



**PHI 167 M1 ETHICS & FILM**  
**DR. W. TEAYS. FALL 2021**  
**SYLLABUS**

**WTEAYS@MSMU.EDU**

**OFFICE HOURS: WED 2:00-4:00, SAT 3:00-5:00 AND BY APPT.**

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

*Seeing the Light: Exploring Ethics Through Movies* (W Teays) ISBN 978-1-444-33288-9

*Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters* (Michael Tierno) cheap used copies available

ISBN 978-0-7868-8740-8

Handout by Susan J. Brison on surviving sexual violence (on Canvas)

**FILMS:**

- **CHAOS** (2001, COLINE SERREAU). ON YOUTUBE AND DVD (CONTACT ME)
- **AFTER THE WEDDING** (2006 DANISH). ON PRIME VIDEO. \$3.99
- **BLISS (MUTLULUK 2006)**. ON KANOPY FREE WITH LAPL LIBRARY CARD. DOWNLOAD FREE KANOPY APP
- **WHALE RIDER**. ON PRIME VIDEO \$2.99. FREE ON APPLE TV. FREE ON KANOPY.
- **THE ARRIVAL**. ON PRIME VIDEO \$3.99

Tip: it helps to view the films twice if possible

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Love movies do you? If so, you'll enjoy developing your moral reasoning skills in three key ways: First, we'll see how movies present ethical dilemmas —particularly those faced by the female characters (e.g., oppression, interpersonal violence, existential challenges, developing moral character). A central focus will be on courage in the face of adversity. Secondly, we'll learn how ethical theories can help with individual and community worldviews and values. This includes creating a purposeful life in the context of social and political challenges.. Thirdly, we will use Feminist Ethics to deconstruct films in terms of plot, character, and moral values. Three of the five films of our class are directed by women. All of our films have female protagonists facing challenges that raise important philosophical and ethical issues.

**Our focus is on five films most directed by women and all with female protagonists. We look at various issues women and girls confront, such as sexist attitudes, interpersonal violence, obstacles to leadership, oppressive social and political contexts, and personal adversity. Their path to power is a source of inspiration. In turn, students develop their understanding of ethical theories and moral reasoning. This helps them navigate their way in their own quest for self awareness and personal identity. In addition, our course projects will help develop the analytical skills and ability to think and write clearly and succinctly.**

**LACE category WOMEN & GENDER. COURSE OBJECTIVES ( STUDENT OUTCOMES)**

**WOMEN AND GENDER:** The LACE objective of this course is to empower and challenge students to strive for excellence and for a just society—developing women leaders, with an awareness of gender identity.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students will critically evaluate the roles of women and gender in society, drawing from ethical frameworks a spotlight on Feminist Ethics. In order to meet these outcomes, you will:

1. Develop philosophical skills and apply ethical frameworks to film, focusing on female empowerment, moral development, and inner strength.
2. Become familiar with the major ethical theories and key ethicists in examining authenticity and the quest for personal identity.
3. Develop ability to analyze social, philosophical, and political issues of oppression, injustice, and violence against women to help build a more just society.
4. Perfect writing and critical thinking skills so you express yourself clearly & succinctly.
5. Apply tools of Feminist Ethics to deconstructing films with respect to autonomy, moral agency, and the role of relationships in ethical decision making.

**These goals function individually and in conjunction to build an understanding of the major ethical theories. The course highlights what Feminist Ethics brings to the table, so students understand what distinguishes it and why it is so valuable as a tool for moral reasoning. The emphasis in Feminist Ethics on autonomy, moral agency, care and justice, and the role of relationships gets special treatment in this course. Film is a powerful medium for doing philosophy and in portraying ethical dilemmas with women at center stage. In addition, one goal of this course is to help develop writing skills so students express themselves clearly and coherently and not fall prey to cutting and pasting the work of others. This course is intended to be engaging and interesting—and to convey the joys of doing philosophy.**

## REQUIREMENTS

Reflection posts (5)	100 points
Ethics in film project	100 points
Class newsletter on Ethics & Film	15 points
Exam 1	110 points
Exam 2	125 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>450 points</b>

Extra credit up to +7 for early bird submissions of assignments

**These requirements for our eight week class are an interesting and effective way to build moral reasoning skills and delve into Ethics and film. And they develop the ability to think and write with clarity, precision, and insight. The film project focuses on moral dilemmas raised in our movies and the characters' challenges and decisions. For example, the protagonist of *After the Wedding* comes to realize that everyone around her is dishonest. What's a virtuous person to do? She has to decide. The protagonist of *Whale Rider* has leadership qualities but no power in her community. What do you do when you love the ones oppressing you? She has to decide. The five reflection posts focus on sharing ideas and insights about the films. The class newsletter shares highlights of our wonderful class.**

### Grading Scale in Percentage:

93-100% A, 90 - 92 A-, 85-89 B+, 83-85 B, 80 - 82 B-, 75-79 C+, 68-74 C, 65 - 67 C-, 60 - 65 D+, 55-59 D, 50-58 D-, under 50 F. To figure your grade, add your points and take the percentage—also is on Canvas. Or see me. A's start at 400, B's at 36, C's at 292, D at 225.

## EXPECTATIONS

Without you we are nothing! Watch the films preferably twice to solidify your understanding of the issues, themes, and characters. Do the assigned reading. Take notes. You might even enjoy talking to friends, fellow students, or family about the issues raised by the movies and/or readings. Post responses on any **five** of the six weekly discussion topics. Take your work seriously and you will enjoy the class and learn so much more. If you borrow a DVD you must return it to me—please return any you borrow. I will let you know where you can pick it up and return it to me—or we can arrange through the mail. You can get the first film (Chaos) on YouTube, Bliss on Kanopy (free with a Los Angeles public library card or borrow one from me), and the remaining three on Prime Video. Any problems contact me.

## TIME ON TASK POLICY

Please do the reading and watch the films as scheduled. It's a bad idea to put off reading instead of keeping up with the weekly schedule set out in this syllabus. Post your reflections on or before the due date of Sunday midnight at the end of the week in question. Those posted at least one day **early** will receive +1 point extra credit. Thus you can earn +5 points by coming in early on all your posts. Hand in your Ethics in film paper early and rack up a total of +2 more points! Yay!

**Extra credit opportunities:** So being early on posts, project, and paper can earn you +7 points!

**Most students are diligent when it comes to completing assignments. Many finish early. That is praiseworthy! Consequently, it's good to reward these hard-workers—thus getting early bird extra credit points. Mind you, it's not a big reward—I don't want to inflate grading. But it recognizes an admirable trait. On the other hand, some students are slackers, some over-committed, and some prone to procrastinating. Thus this late paper policy sets down standards of fairness.**

## LATE POLICY (sniff!)

- Late posts are not good. The reflection post for any particular week is due to be submitted on Canvas on Sunday midnight at the end of that week. One late post is permitted for which you will be deducted -2 points for each day late.
- A late Exam 1 or late film paper is definitely not good. Those late must be submitted within 24 hours and will suffer a grade penalty of one full letter grade.
- The final exam—Exam 2—cannot be late! If you have a crisis of tragic proportions, Exam 2 can be up to one day late but will suffer a penalty of one full letter grade.

**Important Note:** if Canvas doesn't work for any reason, email your post, papers, exams to: [wteays@msmu.edu](mailto:wteays@msmu.edu) then get help submitting it on Canvas. Just make sure you email me by or before the deadline.

## EXPECTATIONS ON YOUR READING of *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters*

This book is a user-friendly guide to deconstructing films. You are not responsible for the movies he cites. You just want to pay attention to specifics about Aristotle—for example, his key aspects of film—like plot, character, dialogue, etc. Focus on Aristotle and apply to our movies.

## REFLECTIONS/DISCUSSION POSTS (500-600 words each)

To appreciate the issues raised in the films—you have a choice of 5 WEEKLY topics to discuss and reflect upon. Don't do all six—pick five. These will help solidify your learning and grasp of the material. Be sure to include details and examples to construct a well thought-out post. You want to present defensible arguments demonstrating a careful understanding of the texts and films. Vague generalities are to be avoided. The more precise and detailed the better. Back up your claims! You are encouraged to only use our required class texts and films. Pasting in stuff from the Internet is uninspiring! Your posts should be

your own work. Any post using other sources than the films and our class text must be properly documented with a bibliography including the precise URLs of Websites you use.

**Note:** Each Post should **state your word count** (Indicate the word count by your name).

**These five discussion topics help alleviate writing anxiety, so you are more relaxed when taking pen to paper, or finger to keyboard. In doing these assignments, you empower yourself to write longer pieces. This helps with the film project and with essay questions on the exams. Also the reflection posts honor your own thought processes and not rely on Google as the solution to writing needs. I want to know what you think—not what someone else thinks!**

### **PROJECT ON FEMINIST ETHICS IN FILM:**

This essay project focuses on an ethical analysis of several characters and/or themes in our films—topics will be posted by the end of Week One. Writing is crucial to becoming an intelligent, clear-thinking individual. It is tangible evidence of your creativity and knowledge and it is a way to document your progress as a scholar and learner. Cherish your writing! As Nietzsche said, “Live your life as though it were a work of art.”

**Please note:** Your writing will be graded on the quality of content, coherent arguments, insightful ideas, and grammar, spelling, punctuation and proper documentation. All of these elements are vital for a good paper and, therefore, factor into your grade.

**Film project —Length & Format:** 1800-2000 words, double space, 1” margins, Calibri, Times New Roman, or similar font # 12. Use parenthetical references and endnotes **not** footnotes, include a bibliography and a cover page with your name, email address, topic of your essay, and word count.

### **EXPECTATION:**

When writing your project, essay, exams, and posts, you are expected to exercise academic honesty. Any acts of dishonesty will be taken seriously. Discuss the issues freely with whomever you wish, but do not work together in the actual writing of the paper. And do not use another person’s ideas without giving credit in the paper and in the bibliography. This includes ideas offered in a conversation! Please use Turabian or the Chicago Manual of Style for formatting documentation and your bibliography. Use parenthetical references, not footnotes. For a guide and examples see:

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

If you still need help, email me.

### **DOCUMENTATION**

I recommend that you use no Internet material unless reading more about Feminist Ethics or ethical theories and film commentaries. And if you DO use the Internet or other sources, you must document and credit them. Do NOT use Wikipedia; it lacks credibility and is undependable in many respects. Remember to give credit to *all* of your sources, including friends and family whose ideas you incorporate.

**Documenting material from the Internet:** Cite the author, article, website, and a precise URL. **For example:**

Daniel Williams, “Army Reservist to Plead Guilty to Some Charges,” *The Washington Post*, August 23, 2004, [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A25395-2004Aug23.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A25395-2004Aug23.html)

## CLASS NEWSLETTER

To share our insights and reflections, we will put together a newsletter using our posts or the Feminist film project essays. We will draw from our semester's work. Volunteers to help create our newsletter can get +2 points extra credit.

## EXAMS 1 and 2

I will give you a study guide for both exams. Combination short answer, multiple choice, T/F, essay questions, and fill in the blank. Fine details on the films may be asked, so watch carefully! Take notes when you watch the films—don't rely on your memory. Most films require watching twice—watch with subtitles or closed captioning to get the dialogue and the characters' names right. Go to [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) or Google and run a search for the film title plus cast (e.g., *The Arrival* cast) —then you'll get the correct spelling of the characters' names. Refer to the characters by name, **not** the actors playing the characters.

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

*University PPE Policy:* All students must comply with the University personal protective equipment (PPE) policy while on campus. Non-compliant students will not be allowed to stay in class. *University attendance policy:*

(See): <http://msmu.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2018-2020/2018-2020-Catalog/Academic-Policies-and-Procedures/General-Information-for-Undergraduate-Programs/Attendance>

**Here in our online course that means in terms of attendance you are expected to do the assigned reading and assignments in the timeframe set out on the syllabus.**

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

As a member of this class you are also a member of the community of scholars. As a scholar, your fundamental commitment is to truth. Academic dishonesty undermines the integrity of the educational process and cannot be tolerated. Cheating of any kind is dishonest. This includes cutting and pasting even a sentence or paragraph from the Internet without crediting the source, copying others' essays or exams, stealing exams or essays, buying new or used exams, paying someone else to take an exam or write an essay for which you take credit, and any other way you might receive credit for work that is not your own.

Using one essay for two different classes is also dishonest. If you have a topic appropriate for two classes, original and separate work must be done for each class. Plagiarism is also an act of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is using anyone else's ideas and representing them as your own (i.e., not giving appropriate credit). Acts of plagiarism include the following:

- Failure to document and give credit to an original source
- Paraphrasing another person's ideas without giving credit
- Using direct quotations without proper recognition of the source
- Using statistics, facts, or information from a source (e.g., the Internet) without giving credit.

When in doubt, give credit. Submitting work (even work completed by a team or group) containing material not properly credited is a serious academic offense and a violation of the very principles of academic integrity. Every individual is ultimately responsible for ensuring the honesty and integrity of any of their academic or scholarly work. Strive to always be a person of integrity.

**ACADEMIC FREEDOM STATEMENT:**

For students and faculty, academic freedom in research, teaching, and publication is fundamental to the advancement of truth and learning. You have the freedom to express ideas that differ from any interpretation or viewpoints of your instructor. In exercising this freedom, there should be no disruption of the academic process of the class. You have the right to be evaluated fairly on academic performance. You also have the right to discuss or review any academic performance with your instructor. A student who believes that an evaluation was made on a basis other than academic performance has the right to an appeal procedure. (see the Student Handbook).

**DISABILITY STATEMENT:**

MSMU is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (chronic, medical, physical, learning, psychological, or temporary), or think you may have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or access the University's programs or services; contact Disability Services (DS) as soon as possible. To receive an accommodation, you must register with DS. DS works with students confidentially and does not disclose any disability-related information without student consent. DS coordinates and promotes disability accommodations and awareness and works in partnership with faculty and all other student service offices. For further information about services for students with disabilities, contact DS at the Chalon Academic Support Center, H207, (310) 954-4142, or at the Doheny Student Resource Center, Building 3, (213) 477-2690. You can also email for more information at [disability@msmu.edu](mailto:disability@msmu.edu).

We now have a Disability Manager, so faculty and students can contact her at [disability@msmu.edu](mailto:disability@msmu.edu)

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

Student learning is at the core of the MSMU mission; thus, we have developed a college-wide assessment plan. These outcomes represent the knowledge, skills and attitudes expected of Mount students. In this class one or more student learning outcomes will be assessed. Some assignments may be used for to improve the quality of education at the Mount. This is also a LACE Women and Gender designated class, and an assessment tool will be chosen to assess how well this class meets LACE requirements.

**STUDENT CREDIT HOUR POLICY:**

A credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that reasonably approximates not less than:

1. One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
2. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) for other academic work leading to the award of credit hours

See: <http://msmu.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2016-2018/2016-2018-Catalog/Academic-Policies-and-Procedures/General-Information-for-Undergraduate-Programs/Student-Credit-Hour>

**Class Etiquette**

Treat one another with kindness and make any criticisms constructive. And please let me know if you need help with reading or writing. If so, contact the LRC and me too if you have trouble getting help.

## **Special Needs**

Anyone with a special needs should see the Learning Center at once about accommodations that need to be made. The Learning Center will assist you with the recommended steps, so please see them if this applies to you. You need to give me a letter specifying necessary accommodations. It's mandatory to provide me with an official letter.

## **Need Help**

See me. I am happy to be a resource for you and to Zoom or phone "meet" with you if you need extra assistance or just want to discuss how our class is going or how you are doing in it. Also, The LRC has tutors who can help you.

**Emergencies—Email me or text me at 323-791-8209**

## **STUDENT SUPPORT**

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or sufficient food to eat,, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, thus affecting their performance in the course, is urged to contact Jessica Cuevas, Dean of Student Life 213-477-2570 and [jcuevas@msmu.edu](mailto:jcuevas@msmu.edu)



# PHI 167 M1 SCHEDULE

## WEEK 1 THE JOURNEY BEGINS

**WEEKS START ON MONDAY. POSTS ARE DUE AT THE END OF THE WEEK on Sunday midnight**

Welcome to our class! Our focus and goals. Go over the syllabus and requirements

Read for this week

**SEEING THE LIGHT Chapters 1.0 pp. 15–20, 1.1, and 1.2.**

Looking at the human condition & authenticity and personal identity

Laying the groundwork for a Feminist film study

Read also

**Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters chaps 1–5.** Tools for the journey— deconstructing movies

**Susan J. Brison, "Surviving Sexual Violence"** (posted on Canvas in Modules)

We open with a discussion of leading a life of authenticity vs inauthenticity and what that means. This lays a foundation for our journey and leads as to the quest for personal identity—what are the boundary conditions that gives life meaning? How do our values and beliefs shape the direction women's lives take? How does gender factor into the challenges and obstacles that women confront? What does it mean to be autonomous—my own person? To undertake this quest, we need tools. Ethical theories and movies will be invaluable. And one powerful tool at our disposal is Aristotle's *Poetics*. Using his template of *plot, character, dialogue, music and special effects*, we can get an understanding of a film's components and are better able to unpack the movie.

## WEEK 2 AUTHENTICITY—SHAPING A LIFE OF INTEGRITY

AUTONOMY, LIBERTY, AND COURAGE

**FILM #1 ALERT: Watch *Chaos* (2001, Coline Serreau Director)**

**Reflections post #1** due this coming weekend—Sunday midnight before Week 3

Read for this week

**SEEING THE LIGHT Chapters 1.3 and 1.4**

Moving forward requires inner strength and determination.

For that we need the autonomy to believe in ourselves,

the liberty not to be trapped, or trap ourselves, and the courage

to find the middle path—not too wimpy and not too rash or reckless

Read also. **Aristotle's Poetics chapters 6-8, 11.** More film deconstruction tools

We proceed by looking at three vital traits for the path to power—autonomy, liberty, and courage. Facing the journey ahead, overcoming obstacles, and persevering in the face of adversity is a test of strength. But we don't give up! These concerns are central to our first film. The main character is beaten senseless by men who have exploited her sexually. To acquire the autonomy to liberate herself will take courage and determination. We look carefully at what those moral virtues require.



## WEEK 3 MORALITY & RELATIONSHIPS: FEMINIST ETHICS

OVERVIEW OF ETHICAL THEORY, INTRO TO FEMINIST ETHICS

**FILM #2 ALERT:** Watch *After the Wedding* (Susanne Bier Director)

**Reflections post #2** due Sunday midnight before Week 4

Read for this week

**SEEING THE LIGHT Chapter 2.0, 2.4, and 2.7**

We're building power as we head into ethical theory.

We start with superstar Immanuel Kant, and an overview of Feminist Ethics

Read also *Aristotle's Poetics* chapters 12-15. More film deconstruction tools

**Handout:** Thich Nhat Hanh's "Path to Personal Power" (on Canvas)

At this point, we are getting more insight into the major ethical theories and their value for developing moral reasoning and strengthening analytical skills. We start with Kantian ethics and its emphasis on moral duties and rationality. We then turn to Feminist ethics and see how and why they say rationality is not enough. Care, empathy, and relationships also figure into our moral agency, our moral core. To examine the plot, character and themes of our films, these ethical theories are powerful vehicles. Kant saw honesty as a primary duty and noted how destructive dishonesty was to the society. Our second film, *After the Wedding*, reveals the perils of dishonesty—our female protagonist faces ethical dilemmas as to how to respond to all the lies her wedding lays bare.

## WEEK 4 THE QUEST FOR SELF

PERSONAL IDENTITY AND THE PATH TO EMPOWERMENT

**FILM #3 ALERT:** Watch *Bliss* (2006, Mutluluk, Abdullah Oguz director)

**Reflections post #3** due Sunday midnight before Week 5

Read for this week:

**SEEING THE LIGHT Chapter 2.3, 3.2, and handout of Ross's duties**

Utilitarianism & the concept of Evil—central to this and next week's films

*Aristotle's Poetics* chaps 18, 21, 22, 24, & 26 focus on points on Aristotle

Start your draft of your **Ethics in film project** And start prep for Exam 1.

This week we look at Utilitarianism, which seeks to maximize benefits for the society, even at the cost of individual rights. This has not always benefitted women, so this theory poses challenges for Feminist Ethics. The concept of justice takes different forms according to the perspective taken. Is it always in the service of women's rights and human rights to prioritize the majority? We also look at evil and some of the ways it has been perceived. Our third film, *Bliss*, spotlights these issues.

## WEEK 5 FACING EVIL—FINDING OUR MORAL FOOTING

### RELATIONSHIPS & THE PATH TO SELF

**Reflections post #4** due Sunday midnight before Week 6

Read for this week

**SEEING THE LIGHT Chapter 2.5 & 2.6, & Review Chapter 2.0**

Aristotle's Virtue Ethics and Rawls's Justice Theory.

Review our first 3 films, go over the ethical theory & the study guide

**EXAM 1.** Includes specifics on the first three movies.

This week we look at two of the other superstars of Ethics—Aristotle and Rawls. Both are important in two ways— one, for helping us think about all the issues raised in our films and, two, for helping us better understand the ways Feminist Ethics looks at relationships, caring, and justice. All of these are important for examining justice and human rights issues in both *Bliss* and *Whale Rider*.

## WEEK 6 MORAL OBLIGATIONS LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY

### ETHICS IN COMMUNITY— OVERCOMING OPPRESSION

Feminist Ethics, importance of relationships and finding justice.

**The Ethics in Film Project is due Friday!**

**Reflections post #5** due Sunday midnight before Week 7

Read for this week

**SEEING THE LIGHT Ch. 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 Teleological Ethics**

REVIEW Thich Nhat Hanh's path to power

**FILM #4 ALERT: Watch *Whale Rider* (Niki Caro Director)**

This week our film project is due. How exciting! The ethical framework of this week is Ethical egoism and Ethical relativism, both of which play roles in the way people live and behave in community. They also help us think about the issues raised in our last two films. As we will see in this week's film, a lot can go wrong when people are so invested in their own worldview that they miss what's right in front of their eyes. Women and girls may have suffered oppressive rigidity in the values and expectations of their community and/or family. Change, as we witness, may be *slow* in coming. But perseverance and having a group of like-minded women and men can make all the difference—as we see in this movie.

## WEEK 7 MORAL CHARACTER—VIRTUE ETHICS

VIRTUES AND VICES—ARISTOTLE AND THE PATH TO A FULFILLING LIFE

**Reflections post #6** due Sunday midnight before Week 8

Read for this week

**SEEING THE LIGHT** Chapter 3.0 and 3.1, & review chapter 2.6

**FILM #5 ALERT:** Watch *The Arrival* (*Denis Villeneuve Director*)

### EXAM 2

Theory: See the study guide

Movies: *specifics on Whale Rider, The Arrival*

and general points on ethical issues in *Bliss*.

This week's readings are reflections on moral reasoning and the impact of perspective. Do women and men perceive the world and its inhabitants differently? How do extraterrestrials view us? The key characters in our last film, Louise and Ian, have quite different perceptions of time, for example. How does gender factor in, if it does, in their family crisis? The perspective each one takes colors what they see and affects the values which pit them in a struggle with one another. Our readings and this film help us understand how perspective can shape what we see and the decisions we make.

## WEEK 8 DECISIONS MATTER—INNER STRENGTH

THE PATH TO POWER. CONFRONTING THE UNKNOWN

Read for this week

**SEEING THE LIGHT** chapter 3.4 on ethical decision-making

**Ethics & Film newsletter due Thursday**

We end our journey richer than when we started. And happier in light of all we explored together.