

Philosophy and Film

Fall 2020

MWF 1–2 PM ONLINE

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Waggener Hall 408C

Office hours TBA

Course Description

This course is part philosophy *of* film, part philosophy *through* film. For much of the course, we will consider a number of philosophical questions about the cinematic medium in particular and art more generally, such as: What is the relationship between the objects that appear on screen and those that appear in front of the camera? Can we literally see things in films, even though those things may no longer exist? What are the ethical implications of different approaches to filmmaking, and are films ever aesthetically worse off in virtue of being morally flawed? Do Hollywood films implicate a “male gaze”? Is it possible to genuinely fear characters in horror movies, and if so, can we *enjoy* such horrifying experiences?

Another question that we will consider is whether, as some have claimed, films can genuinely *do* philosophy. We will examine this question both in isolation and by attempting to treat particular films as philosophical “texts,” discussing the philosophical questions that they raise and how far they manage to address them. In the process, we will gain a deeper appreciation of what it is to do philosophy and learn how to do philosophy ourselves.

We will also work toward cultivating a number of philosophical and academic skills, such as:

- Understanding and expositing philosophical positions
- Articulating and defending analyses of particular films
- Critically evaluating arguments and viewpoints
- Communicating complex ideas in a clear and economical manner

You can also expect to develop self-awareness for the movies you love, the movies you hate, and why you bother watching movies in the first place.

Course Information and Expectations

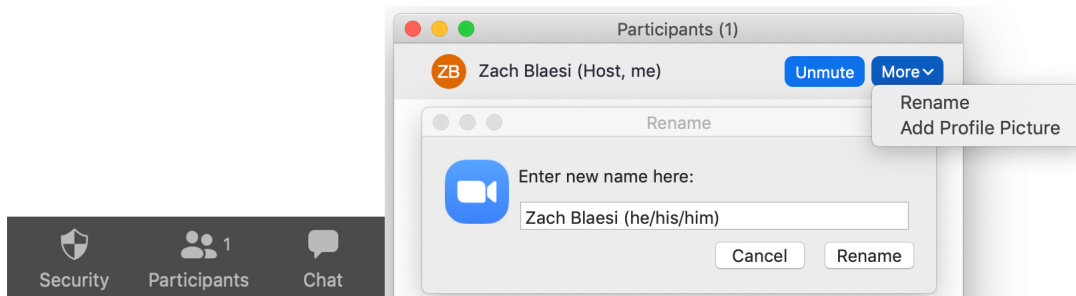
This is an online course with both synchronous and asynchronous components. We will hold three Zoom meetings per week at the scheduled times (MWF 1:00–2:00 PM). All scheduled Zoom meetings can be accessed from the Canvas course site by clicking “[Zoom](#)” from the left-hand menu.

Many of the Zoom meetings will be lecture-based. However, during my lectures, there will be a number of opportunities for students to ask questions and engage each other in discussion. Lecture-based meetings will be recorded and uploaded to Canvas so that students have the option to revisit them at their own pace.

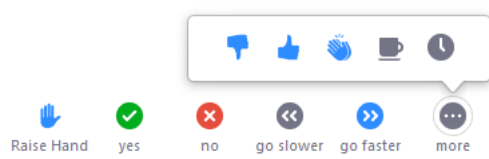
A smaller number of Zoom sessions will be entirely devoted to group activities and discussion. Discussion-based meetings will not be recorded. Additional discussions will take place asynchronously through the Discussions section on the course Canvas site (see Weekly Discussion below).

You are expected to:

- Be responsible for your own education by completing the required readings and films, keeping track of your assignment deadlines and grades, requesting outside help when you need it, and not waiting until the last minute to ask assignment-related questions.
- Be on time and stay for the entirety of each Zoom session. Except in special circumstances, if you are late to a given Zoom session, or leave early, you will be counted as absent for that session.
- Be ready to participate on Zoom by preparing yourself to ask questions or make comments.
- Stay engaged by using the in-meeting chat, raising your hand, using the “**clap**” button when you like a point, participating in polls, and so on.
- Be ready to move into breakout rooms, interact with other students, or actively participate during class activities.
- Show your classmates and instructor respect and be sensitive to their viewpoints and experiences.
- Avoid disruptions and distractions during Zoom sessions as much as possible and mute your audio when you aren't talking.
- Display your preferred name and pronouns on Zoom. You can do this by clicking on your name from the participants page:



We will utilize the following conventions for Zoom meetings:



- If I am moving too fast, press the “**go slower**” button.
- If you don't understand something that was just said and need me to quickly explain it before we move on, press the red “**no**” button.
- If you have a new question, press the “**raise hand**” button.
- If you have a follow up question, press the green “**yes**” button.
- If you like a point that someone made, press the “**clap**” button.
- Feel free to post your questions and observations to the chat. If someone else posts a question to the chat and you know the answer, feel free to respond!

There has been some debate as to whether instructors should require students to enable video during Zoom meetings. On the one hand, students are understandably concerned about their privacy. On the other, meetings without video are less engaging (your visual cues benefit discussion and help

build a sense of community) and less accessible (hearing-impaired students may find it harder to understand you if they cannot see you).

While I have decided not to require it, I **strongly encourage** you to enable video during our Zoom meetings, unless your Internet speed does not support video or you have other strong reasons not to do so (I will not ask what those reasons are). Of course, it is okay to temporarily disable your video during a meeting (e.g., if you need to use the restroom, tend to a child, or move to a different room). You're also welcome to wear whatever you want (so long as you're clothed) and log in from whatever location is most comfortable for you (so long as it isn't extremely noisy and you're able to talk). Finally, feel free to use whatever [Virtual Background](#) you like (so long as it isn't offensive).

Course Materials

READINGS

You are not required to purchase a textbook for this course. Instead, the readings for each week will be made available for download via Canvas under "Files." Many of these readings are dense and need to be read more than once to be fully understood. As a result, I've tried to keep the number of readings to a minimum and to devote more than one lecture to the lengthier articles. The readings for each week are listed on the schedule below. This schedule is *subject to revision*.

FILMS

I will assign a number of films throughout the semester. While some of these may be available through [UT Kanopy](#), others may not. As a result, while you are not required to purchase a textbook for this course, you may need to pay for online movie rentals or temporarily invest in a subscription-based streaming service. The assigned films are listed on the schedule below. Again, this schedule is *subject to revision*.

Assignments & Grading

ATTENDANCE – 10 points

- This is an online class with synchronous learning components. In order to get the most out of it, you must show up for the scheduled Zoom meetings.
- We are scheduled to have approximately 40 class meetings (excluding the first). I will take attendance at each meeting, and you will need to be on time and in attendance for the entirety of the Zoom meeting in order to get credit.
- Each meeting will be worth a total of 0.25 points (0.25×40 class meetings = 10 points total), or 0.0025% of your final grade. I will calibrate Canvas to drop your five lowest attendance grades. This means that it is possible to miss up to five class meetings for any reason whatsoever and still get the full 10 points for attendance. **This is meant to accommodate both unexcused and excused absences (including illness, religious observance, military service, etc.).** (see
- If you have some special reason for being unable to attend most of the Zoom meetings (e.g., you are in a different time zone, have a special accommodation related to attendance, etc.), let me know. We may be able to work out an alternative to the attendance portion of your grade.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION – 15 points

- In order to stimulate additional class discussion, I have set up a [discussion board](#) for the class on Canvas. You will use it to complete a total of 15 discussion assignments throughout the semester.
- For each assignment, you will be tasked with (i) posting a short response to the assigned readings or films for that week and (ii) commenting on another student's post. In order to get full credit for a given week, your post and comment must **each** be **at least** three sentences long. This is the

bare minimum, and students are encouraged to write multiple paragraphs, comment on more than one post, respond to each other, and so on.

- Many of these assignments will be completed in smaller groups so that the threads will be more manageable and easier to follow. However, I will occasionally swap up the groups so that you can get to know other students in the course.
- Each assignment will be worth 1 point, or 1% of your final grade, and they will be graded as Pass (1 point), Half-credit (0.5 points), or Fail (0 points).

READING RESPONSES – 20 points

- Throughout the semester, I will assign **four** different reading response assignments. You must submit a total of (**but no more than**) **two**. The prompts (together with a grading rubric) will be administered through Canvas.
- Each reading response should be **500–700 words** in length (roughly one single-spaced page) and will be worth a total of **10 points**, or 10% of your final grade. However, they will be graded as Pass (10 points), Half-credit (5 points), or Fail (0 points).
- Students who have received Half-credit may revise their submission for the chance to receive a Pass, so long as they submit the revision **within three days** of receiving their grade; however, this courtesy will be extended only **once per student**.

FILM ANALYSIS PROJECT – 15 points

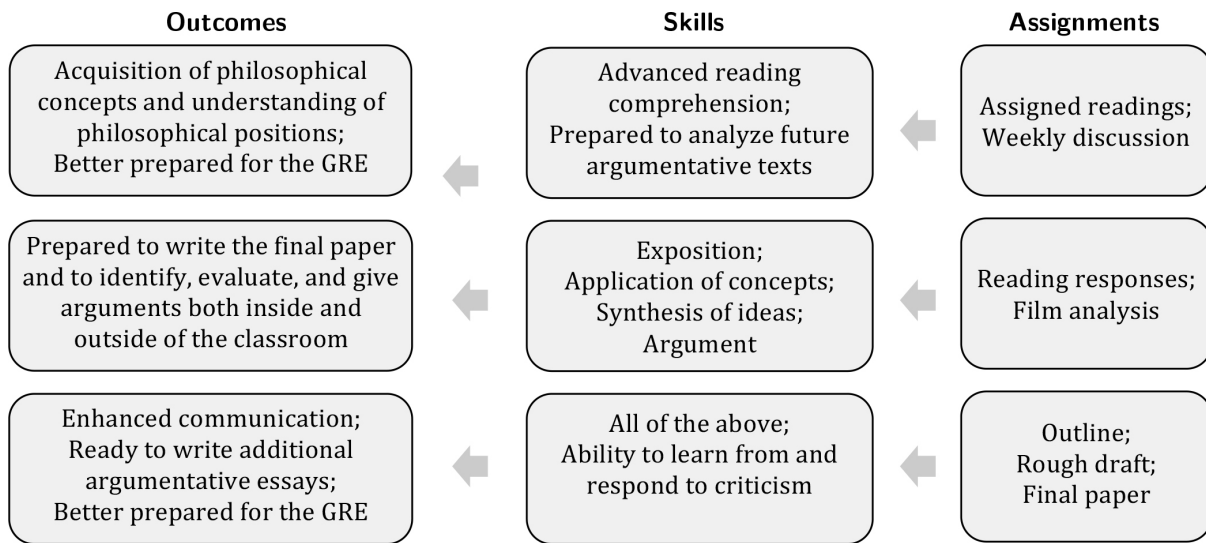
- You will be asked to watch a film of your choice and explain in detail how it connects with a philosophical concept, issue, or position discussed in this course. The prompt (together with a grading rubric) will be administered through Canvas, and the assignment will be worth a total of 15 points, or 15% of your final grade.
- Your written piece should be **700–1,000 words** in length (roughly 1.5–2 single-spaced pages). With prior special permission, alternative media—such as a short podcast or video essay—may be accepted in place of prose. This assignment is meant to be a fun opportunity for you to analyze a film from a philosophical perspective.

FINAL PAPER – 45 points

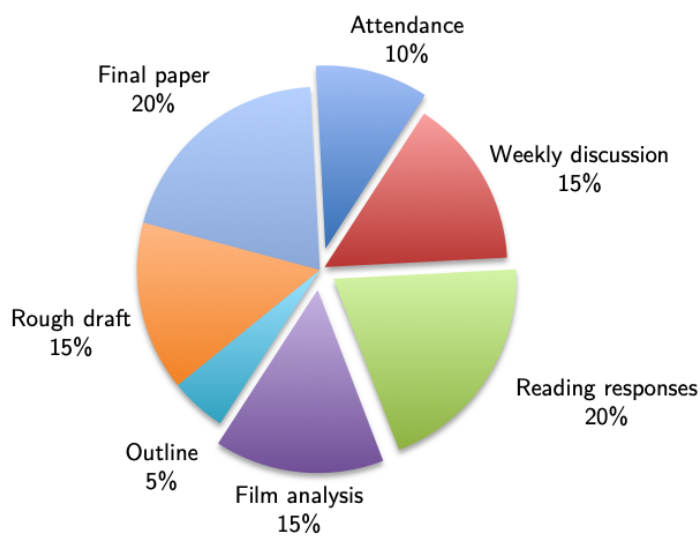
Instead of taking a final exam, you will write a **1,600–2,000 word** paper (roughly 6–8 double-spaced pages) in response to a pre-assigned prompt. The prompts (together with a grading rubric) will be administered through Canvas and discussed in class no later than Week 4, and you will be required to choose a prompt by Week 6. The paper will then be completed in three stages:

1. You will write an outline, which will be graded for a total of **5 points**, or 5% of your final grade. However, it will be graded as Pass (5 points), Half-credit (2.5 points), or Fail (0 points).
2. You will write and submit a rough draft for substantive comments and up to **15 points**, or 15% of your final grade.
3. You will revise your paper in light of those comments and submit it (together with a cover letter explaining your revisions) for final grading at the end of the semester. The final draft is worth **20 points**, or 20% of your final grade.

COURSE OBJECTIVES



GRADE DISTRIBUTION



GRADE SCALE

100.0–93.0	= A
92.9–90.0	= A–
89.9–87.0	= B+
86.9–83.0	= B
82.9–80.0	= B–
79.9–77.0	= C+
76.9–73.0	= C
72.9–70.0	= C–
69.9–67.0	= D+
66.9–63.0	= D
62.9–60.0	= D–
59.9–0.0	= F

GRADE CUTOFFS

To get an A, you must earn a 93.0 or up. In other words, **neither** a 92.5 **nor** a 92.9 is sufficient for an A. And so on for the other letter grades. However, in exceptional cases, I may choose to round up borderline grades. Such cases may include (but are not limited to): you actively participated during Zoom sessions and frequently visited my online office hours to discuss the readings; you received poor grades early in the semester but demonstrated noticeable improvements later in the semester; your grade is not due to excessive absences or failed assignments; and/or I feel you've done better or worked harder than your score suggests. This is a courtesy, not an entitlement.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS & ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Failure to meet assignment deadlines will result in the subtraction of half a letter grade from the assignment per day—in the case of Pass/Half-credit/Fail, that means a potential Pass turns to a

potential Half-credit after the first day late and a Fail after the second day late; in the case of Pass/Fail, that means that a potential Pass turns to a Fail after the first day late.

Any assignment that exhibits plagiarism or any form of academic dishonesty whatsoever will be given an automatic 0, and the student will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. **For the purposes of this course, co-authoring with or copying from a classmate counts as academic dishonesty.** Students who are uncertain as to what constitutes academic dishonesty are encouraged to meet with me. **All suspicious submissions will be thoroughly investigated.**

For general information on plagiarism, visit the following webpage:

<http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism>

Contacting the Instructor

I am happy to respond to emails to answer questions about course content or to schedule an online meeting. I am also happy to discuss course content (and philosophy in general) during office hours. However, do not email me with assignment-related questions except **at least three days in advance** of the assignment due date; in general, I will not respond to last minute emails to answer assignment-related questions. Finally, while I will try my best to respond to emails in a timely manner, I may not respond to emails received after 10:00 PM and/or over the weekend until the next business day.

Course Content Note

In this course, we will watch a number of films together. I may also play a number of short video clips during Zoom meetings to illustrate certain philosophical concepts or issues. Some students may find some of this content to be disturbing, offensive, or even traumatizing. I will try my best to warn you about this content in advance. But if you suspect that a specific reading, film, or Zoom session will be emotionally challenging for you, I'm happy to discuss the situation with you in advance so that we can work something out.

Special Accommodations

Accommodations need to be formally approved by the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), and students with accommodations will need to provide me with a letter of verification from the SSD. While no student is required to provide me with any details concerning their disability, students are encouraged to contact me the first week of class to discuss what I can do to ensure that their learning needs are met throughout the semester. For example, for students who are entitled to extra time on assignments/exams or who anticipate that their disability may cause them to miss a number of classes, I am more than happy to consider alternatives to the attendance policy and/or to grant certain extensions. We can also discuss options for keeping your accommodations private. I understand that some students might be reluctant to take advantage of these accommodations, but please keep in mind that they exist to ensure that students are afforded equal educational opportunities. In general, I am committed to ensuring that students get the most out of this course; providing all the appropriate accommodations is an important part of that.

For information on UT Austin's guidelines for students with disabilities and accommodations, visit the following webpage: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/accommodations-and-services>

Mental Health

College can be extremely stressful, not only academically but also socially, emotionally, and physically, and this is especially true during a pandemic. The UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) has a number of resources designed to help you cope with these stresses, from groups, classes, and workshops to short-term individual counseling.

You can learn more about these resources by visiting the CMHC's website: <https://cmhc.utexas.edu>

Title IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education. Prohibited conduct includes sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, relationship (dating or domestic) violence, and/or stalking. Pregnant and parenting students are also protected from discrimination and guaranteed equal educational opportunities under Title IX; it is advised that they contact a Title IX coordinator (titleix@austin.utexas.edu) to learn more about their rights as pregnant or parenting students. As a Responsible Employee of UT Austin, I am required to support any individual who comes to me to report an alleged violation of the Title IX policy, offer that individual options and resources, and accurately report the alleged misconduct to the correct people in a timely fashion. Students can also report possible misconduct directly to Title IX Training and Investigations, either online, in person, or by phone.

For more information on Title IX or to report possible misconduct, please visit the following website: <https://titleix.utexas.edu>

Writing Resources

This is a writing intensive course, because philosophy is a writing intensive discipline. I am here to help you all become better writers. But did you know that the University Writing Center (UWC) offers one-on-one consultations to assist you at any point in the writing process, from brainstorming to final revisions?

For more information, visit the UWC's website: <http://uwc.utexas.edu>

Additional Resources

Philosophy Undergrad Advising:	https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/philosophy/undergraduate/advising.php Kevin Pluta (WAG 313, kpluta@austin.utexas.edu)
Division of Student Affairs:	http://www.utexas.edu/students
UT's guidelines for attendance:	http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/academic-policies-and-procedures/attendance
Philosophy resources:	http://www.iep.utm.edu http://plato.stanford.edu http://philosophy.hku.hk/think
Movie resources:	https://utexas.kanopy.com

Course Schedule (subject to revision!)		
WEEK/UNIT	READING	DEADLINES/NOTES
Week 1 (Aug. 26–28) Tools of the trade – ARGUMENT	Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy” Bowell and Kemp, “Introducing Arguments”	Due: first weekly discussion assignment (introduce yourself)
Week 2 (Aug. 31–Sep. 4) – NECESSARY & SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS – ARGUMENT TYPES	Lau, “Valid and Sound Arguments” & “Inductive Reasoning”	Mon., Aug. 31: Last day of the official add/drop period
Week 3 (Sep. 7–11) Film as philosophy – THE PROBLEM OF PARAPHRASE	Livingston, “Theses on Cinema as Philosophy”	Mon., Sept. 7: No class, Labor Day Holiday Fri., Sept. 11: Last day an undergraduate student may add a class except for rare and extenuating circumstances. Last day to drop a class for a possible refund.
Week 4 (Sept. 14–18) – DEFENSES OF FILM AS PHILOSOPHY	Smuts, “In Defense of a Bold Thesis” Assigned films: <i>October: Ten Days That Shook the World</i> (excerpt); “The Little People,” <i>The Twilight Zone</i> (Season 3, Episode 28)	Due: reading response #1
Week 5 (Sept. 21–25) Representation and realism – PHILOSOPHY THROUGH <i>Blade Runner</i> – RE-PRESENTATION AND REALISM	Assigned film: <i>Blade Runner: The Final Cut</i> Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”	
Week 6 (Sep. 28–Oct. 2) – RE-PRESENTATION AND REALISM (CONT.) – PHOTOGRAPHIC TRANSPARENCY	Walton, “Transparent Pictures” Tarkovsky, <i>Sculpting in Time</i> (excerpts) Assigned film: <i>The Sacrifice</i>	Due: reading response #2

Course Schedule (continued)		
WEEK/UNIT	READING	DEADLINES/NOTES
Week 7 (Oct. 5–9) – PHOTOGRAPHIC TRANSPARENCY (CONT.) – MEDIUM SPECIFICITY ARGUMENTS Film, fiction, and the attitudes – GAMES OF MAKE-BELIEVE	Carroll, “Forget the Medium!” Walton, “Fearing Fictions”	
Week 8 (Oct. 12–16) – THE PARADOX OF HORROR	Gaut, “The Paradox of Horror” Carroll, “Enjoying Horror Fictions” Assigned film: TBA (maybe <i>The Babadook</i> or <i>The Wailing</i>)	Due: declaration of paper topic; reading response #3
Week 9 (Oct. 19–23) Film and ethics – AUTONOMISM – ETHICISM – IMMORALISM Ethics through film – VIOLENCE AND SPECTATORSHIP	Gaut, “Art and Ethics” Eaton, “Robust Immoralism” McGettigan, “A Bleak Burlesque: Michael Haneke’s <i>Funny Games</i> as a Study in Violence” Assigned films: “College,” <i>The Sopranos</i> (Season 1, Episode 5); <i>Funny Games</i> (2007)	Due: reading response #4
Week 10 (Oct. 26–Oct. 30) – THE MALE GAZE	Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Keane, “A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock, and <i>Vertigo</i> ” Assigned film: <i>Vertigo</i>	Due: reading response #5
Week 11 (Nov. 2–6) – VALUE THEORY – CONSEQUENTIALISM – DEONTOLOGY – APPLIED ETHICS	Readings TBA Assigned films: <i>The Matrix</i> ; <i>The Farewell</i>	Due: paper outline; reading response #6
Week 12 (Nov. 9–13) Metaphysics of mind through film – THE MIND–BODY PROBLEM	Readings TBA Assigned film: <i>Ex Machina</i>	Due: reading response #7
Week 13 (Nov. 16–20) Creativity through film – CONSTRAINT AND CREATIVITY	Levinson, “Elster on Artistic Creativity” Hjort, “Dogme 95: A Small Nation’s Response to Globalization” Assigned film: <i>The Five Obstructions</i>	Due: rough draft
Week 14 (Nov. 23–27)		Thanksgiving holidays, no class
Week 15 (Nov. 30–Dec. 4) Student selected topics	TBA	Due: film analysis project
Last class day (Dec. 7)	TBA	Due: final draft and cover letter