

## PHL 206: Philosophy of the Person

### Philosophy in Film Reflection Paper

**Due Date:**

**Description of Assignment:**

So far in this course we have been discussing theories of the human person that focus on the psychological aspects of the human person: our thoughts, beliefs, intentions, habits of character, and other aspects of our personalities. In these sorts of discussions, memory is often taken to be a crucial factor in determining a person's identity. According to some of these psychological approaches to understanding the human person, a person would not survive a complete "memory wipe" or even a significant change in personality, though he or she might be able to "occupy" completely different bodies at different times or even be temporarily "stored" on a computer's hard drive.

Many of the "science-fiction" scenarios just described serve as important plot devices in Hollywood films or television shows. For this assignment, you are to view at least one film or episode (classic or recent) that deals with issues in personal identity and write a reflection paper on that film or episode, explaining in at least two-to-three double-spaced pages how it relates to some of the material we have covered in class. Your reflection paper should include a *brief summary of the film or episode*, a *more detailed description of the most important scenes and the events that take place during those scenes*, and a *comparison of the events that take place during those scenes to the sorts of scenarios described in our readings*. It should also include a *philosophical analysis of the scenarios portrayed or the themes developed*. For this last section you should consider questions such as:

*In general, what is the film or episode saying about the role of psychological continuity in determining a person's identity? Is it saying that a person's identity was lost because of some change in his or her psychology? Is it saying that a person's identity was preserved because of the continuity of his or her psychology? What do each of the characters in the film or episode think? Do some of the characters disagree on the nature of personal identity? If so, how or in what way? And what justifications or explanations do they offer for their positions?*

There are quite a few films or episodes that would be appropriate for this assignment, but here is a list of films or episodes that I think would be ideal:

*Blade Runner* (1982), *Total Recall* (1990), *Star Trek: The Next Generation*: "Second Chances" (1993), *The X-Files*: "Lazarus" (1994), *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *Fight Club* (1999), *Memento* (2000), *The Sixth Day* (2000), *Identity* (2003), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), *The Prestige* (2006), *Moon* (2009), *Avatar* (2009), *Source Code* (2011), *Oblivion* (2013), *Transcendence* (2014), *Black Mirror*: "White Christmas" (2014), *Self/less* (2015), *Split* (2016), *Get Out* (2017), *Black Mirror*: "Black Museum" (2017), *Soul* (2020). (Also a running theme throughout the shows *Living With Yourself* (2019), *Altered Carbon* (2018-2020), *Westworld* (2016-2020), and *Upload* (2020))

Importantly, if you choose to write your reflection paper on some other movie, you must receive permission from me first so that I can verify that that film would work for the assignment.

**Disclaimer:** Some of the films listed above may contain material that you would find disturbing or offensive (and not just because some of them feature Arnold Schwarzenegger). It is primarily YOUR responsibility to do the research necessary to ensure that you will be comfortable viewing the movie you have chosen, but if you have any questions about any of these films, please do not hesitate to ask me. Also, do not download or stream any of these movies illegally. Most of them are available through major streaming services or accessible through your local library system.