

PHI2016: Philosophy Through Film
ZOMBIES, Scifi

Fall 2013

TR 12:30-1:45, SAN 108

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Course Description:

Zombies serve as a distorted conceptual mirror by which we can examine ourselves. Zombies fascinate us because death terrifies us. This course is an examination of **death, human nature, and consciousness**. Zombies are a philosophical thought experiment which can aim at many diverse philosophical targets: the metaphysics of personal identity, criticisms of social and political philosophy, the range of our moral obligations, and the nature of consciousness.

Zombies raise important philosophical questions, including:

- What happens to your personal identity in the event of zombification?
- Crushing your mother's skull seems morally wrong *ceteris paribus*. However, in the event that she becomes a zombie is crushing her skull still morally wrong or does it become morally obligatory?
- What is the ontological status of the living dead?
- Are zombies metaphysically possible?
- What is it like to be a zombie? Are they conscious, or are their mental worlds "silent and dark"?
- Why are brains so delicious?
- Cannibalism. What's up with that?
- If I am *only* a piece of defecating meat then what happens to me when I die?

The first part of this course will examine the use of Zombie movies as a vehicle for social criticism and as an examination of human nature.

The second part of this course will examine Scifi movies and important metaphysical problems- time travel, skepticism concerning the external world, and artificial intelligence.

The capstone of this course will once again make use of Zombie movies in order to analyze the concept of a Philosophical Zombie (these ain't your mama's zombies).

Throughout the course the films which we watch will serve as a launching pad for a discussion of various philosophical problems, concepts, and positions.

Course Objectives:

This course has three major aims:

PHI2016: Philosophy Through Film

ZOMBIES, Scifi

1. To introduce you to some interesting and important philosophical questions and ways that they have been answered, using films to raise these questions.
2. To develop your capacity for critical and constructive thinking about philosophical topics.
3. To hone your reading and writing skills.

Required Texts:

1. Zombies are Us: Essays on the Humanity of the Walking Dead, Moreman, Rushton. McFarlane Publishers. 2011. =Z
2. Human Nature: An Introduction to Philosophy, Thomas Wall. Wadsworth Cengage Learning. 2005. =HN
3. iClicker+ ISBN 9781464120152 (the iClicker 1 or 2 will also be sufficient)

Disclaimer:

We are going to watch a lot of zombie films. In these zombie films you can expect to find an insane amount of profane language, violence, gore, cannibalism, sexism, racism, rape, and nudity. We will be watching and discussing some deeply offensive topics. ***If you cannot watch such films, then this is not the course for you.***

This course counts towards the Film Minor.

Course Requirements:

1. Watch the movie.
2. Class participation (hence the iClicker)
3. Write weekly comments (200 words each): Only the top 10 will count towards your final grade.
4. Write one paper (1,500 words)

Grading Criteria:

- Class Participation 20%
- Paper 30%
- Assignments 50%

Watching the Movie:

We will hold **optional** movie screenings Monday's from 6-9 in HWC2400.

Class Participation:

During class you will be answering question via the iClicker and this will count towards your class participation.

You will need to register your iClicker remote by September 2nd. TO REGISTER: Log into your Blackboard account. Choose your course and click on the iClicker link. Follow the instructions to type in your remote ID. The remote ID is the series of numbers and sometimes letters found on the bottom of the back of your iClicker remote. iClicker will be used every day in class, and you are responsible for bringing your remote daily.

PHI2016: Philosophy Through Film

ZOMBIES, Scifi

Weekly Comments:

Each week you will receive a writing prompt. The topic of the prompt will vary wildly- some weeks you will be unpacking a deep existential quote, some weeks you will be criticizing a conception of human nature, and some weeks you will be analyzing a scene from one of our beloved Zombie movies. Each weekly comment will be 200 words (you can run over, but you will be penalized for writing less than 200 words). I will only count the best 10 of your comments towards your final grade. There will be *approximately* 14 weekly writing comments. I will provide more detail concerning these weekly comments as I assign them.

Paper:

You will write one 1,500 word essay. You will receive more information on what you will write and how you will be assessed as we approach the due dates. This will be a piece of creative writing which incorporates philosophical themes.

Grading Rubric for the Paper:

Excellent (90 – 100)

An excellent essay answers the question in a clear and concise manner. It goes beyond basic understanding and incorporates new ideas or synthesizes information to show connections between previously unmentioned concepts. It is free of grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors, and it meets, but does not exceed, the word requirement.

Good (80 – 89)

A good essay answers the question clearly and adequately, but does not incorporate new ideas or perspectives. It may have a few grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors, but not so many that they affect the overall clarity of the essay.

Average (70 – 79)

An average essay answers the question, but is lacking in overall clarity and precision. Also, the essay may miss obvious points or fail to make obvious connections. Average essays may have several grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors, which may affect the overall clarity and precision of the essay. May also fail to meet the word requirement.

Needs Improvement (60 – 69)

An essay that needs improvement may answer some parts of the question, but fails to address the question fully. It is also lacking in overall clarity. It likely contains many grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors. It may also fail to meet the word requirement.

Unacceptable (0 – 59)

An unacceptable essay fails to answer the assigned question. It may also fail to meet the word requirement.

PHI2016: Philosophy Through Film
ZOMBIES, Scifi

Grades: will be determined using the University's alphanumeric system as follows:

100-93: A	79-77: C+	62-60: D-
92-90: A-	76-73: C	59-0: F
89-87: B+	72-70: C-	
86-83: B	69-67: D+	
82-80: B-	66-63: D	

Late Paper Policy:

Papers are due by the beginning of class on the assigned date. If you do not turn your paper in at that time then you will receive a 10% deduction every day that it is late. Of course, if you have an excused absence simply let me know *as soon as possible!*

Late Weekly Comment Policy:

Weekly comments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. Unless you have an excused absence, I simply will not accept late weekly comments. I will be assigning 14 weekly comments and only counting the top 10 towards your final grade.

University Attendance Policy: Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

Academic Honor Policy: The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to ". . . be honest and truthful and . . . [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy)

Americans With Disabilities Act: Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center, 874 Traditions Way, 108 Student Services Building, Florida State University, Tallahassee FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice) (850) 644-8504 (TDD)
sdrc@admin.fsu.edu
disabilitycenter.fsu.edu

PHI2016: Philosophy Through Film
ZOMBIES, Scifi

Syllabus Change Policy

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

Week 1: No Movie

8/27- Syllabus/Attendance

8-29- “Your Zombie and Your: Identity, Emotion, and the Undead” **Z**

Week 2: *The Serpent & The Rainbow* (1988)

9/3- “The Living Word Among the Living Dead: Hunting for Zombies in the Pages of the Bible” **Z**

9/5- “Modern Zombie Makers: Enacting the Ancient Impulse to Control and Possess Another” **Z**

Week 3: *Night of the Living Dead* (1990)

9/10- Chapter 1: Eastern Thought, Introduction to Eastern Thought, pg. 18-28; Thich Nhat Hanh, pg. 32-34; Buddhist Ethics, pg. 35-39 **HN**

9/12- “Dharma of the Dead: A Buddhist Meditation on the Zombie” **Z**

Week 4: *Zombie Island* (1979)

9/17- “Religion, Blasphemy, and Tradition in the Films of Lucio Fulci” (pg. 100-104) **Z** & “The Mutated Spirit: The Hollywood Zombie as Psychopomp” **Z**

9/19- Chapter 3: Aristotle, Introduction pg. 102-119; The Soul, The Good, Contemplation: Pg. 122-129; 133- 136. **HN**

Week 5: *Return of the Living Dead* (1985)

9/24- “Rave from the Grave: *Dark Trance and the Return of the Dead*” **Z**

9/26- Chapter 5: Descartes, Introduction pg. 189-211; Meditation I & II, pg. 215-222. **HN**

Week 6: *Dawn of the Dead* (2004)

10/1- “Digital Dead: Translating the Visceral and Satirical Elements of George A. Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* to Videogames” **Z**

10/3- Chapter 7: Marx, Introduction pg. 272-292; Estranged Labor pg. 293-300; The Communist Manifesto pg. 300-306. **HN**

Week 7: *Day of the Dead* (1985)

10/8- “The Funk of Forty Thousand Years” **BB**

10/10- Chapter 8: Sartre, Introduction pg. 313-331; Being and Nothingness pg. 331-339. **HN**

Week 8: *Dead Alive* (1992)

PHI2016: Philosophy Through Film
ZOMBIES, Scifi

10/15- "Zombie Splatter Comedy from Dawn to Shaun: Cannibal Carnavalesque" **BB**

10/17- Chapter 9: Freud, Introduction pg. 353-369; The Instincts, The Early Development of Sexuality, The Social Function of Guilt, pg. 369-379. **HN**

Week 9: *Land of the Dead (2005)*

10/22- "Plans are Pointless; Staying Alive Is as Good as It Gets: Zombie Sociology and the Politics of Survival" **Z**

10/24- Chapter 10: Evolutionary Psychology, Introduction pg. 380-406; Darwin, pg 407-413; E. O. Wilson, pg. 414-419. **HN**

Week 10: *28 Days Later (2002)*

10/29- "Hybridity and Post-Human Anxiety in 28 Days Later" **BB**

10/31- Chapter 11: Cognitive Science, Introduction pg 433-455; In Defense of Eliminative Materialism, The Illusion of Self, pg. 455-466; Life After Death, pg. 470-473. **HN**

Week 11: *Star Trek (2009)*

11/5- "Time" **BB**

11/7- "Paradoxes of Time Travel" **BB**

Week 12: *The Matrix (1999)*

11/12- "Brains in a Vat" **BB**

11/14- "The Experience Machine" **BB**

Week 13: *The Terminator (1984)*

11/19- Artificial Intelligence, Part 1 **BB**

11/21- Artificial Intelligence, Part 2 **BB**

Week 14: *Shaun of the Dead (2004)*

11/26- No Reading

11/28: Thanksgiving, No Class

Week 15: *Zombieland (2009)*

12/3- Philosophical Zombies, Part 1 **BB**

12/5- Philosophical Zombies, Part 2 **BB**

Week 16: No Movie

12/10, 12/12- Final Exam Week