



FILM: **IRRATIONAL MAN**

FDG RATING: 2.5

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Woody Allen: *Director*

Joaquin Phoenix: *Actor: Abe Lucas (college professor)*

Emma Stone: *Actress: Jill Pollard (student)*

DATE: August 23, 2015

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **IRRATIONAL MAN**

Woody Allen's latest film, *Irrational Man*, explores philosophical concepts, specifically how an existential act of murder for a righteous cause can give meaning to a rather meaningless life. Joaquin Phoenix is the depressed, burned out, philosophy professor whose reputation for excessive drinking and having affairs with students, causes a campus stir as he arrives at a small Rhode Island college. His once activist demeanor is now clouded in self loathing and sarcasm as he tells students in his ethical strategies class that "much of philosophy is verbal masturbation." Despite his gloomy teaching style, bright-eyed student Jill Pollard (Emma Stone) is captivated and pursues Abe seeking every opportunity to engage him in philosophical discussions.

As Abe and Jill converse at a diner, and by chance over hear a desperate woman at the next table, recount the frustration of her bitter custody battle and the corrupt judge who is unfairly on her husband's side, a pivotal shift happens. The woman wishes she could do something but wishing is world's apart from actually taking action. Taking extreme action is exactly what Abe decides to do. Rationalizing that the action befitting the extent of the judge's repeated corruption is murder, sparks purpose back into Abe's existence as he emotionally and intellectually crosses the chasm between theory and practice.

The film's premise is interesting, but superb acting by Joaquin Phoenix, a strong performance by Emma Stone, and an unexpected ending aren't enough to excite our resident film critics who were mostly disappointed, and especially our Woody Allen fans, who expected much more. Even the same jazz rendition of *The In Crowd* by Ramsey Lewis was continually repeated while we would have expected Woody, a jazz enthusiast, to use a variety jazz pieces to resonate with the changing scenes.

The philosophical idea of taking irrational thought to its rational conclusion was accomplished. As was the theory that a person must take decisive action to have a life with meaning. The ideas are big but somehow the impact on us was small and somewhat weak. Possibly because, as one of our critics observed, the film seemed contrived. Some of us found the film slow, monotonous, dragged out. Not really a comedy, not a romance, not a drama, and one critic commented that it wasn't very clever. It had potential but failed to deliver, earning a gloomy 2.5 on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best).



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See you at the movies!

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