

# FYS: METAPHYSICS AND MOVIES

## FALL 2012

WF 12:30-1:45, Tribble A307

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Office Hours:

This seminar will examine important philosophical topics through both film and readings. Among the questions that we will address are: what, if anything, can we know about ourselves and the world in which we live? What are our ethical obligations to each other and the environment? Do we have free will? And: What, exactly, is love?

### Films

*The Matrix, The Lorax, Minority Report, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Blade Runner, and Vertigo*

The first five films will be made available through the Library's Electronic Reserve system. You should ensure that you watch the film for each unit **no later than one week after the unit has begun**. We will watch our sixth film, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, as a group, and will begin our discussion of it over dinner following the screening (date & location TBA).

### Readings

All assigned readings will be made available on the course Sakai site.

### Seminar Objectives

Students who participate in this seminar will:

- ❖ Receive a rigorous introduction to central issues in philosophy
- ❖ Gain understanding of their own, and others', positions on these issues
- ❖ Develop skills in assessing the cinematic development of philosophical themes
- ❖ Practice expository and critical writing

### Seminar Format

Following an introduction to philosophy, film, and philosophy in film, we will begin our consideration of specific films and the issues that they raise. The course will be divided into six units, each corresponding to a particular film and philosophical topic.

### Seminar Policies

- ❖ Laptops, cell phones, and other communication devices should be **turned off** during class time.
- ❖ More than **three** unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your course grade.
- ❖ If you miss class, you are responsible for finding out what was presented during that class.
- ❖ Late work will be assessed a penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade per day.

## Assignments and Evaluation

**Participation (10%):** You will be expected to complete each day's reading assignment before coming to class, and to make thoughtful contributions to class discussion. At least twice during each unit, you must post a question or comment, or a response to the question or comment of one of your classmates, on the course Sakai site. If you are not responding to a post, your post must appear no later than 8 pm on the night before class. If you are responding to a post, your post must appear no later than 8 am on the day of class. Your participation grade will be determined by the quality and regularity of your contributions in class and on Blackboard.

**Leading discussion and submitting discussion questions (20%):** Twice during the semester, you will work in pairs to prepare for, and lead, one class session. At least 24 hours before your assigned session, you must post to Blackboard five questions and/or comments for your fellow students to consider prior to class.

**Reaction papers (40%):** You must submit, after the **first**, and then after **three of the next four**, course units, a 2-4 page paper that addresses a **specific issue** raised by the unit's film and/or one of the readings that accompanied it. A guide to writing philosophy papers will be provided at least one week before the first reaction paper is due.

**Final Paper (30%):** You must write an 8-10 page paper in which you examine and defend your own position on a philosophical issue raised by one of our films or readings. Your paper must contain a description and assessment of at least *two* scholarly sources not assigned as class readings. A mandatory tutorial on how to locate and use such sources will take place in the library at a time TBA.

## Academic Integrity

"To put your name on a piece of work is to say that it is yours, that the praise or criticism is due to you. To put your name on a piece of work any part of which is not yours is plagiarism, unless that piece is clearly marked and the work from which you have borrowed is fully identified. Plagiarism is a form of theft...**Your responsibility, when you put your name on a piece of work, is simply to distinguish between what is yours and what is not**, and to credit those who have in any way contributed."

*from the Wake Forest definition of plagiarism*

If you have any questions or doubts about what constitutes academic dishonesty or plagiarism, or about how to use and cite sources, please check with me.

## Schedule

**8/30** Distribution of syllabus and discussion of course themes and expectations  
**9/2** Philosophy, film, and philosophy in films

**9/5-19** **Unit One: (What) Can We Know?**  
**Film: *The Matrix***

**Readings:** *Meditation One*, Rene Descartes  
"Dream Skepticism," "Brain in a Vat Skepticism," "The Experience Machine," C. Grau  
"What's So Bad About Living in the Matrix?" James Pryor  
"Reality, what matters, and the Matrix," Iakdvos Vasilou

**9/21–10/5**      **Unit Two: Value: The commons, the individual, and sustainability**  
**Film: *The Lorax***

**Readings:**      “The Great Global Experiment: As climate change accelerates, how will we adapt to a changed earth?” Jonathan Shaw, *Harvard Magazine*, November/December 2002.  
**Online Test:** Your environmental footprint.  
“The Tragedy of the Commons,” Garrett Hardin, *Science* December 1968, 1243-1248.  
“Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges,” Ostrom, et al., *Science* April 1999: 278-282.  
“Given-ness and Gift: Property and the Quest for Environmental Ethics,” Carol Rose, *Yale Law School Faculty Scholarship Series*.  
“Redefining the Good Life in a Sustainable Society, Lester Milbrath, *Environmental Values*, Autumn 1993.

**10/10—10/24**      **Unit Three: Free Will**  
**Film: *Minority Report***

**Readings:**      “The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will,” Peter van Inwagen  
“Why We Have No Free Will,” Derk Pereboom  
“Freedom and Resentment,” PF Strawson  
“Time and Punishment,” Christopher New  
“The Time to Punish,” Saul Smilansky

**10/26**              **NO CLASS**

**10/31–11/9**        **Unit Four: Personal Identity**  
**Film: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind***

**Readings:**      “A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality,” John Perry  
“The Self and the Future,” Bernard Williams

**11/14-11/23**      **Unit Five: Human Machines?**  
**Film: *Blade Runner***

**Readings:**      “Thinking Machines: Some Reflections on the Turing Test,” Peter Bieri  
“Machines like us”: An interview with John Searle  
“Sentience: The next moral dilemma”  
“Memory,” John Sutton  
“Death,” Thomas Nagel

**11/28-12/7**        **Unit Six: Love**  
**Film: *Vertigo***

**Readings:**      “Romantic Love and Loving Commitment,” by N. Delaney  
“The Woman in Love,” by Simone de Beauvoir  
“Sexual Desire,” by J. Shaffer  
“Vertigo and the Pathologies of Romantic Love,” by N. Carroll