



Atheist Society



A Movie Goer's Guide

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A Movie Goer's Guide > Introduction

Course Introduction

Welcome! *A Movie Goer's Guide to...* is a new course being presented by Leeds Atheist Society. Each session a topic will be introduced using carefully selected segments from popular films, music and television series.

Purpose

The aim of the course is to provide a gentle introduction to complex topics from analytic and continental philosophy. The issues discussed will be secular answers to the question: what does it mean to be human?

Structure

The structure of each individual session may vary depending upon the number of participants and the complexity of the issues. If there are enough coordinators available, the room will be broken up into groups of ten for discussion, otherwise the session will take the form of a presentation, with intermittent questions to the audience. Every Guide will begin with a short description of the topic and an overview of the films being used.

Schedule

There will be two Guides each semester, with the topics and dates for second semester sessions still open for review. Every session is an independent unit: you can attend any without having been to the previous sessions. However, the Guides are meant to fit into a larger narrative with the first analysing our launch into the world, the second the meaning of our entrance and exit and the final two what we should do while we're here.

A Movie Goer's Guide to... Finding an Exit

Using the Twilight Zone Episode, "Five Characters in Search of an Exit", discussion will focus on:

Where are we?

What are we?

Who are we?

Music: O Fortuna, Orff's Carmina Burana

Key Words

Alienation, Absurdity, Inadequacy of Reason , Being in the World;
Sartre, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard

O Fortuna

O Fortuna is a medieval Latin Goliardic poem composed early in the thirteenth century, part of the collection known as the Carmina Burana. It is a complaint about fate, and Fortuna, a goddess in Roman mythology, is a personification of luck. In 1935–36 O Fortuna was set to music by the German composer Carl Orff for his twenty-four-movement cantata Carmina Burana. It is the most famous movement and opens and closes the cycle. Orff's setting of the poem has become immensely popular and has been performed by countless classical music ensembles as well as popular artists. The composition appears in numerous movies and television commercials and has become a staple in popular culture, setting the mood for dramatic or cataclysmic situations.

The Twilight Zone

The Twilight Zone is an American anthology television series created by Rod Serling, which ran for five seasons on CBS from 1959 to 1964 and remains syndicated to this day. The show consisted of unrelated vignettes depicting paranormal, futuristic, dystopian, or disturbing events, usually brought to closure with a message or moral.

Five Characters in Search of an Exit

A uniformed Army Major wakes up to find himself trapped inside in a large metal cylinder. With him is a Hobo, Ballet Dancer, Bagpipe, and a Clown. None of them has any memory of who they are or how they became trapped. The Major, being the newest arrival, is the most determined to escape. He is told there is no way out except the ceiling, which is too high to reach but nonetheless he investigates and perseveres. The Major's question reveals that the characters have no need for food or water and indeed feel nothing in general.

The characters question, where, what and who they are, with The Major being told, "we are in the darkness, nameless things with no memory – no knowledge of what went before, no understanding of what is now, no knowledge of what will be." Guesses are made about the nature of where they have been placed: the Ballet Dancer speculates that they're on a spaceship, the Clown believes they're in a dream, while the Major believes that they are in Hell.

Eventually the Ballet Dancer suggests a plan to escape: forming a tower of people, each person on the other's shoulders. The plan almost works, but a loud sound shakes the cylinder and sends the five tumbling to the ground. Now even more determined, the Major fashions a grappling hook out of loose bits of clothing and his sword. By reforming the tower, he manages to grapple onto the edge of the container. He escapes and tumbles to the ground outside.

The scene cuts to a little girl picking up a doll in the snow: a doll in the dress of an Army Major. A kindly woman tells her to "put it back in the barrel with the rest of them." It is revealed that the cylinder is a toy collection bin for a girls' orphans home, and that all five characters are nothing more than dolls. The loud noise was the shaking of a hand held bell which the woman used to attract donations.

The final shot is of the five characters, now seen as dolls with painted faces and glass eyes. The ballet dancer moves to hold the hand of the major and her eyes fill with tears.

A Movie Goer's Guide > Questions

Opening Questions

Is O Fortuna's assessment of the human condition correct?

Who are you, where are you, what are you?

Where are we?

Where are the characters?

What does reason tell you, what does imagination tell you?

What is the nature of the world the characters inhabit?

How do the characters relate to the world?

Why does The Major find this question urgent? Is It?

Who put the characters there?

In what sense is our world the same as theirs?

What are we?

What are the characters?

How does this impact on their endeavours?

What does reason tell you, what does imagination tell you?

What are the differences between what we are and what the characters are?

Are these important?

Who are we?

How are the characters identified? Is their identity fixed?

What are their attitudes to escape?

What are the consequences of the characters actions?

What does reason tell you, what does imagination tell you?

In what way are we the same as the characters; are these parallels
“good”?

Closing Questions

Is O Fortuna’s assessment of the human condition correct?

With which character do you identify?

Who are you, where are you, what are you?

Next Session: Related Questions

Why are we?

How long will we be here?

A Movie Goer's Guide > Quotes

Narration

"Clown. Hobo. Ballet Dancer. Bagpiper. And an Army Major. A collection of question marks. Five improbable entities stuck together into a pit of darkness. No logic, no reason, no explanation. Just a prolonged nightmare in which fear, loneliness, and the unexplainable walk hand in hand through the shadows. In a moment, we'll start collecting clues as to the whys, the whats, and the wheres. We will not end the nightmare, we'll only explain it, because this is the Twilight Zone."

"Just a barrel, a dark depository where are kept the counterfeit, make-believe pieces of plaster and cloth, wrought in the distorted image of human life. But this added, hopeful note: perhaps they are unloved only for the moment. In the arms of children there can be nothing but love. A clown, a tramp, a bagpipe player, a ballet dancer, and a major. Tonight's cast of players on the odd stage known as the Twilight Zone. "

Characters

"Where are we? What are we? Who are we?"

"One guess is as good as another."

"A couple of very important items seem to have eluded me,
like who am I?"

"You said you were a major."

"Here we are in the darkness, nameless things with no memory – no knowledge of what went before, no understanding of what is now, no knowledge of what will be."

"How long we will be here?"

"We're here because we're here because we're here... you're wasting your time, you know that don't you?"

O Fortuna

O Fortuna
velut luna
statu variabilis,
semper crescis
aut decrescis;
vita detestabilis
nunc obdurat
et tunc curat
ludo mentis aciem,
egestatem,
potestatem
dissolvit ut glaciem.

Sors immanis
et inanis,
rota tu volubilis,
status malus,
vana salus
semper dissolubilis,
obumbrata
et velata
mihi quoque niteris;
nunc per ludum
dorsum nudum
fero tui sceleris.

Sors salutis
et virtutis
michi nunc contraria,
est affectus
et defectus
semper in angaria.
Hac in hora
sine mora
corde pulsum tangite;
quod per sortem
sternit fortem,
mecum omnes plangite!

Fate, in health
and in virtue,
is now against me
driven on
and weighted down,
always enslaved.
So at this hour
without delay
pluck the vibrating string;
since through Fate
strikes down the strong,
everyone weep with me!

A Movie Goer's Guide > My Notes

Who am I?

What am I?

Where am I?

Don't miss our main Movie Goer's Guide this semester...

A Movie Goer's Guide to... The Meaning of Life and Death
Tuesday, November 17th

Using forty minutes of clips from "American Beauty" and a segment from "Nothing in the Dark" the session will focus on:

What is the Meaning of Life?

Am I Free? What is beautiful?

What is Death and should it be feared?

Music: For Now, Avenue Q

