ST CHRIS
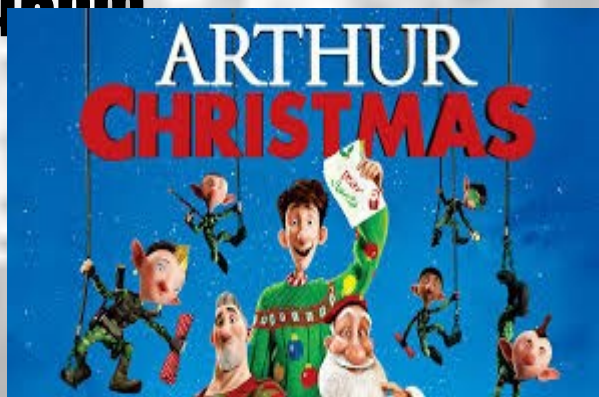# FILM & PHILOSOPHY CLUB

CHRISTMAS SHOWING
November 27th, 2024
4:30pm-5:45pm

WHERE
St Chris
Theatre

HOLIDAY FEATURE:

ARTHUR CHRISTMAS, EXPLORING REPRESENTATIONS OF FAMILY, ATTITUDES TO HOLIDAYS, AND THE QUESTION OF UTILITARIANISM

OPEN TO PARENTS AND STUDENTS

AGE RATING:
Suitable for ages 12+

NO TICKETS NECESSARY!
Just show up at 4:15pm to sign in!

SNACKS AND DRINKS AVAILABLE
Soft drinks and popcorn

FUTURE SHOWINGS
Will include films such as 'The Matrix', 'Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind', 'Sliding Doors' and more!

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FILM FOCUS:

The main thing about Christmas films is that to really work for the audience, certain elements must be present: snow, Santa or St Nicholas, family, children, magic, etc. Another film genre that depends significantly on certain conventions is Sci-Fi: without spaceships, shiny surfaces and advanced technology, audiences can struggle to identify the genre and therefore their expectations. *Arthur Christmas* is unique in that it blends these two traditions seamlessly and uses them to convey the messages of the film.

The sci-fi elements are immediately obvious: the huge, technologically advanced 'sleigh', with the bright white interior, flashing lights and voice interface all indicate science fiction—especially as the voice of the computer is Sigourney Weaver, an actress who gained iconic stature through her role as Ripley in the *Alien* franchise. However we also have Gwen, an impossibly adorable little girl living in Wales, with her snow-covered street and touching faith in Santa Claus, shown through the childish drawing she includes in her letter to the North Pole. These contrasting mise en scene elements strongly centre the film at the intersection of these two genres.

This binary opposition, or contrast, is used throughout the narrative of the film, especially in the characters of Steve and Arthur. Steve is presented as a typical hero of the sci-fi/action mould, with camo outfit, electronic communication devices, rapelling elves under his command and a permanently 'tough' expression on his face. Arthur, on the other hand, is thoroughly 'hand-made': from his garish, lumpy jumper to his singing slippers, his ineptness is in direct contrast to Steve's efficiency. In a way, they represent the two sides of Christmas and both link to the Diderot effect and the argument of Utilitarianism: Steve thinks the 99% success rate is great; Arthur thinks that if any individual is left behind, the whole project of Christmas suffers. And through Arthur's costume and performance (clumsy and gangly), he is certainly a very unique individual! The commercialisation of Christmas is also suggested: is the planning and execution of accepted traditions what is most important? Is the success of the plan more important than the people we are planning Christmas for?

The representations of the different generations of Santas are also interesting. Santa is a zeitgeist figure; he represents the concepts that we as a society value. Therefore Grampa Santa is wiry and grumpy, always telling tales of the War and how they managed Christmas through difficult times. His worn outfit and ancient reindeer 'pet' show a generation that had to struggle to succeed; whereas his son—laid-back, almost lazy and always thinking things will turn out fine without too much effort—could be said to represent almost a 'hippy' Santa, who's life has been significantly easier. These two contrasts once again work with the narrative to ask the audience : what kind of Santa do we want? What kind of Christmas do we want? Who can 'deliver' Christmas more successfully— Steve or Arthur?

PHILOSOPHY FOCUS:

The premise of the movie is that Santa, while having access to magic, is not magical himself, just a normal man, with a normal family. Santa's oldest son, Steve has taken the north pole into the future, streamlining the gift-giving process with the use of technology. Arthur, who is a lot less technologically savvy, is the one who cares. He cares about every child's letter, about every elf, and everything that makes Christmas special. The struggle between the two of them gains traction when a child is missed by Steve's tech driven Christmas and their different views lead to chaos in the North Pole

This poses the philosophical question; do the ends justify the means? Steve argues that the technological gift giving process is serving the greatest good for the greatest number. However, Arthur feels that the rights of the individual are being ignored, and argues that each person should be treated with dignity, regardless of how this affects the majority

This begs the further question—To what extent can technology infringe upon moral decision making?

This also introduces a discussion about Jeremy Bentham's theory of Utilitarianism, with the core maxim of "the greatest good for the greatest number". Should we make moral decisions to benefit the majority, but disadvantage the rights of the individual? Jeremy Bentham was an English philosopher who started Utilitarianism, a philosophical theory that supports the "greatest good for the greatest number". In other words, **whatever action produces the greatest amount of happiness for the majority is justified** .

While the stakes are lower, in *Arthur Christmas* the same point stands. Should Arthur Christmas intervene and help the girl who has not received a present, but risk damaging the magical illusion of Christmas (by exposing the technology of the North Pole) to millions of people, or should he not help the girl which would could cause unhappiness for her as an individual?

Do the ends justify the means? Should we strive to follow universal rules, all should we affirm the Utilitarian maxim of "the greatest good for the greatest number". However Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, opposed Utilitarianism. He argued that we should not treat people as a means to an end. In other words, you cannot use people to achieve your preferred goal if you disregard their dignity as a human. This is known as deontological ethics, which means that actions are good or bad according to a set of rules. Therefore, Kant would argue we should help the girl in the film.

We will also explore The Diderot Effect. This states that obtaining a new possession often creates a spiral of consumption which leads you to acquire more new things. As a result, we end up buying things that our previous selves never needed to feel happy or fulfilled .Do people care about the true message of Christmas (charity and love) or are we too fixated upon consumerism, and mindless capitalistic purchasing habits? In 'Arthur Christmas' the true meaning of Christmas is explored, with the philosophical interpretation of Denis Diderot.