

# Philosophy through Film

Key Texts, Discussion, and Film Selections

Edited by RICHARD FUMERTON and DIANE JESKE

# INTRODUCING PHILOSOPHY THROUGH FILM

KEY TEXTS, DISCUSSION, AND FILM SELECTIONS

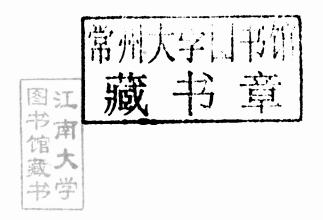
Edited by



Richard Fumerton

and

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## Introducing Philosophy Through Film

For Alexandra Rose (R.F.) For Sara, Emma, and Kate (D.J.)

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## Preface

In this book we try to combine all the virtues of a serious introductory anthology of classical and contemporary readings with a novel pedagogical tool that will engage and excite students who have never before been exposed to academic philosophy. Indeed, we think that the book will so captivate the imagination of the philosophically uninitiated that it may find an audience in high schools. As it is, a number of high schools already experiment with philosophy as an elective. The availability of a text like this might make the option even more attractive.

We have discussed this project with a great many philosophers at all stages of their careers. Without exception, they have been excited about this approach to teaching philosophy. Many indicated that they have thought about using films in their classes, or even have shown the occasional film, but are reluctant to put the time and effort into compiling a more extensive and manageable list of film clips. We recently co-taught a summer course in which we put together scenes from many of the films we outline in our table of contents. It was the most successful introductory course we have ever taught. In particular, we have never seen students so animated in discussion. Even those students who were clearly by nature shy quickly became active participants.

From the beginnings of analytic philosophy, thought experiments have been an indispensable tool in the evaluation of philosophical theories about the nature of knowledge, perception and its relation to the physical world, the self and its

identity through time, justice and morality, space and time, free will and determinism, and the existence and nature of God. But we have found that our students sometimes find the philosopher's description of hypothetical situations incomplete, remote, and artificial. For many students, these descriptions lack a kind of context, detail, vivacity, intimacy, and realism that would make it easier to test "intuitions" about what we would or wouldn't say in describing the situation. More and more frequently we have found ourselves appealing to various films in order to breathe life into the less colorful philosophical appeals to possibilities. We have seen students get excited about old philosophical controversies when they can relate them to movies in which they have become completely engrossed and which they have already often discussed with friends. New technology now makes it feasible to combine a text of classical and contemporary philosophical discussions of fundamental problems in philosophy with introductions that include chapter-by-chapter discussion of clips of popular films, films that illustrate vividly some of the crucial possibilities that are critical to philosophical arguments and positions raised in the readings.

#### Part Introductions

There are introductions to each of the Parts contained in the anthology, and each Part ends with a list of study questions tying readings to film. In

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these introductions, we do not try to provide detailed summaries of either the articles or the films contained in these sections. Rather, we try to give the reader a feel for the philosophical landscape. We try to outline in an accessible way some of the main philosophical issues arising in each area, referring along the way to articles or films that seem relevant to those issues. In discussing the films (particularly in discussion questions), we often make reference by DVD chapter to specific scenes that seem to us philosophically interesting or thought-provoking. We sometimes give a sketch of the plot line, but given the widespread popularity of some of these films it didn't seem profitable to give anything other than a superficial overview. The showing of the film or the philosophically relevant parts of the film will, by itself, set the relevant stage.

#### About the Use of DVDs

Initially, our hope was that we could arrange for an instructor's copy of the book to come with a DVD containing philosophically relevant edited scenes from the movies listed in the table of contents. While some films are in the public domain, copyright issues concerning the use of more recent films (some of which might be of most interest to students) made the idea of an instructor's DVD impractical. It still might be possible to post onto a course website clips of films (and certainly links to sites such as YouTube that contain clips like *Mr Deity*). Instructors should thoroughly research copyright issues, however, before generating such sites.

All the relevant films referred to in this anthology can be obtained easily. Usually, they will be available to the instructor in the university's library, and, in any event, are easily accessed at any movie rental. When we taught our *Philosophy Through Film* course recently, we had no difficulty finding all the DVDs we wanted to use. In some cases, the film clips we recommend using will stand on their own. In others, students will rely on plot summaries provided in the introductions to various sections of the book to provide context for the clip. In still other cases, it may be important for students to see the entire film. This is particularly true of the films used in the section in the anthology on personal

relationships and their implications for morality (Part IV, section B "Obligations to Intimates"). So, for example, the nuanced relationships in *The Third Man, Casablanca*, and *High Noon* can best be appreciated only by those who have seen the film in its entirety. This being so, the instructor can arrange for showings outside of class and can use relevant clips in class to emphasize points drawn from the films.

As indicated above, our introductions to various sections of the book will often include specific advice concerning the parts of films that we think should be used in class. DVDs are divided into "chapters" that are easily accessible on the DVD "menu." In the introduction to Part II, "The Problem of Perception," we discuss, for example, and suggest showing, chapter 23 of Total Recall, the scene in which the hero purports to have a refutation of the possibility that he is dreaming. These detailed suggestions about which chapters of DVDs seem particularly relevant to the philosophical issues at hand are intended to save instructors time in making decisions about how to use the DVDs in classroom presentations. But they are, of course, only suggestions. Again, our own experience suggests that one can most profitably use a variety of approaches in exposing students to the relevant films. Assignments outside of class (including arranged showings), the use of clips in class, and perhaps, occasionally, a long showing in a given class, vary presentation in ways that are both interesting and pedagogically desirable.

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We would like to thank Jeff Dean for his support and enthusiasm for this project. We also received helpful comments from a number of anonymous reviewers for Blackwell. Special thanks are owed to Heather Libby and Chris Lammer-Heindel, who helped review and revise earlier drafts of introductions and who also helped select film chapters and design study questions. Allison Roggenburg was of great help finding and organizing the various readings we chose to include in the anthology. We have received (and continue to receive) countless suggestions of philosophically interesting films from colleagues and former students, and for that we thank them very much.

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### Part I

# Introduction: Philosophical Analysis, Argument, and the Relevance of Thought Experiments

#### Films:

Monty Python, "The Argument Skit"

Pulp Fiction

Seinfeld episode: The Soup