

## Editor's Introduction

I want to begin by thanking our readership for making *Film and Philosophy* a viable enterprise. Once again the journal received a record number of submissions, and I hope you will agree that this is the best edition yet. The topic, "Teaching Philosophy through Film, and Vice-Versa", gets at the heart of why most of us, as philosophers, are so enamored of the filmic medium.

Teaching ethics through film is becoming more widespread, and the volume begins with a pair of articles that use motion pictures to illustrate and evaluate Aristotle's theories of virtue and friendship. The first is precedent setting for this journal, as it deals with a television series and not a film.

Heather Battaly and Amy Coplan collaborate on an analysis of the behavior of the title character in *House*, focusing on whether he is morally virtuous in an Aristotelian sense. They demonstrate that watching episodes of *House* can be pedagogically useful in teaching virtue ethics precisely because Dr. House lacks so many of them. He is also a fascinating character because he appears to possess the intellectual virtues that explain his effectiveness as a physician despite (or perhaps because of?) his all-too-apparent moral defects. The authors have an interesting disagreement over this last question.

Aristotle's theory of friendship has remarkable purchase among undergraduate students, and our second article explores some of the reasons why. Thomas Wartenberg shows how useful Aristotle can be in understanding and evaluating the relationship between Holly Martens (Joseph Cotton) and Harry Lime (Orson Welles) in the postwar *film noir* classic, *The Third Man*. Wartenberg mobilizes the details of Aristotle's theory to show that Holly embodies the loyalty and faith appropriate to a good friend, while Harry embraces vicious extremes to an extent that justifies Holly's eventual betrayal.

As you may have noticed, I am fond of pairing essays on similar themes or artists. The next duo deals with the work of Lars Von Trier, from two very different angles. David LaRocca leads off with an intriguing discussion of *The Five Obstructions*, von Trier's documentary about Jørgen Leth. Leth had made one of von Trier's favorite films, *The Perfect Human*, and the latter challenged the former to remake it not once but five times, each time submitting Leth with a more challenging set of "obstructions" to doing so. In one, Leth is limited to using shots no longer than 12 frames (a half second). This leads LaRocca to muse about posing obstructions to our students' creative assignments in ways that could prove pedagogically useful.

George Connell offers us a more traditional (but no less interesting) analysis of *Breaking the Waves*, explaining how he uses it in teaching Kierkegaard. Not only does the film capture some of the horrors of life about which Kierkegaard spoke in *Fear and Trembling*, but it poses a choice to its central character Bess McNeil (Emily Watson) not unlike the one Abraham faced (though she decided to sacrifice her own life and not that of her child's). In so doing, the film helps us to better understand and appreciate that classic philosophic text, and vice versa.

Genetic discrimination is an increasingly troubling prospect in today's society, and Peter Murphy thinks that the Hollywood film *Gattaca* does a pretty good job of exploring the possibilities. In particular, the decision to disqualify Vincent Freeman

(Ethan Hawke) from the astronaut training program because of his genetic heart defect raises some interesting issues about proper and improper grounds for such exclusions, and whether exclusion based on genetic predispositions is particularly pernicious.

The topic of the next two essays is central to contemporary film-philosophy: whether, and to what extent, film can *do* philosophy. Mark Huston thinks films *can* philosophize, and in a manner uniquely characteristic of the cinematic medium. His reading of Francis Ford Coppola's paranoid masterpiece, *The Conversation*, convincingly illustrates how a film can pose an argument without explicitly stating it. The central mystery turns on surveillance artist Harry Caul (Gene Hackman) correctly interpreting a crucial phrase he taped while trailing an adulterous couple. Read one way, it meant that the couple was afraid her rich and powerful husband was going to kill them. Read another, it constituted a rationale for *them* killing *him*. This crucial plot point argues for the claim that linguistic meaning is contextual.

By contrast, William Pamerleau contends that films *cannot* philosophize (in any robust sense of the term), although they can still serve as reputable *non-philosophical* resources for teaching philosophy. Films cannot do philosophy because they cannot offer explicit arguments, at least in ways characteristic of the filmic medium. But they can concretely illustrate abstract ideas, and hence are useful tools for philosophic instruction.

Jessica Gosnell's interpretation of the pedagogical value of *Return to Paradise* is next up. The film poses an exquisite moral dilemma: three young American men hook up in Malaysia, and purchase a rather large quantity of hashish. Two of them leave the stash with a third, who is arrested with it. The Malaysian government intends to execute the one they have in custody if the other two do not turn themselves in...if they do, all three will serve stiff prison sentences, but no one will die. The struggle with their consciences as the two consider giving up freedom in the U.S. for a brutal Malaysian prison is both fascinating and of great philosophic interest.

Thomas Wartenberg's reading of *White Palace* in his book *Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism* is the subject of our next essay. While he contends that the film cops out by offering a traditional happy ending that unequivocally privileges working class values, Sondra Bacharach argues that the ending should not be taken seriously, but as a parody of such clichéd Hollywood closure. Proceeding backwards from this novel interpretation of the ending, she argues that *White Palace* is a more challenging film than Wartenberg appreciated.

Volume 12 featured a number of articles that took aim at the philosophy of film of Noël Carroll, and we decided to give him a chance to respond to some of them. In particular, he defends his account of horror films and his general definition of the Moving Image against attacks that he believes either misconstrue his intent or miss the logic of his arguments.

Volume 13 concludes with a holdover, and with a brief piece in which I register my two cents worth on the special topic. "*Wings of Desire: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality*" is an article by Aaron Smuts that was accepted for the previous volume but which space would not permit publishing at that time. Our apologies to Aaron,

and praise for an article that argues the inventive thesis that immortal life would not be desirable even if it was possible.

Including an article of my own here is shameless, especially given the number of subs these days, but I could not resist contributing to the dialogue about whether films can do philosophy (in my defense, an earlier version of this piece *was* accepted for an SPSCVA session at the Central Division meetings a couple of years ago, and for the first Film and Philosophy conference in the United Kingdom last summer, but I was unable to deliver it either time). My thesis is that M. Night Shyamalan's movie *Signs* is a brilliant cinematic embodiment of the Divine Providence response to the problem of evil. Films *can* philosophize without simply "downloading arguments onto the soundtrack" (to use Stephen Mulhall's apt phrase), and in ways that are especially impressive to undergraduate students, who are much more likely to learn something these days if they are shown rather than merely told.

**Daniel Shaw**