

Paper #2 Instructions
PHIL 130.1001
Spring 2025
Dove and Woodbridge

Due on Wednesday, April 23rd by 11:59pm. **Late submissions are subject to a grade penalty as follows:** Papers submitted after 11:59pm on 4/23 get 3 points off, until 12:00am on 4/24 when they get another 3 points off (so, 6 points total). And so on. This adds up quickly. Don't be late. [Relevant material: films and readings assigned from 2/19 through 4/2—check the Webpage]

Topic: Can films *do* philosophy? Explain.

To answer this question, you will need to do the following.

1. Briefly explain:
 - a. What it means to do philosophy. This means you will have to explain at least one example **of each of** the following:¹
 - i. philosophical method,
 - ii. philosophical concepts/topics,
 - iii. philosophical questions/challenges
 - b. What makes something a film.
2. Explain the positions presented by Bruce Russell and Murray Smith, along with those from any other readings that you think are relevant, regarding *whether film can do philosophy*.
3. Critically evaluate those positions by considering at least two films, as well as any additional ones, that you think can help you either to make a case that those views are right or to make a case that those views are wrong.
4. Analyze films that you think make **the best case** for thinking that films *can* do philosophy, then explain whether these best examples succeed or fail to do philosophy. In the process, discuss the particular philosophical topic/concept or question that each film relates and what some philosopher(s) have said about this.
5. Summarize your conclusion.

The most important thing for you to do is argue for a position regarding whether and to what extent a film can do real philosophy. We have recently been proceeding “as if” film *CAN* do philosophy, while exploring some classic philosophical topics; however, you need to discuss whether and to what extent this is true.

Here are some elements of doing philosophy (of philosophical method) to consider: Illustrating a Thesis, Presenting a Counterexample, Doing Thought Experiments, Doing Conceptual Analysis, Raising Philosophical Questions (and Giving Answers), Making an Argument/Case for a Thesis.

Here are some philosophical topics/concepts and questions that we have considered: Alienation from Labor, Avoiding Moral Consequences, Mind-Body Dualism, The Basis of Morality, Why Be Moral? Are There Moral Dilemmas? The Nature of Personhood, The Nature of Minds, The Role of Memory in Identity, What Does Knowledge Require? Is It Possible for Us to Have It?

¹ DO NOT TRY TO EXPLAIN EVERY PHILOSOPHICAL THEORY AND CONCEPT FROM THE LECTURES.

You should discuss some of these methods and topics/questions, OR any other philosophical methods or concepts/topics or questions that have come up in films that you think have the best chance of showing that film can do philosophy.

You must discuss at least *two different films* that you think make the best case for the thesis that film *can* do philosophy, then assess whether these best cases succeed or fail. The main critics you must consider are Bruce Russell and Murray Smith. Respond to these two critiques of the idea that film can do philosophy separately. Views from other readings, such as those by people doing philosophy directly, might also be relevant for making the best case that film can do it too.

One way to start your paper is with a brief discussion of a film that you think does (or is the best example of a film potentially doing) philosophy; or, if you don't think film can do philosophy, then start with a film that one of our readings thinks does. In either case, explain **HOW** the film does (or is supposed to do) philosophy. Then, you can explain what you think it means for this film to do philosophy. Etc.

Library Concerns: Don't cite, paraphrase, or use readings that aren't assigned. There are so many papers and books and talks and ... on film. We've assigned what we think you must read in order to answer the research question for this course. Other sources are likely to confuse the issue. If you cite or appeal to papers, books, talks, or the like, your paper will be severely punished. This isn't a research paper. This is an essay asking you to apply what you've learned in the readings, in our lectures, and in our discussions to a single question.

Word Count: 1500-2000 words. Works Cited/Bibliographies do not count towards your word count, footnotes and endnotes do. Quotations **will not count** towards your word count.

Grammar, Spelling, Etc.: Grammar, spelling, style, and readability matter. Of course, there can be typos. We all make mistakes. Yet, as mistakes multiply, grades decrease. Why? Because one mistake is understandable, multiple errors show misunderstanding or lack of care or worse.

Naming Convention and File Types: Name your file as follows: "yourstudentnumber.PHIL130S25.paper2.docx". Obviously, replace "yourstudentnumber" with your student number. Also, this means that only .docx files are acceptable. If you use another writing format, convert it to .docx before submitting your paper. Improperly named documents and files in other formats will be considered unsubmitted/late until a correct file is submitted.

First Page Mechanics:

No title page. Indeed, you don't even need a title; though, you can title your essay if you prefer. Please make sure your student number is on at least the first page on the top, left side. Also make sure that your name does not appear anywhere on your paper (e.g., in a header).

Various Mechanical and Stylistic Elements:

- Lines should be double-spaced.
- All pages should be numbered.
- Use whatever font you prefer, but it should be 12-point.
- Margins should be **no greater than one inch on all sides**.

- Do not use right-justification.
- We don't care what citation style you use, just be consistent. The easiest citation style is name/year/page for in-text citations: (Bonevac 1998, 94), for example. Where the details of cited work appear is on a Works Cited page at the end of the document.
- Keep footnotes/end notes to a minimum (if it's worth writing, it's probably worth putting in the body of the paper—if it seems wholly tangential, then why bother?)
- Cite your sources. Use whatever style you wish. We give full bibliographic information for the readings on the syllabus and give some examples here; you can cut & paste these.
- Your style should be suitably academic. You are trying to explain and defend relatively technical and abstract notions. Hence, you should aim to *simplify* the technical bits to make them understandable, while at the same time you should aim to *apply* the abstract bits to make them relevant. Explicit definitions simplify concepts. Examples illustrate concepts. Make sure you do both. As for examples, feel free to steal (and then cite) cases from our readings. You do not have to invent new ones; though you can if they are particularly illustrative.
- Aim for good arguments and clear explanations. Some folks seem to think that their essays must contain *novelty* to be good. That's not true. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) argued that people could be taught edifying lessons by watching and discussing dramas, especially tragedies. He also explored many of the problems associated with it. What makes this an enduring philosophical problem is that we find *better*, as opposed to *newer*, ways to explain what's right and what's wrong with the idea that fictional films can aid in philosophical theorizing. Some of our readings are giving arguments that are centuries old, but they are giving them in ways that better explain the problems and prospects. If you can clarify what's at stake, that's virtuous novelty.
- There is no one length for a good sentence. Some can be short. They make their points quickly. Others require many more words with which to make their points, clarify their concept, and justify their conclusions for whatever content they contain. Still, if all of your sentences are short, your paper will read as choppy. And if all of your sentences are long, your paper will read as long-winded, and, perhaps, boring. To determine whether you have hit the sweet spot for sentence length, you should read your paper aloud. We also use the computer to read to us.
- Likewise, there is no set length for a good paragraph. Some are very short—just a couple of sentences cover all that needs to be said. Others are long, perhaps covering a whole page. Still, one sentence (typically) does not a paragraph make. Alternatively, paragraphs covering multiple pages are surely in need of revision and re-parsing. An unbroken paragraph covering multiple pages unnecessarily taxes the reader.

Grades: Whole letter grades (i.e., no pluses or minuses). We use the following rough rubric:

An **A** paper is excellent. It contains few, if any grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, or stylistic infelicities. It has a clear and well-defined thesis. It supports its claims with argumentation, which includes considering replies and counter-positions. It explains technical terminology. It stays on topic. It is clear, concise, and complete.

A **B** paper is very good. It may contain a few grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, or stylistic infelicities. It has a clear and well-defined thesis. It supports its claims with argumentation, which includes considering replies and counter-positions. It explains technical terminology. It mostly stays on topic. It is mostly clear, concise, and complete.

A **C** paper is average. It probably contains some grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, and/or stylistic infelicities. Its thesis isn't as clear and well-defined as it should be. It supports its claims with argumentation, though the argumentation isn't quite as strong as it should be. It may not explain its technical terminology. It mostly stays on topic. It would be improved if it were more clear, concise, and complete.

A **D** paper has failed in some aspect of the assignment. Perhaps it contains too many errors to be readable (grammatical, spelling, or stylistic). Or its thesis is too unclear or undefined to be defensible. Or it fails to support its claims with adequate argumentation. Or it fails to define its technical terminology adequately. Or it fails to stay on topic enough to generate a sustained essay. In general, it is not clear enough or concise enough or complete enough.

An **F** paper has failed in multiple aspects of the assignment. It may be unreadable. Or it may lack a defensible thesis. Or it may lack argumentation. Or it may lack adequate explanations. Or it may not stay on topic. It needs multiple revisions and edits to make it acceptably clear, concise, and complete.

Plagiarism (or academic dishonesty of any kind—including using generative AI to write or rewrite any sections of your paper) will result in an F for the paper and for the course as a whole.

Here's a list of things we dislike in papers. These aren't listed in order of aversion.

- (a) Unnecessarily grandiose introductory sentences and paragraphs.
- (b) Poorly formed (or absent) thesis statements.
- (c) Unnecessary adverbs.
- (d) Using "actually" when not talking about modal logic and the actual world.
- (e) Using "seems" and/or "appears" when not talking about appearance vs. reality.
- (f) Run-on sentences; comma splices. [Look them up!]
- (g) Treating an essay like a mystery novel: introduce your conclusion early!
- (h) Changing the topic.
- (i) Wordiness.
- (j) Conceptual confusion.
- (k) Slapdash writing.
- (l) Unnecessary qualification.
- (m) Laziness.
- (n) Unnecessary slang. [If it makes sense and adds to the paper, use it; otherwise, no!]
- (o) Unnecessarily passive constructions. [There is a place for passive constructions!]

Here's a list of things we like in papers. These aren't listed in order of preference.

- (a) Clear and concise introductions.
- (b) Explicit conclusions that are introduced early in the paper.
- (c) Perspicuous argumentation—Identify your premises, conclusions, and inference rules.
- (d) Illustrative examples.
- (e) Simplifying explanations.
- (f) Helpful summaries. This can happen at the end of sections, paragraphs, or even particularly difficult passages, and not just at the end of the entire essay.
- (g) Reader-oriented writing. E.g., making the transitions between concepts explicit.

- (h) Dialectical argumentation. This means that you must consider, and reply to, counter-positions, counter-arguments, and alternative interpretations. Failure to do this is dogmatism.
- (i) Cleverness.
- (j) Honest self-appraisal. Some conclusions should be qualified, some shouldn't.

Conclusive arguments—so-called *knockdown* or *destroying* arguments—are rare, and when they do occur, it isn't usually regarding any important concept. Instead, we make incremental progress. You will not be *solving*, e.g., the problem of skepticism or *demonstrating* the utter foolishness of famous philosophers or *inventing* wholly new applications of philosophy to film. You will be explaining and responding to *difficulties* for the idea the films can **do** philosophy. You can use any citation/bibliographic style you prefer. Here are several of our assigned readings and viewings in APA style. **You can cut and paste these into your bibliography (and model other additional entries on them).**

Works Cited

- Allen, W. (Director). (1989). Crimes and Misdemeanors [Film]. Orion Pictures.
- Carroll, N. (2006). Philosophizing through the Moving Image: The Case of "Serene Velocity." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64(1), 173–185.
- Chaplin, C. (Director). (1936). Modern Times [Film]. The Criterion Collection.
- Gehr, E. (Director). (1970). Serene Velocity [Film]. Anthology Film Archives.
- Gondrey, M. (Director). (2004). Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind [Film]. Focus Features.
- Grau, C. (2006). "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" and the Morality of Memory. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64(1), 119–133.
- Lowe, D. (2015). Karl Marx's Conception of Alienation. *1000-Word Philosophy—An Introductory Anthology*. Retrieved from: <https://1000wordphilosophy.com/2015/05/13/karl-marxs-conception-of-alienation>.
- McConnell, T. (2024). Moral Dilemmas. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), Retrieved from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/moral-dilemmas>.
- Raimi, S. (Director). (1998). A Simple Plan [Film]. Paramount Pictures.
- Reiner, C. (Director). (1984). All of Me [Film]. Universal Pictures.
- Russell, B. (2005). The Philosophical Limits of Film. In: *The Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*, (N. Carroll ed.), 387-390.
- Smith, M. (2006). Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64(1) Winter. 33-42.