the show elevated the acting and production values from the original series, charting a way through the stars for many consequential sci-fi journeys to come.

As we boldly go and explore *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, note this TV-PG show sometimes treads into darker places as it deals with life-or-death issues. For more options, Bound4LIFE recently published a list of seven family-friendly pro-life films and seven science-fiction films that venture into life issues.

1. "Hide & Q" (Season 1, Episode 9; 1987)

This early episode chronicles the efforts of Q (a "omnipresent" figure in Star Trek) to tempt the Enterprise bridge crew with impossible dreams. Data (Brent Spiner) is an android who, despite not being programmed with emotion, longs to be human. Geordi La Forge (LeVar Burton) has been blind since birth. Both could be cured at the drop of a hat, at the sacrifice of their human condition—a sacrifice that may prove too costly.

Exploring such themes as genetic modification and strength in weakness, this episode reminds us, as Q (John de Lancie) himself often does throughout the series, that the treasured uniqueness of humanity is often found in its limitations.

2. "The Measure of a Man" (Season 2, Episode 9; 1988)

A cyberneticist wishes to dismantle Data, the only one of his kind, to better understand how his brain was crafted—in order to create more androids to serve Starfleet. It is at first assumed that Data is not sentient (self-aware) and is therefore property, having no right to refuse the procedure that would end his life. Data and Captain Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) fight to disprove that assumption.

"The Measure of a Man" reflects heavily on humanity's own history with slavery—people used as property. Indeed, this turning point in the episode has often been used in college ethics classes for its effective portrayal of why all lives matter.

3. "Half a Life" (Season 4, Episode 22; 1991)

Visiting a culture that practices ritual suicide, a woman on-board the Enterprise falls in love with a scientist. She is devastated to learn he is near his time to undergo this abhorrent "transition" that his society has put into place to avoid infirmity and other struggles of aging.

This narrative obviously tugs at the notion of when a life ceases to have value. Is it when one is no longer able to care for oneself? What if a person is in pain; is there value in suffering itself? With our own nation's unethical shift toward assisted suicide, these are undeniably important questions.

4. "The Masterpiece Society" (Season 5, Episode 16; 1992)

The Enterprise encounters a "perfect," genetically engineered colony on a planet nearing destruction. Several of the inhabitants of this colony must work closely with the Enterprise crew, to whom they believe themselves superior. It is later discovered that there are circumstances where the absence of flaws can be fatal.

Our own society is digging deeper and deeper into genetic engineering. Should we cure the disabled child before he is born? If we cannot, should the child be aborted to spare him and his family the pain? This episode considers the consequences of such actions.

5. "I, Borg" (Season 5, Episode 22; 1992)

In the process of assisting an injured, left-for-dead, adolescent Borg (a cybernetic race with no individual thought), the Enterprise crew discovers that they could use this being to deliver a fatal blow to rid themselves of a mortal enemy that has killed innumerable humans. These plans are reconsidered, however, upon the discovery that this Borg has become an individual.

"I, Borg" delves deeply into a core Star Trek theme: does the good of the many outweigh the good of the few, or the one? The taking of one life of a ruthless race could ensure that entire civilizations survive, but sometimes the right thing is not always a matter of merely enumerating the lives affected.

6. "Tapestry" (Season 6, Episode 15; 1993)

When Captain Picard believes life would be improved by one decision decades before made differently, the quasi-entity Q takes him on a journey to unravel the truth. In the tradition of *It's a Wonderful Life*, "Tapestry" opens up the book of one man's life to discover if removing one page changes the whole story.

While there is value in every life, there are many who feel that their life has none—to others and to themselves. Mistakes often haunt us and cause us to wonder, "*What if?*" Yet this episode makes us consider: "*What if not?*"

7. "Journey's End" (Season 7, Episode 20; 1994)

"Journey's End" sees the return of Wesley Crusher (Wil Wheaton), a former Enterprise crewmember, who becomes motivated to protect a race of people being forcibly relocated from their homes. This dispute also stirs up Captain Picard's related family history.

While this story doesn't focus on the life or death of an individual, it does highlight the value of a society. Humanity has a sordid history of devaluing entire populations. Because they are different from us, some say, they may have no voice in their future. How far can one go to fight for a culture not his own?

Gene Roddenberry, creator of Star Trek, will long be remembered for his vision of a future where people affirm each other's differences and work toward the betterment of mankind. While Roddenberry embraced humanistic atheism, it is glaringly

obvious that biblical themes and spiritual ideas pervade his stories (for instance, he personally introduced the omnipresent Q).

From the dangers of genetic engineering and slavery, to the value of suffering and the protection of the vulnerable, perhaps Roddenberry's life proclaims an even larger truth: God is constantly at work in the lives of His children, whether or not they see themselves as such.

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