

FORG 233/LACS 233 *The Godfather: The Art of Hard Choices*

January Term 2021 (Remote-learning term)

TWRF 10:00-11:40 Online at Zoom

Instructor: John Alcorn

Office hours flexibly by appointment at Zoom

Course description

The Godfather and *The Godfather Part II* films are narrative masterpieces that provide many insights into the interplay of character and culture in decision-making in high-stakes situations outside the law. We will interpret the films as illustrations of strategic interaction in stylized mafia settings. We will focus on narrative techniques, character portraits, psychological mechanisms, and relations between art and life (fiction and reality).

We will study and apply an outstanding, comprehensive handbook about the mind, action, and interaction: Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior* (Cambridge U. Press, 2015).

We will begin with a week of lectures and discussion, to clarify foundation concepts and mechanisms. Then the rest of the course—weeks 2 through 5—will have a seminar format: presentations by students and discussion.

1 course credit.

Assessment

Assessment has written (or media) and oral components:

- Written (or media) components:

Two papers (1,500 words each) or equivalent media projects.

- Seminar components:

Two presentations about designated topics in the films.

Participation in seminar discussion.

Papers (or media projects) and seminar presentations require analysis and interpretation of film clips in the spirit of the syllabus.

- Each paper (or media project) = 20% of the course grade.
- Each seminar presentation = 20% of the course grade.
- Seminar discussion = 20% of the course grade.

Papers (or projects) and presentations are graded on five criteria: focus (balance of breadth and depth), integration of assigned materials, argument (or analysis), evidence, and prose (or presentation).

Prose and presentation are assessed on five criteria: clarity, concision, organization, proportion, and polish.

A seminar is a joint enterprise in which we learn from one another and count on one another. Penalties apply to tardiness and to any unexcused absences. A seminar requires full attention during class. Students should not exit during class time, unless there is reasonable urgency. We will take a short break at the middle of each class.

Purchase list:

Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior*, Revised edition (Cambridge U. Press, 2015): Approx. \$20 (eBook) or \$35 (paperback).

The Godfather - The Coppola Restoration (ISBN 1-4157-4049-6): Approx. \$4 to rent, \$17 to buy.

The Godfather Part II - The Coppola Restoration (ISBN 1-4157-4050-X). Cost: Same as above.

Digital streams are available at Amazon, Netflix, and Google Play.

Syllabus

Week 1. Lecture & discussion

- Readings: Explanation & Mechanisms. The Mind.
Elster (2015) Chapters 1-9 (pp. 1-186).
- Analysis and interpretation of film scenes:
Hard choices about private justice & instrumental friendship (Bonasera; Johnny Fontane).
Hard choices about the market for hard drugs (Corleone family).
Hard choices about revenge ('business' vs 'personal'), war, & peace (Sonny, Tom, Michael).

1:15 - 3:38. Bonasera - "I stood in the courtroom looking like a fool."
3:38 - 7:31. Vito Corleone & Bonasera - Private justice & instrumental friendship.
28:04 - 34:16. Tom Hagen & Jack Woltz - "An offer he can't refuse."
34:19 - 36:08. Vito, Tom, & Sonny Corleone - Narcotics: "So, what's your answer gonna be, Pop?"
36:08 - 39:29. Vito & Sollozzo - "Drugs is a dirty business."
39:46 - 44:04. Sollozzo & Luca Brasi - Preemptive strike (1).
44:06 - 44:36. Sollozzo & Tom - Kidnapping.
44:38 - 46:00. Sollozzo & Vito (& Fredo Corleone) - Preemptive strike (2).
47:52 - 49:27. Sollozzo & Sonny - "Don't lose that famous temper of yours."
49:28 - 52:40. Sollozzo & Tom Hagen - "Now it's up to you to make the peace. [...] Blood is a big expense."
53:18 - 55:42. Caucus of the Corleone family (1) - "What do we do if the old man dies?"
1:03:15 - 1:10:24. Michael Corleone & Captain McCloskey (& Enzo the baker) - "What's the Turk paying you to set-up my father, Captain?"
1:10:30 - 1:12:33. Sonny & Tom (1) - "Well, then business will have to suffer."
1:12:33 - 1:13:21. Sonny & Tom (2) - "The Corleone family would be outcast."
1:13:21 - 1:15:49. Michael, & Sonny, & Tom - "It's not personal, Sonny, it's strictly business."

Week 2. Student presentations about scenes

Readings: Action.

Elster (2015) Chapters 10-16 (pp. 187-294).

Analysis & interpretation of film scenes:

1. Sollozzo grapples with credibility & commitment.
1:21:54 - 1:22:28. Sollozzo & Michael (1) - "I swear on my children. [...] Iddu nun vuo' ragionari."
1:25:15 - 1:27:08. Sollozzo & Michael (2) - "Io sono un uomo d'onore. [...] What guarantees can I give you, Mike? [...] All I want is a truce."
2. Lack of leadership.
1:33:54 - 1:37:11. The Corleone family adrift while Vito convalesces.
1:59:52 - 2:01:36. Vito & Tom - "This war stops now."
3. Meeting of the heads of family to make the peace.
2:06:17 - 2:09:37. Barzini & Vito - "A refusal is not the act of a friend."

- 2:09:36 - 2:10:48. Zalucchi (capo from Cleveland), Vito, & Barzini. "The traffic in drugs will be permitted, but controlled."
4. Vito & Tattaglia grapple with credibility & commitment.
 - 2:10:21 - 2:12:42. Tattaglia & Vito - "But I have selfish reasons."
 - 2:12:44 - 2:13:25. Tom & Vito - "But I never knew until this day that it was Barzini all along."
 5. Corleone caucus about move to Vegas.
 - 2:16:31 - 2:19:42. "Things may get rough with the move we're trying."
 6. Public dissension in the Corleone family.
 - 2:20:29 - 2:25:57. Michael, Fredo, Johnny Fontane, & Moe Green, "Don't ever takes sides with anyone against the family again. Ever."
 7. Sacrament & interpretation.
 - 2:26:41 - 2:30:26. Vito & Michael caucus - "Whoever comes to you with this Barzini meeting, he's the traitor."
 - 2:33:51 - 2:36:56. Vito Corleone's funeral - "It's the smart move."
 8. Sacrament & reckoning.
 - 2:36:57 - 2:48:40. Baptism & vendetta killings - "I do renounce them. [...] Today I settled all family business."

Week 3: Student presentations about scenes (cont.)

Readings: Interaction.

Elster (2015) Chapters 17-25 (pp. 295-451).

Analysis & interpretation of film scenes:

1. Intimate deception.
 - 2:49:35 - 2:53:05. Michael, Connie, & Kay - "This one time, I'll let you ask me about my affairs."
2. How is the whole greater than the sum of the parts? Adumbration & retrospective illumination.
 - Part I Clips, to be selected by student.
3. Hypocrisy.
 - Part II: 16:18 - 20:11. Michael Corleone & Senator Geary - "Senator, we're both part of the same hypocrisy."
4. Trustless cooperation.
 - Part II: 30:02 - 33:14. Michael Corleone & Frank Pentangeli (1) - "Your father did business with Hyman Roth; your father respected Hyman Roth; but your father never trusted Hyman Roth."
5. Putting oneself in others' shoes.
 - Part II: 37:50 - 40:40 & Clips TBD. Michael Corleone & Tom Hagen - "One thing I learned from pop, is to try to think as people around you think. Now, on that basis, anything's possible."
6. Set-up & *mise-en-scène* (1).

Part II: 1:03:50 - 1:05:23. Michael Corleone & Hyman Roth (1) - "Pentangeli is a dead man."

Part II: 1:06:17 - 1:09:32. Michael Corleone & Frank Pentangeli (2) - "Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer."

Part II: 1:11:03 - 1:12:51. Frank Pentangeli & Rosato - "Michael Corleone says hello."

7. Set-up & *mise-en-scène* (2).

Part II: 1:33:20 - 1:16:07. Tom Hagen & Senator Geary - "It will be as though she never existed. All that's left is our friendship."

8. Metaphor & ritual.

Part II: 1:25:04 - 1:26:19. Michael Corleone & Hyman Roth (2). Roth divides the cake - "We have now what we have always needed: real partnership with government."

Deadline for midterm paper or project: Wednesday, January 20, at 6 pm, by email attachment.

Week 4: Student presentations about character

Analysis & interpretation of film scenes:

1. What makes Fredo tick?

Part II 1:28:13 - 1:31:13 and Clips TBD. Michael & Fredo Corleone - "Can I trust you with something, Fredo?"

2. What makes Roth tick?

Part II: 1:31:58 - 1:35:19. Michael Corleone & Hyman Roth (3) - "This is the business we've chosen."

3. What makes Kay tick?

Part II 2:37:58 - 2:44:10. Gender norms & their breakdown: Michael & Kay Corleone - "It was an abortion!"

4. What makes Connie tick?

Clips TBD by student.

5. What makes Pentangeli tick?

Part II 2:33:34 - 2:37:57. Frank Pentangeli & Tom - "The honor of the family is safe" ("*L'onore della famiglia sta a posto*").

Part II 3:01:50 - 3:05:21. Frank Pentangeli & Tom - "Farewell." ("Addio")

6. What makes Tom Hagen tick?

Clips TBD by student.

7. What makes Vito tick?

Flashback clips TBD by student.

8. What makes Michael tick?

Part II 2:57:18 - 3:00:37. Michael Corleone, Tom Hagen, & Rocco - "I don't feel I have to wipe everybody out, Tom. Just my enemies."

Part II 3:08:16 - 3:11:41. Michael settles accounts.

Part II 3:12:00 - 3:16:54. Final scene - Michael Corleone remembers the December 1941 family gathering. Retrospective illumination & adumbration (2).

Week 5: Presentations about final projects

Full rotation of presentations about final projects.

Deadline for final paper (or media project): Tuesday, February 9, at 6 pm, by email attachment.

Please note the following Trinity College policies:

- *Academic accommodations.*

“Trinity College is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you have approval for academic accommodations, please notify faculty during the first two weeks of the semester or a minimum of 10 days prior to needing your accommodations. Please be sure to meet with me privately to discuss implementation.”

(Statement of the Office of Student Accommodations)

- *Academic Integrity.*

“In accordance with the Trinity College Student Integrity Contract, students are expected to abide by the highest standards of intellectual honesty in all academic exercises. Intellectual honesty assumes that students do their own work and that they credit properly those upon whose work and thought they draw. It is the responsibility of each student to make sure that he or she is fully aware of what constitutes intellectually honest work in every examination, quiz, paper, laboratory report, homework assignment, or other academic exercise submitted for evaluation in a course at Trinity College.”

(*Trinity College Student Handbook*, p. 13)

- *The syllabus is subject to change.*

“The content, policies, requirements, and assignments listed in the syllabus are subject to change.”

(Guidelines from the Curriculum Committee and the Dean of Faculty)