

Jason PotterPhone: 720-252-0643; E-Mail: jason.potter@colorado.eduWeb 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: 3:30–5:00 P.M. M-W in HLMS W137, 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, but often two articles and watch one movie each week. 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, and followed 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).

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 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-person Report Group in Class)	5%
(4) Two Online, Timed Open-Book Exams	10%
(6) Two Short Papers (3-5 Pages) (12.5% each)	25%
(7) In-Person 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 required videos [usually Youtube-based]' included in the week's topics, these need not be addressed.. 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 every Wednesday at the start of class by 3-member report groups and each member will be responsible for each of 1/3 of the overall oral presentations. These need not be longer than 10-15 minutes. 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 can include a class activity as part of their presentation. These are always welcome.

(3) **Two Online Timed (75-minute) Open-Book Exams + In-Person Final Exam.** The first two exams will each cover the course material assigned in the first and second 5-week segments of the course. The final exam will be cumulative (Date, Time and Location: TBD). I will provide study guides for all three exams at least a week in advance of their due date.

(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 March 20 at 11:59 pm in Canvas. 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) 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. 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*).

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 30 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).

- (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 spring 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 meetings 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, course website, Canvas, and text 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 that very same title.

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.

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.

SYLLABUS STATEMENTS

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 of 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 Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution and will be subject to academic sanctions from the faculty member. Visit [Honor Code](#) for more information on the academic integrity policy.

Accommodation for Disabilities, Temporary Medical Conditions, and Medical Isolation

Accommodation for Religious Obligations

Instructional faculty members must make every reasonable effort to accommodate all students who have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignment deadlines or required attendance due to a religious observance. Whenever possible, students must notify the instructional faculty member at least two weeks in advance of the expected exam, assignment deadline, or attendance conflict to request an accommodation for religious observance. If the start date of the course is less than two weeks before the date of requested accommodation, students must notify the instructional faculty member on the start date of the course. See the [Student Academic Accommodations for Religious Observances Policy](#) for more information.

In this class, absences due to religious observations and/or obligations are not penalized, nor are late submission of assignments due to such religious observances or obligations penalized. I do ask that students warn me in advance when such a observances or obligations can be foreseen. I will take those into consideration and make an accommodation so that these events will not affect my evaluation of your work.

Student Names and Pronouns

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information does not always align with how they identify. If you wish to have a name other than your legal name appear on your instructors' class rosters and in Canvas, or if you wish to choose pronouns to appear on your instructors' class rosters and in Canvas, visit the [Registrar's website](#) for instructions on how to change your personal information in university systems. Note that if the student information provided in my copy of the class roster does not mention preferred pronouns, I will not know and hope students with such preferences will let me know directly by email or in person so I can accommodate their wishes.

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.

Additional classroom behavior information

- [Student Classroom and Course-Related Behavior Policy](#).
- [Student Code of Conduct](#).
- [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](#).

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation

CU Boulder is committed to fostering a productive 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- or off-campus. Denial of an approved accommodation for disability, religious observance, or pregnancy or pregnancy related medical conditions may be discriminatory. 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 OIEC@colorado.edu. Information about university policies, [OIEC reporting options](#), and [OIEC support resources](#) including confidential services can be found on the [OIEC website](#). Faculty and graduate instructors are required to inform OIEC when someone discloses misconduct regardless of when or where it occurred. This is to ensure that those impacted receive outreach from OIEC about resolution options and support resources. To learn more about reporting and support options for a variety of concerns, visit the [Don't Ignore It page](#).

Mental Health and Wellness

The University of Colorado Boulder is committed to supporting students' mental health and overall wellbeing. If personal, academic, or emotional challenges are affecting your wellbeing or success, [Counseling and Psychiatric Services \(CAPS\)](#), is here to help. CAPS offers counseling, referrals, psychiatric care, crisis support, and much more. Visit CAPS in the C4C, or call (303) 492-2277, 24/7.

Acceptable Use of AI in This Class

I do not object to students using Generative AI tools for study purposes, including to prepare for taking an online exam based on the exam study guides which are always provided in advance of taking such exams. However, while I cannot stop it nor detect its use at this point, I will remind students who use it for the online exams will find that they are likely to do less well on the comprehensive final exam, which will be given in-person. The weekly journals and discussion comments in this course should be generated by the student themselves since these are Pass/Fail (where *Fail* = *Failure to Submit*), but if you want some machine to produce those, I question your judgment but I cannot prevent it. I think it is a good idea to consult an AI agent when thinking through what to write the two essays in the class. They *must* be on a reading or a film that was presented in class sessions or made available to you in Canvas to consult. I don't mind if you run your first draft through an AI agent and ask it to improve the clarity and/or effectiveness of your writing (but learning to write without these crutches will serve you better because you will have developed your *own* skills at self-expression through language). Lastly, anything you do with an AI agent that substitutes what the agent 'knows' for what *you know* is against your own interests and will leave you less-well-educated when you finish your work in this course. I hope that matters to you.