

MALAS 600B/Philosophy 515
Philosophy of Film



Mark R. Wheeler, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Philosophy

San Diego State University
MALAS 600B Schedule #21980
PHIL 515 Schedule #22582
M&W 15h30m-16h45m
COM 206

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Wheeler

Office: Arts and Letters 434

Campus Phone: 619-594-6706

E-mail address: mark.wheeler@sdsu.edu

OFFICE HOURS:

M&W: 13h–14h, and by appointment for other times.

REQUIRED TEXT:

The Philosophy of Film: Introductory Text and Readings, edited by Wartenberg and Curran, Blackwell Publishing.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The main goal of the course is to help you study films from a philosophical perspective.

You will master the major concepts and arguments in the contemporary philosophy of film. I will help you refine your philosophical method. You will display your comprehension of the course materials and methods by means of written work and oral presentations.

Each of you shall pursue research into one of the main topics in the contemporary philosophy of film. These topics include: the nature of film, the ontology of films, the authorship of films, narration in films, films and emotions, the politics of films, the epistemology of films, and the logic and temporality of films.

Among the philosophical problems we will consider in class are: the differences among the philosophy of film, film theory, film criticism, the history of film; the nature of film and imagery; films worlds and the status of the objects in films; film authorship; cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions of film; film narration, montage, and argument; the spatio-temporality of film; film as a tool for social critique; the relationship between film and reality; and the difference between fiction and nonfiction films.

CLASS FORMAT:

The class will meet twice a week for 1 hours and fifteen minutes. We will discuss the assigned readings and consider them in relation to concrete examples.

I will lead the class discussions; you are expected to engage regularly in class discussions. In this way, the class will function more like a seminar than a lecture course. Graduate students will be required to lead a part of at least on class session (see below). Undergraduate students are encouraged to lead the class discussion as well, but are not required to do so.

Each week, outside of class, we will screen films on campus relevant to the material discussed in class. We will watch the films and discuss them. Attending this film series is not mandatory, but it is strongly recommended.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Weeks 1-3: Required reading: All of “Part I: Do We Need Film Theory?”
Weeks 4-6: Required reading: All of “Part II: What is the Nature of Film?”
Weeks 7-8: Required reading: All of “Part III: Do Films Have Authors?”
Weeks 9-10: Required reading: All of “Part IV: How Do Films Engage Our Emotions?”
Weeks 11-12: Required reading: All of “Part V: Must Films Have Narrators?”
Weeks 13: Required reading: All of “Part VI: Can Films Be Socially Critical?”
Weeks 14-15: Required reading: All of “Part VII: What Can We Learn From Films?”

DURING CLASS SESSIONS, I SHALL ANNOUNCE THE ASSIGNED READINGS FOR SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS.

GRADED WORK:

All Papers

General Guidelines for All Papers:

- a. The paper must have a title page with your name or red i.d. on it.
- b. The paper must be delivered digitally in a normal format.
- c. You must use a font *no larger than* 12 point.
- d. The paper must be double spaced.
- e. You must number all of the pages.
- f. There must be fewer than 3 misspellings.
- g. There must be fewer than 5 grammatical mistakes (not including misspellings).
- h. The paper must be handed in on time.

Short Papers

Undergrads: Undergraduates will write 4 short papers. Each paper is worth 15% of the final grade. Each paper must focus on one of the assigned topics for the class.

1. You must locate in the required textbook an argument that you find interesting and that you think might serve as a topic for your paper.
2. In writing your paper, you must do the following:
 - a. State in your own words the argument you find interesting. This means that you must explicitly state the conclusion of the argument and the premises presented in support of that conclusion.
 - b. State why it is interesting or important to consider the argument.
 - c. Provide reasons for thinking that the argument is unsound. This means that you must state explicit reasons for thinking that one of the premises in the argument is false.

- d. Briefly explain how someone might avoid the objection you raised.
 - e. You must write your paper in the first person singular.
3. Each paper must be no shorter than 3 FULL pages in length, not including the title page or the bibliographical pages.

Grads: Graduates will write 2 short papers. Each paper is worth 20% of the final grade. Each paper must focus on one of the assigned topics for the class.

- 1. In a text other than the required textbook, you must locate an argument that (a) relates to a topic in one of the chapters in the required textbook, (b) that you find interesting, and (c) that you think might serve as a topic for your paper.
- 2. In writing your paper, you must do the following:
 - a. State in your own words the argument you find interesting. This means that you must explicitly state the conclusion of the argument and the premises presented in support of that conclusion.
 - b. State why it is interesting or important to consider the argument.
 - c. Provide reasons for thinking that the argument is unsound. This means that you must state explicit reasons for thinking that one of the premises in the argument is false.
 - d. Briefly explain how someone might avoid the objection you raised.
 - e. You must write your paper in the first person singular.

Research Papers

A research paper is a paper written on the basis of sustained and careful research. Students should master the procedures presented in *The Craft of Research 2nd edition* by Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2003; Chicago UP), or a comparable work. Each student must discuss the focus of her research paper with the professor, as soon as possible. The purpose of this discussion is to formulate a research project that makes sense given the student's interests and the focus of the class. Students must pursue research based on the assigned readings, but are otherwise free to pursue what most interests them.

Undergrads: The research paper is worth it is worth 40% of your final grade. A digital version of the paper is due in Wheeler's email inbox no later than 9 May. The grade for your paper will be based on the following criteria:

- a. Undertake a bibliographical search in the SDSU library. Find one philosophical article that has some aspect of the philosophy of film as its main focus. It is a good idea to talk to me *during office hours* about the article you have found. (10 points)
- b. Restate the main argument of the article you have found using the following steps (45 points):
 - 1. Explicitly state the main conclusion of the article, and
 - 2. Explicitly state the main premises presented in the article in support of the main conclusion.
- c. Restate and criticize an argument *other than the main argument* in the article using the following steps (45 points):
 - 1. Explicitly state the conclusion of argument, and

2. Explicitly state the premises presented in the article in support of the conclusion.
3. Criticize the argument presented using the following steps (45 points):
 - i. State and explain an objection to the argument using the following steps:
 - a. Explicitly state which of the premises presented in support of the main conclusion you will criticize, and
 - b. Develop an argument against that supporting premise, using evidence found in at least secondary source.
 - ii. Explain how someone might respond to your objection.

Grads: The research paper is worth 40% of the final grade. Grads shall submit a digital version of the paper to Wheeler's email inbox before the end of 9 May. Grads may submit papers before they are due. I will accept and discuss preliminary versions and drafts, but you are not required to submit these.

Grads should expect the research paper to be around 25 pages in length, double-spaced. You must use secondary sources. The general goal of the research paper is critical and analytic—it is, emphatically, not expository.

The basic criterion for success is publishability. In assessing the papers, the most important considerations will be (1) depth of insight and (2) force of argument, but other factors—such as style, grammar, spelling, and composition—will be crucial to success. You should be absolutely sure that they:

- A. Introduce the topic to a general philosophical audience somewhat unfamiliar with the topic,
- B. State explicitly the direction the paper will take, including a statement of the main conclusion of the paper,
- C. Explain why the topic is important,
- D. Structure the paper so as to guide the reader logically from one idea to the next,
- E. Include signposts (headings, subheadings, et cetera) to let the reader know the content of each section,
- F. Explicitly define and explain important concepts or terms,
- G. Use important terms consistently throughout the paper,
- H. Provide sufficient and pertinent textual evidence for all interpretive claims,
- I. Analyze crucial texts so that the important concepts and arguments are clear,
- J. Formulate an explicit conclusion, state explicitly all of the main premises in support of that conclusion, and include a summary of the findings in the paper, (this may be done in the form of an abstract),
- K. Use the active voice,
- L. Choose words that are specific rather than general or vague,
- M. Maintain focus in each paragraph,
- N. Construct logical sentences whose relationship to each other is clear, and
- O. Proofread and edit the paper for clarity.

Graduate Oral Presentation

Over the course of the semester, every graduate student will lead the class discussion once, by way of a prepared oral presentation. The oral presentation is worth 20% of the final grade. Oral presentations must focus on some part of the assigned readings. Beyond that minimal requirement, the substance of the presentation is up to you.

At least four days prior to her presentation, you must announce to all course participants the readings on which she will focus. The format for leading the discussion is fixed as follows:

- (1) You shall explain the importance of, and the philosophical context for, the passages you have chosen to consider.
- (2) You shall present and criticize an argument related to the passages. It must be absolutely clear (a) what the conclusion of the argument is, (b) how many supporting premises there are, and (c) what the supporting premises are. Criticism must explicitly address the supporting premises of the argument.
- (3) The oral presentation should last no less than 10 minutes and no more than 20 minutes.
- (4) You shall lead the class discussion generated by your oral presentation for 10 minutes.

The written version of the oral presentation should be no longer than five pages, double-spaced, and no shorter than four pages, double-spaced. You shall present the written version to the professor two days prior to the presentation, and shall present digital versions to your classmates one day prior to your presentation.

Oral presentations will receive either an 'A' (good), a 'B' (average), or a 'C' (failing). An 'A' represents the fact that all the above requirements were met. A 'B' represents the fact that most but not all of the above requirements were met. A 'C' represents the fact that most of the above requirements were not met.

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SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

If any of you have special needs related to the assignments, class sessions and/or graded work, please see me after class or during my office hours to discuss the matter. You should see me about such matters as soon as possible. You can rely on my complete confidentiality with regard to any private conversations.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

The University Policy File includes the following statement on Absence for Religious Observances:

By the end of the second week of classes, students should notify the instructors of affected courses of planned absences for religious observances. Instructors shall reasonably accommodate students who notify them in advance of planned absences for religious observances.

California Education Code 89320 states:

The Trustees of the California State University shall require that each state university, in administering any test or examination, to permit any student who is eligible to undergo the test or examination to do so, without penalty, at a time when that activity would not violate the student's religious creed.

Please notify me if you plan to be absent for religious observance.

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How to Read the Assigned Texts

A. Getting the Main Ideas

Use this method to become familiar with the main concepts used in the assigned reading:

1. Quickly look through the text.
 - a. In your notebook, note any words that are bolded, underlined, italicized, or otherwise highlighted in the assigned text.
2. Skim the introduction and conclusion.
 - a. In your notebook, list any word(s) appearing in both.
 - b. List any word(s) unfamiliar to you.
3. Skim the first and last sentence of each textual division.
 - a. In your notebook, list any word(s) appearing frequently, and
 - b. List any word(s) unfamiliar to you.
4. Skim the assigned reading one textual division at a time.
 - a. In your notebook, list any word(s) appearing frequently, and
 - b. List any word(s) unfamiliar to you.
5. Look up the words on your lists in:
 - a. An ordinary dictionary (which you should own), and

- b. A Dictionary of Philosophy (which can be found in the reference section of the library).

B. Finding the Arguments:

Read the assigned text slowly! As you read each sentence, ask yourself the following questions. For some sentences, you can answer “yes” to more than one of these questions; for others, you can answer “yes” to none. If you aren’t sure of the answer, put a question mark next to the sentence and move on:

1. Is the author presenting a definition of a word or concept? If yes, then:
 - a. Highlight or underline the word/concept,
 - b. Note in the margin that it is a definition,
 - c. Write the definition in your notebook, preferably in the words of the author and in your own words.
2. Is the author presenting a conclusion of an argument? (Hint: Look for conclusion indicators such as ‘therefore’, ‘hence’, ‘thus’, ‘it follows that’, and ‘in conclusion’.) If yes, then:
 - a. Highlight or underline the sentence,
 - b. Note in the margin that it is a conclusion,
 - c. Write the conclusion in your notebook, preferably in the words of the author and in your own words, and
 - d. Note whether or not the conclusion serves as a premise in another argument.
3. Is the author presenting the premise of an argument? (Hint: Look for premise indicators such as ‘since’, ‘because’, ‘if’, and ‘either’.) If yes, then:
 - a. Highlight or note the premise,
 - b. Note in the margin that it is a premise,
 - c. Write the premise in your notebook, preferably in the words of the author and in your own words, and
 - d. Note whether or not the premise is the conclusion of another argument.
4. Is the author presenting an example? If yes, then:
 - a. Highlight or note the example,
 - b. Note in the margin that it is a example,
 - c. Note what the example supports or undermines, and
 - d. Write the example, and what it supports, in your notebook (preferably in the words of the author and in your own words).

C. Organizing the Arguments

1. For each of the conclusions you noted in part B2 (above):
 - a. Determine which of the premises you discovered in part B3 (above) relates to that conclusion.
 - b. Using your argument patterns, organize these premises into valid or strong arguments in support of the conclusion.
 - c. Determine whether the conclusion is the main conclusion of the work you are reading:
 - i. If it is, then the argument in support of it is the main argument.
 - ii. If not, then ask how it is related to the main conclusion of the work.
2. State the main argument of the work you are reading:
 - a. State the main conclusion of the work.
 - b. State the premises supporting that main conclusion.
 - c. Using your argument patterns, determine whether the argument is valid or strong.
3. State any arguments that support the premises of the main argument:
 - a. State the premise of the main argument.
 - b. State the premises supporting that premise.
 - c. Using your argument patterns, determine whether the argument is valid or strong.
4. Note any premises presented without supporting argument.
5. State any arguments presented against any premises in the main argument.
6. Evaluate the main argument:
 - a. If any of the premises of the main argument are not supported by further argument, then present the best reasons you can discover for thinking those premises are false.
 - b. For those premises supported by further argument:
 - i. If any of the premises of these arguments are not supported by further argument, then present the best reasons you can discover for thinking those premises are false.
 - ii. For those premises supported by further argument, repeat Step C6b for these premises.
7. Ask yourself how the main argument presented in the assigned reading relate to the main arguments made in the previous assigned readings? Note your answer.
8. Ask yourself what argument is the author likely to present in the next part of the text? Note your answer.
9. If you are having difficulties:
 - a. Reread the assigned reading, and try again.

- b. Review previous assignments and class notes, and try again.
- c. Skim the next part of the text, and try again.
- d. Note the words, sentences, and/or paragraphs that you don't understand, and explain in your own words what you don't understand.
- e. Raise questions either in class or during office hour.

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Cheating and Plagiarism

From the "University Policies" section of the SDSU General Catalog:

Institutions of higher education are founded to impart knowledge, seek truth, and encourage one's development for the good of society. University students shall thus be intellectually and morally obliged to pursue their course of studies with honesty and integrity. Therefore, in preparing and submitting materials for academic courses and in taking examinations, a student shall not yield to cheating or plagiarism, which not only violate academic standards but also make the offender liable to penalties explicit in Section 41301 of Title 5, California Code of Regulations as follows: Expulsion, Suspension, and Probation of Students. Following procedures consonant with due process established pursuant to Section 41304, any student of a campus may be expelled, suspended, placed on probation, or given a lesser sanction for one or more of the following causes that must be campus related.

Cheating

Cheating is defined as the act of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for academic work by the use of dishonest, deceptive, or fraudulent means. Examples of cheating include, but are not limited to copying, in part or in whole, from another's test or other examination; discussing answers or ideas relating to the answers on a test or other examination without the permission of the instructor; obtaining copies of a test, an examination, or other course material without the permission of the instructor; using notes, cheat sheets, or other devices considered inappropriate under the prescribed testing condition; collaborating with another or others in work to be presented without the permission of the instructor; falsifying records, laboratory work, or other course data; submitting work previously presented in another course, if contrary to the rules of the course; altering or interfering with the grading procedures; plagiarizing, as defined below; and knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as the act of incorporating ideas, words, or specific substance of another, whether purchased, borrowed, or otherwise obtained, and submitting same to the university as one's own work to fulfill academic requirements without giving credit to the appropriate source. Plagiarism shall include but not be limited to: submitting work, either in part or in whole, completed by another; omitting footnotes for ideas, statements, facts, or conclusions that belong to another; omitting quotation marks when quoting directly from another, whether it be a paragraph, sentence, or part thereof; close and lengthy paraphrasing of the writings of another; submitting another person's artistic works, such as musical compositions, photographs,

paintings, drawings, or sculptures; and (f) submitting as one's own work papers purchased from research companies.

Disciplinary Action

Cheating and plagiarism in connection with an academic program at the university may warrant two separate and distinct courses of disciplinary action that may be applied concurrently in response to a violation of this policy: academic sanctions, such as grade modifications; and punitive sanctions, such as probation, suspension, or expulsion.

Academic sanctions are concerned with the student's grades and are the responsibility of the instructor involved. Punitive sanctions are concerned with the student's records and status on campus and shall be the responsibility of the university president or designated representative. The Coordinator of Judiciary Procedures shall be the president's representative in matters of student discipline.