Philosophy and Film

Fall 2022

Mark W. Roche PHIL 20440

Logistical Information

Class: Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:00 to 12:15 in G09 Bond Hall.

Office: 349 Decio Hall.

Tentative Advising Hours: Mondays from 12:30 to 2:00 and Wednesdays from 1:30 to 3:00 as well as by appointment. Impromptu meetings can also often be arranged before or after class. Note that if too many students report conflicts during these hours, I will select different times and then update the syllabus as well as Canvas.

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Course Description

Film and philosophy can be studied together. On the one hand, films often give rise to philosophical questions, for example, what are the arguments for and against the idea of justice as the advantage of the stronger? On the other hand, if we have rich philosophical categories, for example, on the nature of tragedy, we can ask deeper and more precise questions of films. The course will juxtapose films by directors, such as Ford, Hitchcock, Eastwood, and Allen, with works by philosophers, including Plato, Hegel, and Nietzsche, among others. The goal will be three-fold: (1) to interpret the films as films; (2) to weigh philosophical arguments; and (3) to enrich our understanding of both realms, film and philosophy, by bringing the two spheres into conversation with one another. Likely topics include knowledge, identity, evil, power, courage, love, and providence.

Students will learn to analyze film as a distinctive art form. Like theater, film is a visual, temporal, and linguistic medium, but film differs from theater insofar as it is defined by camera or shot, which frames our sight; montage or editing, which allows film to be spatially and temporally discontinuous; and mise-en-scène, the totality of expressive content in the filmed image–from setting, props, and costumes to gestures, facial expressions, and lighting. Together these three elements bring forward not only a distinctive art form but also an unusually capacious and creative ontology.

Beyond looking at films as films, we will consider the ways in which cinematic works can raise philosophical questions and convey philosophical meaning indirectly. We will further explore the ways in which we can approach cinematic works by introducing precise distinctions, analyzing presuppositions, and making arguments. Beyond studying the philosophical works in relation to the films, the philosophical works will be analyzed in their own right as philosophical works and their arguments weighed. The course requires that students think for themselves and articulate and defend their own positions.

What is most distinctive about the class is the effort to allow philosophy and film to illuminate one another, to enrich our grasp of philosophy via film and to allow us to better interpret–and raise questions about--films via philosophy.

Students are free to take this course to fulfill the University's requirement for a second course in Philosophy (WKSP) or to fulfill the University's requirement for a course in Art (WKAR).

Calendar of Classes and Readings

The calendar is divided into units but please keep in mind that our knowledge will be cumulative. For example, later sessions will return to earlier ideas, on justice, on tragedy, on the philosophy of history, etc.

I. Introduction (2 sessions)

Topics: names, learning goals, good and bad discussion classes, production-, artwork-, and reception aesthetics, the distinction and ontology of film, philosophy and film.

Sample Questions: What makes for an excellent discussion class? What questions can we bring to a work of philosophy and a work of film? How do the questions compare? What is distinctive about film within the landscape of the arts? What constitutes a film-specific analysis? What is hermeneutics and how is it relevant to this course? What possible combinations exist between film and philosophy and how are they to be weighed?

1 Orientation / August 24

No assigned reading except the syllabus, which can be read also for session 2.

1 Philosophy and Film / August 29

Familiarize yourself with the documents "Basic Terms for Film Analysis" and "Philosophy and Film: Recurring Questions." These will be more meaningful to you as we begin watching the films, but a cursory review now will be helpful and meaningful.
Read Cox, Damian and Michael P. Levine. "Why Film and Philosophy?" *Thinking Through Film: Doing Philosophy, Watching Movies*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012: 3-22 (on Canvas).

II. Moral and Interpretive Puzzles (9 sessions)

Topics: rhetoric and philosophy, power positivism, genesis and validity, self-cancellation, moral puzzles, ambiguity.

Sample Questions: What is the relation of rhetoric and philosophy? What is justice? Can one argue against the elevation of power over all else? How do we weigh whether a claim is true or false? What are the transcendental conditions of dialogue? What is the theodicy and how is it to be understood? What is the value of ambiguity in an artwork? What are the similarities and differences between drama and cinema?

1 Hitchcock, *Rope* / August 31

1 Allen, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* / September 5

3 Plato, *Gorgias*

Plato, *Gorgias*, 447a-470e = 25-55 (30 pages) / September 7

Plato, *Gorgias,* 481b-501d = 56-97 (41 pages) / September 12

Plato, *Gorgias,* 501d-end = 98-129 (31 pages) / September 14

3 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Nietzsche, pp. 3-55, through II.7 (52 pages) / September 19

Nietzsche, pp. 56-94, through III.7 (38 pages) / September 21

Nietzsche, pp. 94-145 (51 pages) / September 26

1 Writing in Philosophy and Film / September 28

1 Swing Session / October 3

III. Tragedy, Comedy, and the Philosophy of History (7 sessions)

Topics: the dialectic, the philosophy of tragedy, the philosophy of comedy, reconciliation, the age of heroes and the age of humans, forms of justice, religious institutions, historical change, irony and history, providence.

Sample Questions: How does change occur in history? Is there a hidden logic to history? Does history move in stages? How are we to understand providence? What is tragedy? Are there different kinds of tragedy? What makes a figure heroic? Why do we laugh? Is there a mode

beyond tragedy and comedy? What do non-verbal elements contribute to cinematic meaning? What is the role of music in film?

1 Ford, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* / October 5

First paper due at 11:00 p.m on October 5.

1 Joffé, *The Mission* / October 10

1 Hegel *Aesthetics* (excerpt on tragedy) / October 12

Fall Break (no class) / October 17

Fall Break (no class) / October 19

1 Vico, *New Science* (excerpts) / October 24

1 Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (excerpt) / October 26

1 Swing Session / October 31

IV. Identity and Crisis (7 sessions)

Topics: theories of truth, individual and collective identity and identity crises, courage (and its relation to fear and hope), self-reflection in art, unity and diversity, critique.

Sample Questions: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of truth? What is self-reflexive art? How should we define courage and what is its relation to other virtues? Why would courage lend itself to cinematic visualization? What constitutes identity? What can we say about individual and collective identity crises? Can an identity crisis be welcome? What are some of the essential features of Plato's early Socratic dialogues? What is the relation of critique and love? What can attention to religion bring to our understanding of film?

1 von Donnersmarck, *The Lives of Others* / November 2

1 Eastwood, *Gran Torino* / November 7

2 Plato, *Laches* / November 9 and 14

1 Plato, *Apology* / November 16

1 Hösle, "Crises of Identity" / November 21

Thanksgiving Break (no class) / November 23

1 Swing Session / November 28

V. Philosophical Analysis of a Single Film (2 sessions)

2 Hitchcock, *North by Northwest* / November 30 and December 5

VI. Review and Discussion of Paper Topics (1 session)

1 Review and Discussion of Paper Topics / December 7

Second paper due at 11:00 p.m on Friday, December 9, 2022.

Learning Goals

1) Film-Specific Analysis: Students will become familiar with the questions and categories with which one can most meaningfully interpret and evaluate any film, including film-specific dimensions, including camera, editing, and mise-en-scène. In this way, they will prepare themselves for a life-long engagement with cinema as an art form, becoming not just consumers but also intelligent connoisseurs, persons who enjoy interpreting films as well as discussing films intelligently with other interested persons.

2) Philosophical Questions: Philosophy begins in wonder, and the first step of philosophical inquiry is to be able to identify fascinating puzzles that invite and require philosophical analysis. Students will develop the habit of identifying philosophical puzzles, questions, and categories that shed light on artworks as well as on ideas, nature, their inner selves, and the intersubjective world. They will bring to these puzzles and questions the philosophical capacity to make meaningful conceptual distinctions. They will become more articulate in asking philosophical questions to improve knowledge and understanding. In relating to philosophical puzzles in a personal way, they will also recognize a strong relationship between their academic work and their personal lives.

3) Hermeneutic Capacities: Students will learn to explore the ways in which some texts, both philosophical and cinematic, work with irony, reversals, and ambiguities; symbols and other modes of indirect communication; self-reflexive moments; comic and tragic structures; and historical referents. Students will improve their skills in interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating works. They will develop their capacity to ask pertinent and interesting interpretive questions, to argue for and against various interpretations, and to evaluate the tenability of various kinds of arguments. Further, they will recognize the extent to which the parts and wholes of works relate to one another. Students will gain an enhanced set of categories and related vocabulary to understand, analyze, and interpret cinematic as well as philosophical works.

4) Philosophical Reasoning: Students will learn to philosophize, which includes, among other capacities, being able to analyze presuppositions, introduce precise distinctions, identify and explain fundamental principles or theories; organize evidence to support an argument and defend

a position; use logical reasoning to draw valid conclusions; and generate and explore new questions.

5) Engagement with Great Works: Students will gain insight into a selection of classical works. Students will grow in appreciating the value of engaging great works and asking great questions as part of a life-long process of continual learning. In so doing, they will cultivate their enjoyment of the life of the mind and build resources for the continued development of their inner world.

6) Philosophical Independence: Students will use reason to address diverse positions. Instead of simply citing tradition or authority, students will argue themselves for (and against) central questions that arise as they think about the diverse topics addressed in the course. Students will be able to describe and defend their own positions in the light of alternative positions.

7) Film and Philosophy: Students will develop the tools to look for ways in which philosophy and film can each contribute to deeper understanding of the other. They will be able to articulate both conceptually and via examples how such relations are manifest.

9) Formal Skills: Students will advance in articulate precision, both spoken and written. Students will improve their capacities to formulate clear questions, to listen carefully and attentively, to explore ideas through dialogue, to argue for and against differing positions, and to express their thoughts eloquently and persuasively.

10) Intellectual Virtues: In developing their capacities for processing difficult materials, engaging in empathetic and thoughtful listening, and developing their own ideas in engagement with others, students will develop various intellectual virtues essential to a flourishing community of learning, including justice, hospitality, diplomacy, humility, courage, perseverance, patience, curiosity, and wonder.

Principles of Student Learning

The course will be organized in accordance with several common-sense pedagogical principles, most of which were embodied already by Socrates and which have been given empirical verification in our age:

- *Active Learning*: Students are not passive minds into whose heads content is to be poured. Students learn by becoming involved, asking questions, engaging in discussions, solving problems, defending positions, and writing papers, in short, by energetically devoting themselves to the learning process. Educators speak of active or student-centered learning. Students learn most effectively when they are actively engaged, not simply listening or absorbing material. In fact simply taking an exam, even when you perform poorly, helps you to learn the material. Accordingly, this course will be student-centered, with considerable focus on student-student discussion, written contributions to a peer sounding board, and paper topics chosen by students.

- *Peer Learning*: Students learn greatly from their peers. You are influenced by the people with whom you spend your time, for good or for ill. Who among your friends awakens your most noble intellectual passions and helps you become a better interlocutor and person? The research shows that the student's peer group is the single greatest source of influence on cognitive and affective development in college. We will enjoy many student-student discussions in which the teacher simply plays a guiding role. You are also encouraged to discuss our various texts and questions with one another and with others beyond the classroom.

- *Existential Engagement*: Students learn more when they are existentially engaged in the subject, when they care about the questions under discussion and recognize their significance. If you volunteer in a soup kitchen, your course on the economics of poverty takes on a different meaning. If you spend a semester in Berlin, German history and politics become far more important to you. To that end and because of their intrinsic value, we will read these works not only to understand them in their own context, as interesting as that is, but also to ask, to what extent they speak to us today. Can we learn not only *about* these works, but also *from* them? That means relating these works to your past experiences, daily lives, and future aspirations, without falling into a purely subjective interpretation of the meaning.

- *Intrinsic Motivation*: Motivation plays a large role in learning. The best learning comes not from external motivation, seeking external approbation and praise, but from intrinsic motivation, from identification with a vision of wanting to learn.

- *High Expectations and Feedback*: Students learn the most when their teachers have high academic expectations of them and when students receive helpful feedback that supports them in their quest to meet those high expectations. To know what you don't know is to help focus your learning. A combination of being challenged and being supported helps learning immensely. You can be sure that if the coach of an athletic team is nonchalant about physical fitness, discipline, timing, teamwork, and the like, the team will not win many games. So, too, an easy A will not help you in the long run, as you interview for highly competitive postgraduate fellowships or positions at the best graduate schools or with the leading firms. The best way to learn is to shoot very high and to recognize what might still be needed to meet those high aspirations. Detailed feedback and discriminating grades are ways of pointing out strengths and weaknesses to students, challenging them to stretch, so that they are not lulled into thinking that their current capacities cannot be improved, and they needn't learn more.

- *Effortful Learning*: Many think that easier paths to learning make for better learning. In truth, the evidence shows that easier learning is often superficial and quickly forgotten, whereas effortful learning leads to deeper and more durable learning as well as greater mastery and better applications. For example, trying to solve a problem before being taught a solution leads to better learning. Hard learning, making mistakes and correcting them, is not wasted effort but important work; it improves your intelligence. Striving to surpass your current abilities and experiencing setbacks are part of true learning, which,

unlike superficial learning, develops and changes the brain, building new connections and increasing intellectual capacities. For better learning, difficulties are desirable: the harder the effort, the greater the benefit. For example, instead of simply reviewing notes on our readings and films, you might reflect on the following: What are the key ideas? What ideas are new to me? How would I explain them to someone else? How are they presented? How does what I am learning relate to what I already know? What questions do I have? What arguments speak for and against a given position?

- *Breadth of Context*: If you put what you are learning into a larger context and connect it with what you already know and are learning in your other courses, your learning will be deeper and more stable. If you can connect a story, an idea, or a principle as you uncover it to other stories, ideas, and principles or to what you yourself think, then the stories, ideas, and principles will be more likely to resonate for you in the future. In our class, seeing connections across works as well as seeing connections between our discussions and discussions and works in other classes as well as your own life will help give you that larger context. The more you know, the more you can learn. Ask yourself, what larger lessons can be drawn from what I am exploring and analyzing.

- *Faculty-Student Contact*. The greatest predictor of student satisfaction with college is frequent interaction with faculty members. Students are more motivated, more committed, and more involved and seem to learn more when they have a connection to faculty members. So take advantage of opportunities to connect with your teachers. Drop in during my office hours (come when you have a need or a question or simply when you would like to chat). Take advantage as well of other opportunities for informal conversations. And don't hesitate to ask for help.

- *Meaningful Investment of Time*: Students who major in disciplines that are less demanding of students' time tend to make fewer cognitive gains in college. Everyone who wants to learn a complex and demanding subject must make a substantial effort. Learning occurs not only during class time. It derives also from the investment you make in learning, the quality of the time you spend reading, thinking, writing, and speaking with others outside of class. For this three-credit course you will want to spend at least six hours per week preparing. An advantage you have in this course is that the works are both challenging and engaging.

- *Diversity*: Another learning principle is diversity. When you discover that your roommate is Muslim, you suddenly become more curious about Islam. That is not especially likely at Notre Dame, so we need to cultivate intellectual diversity, engaging works from other cultures and in languages other than English, even if our access to them in this particular class is via translation. We want to hear different perspectives from one another, even the most unusual, since thinking outside the box can help us see more clearly. Do not be shy about asking off-the-wall questions or making unusual comments. And don't let contrary views bother you emotionally. All such contributions can be useful, as the process of discovering truth involves listening to various perspectives. In addition, many of the

works we will study introduce us to radically different world-views from our own, but precisely in their difference, they may aid learning.

- *Self-Reflection*: Students learn more when they are aware of how they best learn (so that they can focus their energies), what they most lack, and how they can learn more. How can I become a better student? How can I learn to guide myself? We may occasionally have meta-discussions in which we reflect on our discussion at a higher level. Around what central interpretive question did the debate we were just having revolve? Why did we relinquish one interpretation and adopt another? How would we describe the evidence that spoke for and against the various positions? Why was today's discussion particularly successful or less successful? What is helping us learn? The latter question underscores why I have just placed these principles before you.

Student Contributions to Learning and Assessment Guidelines

1) **Class Contribution**: 20%;

Students will be expected to attend all sessions and to contribute regularly to discussions. Class contribution is not equivalent with the quantity of class participation; instead both quantity and quality will be considered. Because student learning is aided by active student participation in the classroom, students will want to prepare well and contribute regularly and meaningfully to both small group discussions and plenary sessions.

2) **Regular Writing**: 20%;

In advance of 14 classes (that is, in advance of half our classes), each student will submit an entry, observation, analytical point, or question, to our online discussion group on Canvas. This will include at least three submissions each for units II, III, and IV. A post need not be especially long; indeed contributions might average around 150 words or so. A few sentences or a paragraph will be fine; more words are not always better. You might respond to a study question, comment on a particular passage or scene, address a formal dimension of a work, raise or answer a philosophical question, discuss an observation from another student, argue for a particular position, relate a relevant personal experience, or ask a question or set of questions that would be productive for the Canvas discussion or our eventual classroom discussion. (Asking good questions is a very important skill.) The posts will aid understanding and help initiate and facilitate discussion. Some of the study questions will be focused on the texts; others will go beyond the texts and invite students to develop their own thinking on the subject.

All posts must be submitted by 8:00 AM on the day of our class. Students are invited to review all the posts in advance of class.

3) **Two Papers:** 40%;

In addition to your informal writing, you will submit two papers.

The first paper, which will count 15%, should be approximately 4-5 pages (ca. 1,200 to 1,500 words). The second paper, which will count 25%, should be approximately 6-8 pages (ca. 1,800 to 2,400 words). You are free to write slightly more than the limits described, but you should not write less than the minimal number of words.

You are welcome to discuss paper topics with me in advance, either before or after class, or during office hours. In addition, we will devote two sessions to the topic of writing papers.

Here are some further guidelines for your papers:

- Students are free to choose their topics within the context of the course and the expectations above. Creative topics and strategies are welcome. Students should not hesitate to think out loud with me about various options before settling on a topic. Starting early is always a wise strategy.
- In these papers students will develop their own positions on a particular topic, question, or puzzle and will describe and defend their positions in the light of alternative positions. Or they will give an interpretation of a work (or more than one work) that is informed by independence and philosophical reasoning.
- All papers should be Times New Roman or a similar standard font, 12 point, and double spaced.
- Each paper should have a title and pagination, and you should list at the bottom the number of words.
- You will want to use MLA style. (MLA stands for the Modern Language Association.) This style is widespread in the humanities and relatively simple and user-friendly. The library has reference materials that spell out MLA style, such as the *MLA Handbook* or the *MLA Style Manual*, and there are short, adequate versions available on the Web. With permission, students may choose an alternative format.
- Unless we very consciously move to Canvas for assignment submissions, please submit your papers via email (to mroche@nd.edu) as a Word document. In either case, your file name should have three elements: your name, the course number or some such designation, such as Philo 2xx or PhiloFilm, and the paper number (for example Ranse Stoddard PHIL 20440 Paper 1). This will make it much easier for me to organize and archive submissions.
- All paper submissions that are more than one hour late will be downgraded a partial grade. A further drop of a partial grade will occur for every 24 hours that passes beyond the due date and time.

4) **Final Examination**: 20%;

Each student will take a final written examination. Questions will be formulated in the light of our learning goals, the works explored, and our discussions. The questions will be oriented to the works and to the learning goals above. Preparation for the examination should be an excellent opportunity for you to deepen your knowledge, and the examination itself will be an opportunity to continue that deepening and to allow me to assess your learning.

The goals of each assignment and of all evaluation are to improve understanding and performance. For detailed assessment guidelines, please turn to the syllabus supplement.

Required Works

Plato, *Laches*. Trans. Rosamond Kent Sprague. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992.

Plato, *Gorgias*. Trans. James H. Nichols Jr. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998.

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals.* Trans. Michael A. Scarpitti. New York: Penguin, 2013.

Plato's *Apology* is being provided to you via Library Reserve.

The readings from Cox and Levine, Vico, Hegel, and Hösle will be provided to you via Canvas.

All of the films we will be viewing as a class are currently available on "Library Reserves" (which you can also access via Canvas). Once you click the title and accept the terms, the video will play in your web browser. In the unlikely event that you have issues with streaming videos, you can always use a computer in one of the labs on campus.

Recommended Reading

Cook, Claire. *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing*. New York: MLA, 1985.

Strunk, William, Jr. and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. New York: Longman, 2000.

Strunk and White is a basic writing manual that many students read already in high school. Cook is more advanced, but superb and ideal for undergraduate writing or writing beyond college. I have placed on Library Reserve samples from each work.

Syllabus Supplement

On Canvas you will find the syllabus supplement, which includes the following sections and subsections.

University Requirements
- Second Philosophy Course
- Course in the Arts

Suggestions for Students
- Speaking in Class: Informal Tips

Grading Criteria
- Policy on Attendance and Tardiness
- Grading Scale for the University of Notre Dame
- Criteria for Grading Class Contribution
- Criteria for Grading Canvas Contributions

Criteria for Grading Papers
Criteria for Grading Final Examinations

University Policies, Guidelines, and Support Structures

Disability Accommodation
Support for Student Mental Health at Notre Dame
Student Privacy Statement
Academic Code of Honor