

# *Introduction to Philosophy Through Film*

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## Course Description

This course introduces philosophy through the medium of film. Each week, we will watch an awesome film and read a fascinating piece of philosophy. Topics will include existentialism, God, applied ethics, love, reality, Buddhism, race, intersectionality, happiness, meaning, and personal identity. Although there will be ample time for students to discuss each film *qua* work of art, instruction will be philosophy-focused. By the end of the course, students will have developed (i) a deeper appreciation of film both as a form of art and as a conduit for philosophy and (ii) the core skill of identifying, reconstructing, and critically assessing an argument.

Information on grading and other logistics can be found at the end of the syllabus.

## Schedule and readings

### Week 1: Existentialism

- Bergman (1958) *The Seventh Seal*
- Sartre (1946) “Existentialism is a humanism”

### Week 2: The problem of evil

- Coen and Coen (2009) *A Serious Man*
- Mackie (1955) “Evil and omnipotence”

### Week 3: Death and assisted suicide

- Hoar (2023) *The Last of Us* season 1, episode 3 “Long, Long Time” (17:10 - 1:03:40)
- Singer (2003) “Voluntary euthanasia: a utilitarian perspective”

### Week 4: Duties of rescue

- Spielberg (1993) *Schindler's List*
- Singer (1972) “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

Week 5: Friendship and love

- Linklater (1995) *Before Sunrise*
- Nehamas (2010) “The Good of Friendship”

Week 6: Pleasure and reality

- Gondry (2004) *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*
- Nozick (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* excerpt on the ‘experience machine’

Week 7: Buddhism

- Fricke (2011) *Samsara*
- Garfield (2021) *Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration* chapter 6 “The Four Noble Truths”

Week 8: Race and racism

- Coogler (2013) *Fruitvale Station*
- West (2003) “Philosophy and the Afro-American experience”

Week 9: Intersectionality

- Jenkins (2016) *Moonlight*
- Crenshaw (1991) “Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color”

Week 10: Happiness

- Scorsese (2013) *The Wolf of Wall Street*
- Haybron (2013) *Happiness: A Very Short Introduction* chapter 2 “What is happiness?” and chapter 7 “Getting outside oneself: virtue and meaning”

Week 11: Meaning

- Sorrentino (2013) *The Great Beauty*
- Wolf (2010) *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*

Week 12: Personal identity

- Linklater (2014) *Boyhood*
- Derek Parfit selection from *Reasons and Persons* in Rosen *et al.* (2018) *Norton Introduction to Philosophy* 2nd ed. (pp. 520-31) (for optional, but recommended, background, read “What is personal identity?” pp. 409-505)

## Course policies

### Grading breakdown

- Participation (including attendance): 10%
- Short writing assignments (argument analyses): 40%
- Exam: 25%
- Term paper (2,000 words): 25%

### Anonymous grading

- To promote a fair and equal grading process, all student work will be graded anonymously. Please do not include your name anywhere on your submitted assignments. Instead, include your student ID number.

### Laptops and other screens

- No devices with screens of any kind may be used during class. (Trust me: the education research is super clear on this!)
- Students with disabilities may request permission to use electronics during class as an accommodation. Requests should be made officially through the relevant office on campus.

### Lateness policy

- Everyone gets *two* 24-hour extensions for free. If you want to use one, email your TA indicating which assignment you'd like to use it on. You can use them separately or at once, as you see fit.
- If you've already used both of your extensions and need another one, please have your advisor or dean write to me *no later than 24 hours in advance* of the deadline explaining your situation.
- Assignments that are submitted late and without an approved extension will incur a late penalty of 1/3 of a grade per 12 hour period.
  - (Example: if an assignment would have been an A+ had it been submitted on time, it would be an A if submitted 0 - 12 hours late; an A- if submitted 12 - 24 hours late; etc.)

### Collaboration

- Use of AI in any way is strictly prohibited and would be considered a form of cheating.
- "For preparing your writing assignments, you are permitted to talk with other students about the assigned reading and the arguments contained in them, provided that:
  - You meticulously document who you talked to.

- The work you produce arises from your own understanding of the material. In other words, talk with others to help understand the argument, but write your own assignment. Do not, under any circumstances, copy another person's work or work on a single jointly-written document or part of document. When in doubt, ask the instructor for guidance.
- You do the readings on your own before you begin discussing them with others.
- More detailed guidance:

You must write your own paper. However, you may discuss the ideas in your paper with others in the class. In particular, you may if you wish to brainstorm for paper ideas together with others from the class. You must give credit where credit is due: if you write a paper based on your own development of an idea kernel that someone else came up with, you must explicitly credit that person. More generally, document what help you have received by not just listing who helped you, but how exactly each of the people helped you did so. Examples of (some of) the sorts of information it would be appropriate to include:

‘Quentin reacted to my argument that such-and-such with the objection that so-and-so. That led to me writing the discussion in section 3 of my paper.’

‘I discussed such-and-such paper with Una. She thought it odd that [so-and-so]. That led to the idea that [...], which led to the main idea of my paper, which is [...].’

Another example: suppose that you have a paper idea. You may explain the idea to someone else from the class to see if it makes sense to them. You may ask them to help you come up with objections and weak points in your reasoning. But this should all take place within the context of a discussion of ideas, as opposed to the manner in which those ideas get expressed. As usual, give credit for any objections or observations that your classmates supply.

You should not be working with anyone else when you are actually typing the text of your paper.” (Language due to Prof. A. Elga, with minor modifications)

#### Use of work

- “The work you do for this course may be anonymously used for the benefit of other students. If you would prefer that your work not be used in this way, please email the course instructors at any time in the semester. No explanation is required: an email with the subject line “I opt out of future use of work I do for this class” is sufficient. Students who opt out will not be

penalized in any way. Also, if you are generally OK with such use but there is a particular assignment you'd prefer to be kept private, feel free to include a note saying so at the top of that assignment.” (Language due to Prof. A. Elga, with minor modifications)

#### Office hours

- Professor and TA office hours will be posted at the beginning of term. Each of us loves talking about philosophy, so you are warmly encouraged to come chat with us!