

DR2065 / ME33FP Film as a Public Ethical Arena**15 credits – 11 weeks, first half-session****PLEASE NOTE CAREFULLY:**

The full set of school regulations and procedures is contained in the Undergraduate Student Handbook which is available online at your MyAberdeen Organisation page. Students are expected to familiarise themselves not only with the contents of this leaflet but also with the contents of the Handbook. Therefore, ignorance of the contents of the Handbook will not excuse the breach of any School regulation or procedure.

You must familiarise yourself with this important information at the earliest opportunity.

COURSE TEAM

Dr Brian Brock (Course Coordinator and Lecturer)

b.brock@abdn.ac.uk. Office hours by Email appointment.

Dr Robert W. Heimbürger (Marker and coordinator of online screenings)

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Discipline Administration:

divrs@abdn.ac.uk

TIMETABLE

For time and place of classes, please see [MyAberdeen](#)

Students can view their university timetable at

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/study/timetables-550.php>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will help students excavate and clarify their own moral beliefs through engagement with a wide range of cinematic depictions of our

contemporary world. Exploring questions of economic ethics, political ethics as well as our relationships with disabled people, animals and the environment (and much more), students will be given the opportunity to develop and present their own views in classroom discussions which will be complimented by lectures clarifying the importance of engaging such questions as active citizens.

INTENDED AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course will enhance the cultural and political competence of students by teaching them to read cinematic forms of communication with greater skill and orally to discuss and debate contemporary moral questions. The aim is for students to becoming more aware of their own positions and ethical assumptions. The course will also expose students to the variety of academic disciplines and methods that can be used to explore such issues.

LECTURE/SEMINAR PROGRAMME

WEEK 1: 29th September

Introduction to course, practice discussion about Frontline documentary, 'College Inc.'

WEEK 2: 6th October

'The Internet's Own Boy'

WEEK 3: 13th October

'Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things'

WEEK 4: 20th October

'Our Daily Bread'

WEEK 5: 27th October [Med students]

Medical students will need to have watched the recorded introductory lecture *before* joining in this first session.

'Anthropocene: The Human Epoch'

WEEK 6: 3rd November [Med students]

'Guardians of Eternity'

WEEK 7: 10th November [Med students]

'Jade: The Reality Star Who Changed Britain'

WEEK 8: 17th November [Med students]

'Weiner'

WEEK 9: 24th November [Med students]

'You've Been Trumped'

WEEK 10: 1st December [Med students]
'Fight Church'

WEEK 11: 8th December
'House of Mephibosheth'

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Small group teaching is compulsory. If you fail to fulfil any of the course requirements (including attendance, engagement or submission of all course assessments by the stated deadline or agreed extension period) you will be contacted and may not be able to continue with the course.

READING LIST

To prepare to 'read' documentary films as a genre, see:

- Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience* (Boston: Bedford, 2018), 5th ed., chapter 8, 'Representing the Real: Documentary Films'.

For a philosophical discussion of how films change the moral views of the viewer, see:

- D. N. Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

For an overview and analysis of what happens in this course, see:

- Brian Brock, *Captive to Christ, Open to the World: On Doing Christian Ethics in Public*, edited by Kenneth Oakes (Eugene: Cascade, 2014), chapter 3.
- Brian Brock, 'On the Present Reality of our Posthuman Future,' in *Being Human in a Technological Age: Rethinking Theological Anthropology*, ed. Steven C. van den Heuvel (Leuven: Peeters, 2020), 3-22.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment will be 100% by continuous assessment. The formal assessment for the course is of Five Short Reflection Papers (20% each).

This course is a *practice-based* course. Students must understand that the work of the course will happen in the one hour in class session, and that attendance is mandatory.

Aside from the orientation lecture in the first class, the morning seminar will consist entirely of viewing the documentary in preparation for tutorial discussion.

Students need to watch the film when it becomes live at 9:00 am on the day of class, and immediately after watching the film, without discussing the film with others or researching it on line, email Dr Brock (brian.brock@abdn.ac.uk) with an answer to this question: 'What is the most important ethical question that has been raised by this film?'

Please follow this e-mail format: In the **body** of the message, write **only** your question, in one, or at most two sentences.

In the **title line** of your e-mail, put:

"Film Class 1," if you are in the first tutorial,

"Film Class 2," if you are in the second tutorial,

or

"Film Class 3" if you are in the online discussion group because you are in quarantine and unable to come to class.

This email will also signal students' attendance at the afternoon tutorial and will be used to place you in discussion groups.

Students should take the time to think about the film and formulate a clearly worded question about the moral issue raised by the film. As they formulate this question, they should try to clarify their own view of the moral issues at stake. The lecturer will use students' e-mailed questions to organize them into discussion groups in the tutorials.

Please note: normally these films would be watched in class and discussed immediately afterward. Watching the films on the day we discuss them is part of what makes the class work. For this reason the films will not be archived for viewing at another time, and students should plan to watch them during the 9-11am slot, which, on the first week, will also include a 'how to' lecture about what to expect from this course.

Because class discussions will cover controversial issues, a core part of the learning process is for students to practice speaking respectfully with other students about contentious and emotive issues. We will discuss in the first class session the expectations regarding conversational respectfulness, and a red-card system will be in place. Students whose behaviour prevents class conversation happening may be asked to leave the course.

The **five short reflections (500 words)** on which the course assessment is based respond to the previous week's film and class discussions. The **topic** for the paper is '**How I changed my mind.**' The assessment measures the acuteness with which students are paying attention and recording what they perceive clearly. To be paying attention is to be changed in one way or another, even if one's previously held positions are being strengthened or

confirmed. The objects of attention are 1) the film, 2) our cultural context, 3) one's own moral beliefs and 4) one's feelings about one's own positioning in relation to the moral context presented in the film.

The marking criteria for the short reflections will assess the accuracy and insightfulness of the student's attention to these four areas as follows:

- A reflection in the first class range (the A range of 18 to 22) sets out the moral position the student once held and then explains the new moral position they have come to inhabit. The reflection explains what change has happened and explains what the most important reasons for the change were, using clear examples from either the documentary viewed or the discussion about it in class afterward. Those examples demonstrate a clear understanding of the documentary, the discussion, or the cultural context in which the moral issues under discussion exist, displaying depth of attention to detail with no significant gaps of understanding. The paper is well structured, demonstrating a superior and effective command of English and an excellent standard of presentation.
- A reflection in the upper second class range (the B range of 15 to 17) sets out the moral position the student once held and then explains the new moral position they have come to inhabit. The reflection explains what change has happened as well as what the most important reasons for the change, using examples from either the documentary viewed or the discussion about it in class afterward. Those examples demonstrate an understanding of the documentary, the discussion, or the contemporary moral context, with only minor gaps of understanding. The writing is clear, though there may be minor points of lack of clarity. The paper is well structured, demonstrating a good command of English and a good standard of presentation.
- A reflection in the lower second class range (the C range of 12 to 14) affirms that the student has changed their mind, but without clear specification of what has changed. The reflection identifies significant questions raised in the documentary and the class discussion. The reflection includes examples from either the documentary viewed or the discussion about it in class afterward. Those examples demonstrate a basic understanding of the documentary, the discussion, or the contemporary moral context, with some gaps of understanding. The writing is mostly clear with some points of lack of clarity. The paper is adequately structured, demonstrating a satisfactory command of English and a satisfactory standard of presentation.

- A reflection in the third class range (the D range of 9 to 11) states that the student did not change their mind. The reflection identifies at least one significant question raised in the documentary and the class discussion. The reflection includes limited examples from either the documentary viewed or the discussion about it in class afterward. Those examples indicate a misunderstanding of the documentary, the discussion, or the contemporary moral context. The writing is unclear. The paper includes deficiencies in its structure, its command of English, and/or its standard of presentation.
- A reflection which falls below the threshold for passing (the E, F, and G ranges of 0 to 8) does not identify a significant question raised in the documentary or the class discussion. The reflection fails to include examples accurately drawn from the documentary viewed, the discussion about it in class afterward, or the contemporary moral context. The reflection is unclear. It includes major deficiencies in its structure, its command of English, and/or its standard of presentation.

Students will be penalised for essays that stray more than 10% above or below the 500-word essay word limit.

ASSESSMENT DEADLINES

Each reflection paper is due **on the week after the topic was discussed in class** before the ***beginning of next week's class at 9am***. Papers should be submitted on Safe Assign. Late papers will be accepted only under exceptional circumstances, with a doctor or university note of explanation.

SUBMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

When uploading assignments, please do the following:

1. Submit a .doc or .docx and include the word-count.
2. Submit by **3pm** on the due date, no hard copy will be required unless directly requested by the Course Coordinator through [My Aberdeen](#).
3. In advance of uploading, please save the assignment with your student ID number listed in the filename, i.e. 59999999 DR2065 (or ME33FP) Reflection Paper 1.

4. When asked to enter a title for the assignment, please enter a title identical to the name of your saved assignment, i.e. 59999999 (or ME33FP) Reflection Paper 1.

Please note: Failure to submit by the due date (unless a prior arrangement has been made) will result in a deduction of marks. Where no submission is received, this will result in a mark of zero.

Please note: *Safeassign* text-matching software will be used. However the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy reserves the right also to submit material to *TurnitinUK* when deemed necessary.