

Wednesday, 15 November 2023

filmosofia at Rozz-Tox

Cloud Atlas (2012 Wachowskis & Tykwer, dir.) & “Existence is Evidence of Immortality” (2021 Michael Huemer)

Agenda:

- pre-screening discussion starts 6:30pm
- film starts 7:00pm
- 10 minute break
- post-screening discussion of Huemer reading selection and film from 10:00pm to 11:00pm

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 reading selections by Plato are available at the front, and will be paired with a screening of Rossellini's *Socrates* (1971).
- general initial remarks about tonight's film screening and this month's reading selection:
 - this week's topic concerns metaphysics: the theory of reality
 - In this selection, Huemer uses Bayesian probability theory and theories of evidence to argue for a reincarnation thesis:
 - (Reincarnation) You will literally exist infinitely many times.
 - He takes this to be related to the thesis of eternal recurrence:
 - (Eternal Recurrence) You will literally exist in exactly the same way as your life has and will unfold with no differences, infinitely many times.
 - it's clear that these are related, but given different restrictions of "you will literally exist", it seems that reincarnation is more permissive than eternal recurrence.

- the core argument appears in section 6 “Summary” (p148):
 1. *Infinitude of Time*: Time is infinite in both directions.
(Premise)
 2. *Infinitude → Recurrence*: If the future is infinite, then every repeatable condition that obtains has obtained before, and will obtain again, infinitely many times.
(Premise)
 3. *Recurrence → Reincarnation*: If every repeatable condition that obtains will obtain again infinitely many times, then you will be reincarnated infinitely many times. (see sub argument below)
 4. *Reincarnation*: Therefore, you will be reincarnated infinitely many times. (From 1, 2, 3)
- Sub-argument for premise 3:
 - 3a. The probability of your being alive now, given an infinite past and given the conditions required for you to be incarnated are unrepeatable, is zero. (Premise)
 - 3b. You are alive now. (Premise)
 - 3c. The past is infinite. (From 1)
 - 3d. Therefore, the conditions required for you to be incarnated are repeatable. (From 3a, 3b, 3c)
 - 3e. Therefore, if every repeatable condition that obtains will obtain again infinitely many times, then you will be reincarnated infinitely many times. (From 3d)

- central to this argument (especially the defense of 3a) is a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the idea that the conditions for your existence are not repeatable—the fact that you exist now (E) would be a probability zero event, if it were not repeatable.
 - suppose the probability that E occurs now is 1%
 - the probability that E occurs in the last two centuries is 2%, three centuries is 3%, ... two hundred centuries is 200%, which is absurd. (p136)
 - these considerations motivate a “permissive” view of personal identity, rather than a “restrictive” one (p134):
 - permissive: persons of any desired degree of similarity to you would literally count as (different stages of) you.
 - restrictive: such persons would not count as (different stages of) you.

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

- thoughts about what this metaphysical theory would entail for our axiology, if it were right:
 - I am worried that the truth of Huemer’s thesis would pose significant problems for our view of the meaningfulness of life—if true, then depending on how flexible the “desired degree of similarity” between you and your incarnations, you will experience many horrible things. An argument:

1. *Reincarnation*: You will be reincarnated infinitely many times.
(From Huemer's 4 above)
2. If you will be reincarnated infinitely many times, then given sufficient degree of similarity between you and your other incarnations, you will literally experience all of the things your incarnations experience.
3. If you will literally experience all of the things your incarnations experience, then if it is more likely that your incarnations will experience horrible things, then you will experience horrible things.
4. It is more likely that your incarnations will experience horrible things.
5. Thus, you will experience horrible things.
 - a. support for 4: the many ways things can go wrong vastly outnumbers the ways things can go well—more ways to miss the bullseye on a target than to hit the mark.
 - b. more support for 4: depending on what humans we allow ourselves to count as incarnations, we are allowing in many more potentially horrible experiences—think about human history; not a great track record of positive treatment...
 - c. further support for 4: the broader the degree of similarity, the more potential horrible experiences you are allowing in—are we to other mammals? other vertebrates? invertebrates? have you seen what animals do to each other, not to mention what we do to them?

- Nietzsche was apparently obsessed with proving the doctrine of eternal recurrence, but only wrote about it as a test for life: do you find eternal recurrence horrifying, as I argued reincarnation is above? Nietzsche argued that if you do, that's evidence that you need to do something to change your life. (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)
- An objection to Huemer's defense of Premise 3a: false dilemma?
 - he argues for “permissive” theories of personal identity over “restrictive” ones
 - what of a third option—how about a “no-self” view?
- Questions regarding the film “Cloud Atlas”:
 - does the film seem to suggest that there's a “moral arc” to history, and that somehow the incarnations are tending to an improved existence over time?
 - or do you get the sense that there's a futility to the struggle, and that things only change but not improve?
 - do you think that Huemer's argument would lend any support for one view or other regarding the meaningfulness of the reincarnations depicted? (compare to the argument above)