

Wednesday, 4 October 2023

filmosofia at Rozz-Tox

Children of Men (2006 Cuarón, dir.) & “The Afterlife” (2012, Samuel Scheffler)

Agenda:

- pre-screening discussion starts 6:30pm
- film starts 7:00pm
- 10 minute break
- post-screening discussion of Scheffler reading selection and film from 9:00pm to 10:00pm

Pre-screening discussion (6:30pm)

- general remarks about filmosofia series:
 - each month we will screen a film, and pair the film screening with a famous philosophical text (about 20 pages or so) that examines themes related to that film
 - most selections will concern metaphysical topics, although some will concern value theory (axiology)
 - four main branches of philosophy:
 - metaphysics
 - epistemology
 - axiology
 - logic

- I will print copies of the reading selection each month, which will be available in the front of the cafe for free
 - next month's selection by Michael Huemer on reincarnation and immortality (2022) are available at the front, and will be paired with a screening of the Wachowski's *Cloud Atlas* (2012).
- general initial remarks about tonight's film screening and this month's reading selection:
 - this week's topic concerns axiology: the theory of value and the ethical consequences of this identification of what matters
 - In this selection, Scheffler uses doomsday scenarios to motivate the Collective Afterlife Thesis
 - (CA) The knowledge that there will be future generations to carry on with our projects and values is an important source of meaning for us now.
 - Scheffler aims to do this with two thought-experiments:
 - The Doomsday Scenario: an asteroid will destroy the Earth and all inhabitants 30 days after your death.
 - The Infertility Scenario: humans suddenly become infertile and cannot reproduce.
 - The second has the advantage of not involving hastened violent death.

- An argument for CA:

 1. People in the Infertility Scenario would feel despair and that their activities are without meaning.
 2. If that is right, then people should feel that their activities in the Infertility Scenario are without meaning.
 3. If people should feel that their activities in the Infertility Scenario are without meaning, then the CA Thesis is True.
 4. Therefore, the CA Thesis is true.

- potential objections:
 - Premise 1 is false: people wouldn't feel despair (seems implausible).
 - Premise 2 is false: just because people would feel that way, doesn't mean they *should* (Wolf, Frankfurt).
 - Premise 3 is false: ...?

Post-screening discussion (9:00pm to 10:00pm)

- I'm curious about how you all might react to a rival position defended most famously by the South African philosopher David Benatar:
 - The Anti-Natalist Thesis (AN): it is morally wrong for humans to procreate.

- a “misanthropic argument” for AN:
- 1. We have a (presumptive) duty to desist from bringing into existence new members of species that cause (and will likely continue to cause) vast amounts of pain, suffering and death.
- 2. Humans cause vast amounts of pain, suffering and death.
- 3. Therefore, we have a (presumptive) duty to desist from bringing new humans into existence. (Benatar 2015)
- 4. If we have a (presumptive) duty to desist from bringing new humans into existence, then we should collectively see to it that we bring about human extinction by means of ceasing procreation.
- 5. Therefore, we should collectively see to it that we bring about human extinction by means of ceasing procreation.

- potential objections:
 - premise 1 is false: ...?
 - premise 4 is false: the presumptive duty to desist from creating destructive entities is one thing, but is overridden by other considerations...
- The CA argument and the AN argument both seem to be too squarely focused on humans as they are.
 - But one might argue that the CA argument is too anthropocentric, whereas the AN argument is too hasty...

- another challenger appears: the “future-minded” argument:

1. Human beings are the product of evolutionary forces that include a long lineage of rewarding violence and high reproductive drive.
2. If human beings are the product of evolutionary forces that include a long lineage of rewarding violence and high reproductive drive, then the project of enhancing humans to reduce harmful consequences of their existence will likely face insurmountable constraints, and will likely not eliminate the harms of their existence completely.
3. Artificially developed minds will not have the same evolutionary constraints, and will not likely bring about the harms that humans are prone to causing.
4. Both options—enhanced humans and artificially developed minds—will have the capacity to carry on with humanity’s noblest goals and values.
5. We ought to prefer the option that is least likely to bring about the harms that humans are prone to cause.
6. Therefore, we ought to prefer replacement of humans by artificially developed minds. (cf. Shiller 2017)