

Philosophy & Film
(PHIL 3260, sec. 921)

Course Description

In an earlier time, philosophical thoughts were encountered either on the printed page or through word of mouth. Today, more and more people are being exposed to the world's deepest thoughts through the medium of film. In this more modern age, the role played by the book has become subservient to the more rapid and graphic depictions of motion pictures. While their first critics may have seen moving pictures as an interesting novelty, and though some today may see them as simply a form of entertainment or escapism, movies have rapidly become the way in which a vast number of people encounter many of humanity's greatest insights. In this course, we will try to get a sense of why this medium has so rapidly increased not only in popularity, but in its ability to convey the most profound of ideas, as well as why many people prefer the medium of film to any other.

Course Objectives

The primary objective of the course will be to gain a sense of how films express philosophical ideas. The main point will be to gain an understanding of how meaning is uniquely conveyed through a medium that is perhaps more "life-like" than any other. Among the questions we will address are: Does art just imitate life? What difference does it make that the ideas are conveyed through film, rather than in some other way? Are movies better able to convey certain ideas? Are some things better left unspoken? What's the difference between telling and showing, between words and pictures?

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, the student should have a better understanding of the relation between the discipline of philosophy and the medium of motion pictures. In particular, the student should be able to:

- 1) recognize and define specific philosophical concepts,
- 2) identify films in which those concepts are depicted,
- 3) determine how those concepts were expressed through the medium of film, and
- 4) express their own understanding of the relation philosophical ideas and their cinematic expression.

Course Requirements

Students will be required to watch a variety of films dealing with philosophical topics, and to discuss both the topics themselves as well as how the films convey the ideas involved. They will also be required to keep up on the daily reading assignments, and to discuss their agreements and disagreements with those readings.

Students will also be required to write a brief description of the ideas presented in each film, how they ideas were conveyed, as well as how those ideas might be differently or more effectively expressed.

Each student will also write a term paper on a philosophical topic of his or her choice, using one or more films to show both what is involved in the idea and what was done in order to illustrate its complexity. The paper will be a minimum of 2,500 words in length, and will be due on the last day of class.

Students will also take 2 exams on the readings and on films seen in previous classes.

Attendance

Regular *attendance* is required, and will count toward the final grade. Missing a day of class will result in the loss of one letter grade (e.g. A + 1 day of absence = B).

Grading

The term paper will count for 30% of the overall score, and each exam will count as 30%. The remaining 10% will be determined by attendance and class participation.

Required Texts

Mary M. Litch, *Philosophy Through Film*, Routledge, 2015

Colin McGinn, *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact*, 2005

Also Recommended:

Hugo Bedau - *Thinking and Writing about Philosophy* and/or

Zachary Seech - *Writing Philosophy Papers*

Additional readings will vary according to each student's chosen paper topic.

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and to evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the UNO Judicial Code for further information. The Code is available online:

http://www.uno.edu/~stlf/Policy%20Manual/judicial_code_pt2.htm

Disability Accommodations:

UNO is committed to providing for the needs of students who have disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Students who qualify for services will receive academic modifications to which they are legally entitled. It is the responsibility of students who may require such services or modifications to register each semester with the Office of Disability Services (University Center 260) and follow its procedures for obtaining assistance.

Classroom Conduct/Sexual Harrassment

Feel free to speak openly to me or to your peers, but please tailor your remarks so as not to be uncivil, offensive, or inappropriate. There will be no toleration for ANY abusive language or behavior, personal attacks, or name calling.

Tentative Reading and Test Schedule

July 4 – Introduction; *The Purple Rose of Cairo*

July 5 – Litch, Chapter One: Truth/McGinn, Chapters One & Two

July 8 – Litch, Chapter Two: Skepticism

July 9 – *The Truman Show*

July 10 – Litch, Chapter Three: Personal Identity

July 15 – *Memento*

July 16 – Litch, Chapter Four - Artificial Intelligence; *AI*

July 17 – Litch, Chapter Five: Free Will & Determinism; *Gattaca*

July 18 - *Midterm*

July 22 - Litch, Chapter Six: Ethics

July 23 – *Bullets Over Broadway*

July 24 – Litch, Chapter Seven: Political Philosophy

July 29 – *Pleasantville*

July 30 – Litch, Chapter Eight: Religion & Evil

July 31 – *The Seventh Seal/God On Trial*

August 1 – Litch, Chapter Nine: Existentialism; *Life is Beautiful*/Term Papers Due

August 2 – *Final Exam*