PLEASE READ: Students who register for this course will be required to watch weekly film screenings that fall outside of our scheduled class meetings (although you can watch these on your computer at a time that works best for you). Moreover, many of the films used in this course address adult themes and some contain profanity, graphic violence, explicit sexual situations and/or nudity. If you believe that the themes, imagery and language found in these films may be offensive to you, I recommend that you consider dropping the course. While the pursuit of knowledge often requires us to confront issues that challenge our pre-existing belief systems and moral codes, the use of film as a medium of intellectual discovery poses some real pedagogical and ethical challenges. Given that cinema is a visual art, whose success is dependent on its ability to evoke an emotional response from its audience, controversial issues are often presented to us in very graphic and psychologically disturbing ways. Since I do not want anyone in the class to feel that they are being pressured to view or hear things that violate their personal or religious principles in such an explicit manner, I ask all of you to think long and hard about your decision to join the class. The films to be viewed in this class have been selected specifically for their relevance to course themes and in no way reflect the views of the instructor or CSU.
“Freedom is the birthright and deep desire of every human soul, and spreading freedom’s blessings is the calling of our time.”

“The trend is clear: in the Middle East and throughout the world, freedom is on the march.”

-- President George Bush (2005)

The modern age has rightly been referred to as the “age of freedom.” Compared to life in ancient and medieval societies – where superstition, communal obligations and entrenched hierarchies of social power effectively undermined the autonomy of individual action and thought – the modern age represents a “rational” rejection of these traditional forms of social stratification, authority and control. Forged by the ideals of the European Enlightenment, the modern world was envisioned to be a world in which the individual would be liberated from the dead hand of ignorance, tradition and hierarchy. While the desire of humankind to shed the yoke of unjust authority relations and systems of social control is, as noted by President Bush, “on the march,” nevertheless, the appropriate role of freedom in society continues to be a matter of considerable debate and conflict. While “spreading freedom’s blessings” may be “the calling of our time,” what, precisely, does this mean? What does it mean to have free will; to live in a free society; to express oneself freely? Moreover, is the march of freedom inevitable? Is it desirable? Should it be unbridled in its promotion and construction? Is freedom the “natural” condition of mankind – “the birthright and deep desire of every human soul” -- or do humans actually covet other values – personal happiness, social order, fealty to God, commitment to community, the pursuit of social justice, etc. – which may actually conflict with the unchecked promotion of individual freedom? While there is a temptation in our society to uncritically accept the idea of freedom as an unalloyed “good,” in this course we will seek to deconstruct the idea of freedom and systematically explore its social and ethical boundaries.

In this course we will view the concept of freedom through the analytical lens of philosophy and the artistic lens of modern cinema. Why cinema? The arts – painting, literature, theatre, music, dance and film – play an important role in human society not simply because they entertain us but also because they force us to reflect upon and challenge our commonly held beliefs concerning social reality (metaphysics), human knowledge (epistemology), and moral values (axiology). In other words, the arts help us better understand, as well as shape, our collective human experiences. Contemporary cinema, while often infantile and banal, nevertheless, possesses the capacity to both challenge and mold our values, desires and even identities with its powerful narratives and images. In this class we will use film as a pedagogical tool for better understanding the role of freedom in our lives. In addition to exploring how modern cinema addresses the idea of freedom, we will also explore the significance of this artistic medium as a mechanism for both social liberation and social control.

Throughout the course of the semester we will examine this topic by approaching the concept of freedom through a myriad of distinct -- and often incompatible -- perspectives: (1) psychological freedom; (2) spiritual freedom; (3) biological freedom; (4) metaphysical freedom; (5) social freedom; (6) political freedom; and (7) economic freedom. As we shall discover, only by exploring the many dimensions of freedom, and then investigating how each dimension is influenced by the degree of freedom found in the others, will we be able to
achieve a deeper understanding of the promises and pitfalls associate with the pursuit of human liberation in the contemporary world.

While this course does not require you to have a background in philosophy, nonetheless, it does require you to do some real philosophizing. That is, it requires you to have a commitment to a careful reading of (or listening to) the texts under investigation and a willingness to think and write analytically about some very large, abstract and difficult subjects. In short, this won’t be a “let’s-get-together-and-watch-some-fun-movies” course, even though we will be talking about (what I hope you will agree are) some excellent films. With that in mind, the core goals of this class can be summarized in the following manner:

**COURSE GOALS**

- To introduce you to the central ideas and core debates surrounding the concept of freedom;
- To explore how these debates are reflected in the medium of film;
- To present the requisite philosophical background for understanding these debates;
- To explore how historical, political, cultural, economic and sociological forces shape the philosophical discussion of freedom;
- To provide assistance in acquiring the necessary critical skills for evaluating the debates surrounding the idea of freedom; and
- To help you determine your own personal philosophy concerning the appropriate role of freedom in your life and society at-large.

**OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE**

I want to stress that this course will be intellectually challenging. Given the seminar structure of this course, it is **your responsibility** to read (or listen/view) the assigned materials and watch the required movies prior to each seminar and be prepared to discuss these materials in a free-form group discussion led by myself. In addition to the relatively heavy preparation load for this course (on average, plan on 2 hours of class preparation per week), you will need to set aside some time to watch one film per week (ranging anywhere from 1:15 minutes to 2:40 minutes in length) that will serve as the catalyst for our seminar discussion. While I will schedule one organized screening of these films per week (on Tuesday afternoons following our regularly scheduled seminar discussions), you will be able to access all of these films online thus providing you with the opportunity to watch them at your own convenience in the comfort of your own home. Moreover, throughout the semester I will stress the importance of critical thinking and argumentation -- both in written and oral forms. The issues with which we will wrestle with in this class are not easy but if you are willing to put forth the effort I am confident that you will find it a worthwhile (or at least a thought provoking and mind expanding) endeavor.

Your final grade for this course will be assigned on the basis of your performance on five criteria that are weighted in the following manner:

- **Seminar Contribution = 30%**
- **Persuasive Speech = 10%**
- **Philosophical Film Review = 05%**
- **Comparative Philosophy Paper = 25%**
- **Final Exam = 30% (15% final paper + 15% oral final exam)**
SEMINAR CONTRIBUTION:

1) **OVERVIEW:**

Seminar contribution is worth 30% of your final grade. This is an integral, albeit difficult to quantify, component of the course. It is my firm belief that true learning requires active participation. For you to simply sit back and assume that the words that leave my mouth will somehow make an indelible mark on your brain is a doubtful (and somewhat scary) proposition. If you are to get anything out of this course you must engage fellow students, the topic and me! This requires asking questions, offering observations and voicing your support or disagreement with the arguments that I, or your fellow classmates, are presenting. This does not require that you be a skilled orator, only that you make an effort to posit logically sound and coherent arguments/questions/observations. I recognize that this is not a skill that many of you feel that you excel at (and may, in fact, dread), yet it is essential for the success of the seminar experience. Not surprisingly, evaluation of seminar contribution is a somewhat inexact science.

In an effort to add a quantitative dimension to this enterprise, I will evaluate your seminar contribution based on three criteria: class preparation (60%), class attendance (20%), and class participation (20%). In other words, your overall seminar contribution will be assessed on the “three Ps”: (1) your intellectual preparedness, (2) your physical presence and (3) your active participation.

2) **CLASS PREPARATION:**

In an effort to measure the quality of your contribution to our seminar meetings, I have incorporated a series of written seminar discussion assignments directly into your seminar contribution grade. These seminar discussion assignments require you to use the philosophical material for the week to analyze/interpret/critique the films (either in their entirety or a specific scene contained within it) under investigation (350-500 words). The goal of these writing assignments (a.k.a., SDQs) is to prepare you for our seminar discussions by making you think about the material prior to our scheduled class meetings. This preparation, in turn, should allow you to feel more confident in voicing your opinions during the seminar meetings.

You are required to turn in one SDQ per week (excluding Weeks 1, 9, 13 and the week you select to write your formal film analysis). These assignments – 12 in total -- will be evaluated on the basis of two criteria: (1) did you turn in the assignment on time; and (2) did you make a good faith effort to seriously engage and answer the question at hand (which includes referring to both the assigned course material and the movie under review). Grading of this assignment will be based on the following criteria:

- If you turn your SDQ in on time and demonstrate that you put some serious intellectual effort into your answer, you will receive “full credit” (1.5 points) for the assignment.
- You will receive only “partial credit” (0.75 points) if you turn your response in on time but fail to answer the question in an intellectually rigorous manner (e.g., fail to engage the required philosophical material or demonstrate a lack of understanding of this material).
- Finally, you will receive “no credit” (0 points) if you do not complete the assignment or attempt to turn it in late.

It is important to note that there is a significant penalty incurred if you fail to do the assignment or fail to give it the requisite intellectual attention that is required to facilitate our seminar discussion. Remember, the goal of these assignments is to help you prepare for the seminar discussions (where the real learning takes place!), not for you to develop, hone and support a fully formed philosophical thesis. So, all I’m asking of
you here is, to the best of your ability, invest some time into the assigned philosophical material, think about it deeply and then try to make some intellectual connections to the film under investigation.

**Important Information Regarding SDQs:**

- Your overall performance on this criterion constitutes 60% of your seminar contribution grade (or 18% of your overall course grade).
- You must submit one seminar discussion assignment per week unless otherwise instructed (i.e., *Weeks 1, 9, 13 and the week you select to write your formal film analysis*);
- You must submit these weekly assignments to the corresponding assignment folder found on the Canvas site for this course;
- Your posts to the Canvas site must be submitted by 2:00 p.m. on the day of our scheduled seminar meetings. After the 2:00 p.m. deadline has passed, I will not accept any further posts for the day’s seminar;
- When writing these assignments always remember that the goal of this exercise is for you to **identify at least one major philosophical argument from the assigned reading/audio/video material for the week and then use it to analyze the film (or a scene from said film) that we will be exploring in our seminar discussion**. Below you will find a good example of how one student used the philosophical insights from Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy to interpret a scene from the 1972 movie, *Deliverance*. In this essay the student is attempting to show how Kant’s philosophy could be used to justify the actions by the Burt Reynolds’ character vis-a-vis the men who had been subjecting his friends to unprovoked violence while on a camping trip in the Appalachian Mountains:

  Kant’s first insight— that an action has moral worth if it is done for the sake of duty— says that an action’s moral worth is measured by the reason for which it is done. Kant makes a point of saying that there is far more moral value in the action of a person who does something because it is right than the person who does it because he feels compassion, sympathy or pity. Your action must be done because it is morally correct and without any self-serving motives; it is simply the right thing to do, meaning, it is done for the sake of duty.

  In one scene Lewis (Burt Reynolds) happens upon his friends—one has been sodomized and is lying upon the ground, the other is about to be forced into a sexual act—both men are in danger because this all takes place at gunpoint. Lewis has a weapon (bow and arrow). Lewis aims, shoots, and kills one of the attackers.

  Was Lewis morally right in his action in accordance with Kant’s first insight? Yes, because he committed this act out of duty. It was his duty to save the lives of those men. It would have been morally unjust to let them die. One may argue that his actions were not purely out of duty, due to the fact that emotions may have played a part. Naturally, since one man was his friend, and the other an acquaintance, he was inclined to feel sympathy for them. However, Kant never said that one’s action must be totally devoid of emotion, simply that emotion should not be the determinant of moral action. It is one’s duty to save lives whether they are friend or foe, and by taking measures necessary to saving the lives of innocent human beings, even at the risk of killing those who are responsible for the violation, Lewis is fully in keeping Kant’s first insight.

3) **CLASS ATTENDANCE:**

   It goes without saying that it is difficult to contribute to the overall success of the seminar if you are not there. So, attendance has to be factored into your overall contribution grade to some degree. Recognizing the randomness and volatility to life, 100% attendance is not my goal. However, given that this is a seminar, where your participation is essential to the overall learning experience, and we only meet once per week, I do have relatively high expectations for your attendance.

   I generally expect that students will miss two (2) or fewer classes over the course of the semester (approximately 13% of scheduled seminars) due to unforeseen events. If you need to miss more than this
due to scheduling conflicts or protracted illness/hardship, you will need to let me know and provide me with the necessary documentation for your absenteeism. While I do not call roll every day, nonetheless, if I notice that your attendance has become sporadic, I will take note of this and begin to log your attendance (or, more precisely, your lack thereof).

Your overall performance on this criterion constitutes 20% of your seminar contribution grade (or 6% of your overall course grade). I will grade your attendance in the following manner:

- If you miss fewer than 2 of the scheduled class meetings, you will be marked as “meeting expectations” and will receive full credit for attendance (6 points). However, if you miss more than this, and fail to provide me with appropriate documentation for your absenteeism, you will be penalized.
- Students that miss 3 of scheduled class meetings will receive “partial credit” for attendance (3 points).
- Finally, those students who have been identified as having a chronic absenteeism problem (and miss 4 or more of our scheduled classes) will receive “no credit” (0 points) for attendance.

4) **ACTIVE CLASS PARTICIPATION:**

Finally, student contribution to the seminar will be evaluated by your willingness to let us hear your ideas. While I will make some effort to assess the quality of your contribution to class discussions, nevertheless, this dimension will largely be determined by the quantity of your contribution. I will use the following criteria as my guide:

- You actively contribute to every seminar meeting (providing multiple “insightful” comments/questions) (6 points);
- You regularly contribute to class discussion: on average, once per seminar meeting (5.5 points);
- You only periodically contribute to class discussion: on average, every other seminar (5 points);
- You infrequently contribute to class discussion: once a month (4.5 points);
- You seldom, if ever, contribute to class discussion: for all intents and purposes you have chosen not to actively participate in the seminar but you seem to be listening intently and appear to be intellectually engaged (4 points);
- You seldom, if ever, contribute to class discussion: for all intents and purposes you have chosen not to actively participate in the seminar and you seem to be bored to be there or otherwise disengaged from the seminar discussion (2 points).

It is also important to note that I will factor in the consistency of your participation into your grade. If you participate a lot at the beginning of the semester but then chose not to involve yourself in class discussion later in the semester, this will impact your overall grade. Your overall performance on this criterion constitutes 20% of your participation grade (or 6% of your overall course grade).

**PERSUASIVE SPEECH:**

1) **ASSIGNMENT:**

This course requires each student to prepare and deliver a 10-minute extemporaneous speech that argues in support of a persuasive claim. I will leave it up to every student to select their own topic for their presentation. The only requirement is that **you must discuss your chosen topic from the perspective of freedom.** That is, you must convince (or persuade) us that the topic under discussion is actually an issue of
If you pay close attention to public discourse in our country, the centrality of freedom becomes obvious. This is the case because people tend to see freedom as an unalloyed good: who doesn’t want to protect or preserve freedom? In general, the more closely one can tie their discussion to the concept of freedom, the greater the chance that they will be able to persuade people to accept their argument. Given the rhetorical power of this concept, I want all of you to pick a topic that interests you and then try to establish as clearly as you can its linkage to the idea of freedom. Just to be clear, it is important that the idea of freedom is central to your overall argument and not just thrown in at the introduction and the conclusion of your presentation.

2) **EVALUATION:**

This assignment is taken very seriously and will constitute 10% of your final course grade. This assignment will be graded on (1) the overall persuasiveness of your argument; (2) your effectiveness in tying your speech to the idea of freedom; (3) the credibility and confidence of your delivery; and (4) the structure and completeness of your outlines (which must include a detailed bibliography).

3) **IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING THE SPEECH ASSIGNMENT:**

- We will be conducting speeches between Weeks 5 and 14 of the semester. I will post a more detailed description of this assignment (including your presentation date) on the Canvas site for this course by the end of the first week of the semester. If you have a strong preference on when you don’t want to give your speech, please let me know by 1/24/19.

- In order to fulfill the Speech Department requirements for this assignment you will need to provide me with two (2) copies of your “full sentence outline” (one electronic and one paper) and one (1) copy of your “key word” or “topic outline” (a paper copy which you will use when presenting your speech).
  - The paper copies of your full sentence and topic outlines are due at the start of class on the day of your assigned speech.
  - The electronic version of your full sentence outline must be uploaded to the Canvas site by 5:00 p.m. two (2) days prior to your speech date. Thus, the electronic version of your full sentence outline must be submitted to me by 5:00 p.m. the Sunday prior to our scheduled seminar. I will forward this copy of your full sentence outline to the Speech Department for review and evaluation (Note: their evaluation of this document will not factor in to your course grade).

- Your “full sentence” outline must be thoroughly documented with citations from at least six (6) academic/scholarly sources.

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**PHILOSOPHICAL FILM REVIEW:**

1) **ASSIGNMENT:**

This assignment requires you to write a 5-6 page film review of one of the movies shown in this seminar. The central goal of your review will be to highlight how the philosophical ideas under discussion are presented in the film. Think of this as a more elaborate and sophisticated version of the Seminar Discussion Questions (SDQs) that you are writing for this seminar. In this paper you will want to both give the reader your impression of the film as well as introduce them to the underlying philosophical ideas at play within it. In other words, you are simultaneously critiquing the aesthetics of the film as well as laying bare the philosophical foundations upon which it was constructed. In writing this film review you will want to adhere to the following template:
In 1994, when Robert Zemekis’ cinematic sensation Forrest Gump topped the box office and waltzed away with six Oscar nominations, the critics were firmly in two camps: either the film was unworthy escapism, or it was an ultraconservative conspiracy to communicate an outdated message of traditional values such as patriotism, capitalism and the family. The liberal elite delivered the resounding verdict that there was no serious moral to the story, or else there was a highly suspicious one. And in typically literalist fashion, right-wingers in America lauded the film as a thinly-veiled assault on the counterculture, arriving at an astonishingly simplistic interpretation of the film: Jenny, Forrest’s sweetheart, took drugs, hung out with anti-Vietnam types, and was rewarded with AIDS. By contrast, Forrest wore his country’s uniform, invested wisely, went to church, and made a mint. Yet the film never suggests that making the cover of Fortune magazine (as Forrest does) is where our human aspirations ought to lie. Forrest Gump deserves to be rediscovered.

As the film opens we see a white feather fluttering on the wind as it gradually floats down, eventually landing next to Forrest Gump’s dirty-tennis-shoe-clad foot. Gump is sitting on a park bench in Savannah, Georgia, a box of chocolates perched on his lap. These two symbols, the feather and the chocolates, illustrate the film’s true key theme: Fate – the uncontrollable events that make each of us what we are. But the film’s emphasis is not on fate itself, but on our responses to what fate deals us. While we can’t decide what happens to us, we each have important choices to make in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Thus in many ways the film’s message is existentialist.

In Existentialism and Humanism (1946) Jean-Paul Sartre distinguishes between human nature and the human condition (p.45ff). Sartre rejected the idea that we possess a generic nature, in the sense of an essence that can be found in each and every human being. Nevertheless, he argued that we share a universality of condition. We find ourselves thrown into the world, and we share the necessities of having to labour and die here. While these necessities are fixed and universal, Sartre stresses that there is nothing about this condition that determines the kind of life we must lead, either as individuals or as groups. Thus our condition limits us in various ways, but it does not compel us to behave in particular ways. Our common predicament means that we must give moral shape to our lives through our free choices. This is an enormous responsibility, because, since humanity has no essence, each of us is literally responsible for creating our humanity. If we choose a holocaust,
says Sartre, then this is what we have made of ‘human nature’. Likewise, if we choose resistance or peace, then this is what ‘humanity’ has become for us. Forrest Gump is about these sorts of choices.

The real target of Forrest Gump’s critique is the (typically Protestant) American notion that material rewards are the inevitable outcome of a virtuous, industrious life. The film shows that by contrast, people don’t get what they deserve, and life isn’t fair; it’s more like a box of chocolates: “you never know what you’re gonna get.” All of the main characters in the story – Forrest, Mrs. Gump, Jenny, Lt. Dan, Bubba – are dealt their share of suffering and grief. Forrest is born mentally disabled, and with “a back as crooked as a politician”; Mrs. Gump’s husband has left her; Jenny’s only parent, her father, is abusive; Lt. Dan gets his legs blown off in the war; Bubba is killed in Vietnam while others survive. None of us can control fate, but in an important sense we make our own destiny by the ways in which we respond to it. On her deathbed, Mrs. Gump summarises this philosophy: “I happen to believe you make your own destiny. You’ve got to do the best with what God gave you.”

To illustrate this philosophy, in an early scene, Mrs. Gump tries to instill in her son a belief that he is “the same as everybody else.” Despite the fact that the young Forrest is mentally slow and has to wear braces on his legs, he is entitled to the same opportunities and has the same human dignity as everyone else. “If God had wanted everyone to be the same,” Mrs. Gump explains, “then He would have made it so everyone had braces on their legs.” When she attempts to enroll Forrest in school, the Principal insists that Forrest will have to go to a special school because his intelligence is below normal. But Mrs. Gump refuses to deny Forrest the same opportunities as everybody else, and to that end she’s willing to prostitute herself. While the Principal is collecting his bribe from Mrs. Gump, young Forrest hears loud grunts emanating from her bedroom. When the guardian of institutional normality emerges, wiping the post-coital sweat from his brow, it is he who is made to look stupid, when the young Forrest mimics his grunts. This scene highlights the Principal’s hypocrisy: he is the head official in an institution that exists for the purpose of improving people’s minds, yet his own mind is too small to conquer his libido. Meanwhile, Mrs. Gump’s behaviour may be socially unacceptable, but her intention is worthy and she doesn’t feel ashamed. This scene alone is a damning indictment of 1950s American social institutions.

These scenes establish Mrs. Gump’s moral voice in the story. She is the main influence on Forrest’s life, and her message is that what makes him the same as everybody else is not that his natural endowments are identical to everyone else’s (none of us are equal in that sense), but that, like everyone else, he has the potential to make his own destiny with what fate has given him. His basic human condition (what Sartre would’ve called his facticity) is what makes Forrest just like anyone else.

Lt. Dan learns the film’s central message painfully when his own destiny veers off the expected path, disrupting his family’s tradition of war martyrdom. Lt. Dan curses God for instead being made to live with a physical disability. He is reluctant to accept the fact that life is unfair. Yet although the facts are arbitrary, our ability to make choices and to do something with our condition is fair, as the ability to choose is equally distributed to all. In the realm of freedom we all have an equal opportunity to give our lives value. Dan is only liberated from his crippling emotional bitterness when he finally accepts that his freedom, his ability to make the most with what destiny dictates, is where the real value of his life lies.

Forrest delivers the film’s central motif at Jenny’s grave: “I don’t know if Mama was right, or if it’s Lieutenant Dan. I don’t know if we each have a destiny, or if we’re all just floatin’ around accidental like on a breeze... but I think maybe it’s both. Maybe both is happening at the same time.” The seemingly arbitrary feather on the wind is a symbol of our lives. We too are tossed about by destiny, with little control over where we’ve come
from or where we’re going. But Forrest Gump shows us we still have important choices to make in spite of this, and that these choices give our lives its real value.

- Conclusion/Evaluation - The closing of your film review should remind the reader of your general thoughts and impressions of the film as well as its philosophical contribution. You may also implicitly or explicitly state whether or not you recommend the film.

2) **EVALUATION:**

Everyone is required to write one philosophical film review from the following list of movies:

- *Gattaca* (focus on Transhumanist philosophy) – Week 5 (due on 2/19/19)
- *City of God* (focus on Hobbes’s social contract theory) – Week 7 (due on 3/5/19)
- *A Clockwork Orange* (focus on the philosophical foundations of the 19th and 20th century psychology of Freud and Skinner) – Week 8 (due on 3/12/19)
- *Django Unchained* (focus on Nietzsche’s philosophical concepts of the ubermensch, eternal recurrence and master and slave morality) – Week 11 (due on 4/2/19)
- *Do the Right Thing* (focus on the philosophies of King, Fanon and Freire and their approaches to fighting social injustice) – Week 12 (due on 4/9/19)
- *V for Vendetta* (focus on the pluralist philosophy of Berlin and his discussion of positive and negative freedom) – Week 14 (due on 4/23/19)
- *Modern Times* (focus on the philosophical debates between capitalists, Marxists and Buddhists concerning freedom and market economics) – Week 15 (due on 4/30/19)

This assignment will be in lieu of your weekly SDQ and must be submitted on Canvas by 2:00 on the day of the seminar in which we will be discussing the film you have chosen to review. When writing your review, you need to do your best to synthesize and incorporate all of the required philosophical material associated with the film you have chosen to review (the assigned material is linked to the SDQ). While you don’t need to talk about each piece in detail, nonetheless, you need to be able to demonstrate that you have a broad understanding of the main philosophical themes and debates being discussed in the material. This assignment is worth 5% of your total course grade.

**COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY PAPER:**

1) **ASSIGNMENT:**

This assignment requires you to write a 10-12 page essay comparing and contrasting two philosophical approaches to the concept of freedom that we will be covering during the first 10 weeks of the course. You will be required to pick two of the following philosophers (or philosophical schools of thought) to analyze in your paper: *Spinoza* (Week 3), *Buddhism* (Week 4); *Existentialism* (Week 6); and *Anarchism* (Week 10). This paper will be due on 4/16/19 (Week 13) and will constitute 25% of your overall course grade.

All required material for this assignment is located on the Canvas site for this course. In order to do well on this assignment, you will have to demonstrate to me that you have an intellectually rigorous and comprehensive understanding of the philosophies under investigation. In order to do so, I expect you to read both widely and deeply in the production of this analysis. While this assignment does not require you to read every source I have presented to you, nonetheless, it does require you to demonstrate that you put in a significant effort to fully grasp the complexities and nuances of each philosophical tradition under investigation. So, try to read as many of the readings as you can in an effort to gain a higher degree of intellectual purchase on
the philosophies under investigation. Also, try to challenge yourself by moving beyond the introductory material and into the deeper, more complex analyses presented to you. In order to facilitate this, make use of the following rating system tied to the assigned material: * = easy; ** = challenging; *** = difficult. The greater the use (and understanding) of the more challenging and difficult material for this assignment, the more insightful, compelling and persuasive your analysis will be.

1. Spinoza:
   a. **Philosophy: The Classics (audio)**: Nigel Warburton on Spinoza's *Ethics*. (*)
   b. *Philosophy Bites (audio)*: Susan James on Spinoza on the Passions. (*)
   c. *The School of Life (video)*: Spinoza. (*)
   d. Nadler, Steven. “Spinoza's Philosophy of Freedom,” The Times Literary Supplement, 27 April 2018. (*)
   g. Adkins, Brent. *True Freedom, Spinoza's Practical Philosophy*, Rowan and Littlefield, 2009, pp. 5-12; 45-53; and 91-97. (**)

2. Buddhism:
   a. *The School of Life (video)*: The Buddha. (*)
   c. Thich Nhat Hahn (video): On Buddhism. (*)

3. French Existentialism:
   a. *Virtual Philosopher (audio)*: Nigel Warburton on Sartre's Existentialism is a Humanism. (*)
   b. *The School of Life (video)*: Sartre. (*)

h. Panza, Christopher and Gregory Gale. “Sartre’s Existentialism” in Existentialism for Dummies, pp. 157-79. (**) 


k. “Introduction to Camus: The Absurd, Revolt and Rebellion,” Academy of Ideas, April 10, 2016 (video): Camus (**) 


4. Anarchism:


2) **EVALUATION:**

Your goal in writing this paper will be to (1) explore how each thinker/school of thought uses the idea of freedom when developing their philosophical arguments, (2) identify the similarities and differences within their respective discussions of freedom, and (3) to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of these philosophical arguments concerning the nature and value of freedom. In other words, you want to be able to elaborate on what each philosopher/philosophy has to say on the topic of freedom, identify where they agree and disagree with one another and, finally, tell us what you think about the logical persuasiveness and usefulness of each approach. **You will need to show a deep understanding of these philosophies – gleaned through a careful reading of the assigned material – when writing this paper.** When developing your essay, you will want to:

- Demonstrate how each philosopher/philosophy both conceptualizes and logically develops their understanding of freedom.
  - In doing this you will want to provide the reader with a thorough understanding of their overall philosophical frameworks and show how the idea of freedom fits within these frameworks.

- Discuss the similarities and differences between the two philosophers/philosophies with regard to their respective conceptualizations of freedom.
  - In doing this you will want to identify how each philosopher/philosophy thinks about the following questions:
What does it mean to be free?
What is the source of human freedom?
What, if any, ethical or social value is found in the idea of freedom?
What are the greatest challenges to our ability to realize our freedom?
How can we overcome the obstacles that enslave us and prevent us from being free?

- Critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of these philosophical approaches to freedom.
  ✓ In doing this you will want to be able to address the following questions:
    - Do you find the philosophical arguments under investigation to be logically coherent and persuasive?
    - What do you consider to be the strongest parts of their arguments and what are their weakest?
    - On the whole, which philosophical argument do you find to be more persuasive than the other?
- Be able to discuss what philosophical insights you can take from both of these philosophers/philosophies to better help you achieve freedom in your own life.

**FINAL EXAM:**

1) **OVERVIEW OF THE ASSIGNMENT:**

The final exam for this course consists of two interrelated components: a written paper and an oral examination. Both of these components will focus on John Stuart Mill’s seminal work, *On Liberty*. A 7-page critical analysis of Mill’s argument will be turned in to me by the last day of the semester (prior to finals week). I will read and grade this paper and then use it to help me create an oral examination designed especially for you (which will be held during finals week).

2) **CRITICAL ANALYSIS PAPER ON MILL’S ON LIBERTY**

The first component of the final exam is a 7-page critical analysis of John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* (which we will begin to explore during Week 13 of the semester). Mill’s work is one of the most important pieces of Western political philosophy written in the past 200 years and will inform many of our discussions in the last month of the semester. Given the importance of Mill’s work to both Western political thought and our class, I need you to have a good grasp on the essence of his argument. While we will begin to explore Mill’s argument in Week 13 of the semester, your critical review is not due until the end of the semester. While you can turn this assignment in to me any time after Week 13, it must be submitted to the Canvas site by no later than 5:00 on Friday 5/10/19. This component of the final exam constitutes 15% of your course grade.

In addition to the material presented in Week 13, you are also required to read Nigel Warburton’s three chapters on Mill’s argument presented in his book, *Freedom*. These chapters can be found on the Canvas site for this course (see Warburton – Mill on The Harm Principle; Warburton -- Mill on Freedom of Speech; and Warburton -- Mill on Experiments of Living).

In this paper you should address the following three items: (1) outline the core philosophical arguments found in Mill’s work; (2) critique these arguments by identifying both their strengths and weaknesses; and (3) outline your general position on Mill’s philosophy of freedom (e.g., What do you like about his argument? Where do you think his argument is either underdeveloped or inadequate as a general philosophy
of freedom? How would you improve on Mill’s argument?). You should give equal weight (and time) to each of these items.

3) **ORAL EXAMINATION (WITH A FOCUS ON MILL’S ON LIBERTY)**

The “one-on-one” oral exam, which constitutes the second component of this assignment, will require you to think broadly about the concept of freedom and, where relevant, address the various films and philosophies that we have covered over the course of the semester. In addition, a fair amount of our time will be devoted to discussing your written critique of Mill’s *On Liberty*.

The oral exams will be held in the lobby of the Academic Village dining hall during finals week. Each exam will take about 1 hour. This component of the final exam constitutes 15% of your overall course grade.
COURSE SCHEDULE

NOTE: ALL READINGS ARE LOCATED ON THE CANVAS SITE FOR THIS COURSE AND ALL AUDIO AND VIDEO FILES ARE HYPERLINKED TO THIS SYLLABUS (just click on the underlined title of the file in question).

I WATCH, THEREFORE I AM: AN INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING THROUGH FILM

WEEK 1 (1/22/19) – BIG QUESTIONS, DEEP THOUGHTS AND THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM: UNDERSTANDING THE PHILOSOPHER’S MIND (AND YOURS)

In addition to overviewing the logistics of the course, in this seminar we will introduce the idea of philosophy and discuss how we can employ cinema to explore philosophical questions.

WEEK 2 (1/29/19) – NEO’S FREEDOM …. “WHOA!” EXPLORING THE PHILOSOPHICAL THEMES WITHIN THE MATRIX

Film Screening: The Matrix – TUESDAY 1/22/19 (4:00-6:16)
  • Online Streaming – The Matrix
Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 1/29/19

✓ HOW DO I KNOW I EXIST? ACKNOWLEDGING THE HIGH PROBABILITY THAT YOU, LIKE NEO, ARE LIVING IN A COMPUTER SIMULATION (a question of metaphysical philosophy)
  • 8-Bit Philosophy (video): Are We Living in a Simulation?
✓ DOES LIFE IN THE MATRIX HAVE MEANING? IS THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN BEING HAPPY? (a question of moral philosophy)
✓ WHAT DO WE GAIN BY ESCAPING THE MATRIX (AND WHO SHOULD LEAD US)? PHILOSOPHER-KINGS, THE PURSUIT OF “TRUTH” AND THE CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE (a question of political philosophy)
  • The School of Life (video): Plato.

FREEDOM – TAKE 1: PSYCHOLOGICAL, SPIRITUAL, BIOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL LIBERATION

WEEK 3 (2/05/19) – CONFRONTING THE TYRANNY OF THE SENSES: FREEDOM AS THE PROMOTION OF “THE GOOD LIFE”

Film Screening: Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind – TUESDAY 1/29/19 (4:00-5:48)
✓ Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004 – USA – 108 minutes) – Michael Gondry (IMDB 8.3/10)
  • Online Streaming – Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 2/05/19
✓ WHAT DETERMINES A “GOOD LIFE”? EXPLORING THE EUDAIMONIST IMPULSE IN ANCIENT AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY
✓ IS THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS A FOOL’S ERRAND? UNCOVERING HOW THE QUEST FOR PERPETUAL EUPHORIA MAY BE MAKING US CHRONICALLY UNHAPPY
  • Philosophy Bites (audio): Pascal Bruckner on Happiness
✓ DO WE CONTROL OUR EMOTIONS OR DO OUR EMOTIONS CONTROL US? SPINOZA ON FREE WILL, “THE PASSIONS” AND THE EMANCIPATING POWER OF REASON
  • The School of Life (video): Spinoza.
  • Philosophy Bites (audio): Susan James on Spinoza on the Passions.
WEEK 4 (2/12/19) — FREEDOM AS THE ATTAINMENT OF SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT: THE BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Film Screening: Fight Club — TUESDAY 2/05/19 (4:00-6:20)
✓ Fight Club (1999 – USA – 139 minutes) – David Fincher (IMDB 8.8/10)
  • Online Streaming – Fight Club

Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 2/12/19
✓ WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF HUMAN MISERY? DOES WESTERN SOCIETY THREATEN THE ATTAINMENT OF SPIRITUAL FREEDOM?
  • The School of Life (video): The Buddha.

✓ ARE YOU TRULY FREE IF YOU ARE FREE TO DO ANYTHING YOU WANT? RIGHT PERCEPTIONS AND THE PATH TO FREEDOM
  • Thich Nhat Hahn (video): On Buddhism.

Class Assignment
✓ Complete the Honor’s Program self-evaluation requirement at www.honors.colostate.edu/picc by 2/12/19.

WEEK 5 (2/19/19) — LIBERATION BIOLOGY: TRANSHUMANISM AND THE CHALLENGES OF A POSTHUMAN FREEDOM

Film Screening: Gattaca — TUESDAY 2/12/19 (4:00-5:41)
✓ Gattaca (1997 – USA – 101 minutes) – Andrew Niccol (IMDB 7.8/10)
  • Online Streaming -- Gattaca

Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 2/19/19
✓ SHOULD WE HAVE THE FREEDOM TO “PLAY GOD”? TRANSHUMANISM AND THE PROSPECTS FOR A POSTHUMAN FUTURE

Student Presentations (2)
WEEK 6 (2/26/19) — CONDEMNED TO BE FREE: UNDERSTANDING THE EXISTENTIAL QUEST FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE IN AN ABSURD WORLD

Film Screening: The Seventh Seal – TUESDAY 2/19/19 (4:00-5:36)
✓ The Seventh Seal (Det Sjunde Inseglet, 1957 – Sweden – 96 minutes) – Ingmar Bergman (IMDB 8.2/10)
  • Online Streaming – Seventh Seal

Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 2/26/19
✓ WHO AM I? SARTRE ON FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY
  • The School of Life (video): Sartre.
  • Virtual Philosopher (audio): Nigel Warburton on Sartre’s Existentialism is a Humanism.

✓ IS LIFE WITHOUT GOD A LIFE WORTH LIVING? CAMUS AND DE BEAUVOIR ON THE REVOLT AGAINST THE ABSURDITY OF LIFE AND THE PURSUIT OF HUMANIST TRANSCENDENCE
  • Small, Stephen. “Albert Camus (1913-1960),” Philosophy Now, October/November 2015. (paper)

Student Presentations (2)

FREEDOM – TAKE 2: SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LIBERATION

WEEK 7 (3/05/19) – LEVIATHAN TO THE RESCUE: ANARCHY, REASON AND THE ORIGINS OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Film Screening: City of God – TUESDAY 2/26/19 (4:00-6:10)
✓ City of God (Cidade de Deus, 2002 – Brazil – 130 minutes) – Fernando Meirelles (IMDB 8.6/10)
  • Online Streaming – City of God

Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 3/05/19
✓ WHY DO WE NEED GOVERNMENT? HOBBES ON THE SOCIAL CONTRACT
  • The School of Life (video): Thomas Hobbes

Student Presentations (3)
**WEEK 8 (3/12/19) — THE ID, THE EGO AND THE TAMING OF THE HUMAN SAVAGE: IS CIVILIZATION A THREAT TO INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS?**

**Film Screening:** *A Clockwork Orange* – TUESDAY 3/05/19 (4:00-6:16)
  - Online Streaming – *A Clockwork Orange*

**Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 3/12/19**
- **WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY? FREUD ON CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS**
  - *The School of Life* (video): Sigmund Freud.
- **DO WE HAVE FREE WILL? SKINNER ON FREEDOM AND THE SCIENCE OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR**

**Student Presentations (2)**

**WEEK 9 (3/19/19) — SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)**

**WEEK 10 (3/26/19) — STICKING IT TO “THE MAN”: ANARCHISM AND THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIBERATION**

**Film Screening:** *Daisies* – TUESDAY 3/12/19 (4:00-5:14)
- *Daisies* (Sedmikrasky – 1966 – Czechoslovakia – 74 minutes) (IMDB 7.4/10)
  - Online Streaming -- *Daisies*

**Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 3/26/19**
- **WHAT DEFINES A JUST SOCIAL ORDER? ANARCHIST PHILOSOPHY AND THE LIBERATION FROM GOD, THE STATE AND ECONOMIC OPPRESSION**
- **ARE GENDER ROLES A THREAT TO THE FREEDOM OF WOMEN? FEMINISM, SEXUAL LIBERATION AND THE ANARCHIST ATTACK ON PATRIARCHY AND PURITANISM**

**Student Presentations (3)**

**WEEK 11 (4/02/19) — BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL: THE WILL TO POWER AND THE LIBERATION OF INDIVIDUAL GREATNESS FROM THE INDIFFERENCE OF THE HERD**
Film Screening: *Django Unchained* – TUESDAY 3/26/19 (4:00-6:46)
- *Django Unchained* (2012 – USA – 166 minutes) – Quentin Tarantino (IMDB 8.4/10)
  - Online Streaming – *Django Unchained*

Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 4/02/19
- FREEDOM AS THE HERO’S QUEST FOR WHOLENESS: NIETZSCHE ON RESENTMENT, THE UBERMENSCH AND THE TYRANNY OF HERD MORALITY
  - *Genius of the Modern World* (video): Friedrich Nietzsche

Student Presentations (2)

WEEK 12 (4/09/19) – FIRE IN THE MINDS OF MEN (AND WOMEN!): HIERARCHY, OPPRESSION AND THE (SOMETIMES VIOLENT) STRUGGLE AGAINST SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Film Screening: *Do the Right Thing* – TUESDAY 4/02/19 (4:00-6:00)
- *Do the Right Thing* (1989 – USA – 120 minutes) – Spike Lee (IMDB 7.9/10)
  - Online Streaming – *Do the Right Thing*

Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 4/09/19
- IS VIOLENCE EVER A MORALLY JUSTIFIABLE RESPONSE TO SOCIAL DOMINATION AND INJUSTICE?
  - King, Martin Luther. “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence (excerpts from *Stride Toward Freedom*),” 1958.
  - Listen to “Frantz Fanon and the Violence of Colonialism,” *Philosophy Talk*, Episode 448 (audio) and read Fanon’s “Violence and Self-Definition,” in G. Presbey et al., *The Philosophical Quest*, pp. 538-540.

Student Presentations (2)

WEEK 13 (4/16/19) – A DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE PRINCIPLE: AN INTRODUCTION TO JOHN STUART MILL’S *ON LIBERTY*

Discussion of Readings – TUESDAY 4/16/19 (no film this week!)
WHAT ARE THE APPROPRIATE LIMITS TO STATE AND SOCIETAL POWER? MILL ON EXPERIMENTS OF LIVING, FREE PRESS AND THE HARM PRINCIPLE

- Philosophy Bites (audio): Richard Reeves on Mill's On Liberty


Film Screening: *V for Vendetta* – TUESDAY 4/16/19 (4:00-6:12)

  - Online Streaming – *V for Vendetta*

Discussion of Readings – TUESDAY 4/23/19

- CAN YOU COERCE SOMEONE TO BE FREE? BERLIN ON THE DANGERS OF POSITIVE FREEDOM
  - Jaggers, Keith. “A Summary of Isaiah Berlin’s Political Philosophy”.
  - Philosophy Bites (audio): Henry Harding on Isaiah Berlin's Pluralism

Student Presentations (2)

FREEDOM – TAKE 3: ECONOMIC LIBERATION

WEEK 15 (4/30/19) – SEARCHING FOR THE SOUL OF THE MACHINE: CAPITALISM AS LIBERATOR OR OPPRESSOR?

Film Screening: *Modern Times* – TUESDAY 4/23/19 (4:00-5:27)

- *Modern Times* (1936 – USA – 87 minutes) – Charlie Chaplin (IMDB 8.6/10)
  - Online Streaming – *Modern Times*

Discussion of Film – TUESDAY 4/30/19

- WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FREE MARKETS AND FREEDOM? CAPITALIST, MARXIST AND BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES
  - Philosophy Bites (audio): Jonathan Wolff on Marx on Alienation

WEEK 16 (5/07/19) – BREAKING THE TYRANNY OF POVERTY & SOCIAL INJUSTICE: FREEDOM AS THE “FAIR” DISTRIBUTION OF CAPABILITIES

Film Screening: *Born into Brothels* – TUESDAY 4/30/19 (4:00-5:25)
✓ **Born Into Brothels** (2004 – USA – 85 minutes) – Zana Branski and Ross Kauffman (IMDB 7.3/10)
  - Online Streaming -- *Born into Brothels*

Discussion of Film and Readings – **TUESDAY 5/07/19**
✓ **WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FREEDOM? NUSSBAUM ON THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH**