# Watching Philosophy?

*reviewed by Trevor Curnow*

This book is primarily aimed at anyone interested in introducing students to philosophy though the medium of film, and is based on the author's own experiences of doing just that. It is thoughtful, well-organised and stimulating. Anyone who has thought of taking this approach, but been uncertain about doing so for whatever reason, will find here the support and encouragement they need to try it out.

The topics are familiar ones: scepticism, relativism, personal identity, artificial intelligence, ethics, free will, determinism and moral responsibility, the problem of evil, and existentialism. The films, too, are on the whole likely to be familiar to students. Apart from *The Seventh Seal,* all are relatively recent, with *Crimes and Misdemeanors* being the only other one to predate the 1990s. All are available on video or DVD, and the author very helpfully gives a timeline for each film, making the location of specific episodes easy, an invaluable practical aid.

Each chapter follows the same basic pattern. First the philosophical topic is introduced, then the film is introduced, then the topic is explored in the light of the film. Each chapter ends with some discussion questions, and annotated suggestions for further reading and watching, including useful websites where appropriate. Suggestions for further reading are generally divided into 'classics' and contemporary texts. The exceptions are artificial intelligence (on which the classics are silent) and, more puzzlingly, personal identity, where only Locke and Hume are cited, with no contemporary sources mentioned at all. Given how much material is available, the omission is a curious one.

Film buffs may quibble over the choice of titles, but I assume concessions have been made to what students are likely to have seen or want to see, although some of the suggestions for further watching include more stretching material. Given the choice I would always prefer *Rashomon* or *Citizen Kane* to *Hilary and jackie,* but I wouldn't necessarily expect my students to (although they may have heard of Kurosawa's film through *The Simpsons;* Marge: You liked *Rashomon.* Homer: That's not the way I remember it.).

However, *Philosophy through Film* need not be regarded as narrowly prescriptive. While it certainly can be used as a textbook, it can also be treated as a resource containing tried and tested possibilities that can be taken as they are, adapted, or rejected in favour of others. The same ideas can be used to teach philosophy through literature, another approach that is underexploited.

One of the strengths of the book is that it can help students appreciate that philosophy is not an abstract academic discipline that has little relevance to everyday life, but instead help them to see that philosophical subjects can be raised in the most unexpected and familiar of contexts, including popular entertainment.

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