Course Overview

In this course we use film as a medium to explore different concepts in philosophy and religion. We will consider issues related to metaphysics, ethics, temporality, the “death of God,” feminism, the portrayal of religion in culture, the understanding of religious traditions through practice, and the representation of religion.

Course Objectives

i. Students will discover, identify, and explain issues related to religion and philosophy in both critical texts and film.

ii. Students will actively engage in dialogue by critically discussing and evaluating important arguments in both religion and philosophy.

iii. Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of and critical thinking about philosophical and religious concepts.

iv. Students will be able to identify theoretical and critical principles in philosophical and religious thinking from diverse historical and cultural contexts.

v. Students will have a greater awareness of issues of religious and philosophical importance that are displayed in popular cinematic culture.

Required Texts and Materials: Articles accessed online through Canvas.

Basis for Final Grade: Each week, we will discuss the assigned readings in the discussion forum, watch the assigned film, and complete a quiz. In one week of your choosing, you will also write a response paper.

Discussion Posts (20 points): You will respond to the discussion topic (listed below in Course Schedule) for each unit. Discussion posts should be at least 250-300 words, interacting with the assigned texts and properly cited using APA format. After you make your initial post (12 points and due on Wednesdays), you should respond to the posts of at
least two of your classmates, raising substantive questions or challenging their assertions (8 points and due by Sunday of each week of discussion). Your responses must go beyond “nice post” or “good work.” Ask a probing question of your classmate to help further the discussion. You can also consider how the readings apply to the films in your responses. This is a significant component of your grade; spend some time with these posts! Show that you have read the assignments and made the connections to the films. Please see the grading rubric for additional information (found in Modules).

**Paper Assignments (50 points):** You will write 1 paper out of 5 possible assignments (you have 4 weeks to “skip.”) Papers will be 2-3 pages, 12 pt Times New Roman font (approximately 750 words) responding to the paper topics found below in Course Schedule. I will return the papers to you with comments as soon as possible, but please allow up to 2 weeks to receive grades and feedback. Papers will be due on Saturdays of each week at 11:59 pm, with the exception of Assignment #2 (due on Monday, Jul 7 at noon due to maintenance on Webcourses) and the final paper (due on Friday, August 1 because of the end of the term). Please see the grading rubric for additional information (found in Modules).

**Movie Quizzes (10 points):** There will be a quiz due every week on Saturday at 11:59 pm, accessible through Webcourses, with the exception of Assignment #2 (due on Monday, Jul 7 at noon due to maintenance on Webcourses). The quizzes will have a 20-minute time limit for completion. The questions will relate to the readings and the movie for that week.

Discussion Posts = 120 points  
Papers Assignment = 50 points  
Quizzes = 60 points  
TOTAL = 230 points

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Course Policies:

**Late Work Policy:** This class operates in Eastern Time Zone (US & Canada) and assignments are due by 11:59 pm of the date specified in the course schedule. Late posts in the forum will be deducted by .5/pts per day late. The discussion forum closes at the end of the day on Sunday. If you have a special circumstance that prevents you from posting to the forum on time, then please notify me as soon as possible and I will determine extensions on a case-by-case basis. Plan the week you choose to write the paper wisely. A late paper will count as a “skip” and will not be accepted.
Email: Since this is a Webcourse, email will be our primary form of communication. In most circumstances, you can expect a response from me immediately, but please allow 24 hours for a response. If something arises and I will be away from email, I will let you know in advance.

Movie screening: Most of the movies are accessible online through the Webcourse. If a movie is not able to be streamed online (due to licensing issues), then I will notify you in advance and it will be your responsibility to obtain the movie through Netflix, Redbox, Amazon, etc.

Disability Access: The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Ferrell Commons Room 185, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

Professionalism Policy: I look forward to lively and engaged discussions in the forum, although please keep your posts respectful and appropriate for the classroom environment at all times.

Academic Conduct Policy: Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. If you are uncertain as to what constitutes academic dishonesty, please consult The Golden Rule, the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook (http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/) for further details. As in all University courses, The Golden Rule Rules of Conduct will be applied. Violations of these rules will result in a record of the infraction being placed in your file and receiving a zero on the work in question AT A MINIMUM. At the instructor’s discretion, you may also receive a failing grade for the course. Confirmation of such incidents can also result in expulsion from the University. In this course we will utilize turnitin.com, an automated system which instructors can use to quickly and easily compare each student's assignment with billions of web sites, as well as an enormous database of student papers that grows with each submission.

Please see http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/ for information on APA citation format.

University Writing Center: The University Writing Center (UWC) is a free resource for UCF undergraduates and graduates. At the UWC, a trained writing consultant will work individually with you on anything you're writing (in or out of class), at any point in the writing process from brainstorming to editing. Appointments are recommended, but not required. For more information or to make an appointment, visit the UWC website at http://www.uwc.ucf.edu, stop by MOD 608, or call 407.823.2197.

The dates and assignments listed in the syllabus are tentative, and can be changed at the discretion of the professor.

Course Schedule
Week One: 6/23-28 (Introduction and Platonic Metaphysics)

• Post an Introduction in the discussion forum. Tell us your name, location, expectations for the class, and something entertaining!

Readings:
http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/allegory.html (Plato, “Allegory of the Cave” from Republic)
http://www.northampton.edu/Documents/Faculty/Harold%20Weiss/Intro%20to%20Philosophy/Plato.pdf
http://www.trinity.edu/cbrown/intro/plato_two_worlds.html

http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/platform.htm
Discussion Question:
Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” presupposes that there is a distinction between appearances and reality. Do you agree? Why or why not? Why does Plato say at the end that it is impossible for professors of education to put knowledge in the soul which was not there before? (Initial post due Wed Jun 25; Responses due Jun 29)

Film Screening: *The Truman Show* (1998)

**Paper Assignment 1:** Provide an account of Truman’s experience using Plato’s metaphysical views. Be sure to consider forms, appearances, the senses, and rationality. How should his experience be compared to the prisoners in the cave? (Due Saturday Jun 28)

**Week Two: 6/29 – 7/5 (Nietzsche and the Eternal Recurrence)**

Readings:

Nietzsche, Prologue from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze, esp. pp. 70-72

Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus”
http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/00/pwillen1/lit/msysip.htm

Discussion Question:
In Nietzsche’s thought, how are the concepts of the “death of God,” the eternal return, and the overman related to one another? Is this an optimistic or pessimistic view of life and existence? (Initial posts due Wed Jul 2, Responses due Mon Jul 7 noon due to maintenance on Webcourses)

Film Screening: *Groundhog Day* (1993)

**Paper Assignment 2:** Relate Phil Connors’ experience to Nietzsche’s concept of the eternal recurrence and the overman. Why was he stuck and how did he break the cycle? How did Phil use his experiences as a possibility for transformation? (Due Mon Jul 7 noon due to maintenance on Webcourses)

**Week Three: 7/6-12 (Consequentialist and Deontological Ethics)**

Readings:
Consequentialism:
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/utilitarianism-history/
(esp. Section 2)

Mill, “Utilitarianism”

Deontology:
http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/socialsciences/ppcorino/MEDICAL_ETHICS_TEXT/Chapter_2_Ethical_Traditions/Categorical_Imperative.htm
Kant, “The Categorical Imperative”

Discussion Question: Compare how a utilitarian and deontologist would each approach the moral question of whether or not to tell a lie. What factors would they consider when making their judgment? Walk the reader through the process. (Initial posts due Wed Jul 9, Responses due Sun Jul 13)

Film Screening: Training Day (2001)

**Paper Assignment 3:** Based on the actions of Jake Hoyt and Alonzo Harris, which figure would be most closely associated with consequentialism and which with deontology? Explain your answer using at least 1-2 direct examples for each from the movie. (Due Saturday Jul 12)

**Week Four: 7/13-19 (Feminist Thought)**

Reading:
de Beauvoir, selections from The Second Sex

Discussion Question: How does the dichotomy of immanence/transcendence relate to de Beauvoir’s views on the female social identity? (Initial posts due Wed Jul 16, Responses due Sunday Jul 20)

Film Screening: Mona Lisa Smile (2003)

**Paper Assignment 4:** Who do you consider the feminine hero of the film: Katherine Watson, Betty Warren, Giselle Levy, or Joan Brandwyn? Why? Do you think Simone de Beauvoir would agree with your position? Why or why not? (Due Saturday Jul 19)

**Week Five: 7/20-26 (The Christian Gospels)**

Reading:


Pagels, excerpt from The Gnostic Gospels


Discussion Question: How does the Gospel of Thomas compare to The Gospel of Mark concerning the ideas of self-knowledge, salvation, and the figure of Jesus? (Initial post due Wednesday Jul 23, Responses due Sunday Jul 27)

Film Screening: Stigmata (1999)

**Paper Assignment 5:** (last paper opportunity) Frankie Page considered herself to be an atheist before her affliction, yet after being exposed to a heterodoxical text in Christianity, she became a kind of believer. Is she now a “Christian,” in an orthodox sense? How is this defined? Consider the Gospel of Thomas as it relates to the Christian tradition at large in your answer. (Due Saturday Jul 26)

**Week Six: 7/28 – 8/1 (Holocaust and Representation)**

Reading:
Gourevitch, “A Dissent on Schindler’s List”
Felman, “Film as Witness: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah”
Loshitzsky, “Holocaust Others: Spielberg’s Schindler’s List vs. Lanzmann’s Shoah”
Des Pres, “Holocaust Laughter?”
What’s So Special about Art Spiegelman’s Maus?  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVQcFQjupXs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVQcFQjupXs)

**Discussion Question:** Describe two of the challenges discussed in terms of producing representations of the Holocaust. What style of narration do you feel is most appropriate? **Please note due dates:** (Initial posts due **Wednesday** July 30; Responses due **Friday** August 1)

**Film Screening:** (two films) Schindler’s List (1993) and Train of Life (1998)