

BTP2NA_T_19
Philosophy and the Cinema

Time and Venue

Tuesday 14.00-15.40 MBlg. 54

Instructor

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Office hours

Monday 11.00-12.00

Tuesday 9:00-10:00

Course goal and general requirements

"What is reality"? "What is truth"? "Where do morality and justice reside"? are the most basic questions with which philosophers in the Western world have been preoccupied for the past two and a half millennia. This course, offered for 2nd-year MA students, is designed to explore how these questions are represented and (re)interpreted in films of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which implicitly or explicitly construe classical philosophical issues. The films to be discussed will be divided into two major groups: the pieces in first feature problems of reality and truth (metaphysics and epistemology), which include *The Matrix* (1999) by the Wachowskis, *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006) by Marc Forster, and *Inception* (2010) by Christopher Nolan; while those in the second group deal with issues related to ethics and justice (moral philosophy), specifically focusing on the problematic relationship between truth-telling and lying. Films in this group include *Memento* (2000) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) by Christopher Nolan, *3:10 to Yuma* (2007) by James Mangold, and *Locke* (2013) by Steven Knight.

Under the current regulations, the course is planned to be a face-to-face, classroom-based course. However, if due to the pandemic we have to switch to remote teaching, please be prepared to use the University of Debrecen E-Learning system at elearning.unideb.hu. In case such a switch occurs, the course evaluation methods (e.g., for class participation) and grading rules may be subject to change. You will be notified of these changes by the instructor if needed.

It is our shared responsibility to observe effective hygiene rules and follow the relevant government, university and faculty regulations regarding the pandemic. If you become ill or experience any symptoms, please stay home to protect others from infection.

There is a philosophical text assigned to each film for each seminar session, which will be discussed alongside the given film. The texts are not directly related to the films, but to the general philosophical problem(s) featured in them. One of the chief objectives of the course is to help students master certain complex philosophical problems through a ubiquitous and more accessible medium, and demonstrate that apparently inaccessible abstractions may gain substantive relevance in the specific context of films.

Requirements for a grade

Active participation in class discussion (15%)

Active participation in class discussions is essential and will have a mighty influence on one's grade. The individual seminars are designed to address particular problems concerning the problematic of essentialism that arise from various discourses we focus on. Several of these questions may incite controversies, and you are all welcome to take your stances in relation to the given problem at hand and engage in debate.

Regular class attendance (25%)

Regular attendance is required: more than three absences will result in "no grade" for the course. Since at the end of the semester you will be tested on your knowledge of the assigned texts and the material covered, it is not a good idea to skip classes and readings, because doing so might severely lessen your chances of understanding what comes subsequently. Should you happen to miss a class for whatever emergency, I am happy to consult anyone on the assigned texts in my office hours or at an appointed time.

Graded assignment (60%)

During the course of the semester, students will be provided with a list of films coupled with philosophical texts not covered in class, from which they can choose and EITHER write a **response paper** of cca. 1500-2000 words (detailed

requirements to be given later, should anyone opt for this assignment) OR prepare them for an **oral review** to be conducted at the end of the semester.

SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Introduction: philosophical paradigms

Week 2 – Slavoj Žižek's *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006) – in-class viewing

I. TRUTH AS A MATTER OF FACT

Week 3 – The Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999)

Reading: Excerpts from Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Week 4 – Marc Forster's *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006)

Reading: Jerome Bruner: "Life as Narrative"

Week 5 – Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010)

Reading: Excerpts from Descartes' *Meditations*

II. TRUTH AND LIE AS PREREQUISITES OF MORAL ACTION

Week 6 – Roman Polanski's *Death and the Maiden* (1994)

Reading: Elaine Scarry. "The Structure of Torture"

Week 7 – Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989)

Reading: Excerpts from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*

Week 8 – Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000)

Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche "On Truth and Lies in an Extramoral Sense" (1873)

Week 9 – CONSULTATION WEEK

Week 10 – James Mangold's *3:10 to Yuma* (2007)

Reading: Excerpts from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*

Week 11 – Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008)

Reading: Excerpts from Albert Camus' *The Rebel* (1951)

Week 12 – Steven Knight's *Locke* (2013)

Reading: Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* revisited

III. CLOSING EVENTS

Week 13 – Oral reviews

Week 14 – Closing