



Week Eleven Writing Assignment

exploring
Mind and Self
ID1§13, Fall 2005

Here are some discussion questions for *Twelve Monkeys*.

Time Travel

How is time travel depicted differently in this movie compared to other time travel movies you may have seen (e.g., *Back to the Future*, *Butterfly Effect*, *Time Machine*)? What are the constraints in this movie on how time travel works?

Foreknowledge

Do any of the characters know what's going to happen "in advance"? How certain are they about what they know? (Is this kind of foreknowledge unique to time travel movies?)

Fate

In what sense are the events in the movie, such as the viral plague, fated to happen? Recall the following scene in the psychiatry hospital:

Cole: Five billion people died in 1996 and 1997. Most of the entire population of the world. Only about 1% of us survived.

Doctor: Are you going to save us, Mr. Cole?

Cole: How can I save you? This already happened. I can't save you. Nobody can. I'm simply trying to gather information, to help the people in the present trace the path of the virus.

Doctor: We're not in the present now, Mr. Cole?

Cole: No, 1990 is the past. This already happened. That's what I'm trying to explain...

Doctor: Mr. Cole? Mr. Cole? You believe 1996 is the present, is that it?

Cole: No 1996 is the past too. Listen to me...

Free Will

For those of you who aren't writing a paper this weekend, think about whether any of the above have any implications for whether people in the movie can act freely. Can anyone in the movie *do* anything about events like the viral plague? Do they have any *control* over what will happen?

Write out an argument based on considerations from the movie that the characters in the movie have no free will. Number the premises of your argument, and indicate in parentheses whether this premise is an assumption or follow from other premises. E.g.,

1. Ripley is a human being. (assumption)
2. If Ripley is a human being, then Ripley is mortal. (assumption)
3. Ripley is mortal. (from 1 and 2)

(I hope your numbered argument will be considerably more detailed than this.) After you write out your numbered argument, briefly defend what you take to be the crucial and/or controversial premises.

Note: you might feel it's very obvious that we have no free will. Even if that's the way you feel, the challenge for you is to explain why. (For what it's worth, I don't think it's so obvious...) So do your best to defend the assumptions of your argument; make it clear to your reader why the conclusion that the characters have no free will is simply unavoidable.

Please email me your response in MS Word format **Tuesday morning, 11/8, before 10 a.m.** and bring a copy with you to class.