

PHIL 330-02: Philosophy of the Human Person

Philosophy in Film Reflection Paper

Due Date:

Description of Assignment:

So far in this course we have been investigating various theories of personal identity that focus on the psychological features of human persons. In these sorts of discussions, memory is often taken to be a necessary condition, a sufficient condition, or both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the continued existence of persons over time. According to some of these “psychological continuity” views (though not all), a person would not survive a complete “memory wipe” or even a significant “personality adjustment”, though he or she might be able to “occupy” completely different bodies at different times or even be temporarily “stored” on a computer’s hard drive.

Many of the “science-fiction” scenarios just described serve as important plot devices in movies. For this assignment, you are to view at least one film (classic or recent) that deals with issues in personal identity and write a reflection paper on that film, explaining in at least four double-spaced pages how it relates to some of the material we have covered in class. Your reflection paper should include a *brief summary of the film*, a *more detailed description of the relevant scenes*, and a *comparison of the events that take place to the sorts of scenarios described in our readings*. It should also include a *philosophical analysis of the scenarios portrayed or the themes developed*. For this last section you should consider questions such as:

- *Is this film either arguing or assuming that memory or the continuity of some other mental states is necessary for the continued existence of persons over time? Does it provide any support for, or give any counterexamples to, this claim?*
- *Is this film either arguing or assuming that memory or the continuity of some other mental states is sufficient for the continued existence of persons over time? Does it provide any support for, or give any counterexamples to, this claim?*
- *Is this film arguing or assuming that some other account of identity is true (bodily continuity, biological continuity, continuity of soul)?*

There are quite a few films that would be appropriate for this assignment, but here is a list of films that I think would be ideal:

Blade Runner (1982), *Total Recall* (1990, 2012), *Dark City* (1998), *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *Fight Club* (1999), *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999) *Memento* (2000), *Identity* (2003), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), *The Prestige* (2006), *Moon* (2009), *Source Code* (2011), *Oblivion* (2013), *Transcendence* (2014)

Importantly, if you choose to write your reflection paper on some other movie, you must receive permission from me first so that I can verify that that film would work for the assignment.

Disclaimer: Some of the films listed above may contain material that you might find disturbing or offensive (and not just because one of them includes Arnold Schwarzenegger). It is YOUR responsibility to do the research necessary to ensure that you will be comfortable viewing the movie you have chosen. If you have any questions about any of these films, please do not hesitate to ask me. Also, do not download any of these movies illegally. Doing so would violate the Categorical Imperative. The Saint Louis Public Library system has copies of almost all of them, and never charges for its services.