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Perspectives on Film

! **Need for Interpretation**
 (General)

Mind Games Survival Course Manual



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Perspectives on Film

What's in a movie?

Todd Kappelman

IV. The need for interpretation (general)

- A. *C.S. Lewis said:* "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered." (*The Weight of Glory*, "Learning in War Time.")

Because film does contain the philosophical positions of the men and women who make them, it is necessary that the Christian interpret films with accuracy and integrity. This means that one needs to "train" the eye and the mind to read and understand each piece and not merely react.

2. *Matthew Arnold clearly expresses what art is and how it functions:*

The grand power of poetry [and by extension the other arts] is its power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them. When this sense is awakened in us, . . . we feel ourselves to be in contact with the essential nature of those objects, to be no longer bewildered and oppressed by them, but to have their secret, and to be in harmony with them; and this feeling calms and satisfies us (Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*).

Film is thus able to convey the realities of life, often with all of the faults and ugliness, as well as that which is beautiful and true to the viewer who is attentive to the message.

3. *When interpreting a film, one should ask the following questions:*



1. How important is life to the director/writers etc.? Are the tough

issues dealt with or avoided?

2. Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your interpretation?
3. Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to determine if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that is in agreement with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality.
4. Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film seek to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone?
5. Is the film technically well made, written, produced and acted?

Conclusion: Any meaningful interpretation of film [or any art] should be more than an initial reaction or unreflective opinion. If criticism is to be valid and respected it should bear the marks of thoughtful consideration and fairness while demonstrating the ability to make a case for one's assessment(s).

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