

PH367-15 Philosophy through Film

25/26

Department

Philosophy

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Karen Simecek

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

Multiple

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

There are many films (including TV series) that are celebrated for being philosophical (e.g. Blade Runner, The Matrix, and more recently Severance) but what do we mean by this, is it just that such films are concerned with philosophical themes or can we do philosophy by simply watching or making films? Is there anything unique about this artform that makes it able to engage audiences and filmmakers in philosophical inquiry? In addressing these questions, this module will introduce contemporary debates around the cognitive value of film, the role of fiction in philosophical inquiry, the relationship between emotion and thought amongst other themes with examples of classic philosophical films.

Questions covered will include

- Is there anything special about the experience of fiction films that makes it well suited to philosophical inquiry and reflection?
- Have any original and philosophically significant ideas been developed in a cinematic work?
- Under what circumstances can the film medium be used to express an author's philosophical vision?
- What sort of background knowledge needs to be in place for a film to be interpreted as articulating philosophical theses and arguments?
- Does the goal of working out a film's philosophical meaning sometimes conflict with the goal of appreciating its value as a work of art?

Module aims

The aim of this module is to introduce students to key philosophical ideas relating to film, in particular, debates about whether philosophy can be done through the medium of film. The module will also cover the important debate concerning to what extent the aesthetics of a work contribute to the promotion of philosophical reflection. Alongside these theoretical concerns regarding the philosophical value of film, the module will also explore the philosophical themes of the works studied, which will be used as the focus of the theoretical debates covered on the course.

By encouraging students to draw on their own experiences and knowledge of film, the module aims to help students to develop a critical stance towards such discussions with reference to their own examples.

The module encourages students to reflect on the methodologies adopted in the practice of philosophy in other modules, as well as developing skills in applying their own examples to these philosophical debates. Through the coursework, students will explore the possibilities of representing a philosophical argument through both the written word and video-presentation, which will further enhance their transferable skills.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Example schedule:

Topics

- Week 1: Doing philosophy through film and thinking through images (central debate)

What might be meant by 'cinematic thinking'? How might this relate to what we think of as philosophizing? We will begin by considering *The Seventh Seal* - a key example in this debate.

- Week 2: Fiction and the problem of representation

How can fictional representations reveal philosophical insight? In discussing this question, we will consider *Mulholland Drive* (silencio scene), which draws our attention to the relationship between illusion and the real, and the nature of fantasy.

- Week 3: Imagination/importance of experience

Cinematic experience seems to resist attempts at paraphrase (and necessarily so). Is this compatible with thinking of film as being able to offer philosophical reflection? Does film merely offer the potential for thought experiment? We will consider these questions in relation to *Blade Runner*.

- Week 4: The role of narrative/understanding the self

Can narrative play an important role in philosophical inquiry? Drawing on the example of Mulholland Drive, we will explore the importance of narrative in film and to what extent this can reveal something about the nature of the self.

- Week 5: Understanding emotions/emotion and affect

Through consideration of Talk to Her, Can our responses to film give us knowledge about the emotions? Is cinematic-media particularly suited to revealing ethical insights through its affective properties? Can film help cultivate empathy? We will also consider the moralism debate.

- Week 7: Spectatorship and authorial intention

The central focus for this week will be on trying to locate where the philosophizing of film takes place. Is it in work done by the audience or are they receiving a philosophical argument/vision of the director of the film? Drawing on the examples of Into the Abyss and Five Obstructions we will investigate to what extent a film can be independent of the director's vision. When evaluating a film for its philosophical value, to what extent do we need to consider the author's intentions? What is the nature of the audience's role in interpreting the work?

- Week 8: Documentary and the real

Continuing with the examples of Into the Abyss and Five Obstructions we will consider whether documentary has any philosophical advantages over fiction films, and whether there are philosophical limitations in representing reality. Does accuracy of such films impact on their potential for philosophising?

- Week 9: Ethics of film (constraints and dogme 95)

Turning to focus on Five Obstructions and the dogme 95 movement, the focus will be on what film can say about film - can it offer a philosophical self-reflection? What constraints ought to be placed on the production of film to serve philosophical and ethical aims? Can rules and constraints enable creativity?

- Week 10: The Philosophical limits of film

In the final week, we will return to consider the bold thesis and Livingston's argument against this view. We will reflect on the moderate position put forward by Levine and Cox.

Examples of film to be studied

- Blade Runner dir. Ridley Scott (dystopia, consciousness, other minds)
- Talk to Her dir. Pedro Almadovar (the nature of love, friendship, and sympathy)
- Mulholland Drive dir. David Lynch (identity and narrative)
- Into the Abyss dir. Werner Herzog (documentary and argument)
- Five Obstructions dir. Lars von Trier (the nature of creativity and intervention)
- The Seventh Seal dir. Ingmar Bergman (life, death, and the existence of God)

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- 1. To understand the way we can approach film philosophically.
- 2. To become familiar with the central debates in this field, and compare the difference in approach and questions when considering film or literature.
- 3. To articulate the aims of philosophical inquiry and how engagement with film might serve those aims.
- 4. To be able to isolate the important claims within readings, understand the structure of arguments, test views for strengths and weaknesses, make good use of examples, and compare the substance of views consistently.
- 5. To be able to develop and apply own examples to conceptual thought in developing arguments in response to the literature.
- 6. To reflect on the way in which we go about doing philosophy and what the best ways are of achieving those philosophical goals.
- 7. To develop transferable skills including application of concepts, argument development, delivering verbal presentations and using video-editing/ presentation software (e.g. iMovie, powerpoint, scribe, ezvid).

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

Research element

Students are required to undertake independent research in writing their essay and producing their video presentation. Students will be encouraged to draw on their own examples of film and TV in addition to the examples introduced on the course.

Interdisciplinary

Alongside philosophical readings, concepts, distinctions and methodologies, students will be introduced to some critical tools from film studies in order to enable students to provide deep critical analyses of cinematic examples. No prior knowledge of film studies is required for the course and all relevant concepts will be introduced in the lectures.

Subject specific skills

Through studying on this module, students will learn how to critically evaluate film drawing on the philosophical literature. This will require students to apply their learning of philosophy to examples from cinema. Students will also develop skills in drawing on artworks in making a philosophical argument. Students will develop skills in developing and presenting complex philosophical arguments. Students will be supported in developing skills in philosophical research using a range of sources (print and electronic media), documenting research carefully, and showing the ability to engage independently in philosophical debate.

Transferable skills

Students will develop their critical thinking skills, knowledge and skills in using aesthetic features to make and support an argument through producing a video presentation. The assessments will support development in students presentation skills (both oral and written). The module will also include a 2 hour workshop to support students in gaining skills in producing their own presentation (filming, editing).

Study

Study time

Type	Required	Optional
Lectures	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)	
Seminars	8 sessions of 1 hour (5%)	
Practical classes	(0%)	1 session of 2 hours
Private study	124 hours (83%)	
Total	150 hours	

Private study description

Private study, reading and assessment preparation

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Video Presentation	40%		Yes (extension)
5-10 minute-presentation/video			
2000 Essay	60%		Yes (extension)

Assessment group R

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
3000 word essay	100%		Yes (extension)

Feedback on assessment

- Peer feedback
 - Verbal feedback on essay plans
 - Verbal feedback on presentation during the course
 - Written feedback on final assessed presentation and essay
-

Availability

Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 3 of UPHA-VQ52 Undergraduate Philosophy, Literature and Classics

This module is Optional for:

- UPHA-L1CA Undergraduate Economics, Psychology and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of L1CA Economics, Psychology and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of L1CC Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Behavioural Economics Pathway)
 - Year 2 of L1CD Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Economics with Philosophy Pathway)
 - Year 2 of L1CE Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Philosophy and Psychology Pathway)
 - Year 3 of L1CA Economics, Psychology and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of L1CC Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Behavioural Economics Pathway)
 - Year 3 of L1CD Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Economics with Philosophy Pathway)
 - Year 3 of L1CE Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Philosophy and Psychology Pathway)
- UPHA-L1CB Undergraduate Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of L1CG Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Behavioural Economics Pathway) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of L1CH Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Economics with Philosophy Pathway) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of L1CJ Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Philosophy and Psychology Pathway) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of L1CB Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (with Intercalated Year)
- UPHA-V700 Undergraduate Philosophy

- Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
- Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
- Year 4 of UPHA-V701 Undergraduate Philosophy (with Intercalated year)
- Year 4 of UPHA-V702 Undergraduate Philosophy (with Work Placement)
- Year 2 of UPHA-V5L2 Undergraduate Philosophy and Politics
- Year 4 of UPHA-VL80 Undergraduate Philosophy with Psychology (with Work Placement)
- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
- Year 4 of UPHA-V7MM Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics (with Intercalated year)
- UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 2 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 3 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
- Year 4 of UPHA-V7MX Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Core option list A for:

- Year 3 of UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
- Year 3 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list B for:

- Year 2 of UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
- Year 2 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list C for:

- Year 4 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Option list A for:

- UPHA-VL78 BA in Philosophy with Psychology
 - Year 2 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
 - Year 3 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
- Year 4 of UPHA-VL79 BA in Philosophy with Psychology (with Intercalated year)
- Year 4 of UMAA-GV18 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year

This module is Option list B for:

- UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature
 - Year 2 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature
 - Year 3 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature
- Year 2 of UPHA-VQ52 Undergraduate Philosophy, Literature and Classics
- Year 2 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics

This module is Option list C for:

- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 3 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
 - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
- UPHA-V7MM Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics (with Intercalated year)
 - Year 4 of V7MS Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of V7MQ Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite) with Intercalated Year
 - Year 4 of V7MM Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite) (with Intercalated year)

This module is Option list D for:

- UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V1V5 History and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of V1V5 History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V9 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)
- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 2 of V7MR Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major)
 - Year 3 of V7MR Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major)