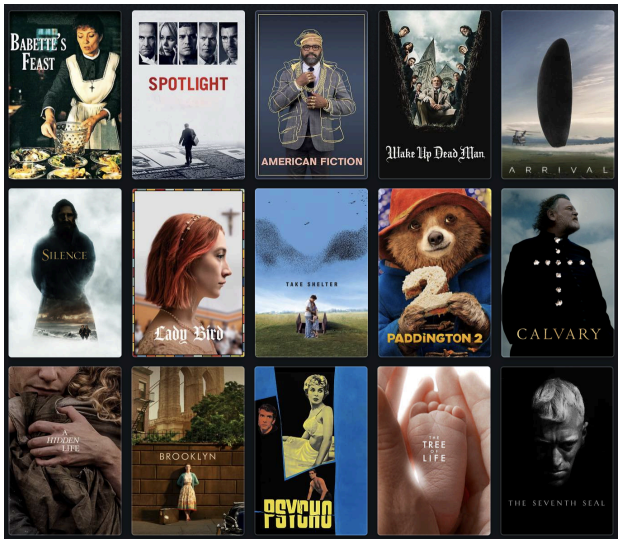
PH 393: Movies and the Meaning of Life
Theology and Philosophy in Film
Spring 2026, Mondays @ 8 pm, 3 credit hours
Dr. Derek King
Email: derek.king@asbury.edu; dking@lewishouse.org
Office Hours by Appointment Only

Tentative Syllabus - Subject to change



Course Description

This course is an exploration of philosophical questions through the medium of film. It primarily consists in watching films, and reading articles alongside those films, toward deeper discussion of faith and other philosophical themes.

See the movie list on Letterboxd here:
https://letterboxd.com/dsking6/list/lewis-house-class-movies-and-the-meaning/

Required Texts

- *Deep Focus,* Robert K. Johnston (Baker Academic)
- Other readings supplied by the professor

Course Objectives

- To introduce students to good films
- To teach students how to analyze film
- To facilitate rich theological and philosophical discussion
- To improve students' communication abilities

Classroom Policies

Be respectful | At some point in the semester, you'll likely disagree with a classmate (or me) during this course. Hopefully, you will! That's okay. Welcome to academic discourse. Do it respectfully. Don't be distracting. Don't interrupt. Don't yell. Don't be insulting. Failure to follow these guidelines might result in you being asked to leave the classroom and being marked absent for the day. If the behavior continues after an initial warning, further action will be taken at my discretion.

No plagiarism | Online work must be submitted through Canvas; no email submissions will be accepted. Ignorance is not an acceptable defense for plagiarism. Submitting work written by AI, such as ChatGPT, counts as plagiarism. The University takes plagiarism very seriously. Video and audio recordings are not permitted during the class unless the student has received prior permission.

Other important notes:

- I usually check emails Monday - Friday from 9 AM - 5 PM. Expect responses only within those times. Even within those times, I may not respond immediately. Expect a reply within 48 hours.
- **Use Chicago Manual Style for papers**. Papers should conform to academic standards. It usually helps to read the paper aloud, too.

Grading

Students' grades will be determined by accruing points out of 1,000 possible points. Grading scale: 900-1,000 points =A; 800-89 =B; 700-799=C; 600-699=D, 599 or below=E.

Participation: Because this course only meets once per week and involves viewing movies, attendance is vital. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence per semester. For each additional unexcused absence, 20 points will be deducted from the student's final grade. Participation is defined as showing up, giving attention, and participating in class discussions. **200 points.**

Movie Journal: You will keep a movie journal. After every movie we watch, you will write reflections about the movie in your journal, including thoughts or feelings it provoked in you, themes you discerned in it, or details about the cinematography that shaped your viewing. Each entry should be about a page of handwritten reflection. At the end, you will be graded on the quality of your engagement. **200 points.**

Movie Reflection Paper: You will write two philosophical reflection papers on a movie (of your choice) from the movie bibliography below. The papers should be 800-1,000 words each. 150 points each. **300 points**.

Final Paper: You will choose one of the movies from the movie bibliography below (but not one that you watched for a movie reflection paper) and write a detailed reflection on it. In 1,600-2,000 words, use the philosophical and theological categories to analyze the movie. **300 points**.

Tentative Schedule (A * on the schedule below denotes PDF readings on Canvas.)
Note: Read all readings prior to class
You will read *Deep Focus* at your own pace throughout the semester.

Unit 1 - What is good art?

1/13 | *Babette's Feast* // C. S. Lewis, "Men Without Chests"

1/20 | *Spotlight* // Eleonore Stump, "Beauty as a Road to God"

1/27 | *American Fiction* // Tyler Harper Austin, "Why I Quit the Tenure Track"

Unit 2 - Faith (and Doubt) & Film

2/3 | *Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery* // Derek King, "We Need a Warrior: Reflections on Revelation and Wake Up Dead Man"

2/10 | *Arrival* // Ted Chiang, "Story of Your Life"

2/17 | *Silence* // Reading from *Silence*

2/24 | *Lady Bird* // Reading from Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*

3/3 | *Take Shelter* // Brad East, "Doubt is a Ladder, Not a Home"

Unit 3 - Faithfulness, Redemption, and Self-Sacrifice

3/10 | *Paddington 2* // Reading from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

3/17 | No Class, Spring Break

3/24 | *Calvary* // Reading from

3/31 | *A Hidden Life* // Alan Jacobs, "Patience: Terrence Malick's *A Hidden Life*"

4/7 | *Brooklyn* // Reading from John Paul II's *Love & Responsibility*

Unit 4 - Hope & Eschatology

4/14 | *Psycho* // Reading from Phil Tallon's "How Horror Movies Can Save Your Soul"

4/21 | *Tree of Life* // Reading Peter Leithart's *Shining Glory*

Movie Bibliography

- *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928)
- *The Flowers of Saint Francis* (1950)
- *The Seventh Seal* (1957)
- *Andrei Rublev* (1966)
- *Network* (1976)
- *Stalker* (1979)
- *Sacrifice* (1986)
- *Thin Red Line* (1998)
- *There Will Be Blood* (2007)
- *No Country for Old Men* (2007)
- *Of Gods and Men* (2010)
- *To the Wonder* (2012)
- *Hail, Caesar!* (2016)
- *Dick Johnson in Dead* (2020)
- *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* (2022)
- *Barbie* (2023)
- *Sheep Detectives* (2026)