

Western Philosophy

Discussion Questions for the film 'Minority Report'

After watching the film *Minority Report*, please address these questions. They are intended to be thought provoking. In what you turn in, please offer at least one paragraph for each (more is ok). (turn in the one-paragraph for each; we'll have a broader conversation on these in class)

1. Contrast the world (and laws and values) of the *Minority Report* future with the society of today. **What is similar? What has changed? Which of the first eight Amendments to the Constitution (might need to look online for them) which we have today no longer applied in their future?**
2. The first individual arrested for the future murder of his wife seemed to be suffering from "a short fit of madness" as Thomas Reid would describe it, considering he discovered his wife was cheating on him. In today's society, we tend to be more lenient for such a circumstance. We even have different sentences for the different situations surrounding a crime ex. Murder 1, 2, Rape, Statutory rape. In the movie, the punishment is the same for all, isolation from society, and life in general. **Could a society today accept a standard punishment for all crimes? What about for certain crimes, such as murder?**
3. At the beginning of the movie, the drug dealer appears with both eyes removed, and says "my daddy always said in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." Not only is the fact that his eyes are cut out significant, but how significant is his claim? **Do you think it's true? Does it apply to society today, and if so, how can it be supported?**
4. The movie plays on the idea of determinism being true. For instance, the system of predicting murders must hold that actions are determined by outside forces that can be measured. However, the determinist might have a problem. If all actions are determined, then it doesn't follow that actions couldn't be controllable and therefore punishable? But they do in fact punish the perpetrators with a halo device that removes them from existence almost. **How might a determinist respond?**
5. The idea behind Christianity is that God is omnipotent, that he knows all. This seems to hint that actions are determined, considering he already has a plan and he knows what it is. **First of all, does this have any bearing on the choices we make? Second, does your "knowing" God's "all knowing" affect the decisions we make?**
6. In the movie, Danny dives into the issue saying "we arrest individual's who have broken no law." Fletch responds: "but they will." Danny counters saying "but it's not the future if you stop it ... isn't that a fundamental paradox?" John enters and demonstrates his answer. He rolls the ball across the workstation, and Danny catches it before it falls to the ground. Did his preventing the ball from hitting the floor change or prevent its future? How does this affect the deterministic outlook? **How might Danny or any freewill advocate respond?**
7. At the end of the movie, Lammie is forced to make a decision. If he shoots John, then precognition works, and the system continues. If he doesn't, it proves people do have an alternate choice, but the system has failed. **But would his decision really prove that it works or fails? Think about Christianity in particular, referring back to the omnipotence example.**
8. Danny does respond by asking "do you ever get any false positives" or someone who was intending to do something, but didn't go through with it. Anderton answers "well the precog's don't see what you intend to do; only what you will do." But has he closed the case? Consider Anderton was "supposed" to shoot Crowe, but instead Crowe gets shot, and falls out the window in quite a different way than the precogs envisioned. **How does this affect either the free will or determinism case?**
9. When they visit the temple, John states that "it's better to not think of [the precog's] as human." This is a dehumanizing statement, and sort of seems like these children are robots, undeserving of humane treatment. **Do you think this would be an accurate assessment? Do you think it's worth dehumanizing 3 children (or anyone for that matter) to achieve a system of crime control of this magnitude? Does the wellbeing of the larger society make this ok?**

10. John escapes to a house of a woman who he says “invented pre-crime.” He wants some sort of explanation of his predicament. She tells him that “the precogs are never wrong, but they sometimes disagree” and “sometimes someone might have an alternate future,” but that precog could not function “with a hint of fallibility.” **If the precogs disagree sometime, does that hamper the deterministic foundation pre-crime is founded on?**
11. Our current criminal justice system fallible in the sense that innocent people are often convicted of crimes that they didn’t commit. Also, our current system does not adequately deter would-be criminals. In the movie, there had not been a murder in 6 years. However, they cancelled the program over one incident of a supposed “fallibility” in the system. Further, they release thousands of people that were “going” to murder someone and were predicted to commit a crime. **What is the right balance between fallibility (system error) and deterrence (that punishment would prevent future crime)?**
12. The plant lady says that the basic instinct is survival. “When the chips are down every creature is interested in one thing, and one thing only, its own survival.” **Do you think she’s right? Do humans only “survive” or do we strive for some other end.**
13. The movie identifies people with eye scanning and retina identification. For instance, in the GAP store, everyone that walked in would get scanned and then greeted with advertisements suited to their previous tastes, sort of like running personal setups on a computer. **If a system like this could be created, would how might this affect our civil rights?**
14. When Anderton arrives in the location where he is predicted to kill Leo Crowe, things seem to fall into place. However, during the scene of his death, several things happen differently than predicted. For example, the precogs seem to envision Crowe getting murdered by an enraged Anderton. What in fact happens is Anderton tries to leave, and Crowe forces himself to get shot. Also, when Lamar shoots himself instead of John, precrime supposedly fails because Anderton was supposed to be the victim. **To what extent does any of this prove that pre-crime doesn’t work?**
15. Does “knowing” an outcome to an action change your reactions? For instance, if you knew that the ball was not going to fall, but would float instead, would you prevent it from falling? **Might Anderton, or any of the others, have an alternate choice, if they were not informed of it or their future?**
16. Spielberg states in the Bonus Material that because the world he created was “in the foreseeable future ... [he] wouldn’t have to recreate society.” What do you think about this? Considering he had a “team of scientists” who “spent a weekend thinking about the future,” **Did he succeed in replicating what society would be like in half a century, rather than creating a model of a new society? (ie, how plausible is the world he created?)**