# Movie Night Fall 2015

**Philosophy 100 Danielson**

Tim’s Vermeer (2013)

*Here are questions you might keep in mind while watching the film. These can be used for discussion the night of the film, or to answer for those who watch on their own. If you are writing answers because you did not attend the film, please answer one or more of the questions (but no more than 3) with a two-page response. You have until the date of the next film to submit your responses.*

1. Compare the way art is depicted or discussed in the three films we’ve watched so far. *Ex Machina* has a discussion of Jackson Pollack’s painting technique and meaning, the creation of the Moai being carved by the inhabitants of the island in *Rapa Nui*, and the discussion in *Tim’s Vermeer*.
2. If paintings such as Vermeer made can be made by a mechanical algorithm as discovered by Tim Jenison, are they truly art? Why? Why not?
3. Discuss Jenison’s commitment to curiosity. How has his desire to figure things out, or think about problems contributed to his life? How can his pursuit be an inspiration to the rest of us?
4. What is the moral of the story in this movie?
5. Does Jenison’s pursuit of painting the “Vermeer” exhibit that he has one or more of Aristotle’s virtues? If there isn’t a direct correlation to one of Aristotle’s virtues, should there be a virtue for his inventiveness and perseverance? Why? Why not?
6. Does this film allow Jenison to exhibit his genius? In what sense is he a genius? (Or is he merely a clever technologist and not truly a genius?
7. This film has been called the “Ultimate Geek Documentary.” Why do you think that is? Does it appeal, should it appeal, to more than Geeks? Why? Why not?
8. The book Zero: the biography of a dangerous idea examines the concept of zero and the role it has played in world history. According to the author a key moment in Western history occurs when artists use the zero as the vanishing point in paintings allowing them to create realistic paintings. How are mathematics and art related?
9. Should all students earning a Bachelor’s Degree be required to produce some work of Art? How widely should the definition of Art be expanded to accommodate different meanings?
10. Should this technique Jenison used be taught in art school?
11. The film is part detective story with Jenison, perhaps, figuring out how Vermeer painted. Does the detective story “framework” enhance the story?
12. Jenison decides to recreate the room and the materials to an incredible degree. Would the outcome be as impressive if he had used modern replicas, like modern paints, he could buy at the store? Why or why not? Would it be as authentic?
13. Why is Art important to human society?
14. A philosopher I know once said “Beauty is the only thing worth spending money on.” What do you think she meant? Should the painting by Tim Jenison be valued the same as those painted by Vermeer?
15. In what ways is Jenison’s attempt to create a “Vermeer” truly a scientific experiment? How is it different than an experiment?
16. Should artists try to represent the world as we perceive it, or should artists try to point out a new way to see the world, or is it a combination, or something else altogether?
17. In his book Art and Physics, Leonard Shlain proposes that artists often represent the world in ways which scientists have yet to understand at the time the art is created. He uses examples of Impressionism and how the physicists at the time were just about to uncover the subatomic world. [(Shlain gives a nice talk on this topic here.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRgzRdFRXXk) Watch the video and write a critique of the ideas.) How much credence should we give to Shlain’s ideas? Does this mean that science needs the artists to point out new ways of investigating the world?
18. In the film *Mindwalk* the role of artists is mentioned in connection with the ideas of Quantum Physics. After watching Mindwalk for class, discuss Sonya’s ideas about Turner’s attempt to paint light and how that idea helps explain the scientific concepts she is describing.
19. There is a lot of talk about light in the film: it was said that Vermeer “painted with light.” Light is also used by Plato as a metaphor for the Good. Why do you think light is so significant in these discussions?
20. “This technique, it turns you into a machine. Was Vermeer a machine?” This question was asked by Philip Steadman, author of Vermeer’s Camera. If Vermeer is a “machine” does it make Ava from *Ex Machina* more believable as a person?
21. Art and science are often seen as being vastly separate fields of study. Does this movie convince you that this distance between them is far closer than usually thought? Why? Why not?