

## Introduction to Philosophy Through Film (PHIL 22002)

(All information below is subject to change)

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**Class**, M/W, 1:30-2:50, Pick Hall 506; **Film Screenings**, Th, 6:00-9:00pm, Cobb 202

Instructor: Rory Hanlon

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 12-1:30 pm (or by appointment)

“Walk-ins” are welcome, but priority will be given to those with appointments

### Course Description

Film has been and is perhaps *the* central artistic medium, influencing and reflecting the values of our time, while also exploring perennial aspects of the human condition. Movies then present powerful avenues through which to engage with our deepest and most enduring philosophical questions. This course serves as a general introduction to philosophy, using films to explore the practice of thinking philosophically, as well as the broad range of questions and themes with which philosophers have concerned themselves for over 3,000 years, such as: How can we be free if we are subject to the laws of nature? How can we know or perceive anything with certainty? What is a just political community? Can we ever determine the right answer to ethical dilemmas? To explore these questions, we will discuss a wide selection of films, from *The Third Man* to *Blade Runner* to *Do the Right Thing*; we will examine how philosophers themselves have engaged directly with those films; and we will study philosophical texts, both historical and contemporary, that address questions raised by those films.

### Course Objectives

This course is, first and foremost, an introduction to philosophy. Accordingly, our aims will be twofold: First, we will aim to learn and improve core philosophical skills:

- Engaging in thoughtful and open **dialogue**
- Asking genuine philosophical **questions**
- Honing our skills in careful and critical **interpretation** (what is often called “close reading”)
  - This goes not just for our reading of rich philosophical texts, but as well for our watching of rich philosophical movies.
- To practice philosophical **argumentation** and **reasoning**
- To engage in clear analytical **writing**:
  - Use writing as a tool of textual analysis and critical inquiry
  - Communicate your observations and interpretations of texts through expository writing
  - Be self-reflexive readers and editors of their own writing

We will also broadly survey the field of philosophy. In doing so, you will explore and gain knowledge of a wide variety of subdisciplines of philosophy (e.g., metaphysics, epistemology, ethics) fundamental philosophical questions (e.g., Can we know anything? What is a person? What does it mean to do the right thing?), and crucial philosophical terminology (“validity”, “consciousness”, “duty”). We will do so through exploring and closely discussing the following:

- Philosophically rich and provocative films
- Reflections by philosophers on those films
- Texts written by historical and contemporary thinkers on related topics

## Course Assignments

You are expected to show up to class having done all of the required reading/watching of texts/films.

Further, the central assignments for the course will be various sorts of philosophical writing:

- (1) Short papers (2-3), in which you respond to prompts concerning the topics/readings/films for a given week. These will be due at the end of weeks 2, 4, and 6.
- (2) A final paper (5-7 pages), in which you expand one of your earlier short papers. This will be due on 5/31 (or 5/23 for students graduating this Spring).
- (3) Biweekly reading responses, in which you pose a philosophical question or observation (e.g., an objection, an implication) you have about the reading for that class. These are meant to be low-stakes and are not graded (beyond them being submitted). Think of them like brief diary entries for each reading/film in which you note what you find interesting or confusing.

## Assessment

Participation (Reading Responses, Attendance, Discussion): 30%

Short papers: 35%

Final Paper: 35%

## Required Text (available at the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore)

Wartenberg, Thomas, *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy*, (2009), Routledge.

## Engagement

- Discussion and Dialogue: You will be evaluated on the quality of your contributions to the class discussion. Your contributions should reflect a commitment to understanding and thinking critically about the assigned readings as well as the ideas being developed in the course of class discussion. I am interested in contributions that are helpful to promoting our shared understanding of textual and thematic ideas and problems. Set your sights there, rather than on showing me that you are smart. (I already know that!)
  - Try to contribute something to the class discussion every day. I also know, however, that speaking in class can be daunting. We should aim to cultivate an environment in which everyone feels able and comfortable to speak. This begins, I think, by recognizing that contributions to discussions need not be perfect—expressions of genuine puzzlement, sincere and thoughtful questions, or first attempts at understanding something hard are perhaps the most valuable additions to a conversation. See **Bailey's "But How Do I Participate?"** (available under the "Files" tab on the Canvas Site) for some helpful discussion of ways to participate in a philosophical discussion.
- Discussion Norms and Respect: Productive discussion and learning arise in an inclusive classroom that is welcoming of diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds. We should aim to cultivate such an environment by always remaining respectful of diversity in all its forms and across all dimensions of identity, social location, and experience. I expect class discussion to proceed in this spirit of respect throughout (see also below under "Diversity and Inclusion"). I welcome suggestions on how to enhance our discussions of the class, so please do be in touch with any thoughts or questions about this.
- Reading Assignments: You are expected to have read fully the assigned readings before each class period and come prepared to talk about it. This requires, among other things, that you come with a particular passage that you'd like to discuss, with particular questions about the text, or particular thoughts on how to interpret it. As we proceed in class, we will practice and discuss how to read texts carefully.
- Film Assignments: You are expected to have watched each week's assigned film before the first class (Monday) of that week. As with the readings, you should take notes and come to class with questions and

thoughts about the film and the philosophical questions that it raises. Each film will be available to stream through the library's website. Additionally, I will host a screening in Cobb 202 at 6pm on the Thursday preceding the relevant week.

- **Discussion Posts:** As part of reading assignments, you are expected to post at least one interpretive question on Canvas by Noon before each class (instructions will be discussed during the first class). Each week, I will emphasize one or more writing skills that I want you to practice in your discussion questions (e.g., close reading of a passage). The posts have no length requirement and will not be graded. Instead, they are there only to aid and bolster your engagement with the reading, to foster a more focused discussion in class, to practice asking good questions, and to keep up a constant practice of writing. These questions will also give me a sense of the aspects of the text that you find most interesting or confusing, which will inform how our discussions will proceed.

- **Attendance:** Being present (both physically and mentally) is, of course, is an important part of engaging in class and in discussions. Attendance, then, is vital to our class, and is considered part of your participation grade. Yet, given the unprecedented circumstances at the moment, I will have a dynamic and flexible attendance policy (see below under “Health and Wellness” for more details).

- **Office Hours:** My office hours policy are described below. Part of your engagement grade is a **requirement that you attend at least one office hours meeting**. We can discuss papers, reading assignments, general topics that you’re interested in, or any feelings, questions, or concerns you have about the class. This can also be a good time to let me know if there is anything that *I* can do differently to better support your learning.

- **Midterm Course Evaluations:** During midterm week, I will ask you to complete an evaluation about the course thus far. Please take a few minutes that week to think honestly about the course thus far—what you have found to be valuable and helpful, as well as deficient and unhelpful. The opportunity to get your feedback at this point is invaluable (you also should feel welcome throughout the quarter to let me know any concerns or problems you are having in the course during my office hours).

## Policies

- **Academic integrity** is fully expected. You must acknowledge other people’s ideas whether you are quoting them directly or paraphrasing them. Failure to credit sources of ideas or information constitutes plagiarism, which can potentially lead to your being expelled from the university. There can also be consequences for your assignment grade and course grade. So, as a word of advice, just don’t do it!

- **Classroom and assignment accommodations:** I strive to create an inclusive learning environment. If you have ADA accommodations, please let me know so we can think together about how to make things work best. I will ask you for documentation from Student Disability Services (SDS). If you are unsure whether you qualify for ADA accommodations, by all means contact Student Disability Services at 773-702-6000, or [disabilities@uchicago.edu](mailto:disabilities@uchicago.edu). You can also report an access barrier, ask for services in a particular university facility, and more at: [Request an Accommodation](#)

- If you are concerned that you may have a learning disability or are otherwise struggling with your schoolwork, Student Health and Counseling Services has an academic skills assessment program that may be able to help you sort out what is going on: [Academic Skills Assessment Program](#)

- **Religious holidays:** Please let me know if you need to miss class or adjust deadlines to accommodate religious observance. As with health-related reasons (see below), I will be very flexible and am happy to work something out. All that I ask is that you communicate with me in advance.

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** The University of Chicago is committed to diversity and rigorous inquiry that arises from multiple perspectives. I wholeheartedly support this commitment and so aim to maintain a productive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. I view the diversity that students bring to this class as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, generational status,

socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, religious background, and immigration status. Any suggestions for promoting a positive and open environment will be appreciated and given serious consideration. We will be given time at the beginning of the quarter to say our preferred name and gender pronouns, if you wish to.

- If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, I hope you will let me know. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions.
- **Electronic devices:** You are welcome to use a laptop or tablet in this class, *as long as it contributes to your learning*. I myself will often use my computer to take notes, mark attendance, etc., As noted above, this class is discussion based. This means that all students are expected to actively listen to one another in order to participate in classroom activities. If you are unable to contribute to the discussion or are otherwise distracted by your computer, cell phone, or tablet, I will ask that you refrain from using it in class. If you have any questions or concerns, please be in touch with me.
- **Deadlines:** As a general rule, written work needs to be submitted on time. This means that you need to manage your time and plan in advance. However, especially given the challenging circumstances, I am willing and able to give extensions. If you need an extension for non-medical reasons (e.g., you have big test in another class that day), you will need to ask **at least 72 hours** in advance of the deadline. Work that is late without permission (or unforeseen emergency) will be penalized for lateness by a +/- per day late. (So, a paper that would earn a B receives a B- if it is one day late; C+ if two days late, etc.)
- **Office hours:** My office hours are listed in the heading of the syllabus. Unless I've specified otherwise, I am available during those times to meet with you—with the duration of those appointments dependent on demand. “Walk-ins” are welcome, but priority will be given to those with appointments.
  - I will make an effort to extend my regular office hours in the 2 weeks leading up to a paper deadline. I recommend contacting me early if you wish to discuss your paper or ideas with me in this period as these times tend to fill up. Please note that I do not read drafts of papers during office hours.

### **Health and Well-Being:**

- **Health:** We continue to live in a pandemic, which makes navigating everything, including classes, difficult and complex. Please follow *every* safety guideline outlined in the UChicago Health Pact and every added safety guideline that seems right to you.
- **Masks:** In keeping with the University's newly revised mask policies, you are *required* to wear a mask at all times in the classroom up until April 4th. After that, I am not allowed to require anyone, and you are not obligated to, wear masks in classes. I am able, however, to *ask* you to wear masks at all times while in class (as I plan to do myself). You are not obligated to follow this advice, but I do ask that you wear masks. I will try to keep our classroom as well-ventilated and socially distanced as the circumstances allow. For further information, you can peruse the University's official policy: [Mask FAQs](#)
- **Attendance:** As noted above, attendance is a crucial part of class engagement. Still, the health and wellness of our community comes first. Please do not come to class if you so much as think you might be unwell, show any symptoms of Covid, have any reason to believe you have been in contact with someone who has Covid, or for any reason you are feeling uncomfortable about attending an in-person class. All that I ask of you is that you communicate as quickly and as much as possible with me. Your grade will not be affected for missing class, *if* you communicate with me. If you have to miss classes, we will discuss, on a case-by-case basis, alternative ways to engage in class in—e.g., through Zoom, a short writing response to class reading, or a one-on-one discussion during office hours.
- **Mental Wellness:** These are stressful times. Counseling Services and UChicago Student Wellness can help. There are a range of support and other workshops on offer, as well as scheduled and drop-in therapy sessions. Therapy can be a great resource for getting to know yourself (including your work habits) better. And in our present moment, where there is so much reason to feel stressed or uncertain, these sorts of resources are all the more essential. A link are here: [Mental Health | UChicago Student Wellness](#)

### Schedule of Topics/Films/Readings

	Topic	Required Reading	Film Screened
1	Philosophical Inquiry and Philosophical Methods	Nothing!	<a href="#"><i>Examined Life</i></a>
2		“What is a Philosophical Question?”, Uygur; “Can Philosophy be Screened?”, Wartenburg (Ch. 1)	
<b>Theoretical Philosophy</b>			
3	Language, Thought, Time	<i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , ( <i>Meditations 1-2</i> ) Descartes; <i>Republic</i> (selections), Plato	<i>Matrix</i>
4		“Ontology and The Matrix”, Cox & Levine; Wartenburg, 67-75;	
5	Truth, Skepticism, Reality	“Could a Heptapod Act? Language and Agency in <i>Arrival</i> ,” James Pearson	<i>Arrival</i>
6		“On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme”, Davidson	
7	Mind, Body, Consciousness	“Minds, Brains and Programs”, Searle	<i>Blade Runner</i>
8		“Picturing the Human (Body and Soul): A Reading of <i>Blade Runner</i> ”, Mulhall	
9	Personal Identity, Memory, The Good	<i>Essay concerning Human Understanding</i> (“Of Identity and Diversity”), Locke;	<i>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</i>
10		Grau, “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and the Morality of Memory,”; “Arguing Against Utilitarianism: <i>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</i> ”, Wartenburg	
<b>Practical Philosophy</b>			
11	Meaning, Death, Life	<i>Existentialism Is a Humanism</i> , Sartre	<i>Ikiru</i>
12		“Looking for Meaning in All the Wrong Places: <i>Ikiru</i> ”, Cox and Levine	
13	Friendship, Duty, Moral Intelligence	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , (selections from Bk. VI, VIII, IX)	<i>The Third Man</i>
14		“Moral intelligence and the limits of loyalty,” Thomas Wartenburg	
15	Race, Morality, Philosophical Reflection	<i>Souls of Black Folk</i> , Du Bois (“Of Our Spiritual Strivings”; “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others”; “The Conservation of Races”).	<i>Do the Right Thing</i>
16		“Spike Lee and the Sympathetic Racist”, Dan Flory	
17	Technology, Work, Politics	<i>Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844</i> Marx (“Estranged Labour”); <i>Republic</i> , (Selections from Bk. II and IV)	<i>Modern Times</i>
18		“Modern Times—Science, Society, and Technology”, Falzon; “Illustrating a philosophical theory: <i>Modern Times</i> ”, Wartenburg	