

Philosophy in Film

Syllabus Précis

Instructor: Dr. Aaron Smuts

Description

By exploring the philosophical concerns underlying a dozen movies, this course will introduce students to an array of topics that have occupied philosophers for two millennia. We will explore a wide variety of problems, including: What is love? Can we rationally justify our love for another? Do we have any reason to think that there is a god? Is the existence of evil compatible with God's greatness? What is it that makes you, you? Is it rational to fear death? Is any conceivable form of immortality desirable? Do we have free will? Is there virtue in vengeance? What makes a life good for the one who lives it? What's the meaning of life?

Texts

1. *Reason and Responsibility*, eds. Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau. [RR]
2. Numerous articles posted on Blackboard. [BB]

Schedule

- Week 1:** Film as Philosophy — Smuts, "Film as Philosophy: In Defense of the Bold Thesis" [BB] | Livingston, "Theses on Cinema as Philosophy" [BB]
- Week 2:** Worship — "The Little People" (Rod Serling, 1962) | Smuts, "The Little People: Power and Worship" [BB] | Nagasawa and Brown, "Worship" [BB]
- Week 3:** Personal Identity — "Being John Malkovich" (Spike Jonze, 1999) | Williams, "The Self and the Future" [BB] | Dennett, "Where am I?" [RR]
- Week 4:** Problem of Evil — "The Seventh Seal" (Bergman, 1957) | Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" [RR] | Van Inwagen, "A Theodicy" [RR]
- Week 5:** Faith and Reason — "Ordet" (Dreyer, 1955) | James, "The Will to Believe" [RR] | Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" [RR]
- Week 6:** Immortality — "Wings of Desire" (Wenders, 1987) | Williams, "The Markopoulos Case" [BB] | Fischer, "Why Immortality is Not So Bad" [BB] | Smuts, "Immortality and Significance" [BB]
- Week 7:** Time Travel and Fatalism — "La Jetee" (Marker, 1962) and "Happy Accidents" (Anderson, 2000) | Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" [BB] | Taylor, "Fatalism" [BB]
- Week 8:** Love and Authenticity — "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (Peter Hall, 1968) | Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love" [BB] | Baier, "Unsafe Loves" [BB]
- Week 9:** Vengeance — "Point Blank" (Boorman, 1967) | Solomon, "The Virtues of Vengeance" [BB]
- Week 10:** Mind and Machines — "Blade Runner" (Ridley Scott, 1962) | Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs" [RR] | Lycan, "Robots and Minds" [RR]
- Week 11:** Free Will — "Minority Report" (Spielberg, 2002) | Dennett, "I Could Not Have Done Otherwise — So What?" [BB] | Fischer, "Frankfurt-style Examples, Responsibility and Semi-Compatibilism" [FW]
- Week 12:** Friendship and Loyalty — "The Third Man" (Carol Reed, 1949) | Carroll, "The Wheel of Virtue" [BB] | Wartenberg, *Thinking on Screen* [BB]
- Week 13:** Well-being and The Meaning of Life — "Truman Show" (Peter Weir, 1998) | Nozick, "The Experience Machine" [BB] | Parfit, "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best" [BB] | Taylor, "The Meaning of Life" [BB] | Wolf, "Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life"
- Week 14:** "Au hasard, Balthazar" (Bresson, 1966)