**Key Themes of the Class**

These are some themes that appear as key concerns in the works we’ll be reading and the films we will watch. There is some overlap, obviously, but these basic issues appear in different combinations and with different emphases, with all of the works exploring at least a few of them.

* **Identity**:What defines our identity as individuals? How do collective identities form (e.g. societies, cultures, nations)? How do we get others to accept our definitions?
* **Social justice**: Whose rights matter? Which rights are more important? How can society balance the rights of the individual with the needs of the group? How can justice be secured, both for groups within a society and in relations between nations?
* **Heroism**: Redefining the heroic over time (prowess in battle, moral courage, etc)
* **Violence**: How can violence be controlled? When is it needed? What are other ways to solve conflicts?
* **Gender**: How are gender roles and rights defined? How are their relations best regulated? Who gets to decide?
* **Race(s)**: What makes us human? What (and who) divides the human race into subgroups? How do these definitions change?
* **Religion**: What is the role of the spiritual in society? Who gets to decide how spiritual truth should be articulated and codified? How can different religious views be accommodated (or *can* they be)?
* **History:** (personal and societal): Whose version of the past gets precedence? How is the historical record transformed in art, for good or ill? How can our recollections and interpretations of past events be used to serve the needs of the present? How do they shape our ideas of future possibilities?
* **Art:** What is the role of art in recording the ideas, experiences, and values of a society? What role does it serve in the life of an individual? How should society value its artists and the works they produce? (Note: the term “art” here includes all forms—pictorial, sculptural, musical, and literary.)