Lingnan University  
Department of Philosophy – MA in Practical Philosophy Programme

Course Title: Cinema and Philosophy  
Course Code: PHI502  
Recommended Study Year: -  
No. of Credits/Term: 3  
Mode of Tuition: Lecture and Tutorial  
Class Contact Hours: 2 hours lecture per week  
1 hour tutorial per week  
Category in Major Programme: Value Philosophy  
Prerequisite(s): -  
Co-requisite(s): -  
Exclusion(s): -  
Exemption Requirement(s): -

Brief Course Description
A number of major philosophers have written about the cinema, raising a wide range of issues about the artistic and expressive means and functions of audio-visual representations. In this course we will study some of these philosophical writings in relation to important cinematic works. The main goals of the course will be to acquaint students with an important vein of philosophical reflection, as well as to give them an enhanced understanding of an influential popular art form and persuasive medium. Philosophical essays as well as specific cinematic works will be explored with an eye to some of the following topics: (1) the nature and specificity of the cinematic medium; (2) realism and illusionism; (3) cinema and emotion; (4) story-telling and characterization in the cinema; (5) problems of interpretation; (6) philosophical themes in cinematic works, such as personal identity and moral questions; (7) adaptation and evaluation; (8) cinema ‘as philosophy’, or cinema’s potential contributions to philosophical knowledge.

Aims
To acquaint students with philosophers’ reflections on the cinema, and to give them an understanding of the artistic and expressive means and functions of audio-visual representations. Issues pertaining to the evaluation of cinematic works will be surveyed.

Learning Outcomes
This course is designed to enhance basic reasoning, appreciative, and expressive skills as well as to promote an enhanced understanding of a number of philosophical issues raised by the cinematic medium. Completion of the course should grant students:

Basic Knowledge of relations between Philosophy and Cinema

This knowledge enables students to:
1. Respond critically to the philosophical dimensions of films  
2. Assess claims made about the philosophical importance of cinema  
3. Apply crucial background knowledge to audio-visual messages more generally

Ability to engage in further, independent learning and reflection

This ability enables students to:
1. Find and assess intellectually stimulating works of cinema  
2. Find and engage with critical discourse on related topics  
3. Appreciate arguments on related issues  
4. Better articulate responses to audio-visual discourse, moving back and forth between attentive perception of the works and the task of expressing critical observations in verbal and written form
Indicative Content
Philosophical essays as well as specific cinematic works will be explored with an eye to some of the following topics: (1) the nature and specificity of the cinematic medium; (2) realism and illusionism; (3) the construction of time, space, and causation in cinematic representations; (4) authorship, story-telling, and genre in the cinema; (5) characterization in fiction films; (6) the value of films and the status of evaluations; (7) philosophical themes in cinematic works, and in particular, issues concerning personal identity, topics in moral and political philosophy, and philosophical psychology; (8) the nature and status of judgements of value of cinematic works.

Teaching Method
Lectures and discussions.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes
Student’s successful engagement with the films and readings, and corresponding progress towards the learning outcomes outlined above, will be measured by means of examinations comprising both short-answer and more substantive, reflective essay questions.

1. Students will engage in discussion on assigned topic in the tutorials. They are expected to be able to analyse and synthesize various points of view and evaluate them critically.
2. Students’ successful engagement with the films and readings will be measured by means of mid-term test comprising both short-answer and more substantive, reflective questions. Students should be able to show their understanding of issues involved in the subject.
3. Students will write a term paper. They are expected to consolidate the knowledge they have learned in this course. Besides, they should be able to draw on a range of sources appreciate the film and criticizing the philosophical theories.

Assessment
Assessment of the students will focus on their active engagement with the philosophical readings and issues, and their ability to develop articulate critical responses.

Continuous assessment: 50%; Examination 50%

Required Readings
Essays and chapters from various sources, including:

Supplementary Readings