

Critical Inquiry Seminar

Manifest versus Scientific Image



Group Assignment, Due Tuesday November 30

We watched the time travel movie *Twelve Monkeys*, and briefly discussed a number of issues concerning time travel and fatalism:

- 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?
- In what sense are the events in the movie, such as the viral plague, fated to happen?
- Do any of the characters know what's going to happen in advance? Does this have any implications for whether their acts are free? (Recall a similar issue came up in our discussion of the Matrix.)

Oracle: I'd ask you to sit down, but you're not going to, anyway... And don't worry about the vase.

Neo: What vase? [turns and breaks the vase]

Oracle: That vase.

Neo: I'm sorry.

Oracle: I said don't worry about it. I'll get one of my kids to fix it.

Neo: How did you know?

Oracle: Ohhh. What's really going to bake your noodle later on is, would you still have broken it if I hadn't said anything?

- Can anyone in the movie *do* anything about events like the viral plague? Do they have any *control* over what will happen?

The group assignment is to find a worthwhile philosophy article that deals with some of these issues in a general way. (I do not want articles that focus on the movie.) You've thought a bit about these issues as a result of seeing the movie. Are there interesting articles out there that explore some of these issues in more detail?

Your group's job is to find **one** article on time travel or fatalism.

With time travel, we're not interested in scientific explanations of whether time travel is feasible. The issue we want to discuss is whether it is coherent, and, if so, what restrictions there are on its coherence. (E.g., if you travel back in time, in what sense can you change the past?)

Fatalism, in the sense that we're interested in, is the view that all the events that are in fact going to happen are fated to happen, in that there's nothing we can do to stop them from happening.

Here's what you'll turn in:

1. The names of the people in your group.
2. One copy of the article your group selected.
3. Bibliographic information for your article.
4. A brief description of why your group chose this article. I'm not expecting that you will have read and digested the whole article, so I'm not asking for a summary of the whole article. But we (the rest of the class) still want to know why we should read the article you chose. What is the article about? What appears to be the central claim of the paper? Can you give some sketch of how the argument will go about establishing the claim?

Here's an example:

The abortion debate frequently centers on whether the unborn fetus is a *person*, where persons are beings that have moral status. Typically arguments against the morality of abortion claim that the fetus is a person, whereas defenders of the permissibility of abortion claim that the fetus is not a person. Thomson's article is a defense of the permissibility of abortion, but she grants (for the sake of argument) that the fetus is a person. She wants to argue that abortion is morally permissible *even if* the fetus is a person. It appears that her strategy is to argue that the rights of the mother in some sense trump the rights of the fetus, and that this kind of trumping isn't unique to situations involving pregnant mothers. It looks like she's going to use some interesting examples – a kidnapped violinist, “people seeds” – to show that sometimes the rights of one person can trump the rights of another. If successful, she will have provided a really interesting defense of abortion, one that simply bypasses much of the current debate.

5. How you found this article.
6. The names of your group's two or three runner up articles, with bibliographic information, plus a brief explanation of why you rejected them.

I'll select one or two article for the class to read. The group submitting the best article will get to drop the lowest grade from previous assignments. (And yes, I'll be the judge of “best”.)