Philosophy goes to the movies: an introduction to philosophy. By CHRISTOPHER FALZON. Routledge. 2002 pp 230,

This is not a book about the philosophy of film, or about the ways in which films can illustrate philosophical ideas, nor does it argue any particular philosophical line by appealing to particular films. Christopher Falzon has written an introductory textbook of philosophy, in which a fairly standard exposition of fairly standard topics is constantly illustrated by references to films. The exposition is sensible and undogmatic, though sometimes a little difficult, and the sequence of topics makes sense, though there is some repetition. Taken as an introductory textbook, ignoring the film aspect, it would be a well-written choice, covering a surprising ground for its length, for quite literate and alert students. Its special appeal, though, has to be the wealth of film references. I have doubts whether they are used in a way that would actually work pedagogically. I return to these doubts below. But experimental evidence should always be trumps: I hope that some teachers use the book and tell the rest of us how it went.

After a fairly sophisticated introduction, aimed at both student and teacher but likely to go over the heads of most students, the book's first chapter finds the natural place to begin, with illusion. Plato's cave (the original moving picture show), virtual reality films, *The Matrix*. This leads to a discussion of the theory-dependence of perception, which is illustrated with a discussion of *Rear Window* - interpreted as a story of misleading perception rather than of ambiguous evidence - and *Rashomon*, which is interpreted on the basis of some remarks of Kurosawa's as a story of the difficulty of self-knowledge rather than of the elusiveness of reality. Chapter two discusses dualism, personal identity, and personhood, with *All of me* as the central example but also referring to *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (x2), *Bladerunner*, and *2002*. Chapter three discusses moral issues, with *Crimes and Misdemeanors* as central examples but referring to many other films. Chapter four, the most successful for me, discusses political philosophy, starting from a clever comparison of *Antz* with *The Republic*. Chapter five is a nice discussion of film treatments of the dangers of science and

technology and industrial society, beginning with *Modern Times* and again referring to a number of other films. And chapter six attempts the apparently impossible, teaching logic with films. The films here are largely pythonian: *Monty Python and the Hold Grail*, *The Life of Brian*, and some sketches. The excerpts mentioned are well worth any logic teacher noting for possible use.

But how is it all supposed to work? There are so many films referred to that no course could assume that the students had seen more than a very few of them. A course might involve showing six films - a Cartesian film such as *The Matrix*, *eXistenz,* or *The Truman Show*, and the five films that are central to the remaining chapters. That might work. A problem could be that the chapters do not have enough detailed discussion of these central films: most pages are instead taken up with discussions of the other films referred to and with self-contained philosophical discussion. Falzon had a difficult choice to make: he could write a text which required the teacher to show a specific list of films, or he could write one which refers to a great number of films, so that the teacher can either select a list to show or discuss at greater length those which most of the class are acquainted with. He chose not to write in such a way that specific films had to be shown. Since it cannot be very satisfactory to rely on the faint memories of those students in a class who happen to have seen a particular film at some time in the past, the teacher will have to choose a list and show them. But then the discussion of those films in the book will seem rather thin.

I hope that this book is used to teach introductory philosophy, to add to our knowledge of how to teach with film. I suspect, though, that its major use will be as a source book for philosophy teachers. You read the chapter corresponding to the topic you are going to teach, while using a more conventional text, to find films and discussions of them that you can use in your teaching. That is a valuable use, if not the intended one.

It is impossible to read the book without reflecting on the question: what is the special affinity of film and philosophy? The affinity clearly goes deeper than the common concern with illusion. I suggest that one source of the affinity is the

ability of film to present very large amounts of information in a way that combines both pictorial and narrative presentation. As a result a film can present many of the beliefs and preferences that would make up a coherent alternative account of the physical or moral universe. We can get into the workings of a proposed set of values, or a metaphysics, or an account of human motivation. It is just conceivable that this could be done with words alone, but words alone will not summon the sensory and emotional correlates that in actual human life glue large bodies of belief and value into workable unities. (This raises the hard question: are we interested in bodies of propositions that have logical and explanatory coherence alone, or those which also can work as *human* systems of belief.) Moreover in a film there are characters accepting these beliefs and reacting with the required emotions. That can aid the absorption of the whole complex immensely; it is like being in a culture in which the beliefs and values are taken for granted. And of course this can give the illusion of coherence where in fact there is a hole in the logic: just as it does with the beliefs and preferences we actually hold.

If this is so it can explain why a film can be such an eloquent example to support, illustrate, or rebut a philosophical claim. To use the film for philosophical purposes, then, it has to be seen by those it is supposed to have its effect on. This may seem obvious, but when we cite films in philosophical writings we don't usually include a hyperlink to a set of clips. We just say "an example of this is XYZ in which ...". I'm not sure how else we can proceed within the normal limits of philosophical discussion, but it is not really adequate. And this presents a problem for Falzon, too. He cites many films, summarizing their plots and premises in a few sentences. Very often all the work that is needed for his purposes is done by the content of these sentences. But then it is irrelevant that they are *films*. In fact very often the films are taken from stories or plays, and an allusion to the story or play would have done just as well.

One possible solution would be to shape the book around familiar and popular films that will be familiar to almost all the readership as films. Falzon has steered away from that, and I would too as it would make a boring book and a boring

course. But what are the alternatives? I have another suggestion to make. A textbook of philosophy through film could well be even more unlike a conventional textbook than Falzon's publishers probably would have allowed. It ought to be centred around a series of fine films that would be shown as part of the course, and consist of priming material to prepare the students for seeing them in the intended way, and follow-up material for shaping class discussions in which the intended issues would emerge. Given that a single list of films is unlikely to appeal to all teachers, or be available everywhere, this would probably have to take the form of a large advice book for teachers and a number of modules which could be made available to students depending on the films shown and the philosophical themes targeted. Would this be a viable publishing venture? Probably not - but it should not be too difficult to structure it around a set of web pages.

If you use film in your teaching you will want to read this book. If you are interested in the way in which films can communicate you should also read it. Then you can make up your own mind about how you might use it in teaching.

ADAM MORTON
University of Oklahoma