

Online

PHIL 212 Philosophical Issues in Film

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Course Description

This course will address a series of philosophical themes including ethical issues, metaphysical questions and existential quandaries. The study of philosophy can open up vistas of meaning for any student, and films can effectively realize abstract ideas in palpable and compelling ways. Films will be studied that reflect perennial philosophical problems and students will read important works by eminent philosophers such as Descartes, Sartre, Nussbaum, Buddha and Plato.

The course will be divided into thematic sections. In each section we will begin by reading a philosophical text. The instructor will give an illustrated video lecture about the theme. Students will then study a film that specifically addresses the issues raised by the respective text (usually two film options will be suggested for each theme, and the student can pick the one they want). The course opens up a dialogue between films and texts that struggle with common philosophical problems. Students will be encouraged to appreciate the manner in which the art of film and the art of philosophy illuminate each other.

Texts

- 1.) Weekly PDF texts (downloadable from CANVAS)
- 2.) Various Films. Students are required to find and watch the films on their own (via streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, Disney, HBO, YouTube, and some are available free via CCC library online streaming:
<https://libguides.colum.edu/c.php?g=902335&p=6494036>

Basics

Do not attempt to do philosophy while you multitask other activities. Philosophy is the art and science of *reflection*. Bring your mind into the present moment. **Students are expected to complete all modules on Canvas.**

Written work must be handed in on time. If an assignment is handed in after the due date, its grade will be automatically reduced by one letter (e.g., B becomes C, etc.). No written assignments will be accepted after a brief grace period. Canvas will close the window of opportunity to submit egregiously late work. No make-up exams will be given.

Grades will be based on: (1.) a short essay midterm exam (2) a film analysis paper (7-10 pgs), and (3) 15 short weekly “filmosophy responses.” The midterm is worth 25 points, the film analysis paper is worth 30 points, and the filmosophy responses total 45 points (3 points each).

All work will be uploaded to the Canvas system. I will not accept the work via email.

Evaluation Principles

Written work will be of crucial importance. As a basic requirement, all writing will be expected to have good grammar and punctuation. Academic Center for Tutoring is a great resource for drafting and polishing your work: <https://students.colum.edu/academic-services/academic-center-for-tutoring/index> In addition, writing will be evaluated using the following three criteria: (1) logical organization, (2) mastery of the course material, and (3) creativity--in that order.

(1) LOGICAL ORGANIZATION

This criterion is designed to measure your ability to organize your arguments, ideas and observations into a clear and cogent presentation. Your ability to make claims and systematically back them up with evidence and argument, without wandering aimlessly through vague beliefs, is extremely important.

(2) MASTERY OF THE COURSE MATERIAL

This criterion is designed to measure the degree of your grasp on crucial ideas contained in the assigned *texts* and *video lectures*. The degree to which you understand and articulate the concepts entailed in the readings and videos will be vital to your grade.

(3) CREATIVITY

In addition to good structure and evidence of comprehension, you are encouraged to infuse your written work with some creativity. Good writing should include some level of imagination and originality. Nota Bene: Cleverness, while appreciated, is not a substitute for logical organization, nor does it substitute for an understanding of the texts.

Plagiarism: *To steal and use (the ideas or writings of another) as one's own. To appropriate passages or ideas from another author and use them as one's own.*
All use of another author's writings and ideas must be properly acknowledged and cited in your own writing. Failure to do so is tantamount to plagiarism and can result in severe penalties.

Google has made it very easy for me to see if your work contains plagiarism. If I discover it, you will receive zero points for that assignment.

Point/grade criteria for Filmosophy Responses (short weekly responses) **45 points total** :

3 = The comments show clear thoughtful interaction with specific material (ideas in texts, lectures, films, etc.) from the specific module. And the writing is mechanically sound (e.g., grammar, spelling, etc.) as well as interesting.

2 = The comments do not show clear interaction with the ideas of the specific module, and/or the writing mechanics are problematic.

1 = The work is perfunctory and weak, lacking in the aspects described above.

0 = Nothing turned in.

Film Analysis Paper

Each student is required to write a **7-10 page** philosophical consideration of a film. The film can be your choice, but if the film is obscure or difficult to access then you must discuss it with your professor first and get clearance. Your paper is not a summary of the movie. Rather, pick a couple scenes or a character or aspect of the film and give it a philosophical interpretation. You should research the philosophical ideas you're using and cite a few sources that shed light on the theme/issue in your chosen film. Papers will be uploaded to the Canvas system in PDF or Word format. A great resource for your research is the Stanford

Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/> (their entries have excellent bibliographies for you to research further).

Surviving Dr. Asma's Class

In addition to all of the above points, it is worth mentioning a few general reminders.

* This course is *for* you, but it is not *about* you. Not everything is about you. You might find yourself thinking, "What does Renaissance natural history have to do with me?" Or "What do vampires have to do with my major?" Try to overcome such narcissism if it arises. Keep an open mind to all your courses. You never what could turn out to be important for you. Higher education is a bold and imperfect mission, and it's been going on for 3000 years. You are now part of that adventure.

* Philosophy and the liberal arts generally are filled with complex challenging ideas. If you hear or read ideas exchanged in our course that are unfamiliar or make you feel uncomfortable, you are probably not under attack or being injured or violated. You are probably learning, which (as Plato's allegory of the cave demonstrated) usual requires some discomfort.

* Always take careful notes on the material that you're reading. This seems obvious, yet students rarely follow such a simple strategy. Remember, you're not reading a magazine here; philosophy readings are difficult. Logical arguments can be complicated, confusing and tricky. Taking notes will aid your comprehension, and aid your memory when you're asked to recall things. It's good practice to start a "reading journal" to keep track of your notes, questions, and ideas.

* Take notes on the instructor videos and our films. Again, this seems obvious, but it's rarely adopted.

* Be sure to do some additional research for your assignments. The Internet cannot be your *only* outside research source. Any troll in his basement can post bogus info on a webpage without the important filter of "peer review." You can't always trust what you're getting (e.g., "Is this webpage a mask for advertising?"; "Are the writers or site publishers adequately credentialed and qualified?" etc.). I will only allow one citation from *Wikipedia*. Read some books and articles for God's sake. And cite them properly.

* Students are responsible for reading all PDF handouts and/or downloads. The instructor can see analytics on whether or not you are accessing the course materials.

Syllabus

Week

(1) 9/8

Assignment

Module 1 Introduction : Why Philosophy and Film?

Read PDF "What is an Argument"

Watch Prof. Asma's video "Why Philosophy and Film"

Find and Watch film: Astra Taylor's *Examined Life* **or** Tao Ruspoli's *Being in the World*

Submit “filmosophy response” online

(2) 9/14

Module 2 The Problem of Evil

Read PDF “Problem of Evil” (by Mackie)

Watch Prof. Asma’s video “The Problem of Evil”

Watch film: Coen brothers’ *A Serious Man* **or** Malick’s *Tree of Life* **or** Schrader’s *First Reformed*

Submit “filmosophy response” online

(3) 9/21

Module 3 Determinism or Free Will

Read PDF “Hospers on Freedom”

Watch Prof. Asma’s video “Determinism or Free Will”

Watch film: Niccol’s *Gattaca*, **or** Kubrick’s *Clockwork Orange*, **or** *The Good Place* “The Worst Possible Use of Free Will” episode.

Submit “filmosophy response” online

(4) 9/28

Module 4 Existentialism: Condemned to be Free

Read PDF “Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism”

Watch Prof. Asma’s video “Existentialism”

Watch film: Joe Carnahan’s *The Grey* **or** Woody Allen’s film *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, **or** Allen’s *Match Point*

Submit “filmosophy response” online

(5) 10/5

Module 5 The Labyrinth of Skepticism

Read PDF Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy I-III*.

Watch Prof. Asma’s video lecture “Descartes and Skepticism”

Watch film: Wachowski’s *The Matrix*, **or** Jones’ *Moon*, **or** Moorehouse’s *Proof*.

Submit “filmosophy response” online

(6) 10/12

Module 6 Midterm Exam

Upload finished exam to Canvas by 10/18 11:59pm

(7) 10/19

Module 7 Philosophy of Love

Read PDF “Love and Addiction” (L. Young), **and** “Sexual Use and What to do About It” (A. Soble)

Watch Prof. Asma’s video “Philosophy of Love and Friendship”

Watch film: Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* **or** *Solaris* (Tarkovsky or Soderbergh versions) **or** Russell's *Silver Linings Playbook*

Submit "filmosophy response" online

(8) 10/26

Module 8 Fairness, Loyalty and Ethics

Read PDF "The Myth of Universal Love" (S. Asma) **and** "Against Empathy" (P. Bloom)

Watch Prof. Asma's video "Against Fairness"

Watch film: Kore-eda's *Shoplifters*, **or** Nolan's *Interstellar* **or** Bong's *Parasite*

Submit "filmosophy response" online

(9) 11/2

Module 9 Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Read PDF: Dennett's "Kinds of Minds" **and** "Ancient animistic beliefs live on in our intimacy with tech" <https://aeon.co/ideas/ancient-animistic-beliefs-live-on-in-our-intimacy-with-tech>

Watch Prof. Asma's video "Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence"

Watch film: Garland's *Ex Machina*, **or** Whannell's *Upgrade* **or** Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*.

Submit "filmosophy response" online

(10) 11/9

Module 10 Happiness and Hedonism

Read PDF "Plato's Republic Bks II and IX"

Watch Prof. Asma's video "Plato and the Soul of Justice"

Watch film: Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream* **or** Scorsese's *Goodfellas*

Submit "filmosophy response" online

(11) 11/16

Module 11 Buddhism

Read PDF "Buddha and 4 Noble Truths"

Watch Prof. Asma's video "Buddhism"

Watch film: Powell and Pressburger's *Black Narcissus* **or** Wong Kar-Wai's *In the Mood for Love* **or** Ramis' *Groundhog Day*

Submit "filmosophy response" online

(12) 11/23

Module 12 Monsters and Horror

Read PDF "On Monsters Intro" and "Monsters and Moral Imagination"

Watch Prof. Asma's video "Philosophy of Monsters and Horror"

Watch film: Bruckner's *The Ritual*, or Alfredson's *Let the Right One In*, or Eggers' *The Witch*, or Phillips' *The Joker*, or Lynch's *The Elephant Man*.

Submit "filmosophy response" online

(13) 11/30

Module 13 Relativism

Read PDF "James Rachels on Relativism"

Watch Prof. Asma's video "Relativism"

Watch film: Hood's *Eye in the Sky*, or Jordan's *Unthinkable*

Submit "filmosophy response" online

(14) 12/7

Module 14 Personal Identity

Read PDF "Marya Shechtman on Personal Identity"

Watch Prof. Asma's video "Personal Identity"

Watch film: S. Jonze's *Being John Malkovich*, or Nolan's *Memento*, or Scott's *Blade Runner*, or Peele's *Get Out*.

Submit "filmosophy response" online

(15) 12/14

Module 15 Final Essay (Film Analysis)

Upload Final Essay (Film Analysis) by 12/18 11:59pm

Watch Prof. Asma's video "Wrapping Up"

Free speech and free thought.

Teachers, students, and citizens generally should have freedom of speech to discuss and debate every possible topic (i.e., First Amendment). The best remedy against ideas and speech that you disagree with is open discussion and counter-argumentation, not inhibition of speech or force. If a person finds a debate too disturbing or uncomfortable, they can freely and respectfully leave the debate space and explain the departure to their instructor afterward. College, however, is filled with uncomfortable discussions and debates, and if a person frequently feels the need to "escape" debate, then college may not be the best path forward. We are not entitled to stop others from freely expressing their controversial ideas.

Moreover, in a liberal education context it is very common to engage in a Socratic style, where discussants "embody" arguments or viewpoints in order to follow out their implications, strengths, and weaknesses.

When a person forwards an argument in class, it does not necessarily mean that they embrace and endorse that argument or viewpoint (e.g., advocatus diaboli, gadfly, peer review, etc.). Notice that this is not the same as "trolling" people, because the motive of the good-faith discussant is to arrive at truth, whereas the troll is usually motivated by amusement, pointless provocation, and the cultivation of outrage for its own

sake. Our discussions will be motivated by the ultimate goal of developing strong independent powers of judgment, informed by traditional wisdom and the latest available evidence.

Learning Outcomes

1. Distinguish among the philosophical theories/traditions studied in the course (e.g., Buddhism, Existentialism, Determinism, etc.).
2. Learn to read films from a philosophical perspective.
3. Apply Philosophy to specific moral, social, epistemic and metaphysical issues that face us today.
4. Apply Philosophy to specific issues in the student's life.
5. Demonstrate imaginative, creative, and reflective abilities by articulating philosophical insights in exams and papers.
6. Critically analyze and evaluate Philosophy arguments.
7. Articulate an understanding of connections between reason and feeling and between cultural and intellectual traditions.
8. Articulate counter-arguments to one's own position.
9. Demonstrate openness and intellectual humility by approaching situations involving a conflict of views in a spirit

Disclaimer: The course calendar is intended to give the student guidance in what may be covered during the semester and will be followed as closely as possible. However, instructors reserve the right in their discretion to modify, supplement, and make changes as course needs arise.

Humanities courses:

This course satisfies the *Aesthetics and Ethics Pathway*

- Why do some songs give us goosebumps now while simultaneously taking us years back into our childhood? There are performances, images, separate and together, that make our heart race, our blood boil, or chill us to the bone. By what means are we moved, changed, and motivated by art that we describe as beautiful, powerful, transcendent? How do we find these states, and by what power—and by what right—do artists, writers, performers, and other creatives bring us there? In this pathway, you will explore how personal experiences, as well as social and commercial forces, shape and influence our aesthetic and ethical values. There is a dynamic web of connections between individuals, ideas, and institutions for you to discover, with threads of purpose and intent woven through it all. In these classes, you will engage with creatives who have used their work to promote social change as well as enthrall, and you will see how those efforts have altered history, culture and society, and the very moments of our lives, for good and ill.
- **Core Curriculum Information:** Undergraduate students **starting in** Fall 2019 should speak with their academic advisor for more specific information about fulfilling the [Columbia Core Curriculum](#) requirements.
- Undergraduate students who **started before** Fall 2019 should speak with their academic advisor for more specific information about fulfilling the [Liberal Arts and Sciences \(LAS\) Core Curriculum](#) requirements.

Incompletes: An Incomplete Grade (I) can only be issued for an undergraduate student who has successfully completed all course requirements to date but is faced with unexpected circumstances during the final weeks of the semester resulting in the inability to complete course requirements by the end of the semester. The student must have, in the instructor's estimation, the ability to complete missed course requirements outside of class and by the end of the eighth week of the following semester. The instructor must agree to

evaluate the student's work and replace the Incomplete grade before the end of the following semester. A [Student-Faculty Agreement for Incomplete Grade](#) specifying work to be completed and a due date must be signed by both instructor and student and approved by the Department Chair. In the event that an instructor is no longer employed by the College, a program Coordinator, Director, or the Department Chair can evaluate the work and assign the course grade.

Students with Disabilities Statement: Columbia College Chicago seeks to maintain a supportive academic environment for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodations for a disability must register with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office. Once registered, a Columbia College Chicago accommodation letter will be provided to the student each semester. Students are encouraged to present their current accommodation letters to each instructor at the beginning of the semester so that accommodations can be arranged in a timely manner by the College, the department, or the faculty member, as appropriate. Accommodations begin at the time the letter is presented. Students with disabilities who do not have accommodation letters should visit the SSD office, Room 304 of the 623 S. Wabash building, call 312-369-8296, email SSD@colum.edu or visit colum.edu/ssd.

Mandatory Attendance Policy Statement: for undergraduates only: Students are required to attend class regularly. Failure to attend class in the first two weeks of the term will negatively impact financial aid. If your professor reports that you failed to attend and participate in class during the add/drop period, a grade of NS (no-show) will be entered on your record for the course. Please note, you will still be charged tuition and fees for any course for which you receive a NS grade. For more information on non-attendance please visit the Student Financial Services [website](#).

Counseling Services Statement

Counseling Services

731 S. Plymouth Court, suite 112
312.369.8700 counselingservices@colum.edu

Services are designed to help students increase self-awareness and address mental health concerns with the goal of empowering students to manage challenging areas in their lives. All counseling services staff follow professional standards of confidentiality. Information discussed within a counseling relationship is not disclosed without written permission of the individual. Counseling Services are provided free of charge. The most utilized services include individual sessions, group sessions, and linkage to community services. A Columbia College student in a relationship with another Columbia College student, can also receive couple sessions. All currently enrolled students are eligible to receive 12 individual sessions per academic year. Group sessions are unlimited.

College Advising Statement

College Advising Center

623 S. Wabash, Suite 300
312-369-7645 / collegeadvising@colum.edu

The College Advising Center assists undergraduate students with all transitional issues as they navigate their entire college experience. College advisors guide students in creating and implementing an educational and professional plan as they progress from orientation toward graduation. As students take responsibility for their academic and career goals, they should meet with their college advisor on a regular basis. Students at Columbia are expected to meet with their college advisor at least once a semester during their first year.

The Learning Studio Statement

The Learning Studio

618 S. Michigan, first floor
312.369.8130 www.colum.edu/learningstudio

The Learning Studio is an excellent resource for academic progress and success for all students at any level. The Learning Studio provides tutoring in a number of disciplines including Accounting, the Science and Math Learning Center, the Foreign Languages Lab and the Writing Center. Students are encouraged to go to the Learning Studio and work with the tutors. Students can make an appointment through Oasis (using the "Make Appointments" tab) or call the Learning Studio.

Library Statement

The Library serves students with resources and support for research, study, collaboration, fun, and information in all formats—books, ebooks, articles, primary sources, images, film, music, space, programs, technology, and equipment. Our specialized materials and services focus on what students need and want—textbook reserves, study rooms, collaborative technology, maker lab, 3D printer, light boxes, scanners, equipment checkout (cameras, camcorders, projectors) and research assistance by chat, text, email, phone, or in-person. For more, see the website <http://library.colum.edu> or drop by the Library (624 S. Michigan).