

PHIL 136-H01 - Honors Colloquium in Philosophy – Spring 24
The Philosophy of Film Noir - Syllabus – keep handy for reference

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Office hours: M 10-11; TR 11-12; or by appointment

Required Texts:

The Philosophy of Film Noir, Mark T. Conard, ed. (Univ. Press of Kentucky)

Additional readings to be distributed in class or via Blackboard

For film viewings, you can either (a) borrow them from your local public library, (b) rent/stream them from Netflix, or (c) buy/stream them at Amazon

Overview and objectives:

The classic period of Film Noir is generally taken to range from *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) to *Touch of Evil* (1958), in a cycle of films notable for their unusual lighting, disorienting photography, mysterious characters, sinister plots, and a “dark” (*noir*) atmosphere that mirrored concerns about corruption, crime, and social decadence. This course is aimed at examining the philosophical roots, and ramifications, of these films. We will also consider some films from the “neo-noir” catalogue, and examine how the noir legacy was translated to the small screen, with an eye towards their philosophical dimensions. Some of the issues involved this semester include: the question of genre, existential themes, values and nihilism, moral ambiguity, reasoning and detection. We will simultaneously be using film to understand philosophy and philosophy to enhance our appreciation of the films.

Requirements:

This is a one-credit class. We will meet once a week to discuss the films and the readings, and you will write an 8-10 page paper on a topic to be determined later by mutual agreement, which is due April 29th.

Required film viewings:

Classic noir – You should watch these as soon as possible, but not later than Feb 5:

The Maltese Falcon, The Big Sleep, Kiss of Death, Detour, The Postman Always Rings Twice, The Big Clock, The Third Man, Double Indemnity, Out of the Past, Touch of Evil

Neo-noir – you should watch these as soon as possible, but not later than Mar 11:

Chinatown, Blade Runner, Body Heat, No Way Out, A Simple Plan, Reservoir Dogs

TV Noir – selected episodes (TBA) of *Dragnet, Secret Agent, The Fugitive, Miami Vice*

General Outline:

Jan 22 – intro to topic; opening discussion of classic film noir

Jan 29

Feb 5

Feb 12

Feb 21 (NB this is a Wednesday)

Feb 26

Mar 4 – no class, spring break

Mar 11 – begin discussion of neo-noir

Mar 18

Mar 25

Apr 1

Apr 8 – no class

Apr 15 – no class, state holiday

Apr 22 - Noir television; the legacy and future of film noir

Apr 29 – papers due