

Jason Potter

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Web Site: <http://philophizer.com/index.html> (Please note: all handouts, study guides, this syllabus, links to films, readings, and course calendar are available both at this website and on the Canvas site)

Office Hours: 3:00–4:30 P.M. M-W-F in Muenzinger D-120 or BY APPOINTMENT.

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the philosophical approach to film, both as an artform and as an entertainment medium (these are not, of course, mutually exclusive, but rather, *overlapping* categories). It may help to say what it is *not*. It is not a course covering film theory, film history, or what is called ‘film studies’. In particular, we will not be looking at film in the way that literary theory, and associated discourses, look at literature, nor will we be looking closely at the technical means by which films are created. Any of these distinct approaches are not less serious in their approach to film than those pursued by philosophers interested in film, and most overlap with the philosophical treatment of that mode of expression. Most simply, this course takes the publicly-screened film (a relatively recent form of artistic expression which first appeared in the mid-1890s thanks to the Lumière and Skladanowsky brothers) as another artform about which questions that have long been raised by philosophers of art can be asked. Here are some examples: a) What *sort of thing* is a film?; b) Who is the author of a film?; c) If films have meanings (an open question), is that meaning open to interpretation, or are there things that restrict how a film may be interpreted?; d) Do films have narrators?; e) Why do we respond emotionally to film representations we know are fake (aka ‘suspension of disbelief’/The Paradox of Fiction)?; f) What explains our attraction to frightening, disturbing, even disgusting images?; g) Do movies have objective properties that determine which ones we prefer, or are movie preferences *purely subjective* (in the way food preferences are, if not purely, at least *substantially* subjective in nature)?; h) how much of our experience of a film is based on things the *viewer* brings with them to the screening?; i) Can the experience of a film change when we *study it*, and if so, does studying the film change the film, or only change the viewer’s experience of something that stayed the same through all viewings?; j) If a film glorifies something awful (Nazi anti-semitism, for example), can we judge its aesthetic properties independent of its moral properties?; k) How should we regard a masterpiece after discovering that the person who wrote and directed it was a moral monster?

You will be required to read at least one article and watch one movie each week (and in some weeks, more than one of each!!!). While the course has no prerequisites, some previous coursework in philosophy will be very beneficial as philosophical texts about film can be challenging at first. Bear in mind that readings of this kind require *more than one read-through*, beginning with a quick first-reading to get the gist of the article, followed not long thereafter by a more-in-depth read-through in which you (ideally) take notes as you read (this helps to remind you of ideas and reactions you had on the first or second reading and convincing studies by students of the human learning process have proved that *writing down* something you are thinking about, have heard from others, or read, *increases retention*).

Course Objectives

1. That you learn to identify arguments, an important tool of philosophical work, and to distinguish them from the expression of opinions advanced without supporting evidence. This is particularly important when thinking about art since so much of our experience with art *seems* self-evident to the viewer (which makes widespread disagreement about a particular piece of art either beyond evaluation, and therefore not worth discussing, or a puzzle that needs our attention).
2. That you learn to read philosophical works in an active and comprehensive way, and more importantly, to develop the skills necessary to consider alternative versions of *what the author meant* by their assertions, alternatives that you then attempt to refine into the most-plausible interpretation (*very few* people, including some *working philosophers*, develop this skill to the highest level, and philosophy is always worse off for every failure to achieve the highest expression of this skill).
3. That you learn to express your thoughts clearly, and to develop the fine art of listening *with generosity and an open mind* to the ideas, reflections and beliefs of your fellow students.
4. That you make progress in the fine art of watching, reacting to, and thinking about movies.
5. That you come to appreciate some of the many different ways that films can be understood, how different ways of thinking about particular films, or films in general, have consequences in the **quality** of one’s viewing experience. As with all great forms of art and entertainment, knowledge of the medium improves the range and depth of your film-viewing experience of particular films and the way film can augment and improve your quality of life.

Required Texts

I have arranged for the bookstore to acquire the following, very useful book which is the only required text in the course. It will be available both as a rental and as a paperback you keep, whichever best suits your financial situation and preferences:

Carroll, Noel, and Choi, Jinhee, eds. *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). Until the textbook is available through the CU Bookstore, I will be making photocopies of anything you read from it on the Canvas site.

The films will be made available either through Kanopy (accessible through the CU Libraries system¹), or Canvas. Note that required films should be watched *again* even if you have already seen the film before. Repeat viewings improve our sense of what a good (or bad) movie offers.

¹ How to access Kanopy: Go to <https://colorado.kanopy.com/>, login with your identikey username and password, then search for the film by title.

Course Requirements & Percentage of Final Grade

(1) Attendance ² & Participation in In-class Discussions	15%
(2) Weekly Journal Entries (10%) + Discussion Board Participation (10%)	20%
(3) One Oral Reading + Film Summary (given orally by a 3–4–person Report Group in Class)	5%
(4) Two Online, Timed Open-Book Quizzes	10%
(6) Two Short Papers (3-5 Pages) (12.5% each)	25%
(7) Take-Home Final Exam	25%

Notes on Course Requirements:

(1) **Weekly Journal Questions and Reflections + Discussion Board Participation.** There will be one of these journal entries due each week (no *later* than 6:00 p.m. on Fridays). There is a Canvas Assignment Folder for each of these. Each journal entry should contain two questions (or comments) about the reading(s) for the week, along with a short (no less than a half-page paragraph, but no longer than a page [more pages will be ignored!]) reflection on how the movie assigned for the week does or does not relate to the author's argument. When there are 'recommended' or 'additional [usually Youtube-based] required videos' included in the week's topics, these need not be addressed. Only the main movie should be. These entries a) inform me of your questions about the text and reactions to the movie, b) serve as a things you will bring to both Discussion Board exchanges (one entry per week is required, along with at least one response to the entry of another student) and will serve as to encourage your participation in general discussion in class, and c) help you gather ideas you can use in writing your papers.

(2) **Oral Reading + Film Summary.** These reports consist in summaries of the main points made in the main reading for the week (the reading assigned for Thursday of each week) and the most-important features of the main movie assigned for the week (you can for these reports ignore the Youtube videos and 'recommended' but not required movies listed in the course schedule available on the course website). These will be delivered by 3-member report groups and each member will be responsible for each of 1/3 of the overall oral presentations, each no longer than 5-minutes each, that will serve to open each Thursday class session. Each group member can be graded on their contribution *only*, but groups that choose to work together will not be punished for making that choice. Just let me now if you want your contribution to be evaluated separately. Report Groups should feel free to include a class activity as part of their presentation. I will make more time for those groups with such creative things in mind.

(3) **Online Timed Open-Book Quizzes + Takehome Final Exam.** The three quizzes will each cover roughly 1/3 of the course material. The final exam will be cumulative and be made available in Canvas two days before it is due (at 11:59 pm on Monday, December 19 (this is a guess...will be updated when final exam schedules are distributed by the Registrar). I will provide a study guide for the final exam at least two weeks prior to the date of the final exam.

(4) **Two Short Papers.** Each of these paper should be 3-5 pages in length. The first paper should be on one of the movies/readings in the first half of the course and is due on the date indicated in the Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings on the course website (or in the Canvas copy of that schedule) and in the assignment folder in Canvas devoted to that assignment. Since a philosophical essay is *not* like other kinds of essays you may have written in college (or elsewhere), it is strongly recommended that before preparing your papers, you read very carefully the helpful hints for doing philosophy papers, the list of abbreviations used in grading papers, and the model history-of-philosophy paper (all to be found in the supplementary packet available in Canvas for the course and the website under Lectures and Handouts). Students will be responsible for coming up with their own paper topics. The reason for this is that papers on assigned topics tend to be less creative and interesting than those students come up with themselves. But if you have trouble coming up with a thesis topic and statement, please come see me in office hours and I will help you work out something worth writing about. Of course, I do assume that you have already learned how to write essays in English. Here you are trying to learn how to write *philosophical* essays in English. **Note:** You should *cite* any material you use that comes from work not your own (and that includes both such work that you are *paraphrasing* as well as any you are or taking literally [and all latter cases should appear within quotation marks]). In my view, plagiarism *chiefly* victimizes the plagiarizer, but it is also unfair to your fellow students who have not relied on plagiarism to complete their written assignments.

(5) **Grading Policy.** I do not give zeroes for any work, even work that was *not turned in*. The worst grade you can receive on any assignment is 53% of the possible point value of that assignment.

(6) **Grading Scale.** A = 92.5-100%; A- = 89.5-92.49%; B+ = 86.5-89.49%; B = 82.5-86.49%; B- = 79.5-82.49%; C+ = 76.5-79.59%; C = 72.5-76.49%; C- = 69.5-72.49%; D+ = 66.5-69.49%; D = 62.5-66.49%; D- = 59.5-62.49%; F+ = 56.5-59.49%; F = < 56.49%

Clarifications, Rules of the Road, Regrettable Necessities & Errata

(1) What your grade means:

A: Superior work

B: Good work

C: Work with some strengths, balanced against clear weaknesses

D: Work with few strengths, many weaknesses

F: Work that brings CPR to mind (and I don't mean the Critique of Pure Reason)

² This course will not help you to develop the capacities for film appreciation, philosophical exploration of the many questions this form of art and entertainment raises, and the skills in verbal and written expression required to interact meaningfully with others who share your interest in movies, if you do not attend the vast majority of the 43 class sessions. That is where you will be exposed to the ideas of others, learn how to express your own ideas so others will understand what you have in mind, and acquire perspectives on film beyond those you have already developed. This is an opportunity for exploration, and you will receive many fewer benefits if you don't come to class frequently, wide awake, alert, and prepared to consider the readings and movies we will try to understand and enjoy together. For all these reasons, if you miss more than 3 class sessions, your attendance/participation grade (=15 pts) will be reduced by 1 point for every additional unexcused absence until it reaches 53% of the possible credit (=7.95 pts).

- (2) Late papers, exercises, reading summaries, etc., are a Really Bad Thing. The usual excusing conditions must exist if I am to make exceptions to this rule. Check with me if you want to know what sorts of conditions are excusable, but most obviously they include illness (especially possible COVID-19 symptoms) and personal emergencies.
- (3) Breaches of academic honesty will receive the harshest allowable university penalty. However, I do think it is worth noting that to cheat in philosophy is to cheat oneself, since you undermine the potential development of your own mind (which *is the point of any education worth having*).
- (4) You are responsible for the entire reading assignment—not just what we discuss in class.
- (5) Reading assignments in philosophy tend to be both challenging and time consuming. You might want to take this into account when planning your semester. This course is as difficult as any technical course you take (calculus, for example). Do not assume it is a cakewalk....you will regret the assumption later.
- (6) Readings should be done prior to the class for which they are assigned. If this involves a range of days, you should have everything read by the first day in the range.
- (7) Total points possible: 100.
- (8) What to expect from me: prompt and honest feedback, clear leading questions, discussions and lectures (which will only occur occasionally), sufficient contact outside class (e.g., office hours, e-mail, the web site, group chat and blog exchanges).
- (9) I am happy to discuss grades with you after assignments are returned, but please save these discussions for office hours.
- (10) Arrangements to extend deadlines for papers, to be excused for class absences, etc., **can only be made in person**. *Do not email me about these things* except to warn me about a problem and to arrange a meeting to discuss them.
- (11) This syllabus is subject to revision.

Assignment Schedule

To be announced through the Canvas Calendar for this course with cues made available through a separate “Schedule of Lecture Topics, Readings, Movies” made available on the course website on a webpage with thjs very same title.

Basic Needs: I believe that in order to learn, students need to have their basic needs met: food to eat and a safe place to live. If you’re having trouble with either, the campus has some resources for you. If you’re facing food insecurity, reach out to food@colorado.edu, and they will work with you to find food resources. If you’re having trouble paying rent or facing housing insecurity, you can get in touch with these advocates: [Boulder County Housing & Human Services](#) at 303-441-1000 or [Off-campus Housing](#) at och@colorado.edu & 303-492-7053. For assistance with landlord-tenant matters, contact [Mediation Services](#) at 303-441-4364 & mediation@bouldercolorado.edu. A [Student Emergency Fund](#) has been created to support students experiencing a temporary financial hardship as a result of COVID-19. Other campus resources are available here (including mental health resources and [free therapy](#)). [Case manager resources](#) are also available to help you find appropriate campus and local resources. A 24/7 [Suicide Prevention hotline](#) is available for you: just call 303-492-2277. Please don’t hesitate to also approach me if you have trouble negotiating these resources.

One Last Thing

Since I find it very helpful to speak with each of you at least once, there will be **required**, short (10–minute) meetings during office hours the first month or so of the semester to discuss your progress. I will be distributing a digital sign-up sheet in the form of a Doodle poll so you can arrange a time and date that suits you. Don’t put this off too long as it helps me to understand your work in my class if I’ve gotten to know your background, interests, and ambitions through a private conversation.

CAMPUS POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Classroom Behavior

Students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote, or online. Failure to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, marital status, political affiliation, or political philosophy.

For more information, see the [classroom behavior policy](#), the [Student Code of Conduct](#), and the [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](#).

Accommodation for Disabilities, Temporary Medical Conditions, and Medical Isolation

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or DSinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) on the Disability Services website.

If you have a temporary illness, injury or required medical isolation for which you require adjustment, just let me know what kind of adjustment (approval for absences from class, extensions on assignments for which the due dates are not workable given the illness, injury, or medical isolation involved). Privacy rules prohibit teachers to require knowledge of the *exact nature* of such illness, injury, or

medical situation as a condition of providing accommodation. You are therefore *not required* to share that information with me.

Preferred Student Names and Pronouns

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their preferred names and pronouns via the student portal; those preferred names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name.

Honor Code

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the [Honor Code](#). Violations of the Honor Code may include but are not limited to: plagiarism (including use of paper writing services or technology [such as essay bots]), cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. Understanding the course's syllabus is a vital part in adhering to the Honor Code.

All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution: StudentConduct@colorado.edu. Students found responsible for violating the [Honor Code](#) will be assigned resolution outcomes from the Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution as well as be subject to academic sanctions from the faculty member. Visit [Honor Code](#) for more information on the academic integrity policy.

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation

CU Boulder is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. University policy prohibits [protected-class](#) discrimination and harassment, sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner abuse (dating or domestic violence), stalking, and related retaliation by or against members of our community on- and off-campus. The Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) addresses these concerns, and individuals who have been subjected to misconduct can contact OIEC at 303-492-2127 or email CUreport@colorado.edu. Information about university policies, [reporting options](#), and [support resources](#) including confidential services can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and graduate instructors must inform OIEC when they are made aware of incidents related to these policies regardless of when or where something occurred. This is to ensure that individuals impacted receive outreach from OIEC about resolution options and support resources. To learn more about reporting and support for a variety of concerns, visit the [Don't Ignore It page](#).

Religious Accommodations

Campus policy requires faculty to provide reasonable accommodations for students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please communicate the need for a religious accommodation in a timely manner (at least one week prior to the holiday/observance involved).

See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Mental Health and Wellness.

The University of Colorado Boulder is committed to the well-being of all students. If you are struggling with personal stressors, mental health or substance use concerns that are impacting academic or daily life, please contact [Counseling and Psychiatric Services \(CAPS\)](#) located in C4C or call (303) 492-2277, 24/7.

Free and unlimited telehealth is also available through [Academic Live Care](#). The Academic Live Care site also provides information about additional wellness services on campus that are available to students.