



Looking for meaning in all the wrong places

INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

A film screening of
Kurosawa's *Ikiru* and lecture
by Winthrop Professor
Michael Levine, Philosophy,
UWA

Akira Kurosawa directed and co-wrote *Ikiru* in 1952. Filmed in black and white, it ostensibly tells the story of Kanji Watanabe, a bureaucrat and section chief who spends virtually his entire life working in a city office. Neither Watanabe nor anyone else in the office actually does anything much that is worthwhile or productive. They shuffle and stamp papers that simply move from useless pile to useless pile. They may look as if they are actually getting something done, but not only does it become clear that they are doing nothing but also that they are meant to be doing nothing, and also that they on some level, aware that they do nothing. The office, with piles and piles of neatly tied and stacked folders, is itself in effect a façade - a stage set - and in some ways a quite beautiful one.

After he learns he has terminal cancer, a fact that the doctors lie to him about, Watanabe immediately becomes desolate. It is by means of this palpable despair that Watanabe becomes aware that he is faced with a problem that goes beyond his impending death.

The nature of that problem is the focus of this talk.

Ikiru is a case in which a philosophical problem is presented and a solution offered in situ, that is, in the context of a particular life and the concrete problems encountered in it. It is, in many ways, both prior to and more powerful than treatments of the problem in professional philosophy. More through visual than verbal narrative, Kurosawa intimates that in the face of death not only Watanabe, but we too, are alone.

About Michael Levine

Michael Levine is Winthrop Professor of philosophy at The University of Western Australia where he teaches a course on philosophy, film and aesthetics. His publications include: *Prospects for an Ethics of Architecture* (with Bill Taylor. Routledge, 2011), *Doing Philosophy, Watching Movies* (with Damian Cox. Boston: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) *Politics Most Unusual: Violence, Sovereignty and Democracy in the 'War on Terror'* (with Damian Cox and Saul Newman. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and *Integrity and the Fragile Self* (M. Levine; D. Cox; M. LaCaze. Ashgate, 2003.)

He is currently working on regret (oh brother!!!) and other emotions of self-assessment.



ORIGINAL JAPANESE POSTER FOR IKIRU

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA

Event Details

Date: 4 October 2011

Lecture: 6-6.30pm

Film: 6.30pm (142 minutes duration)

Venue: Social Sciences Lecture Theatre
The nearest car park is P3 off Hackett Entrance 1.

This lecture is free and open to the public, no RSVP required.

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