

# Woody Allen



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In this extended essay, Vittorio Hösle develops a theory of the comical and applies it to interpret both the recurrent personae played by Woody Allen the actor and the philosophical issues addressed by Woody Allen the director in his films.

Taking Henri Bergson's analysis of laughter as a starting point, Hösle integrates aspects of other theories of laughter to construct his own more finely-articulated and expanded model. With this theory in hand, Hösle discusses the incongruity in the characters played by Woody Allen and describes how these personae are realized in his work.

Hösle focuses on the philosophical issues in Allen's major films by exploring the identity problem in *Play It Again, Sam* and *Zelig*, the shortcomings of the positivist concept of reality in *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*, the relation between reality and art in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, the objective validity of morality in *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, the power of evil in *Shadows and Fog*, and the relation between art and morality in *Bullets over Broadway*. He cites Allen's virtuosic reinterpretation of older forms of expression and his integration of the fantastic into the comic universe -- elements like the giant breasts, anxious sperm, extraterrestrials, ghosts, and magicians

that populate his movies -- as formal moves akin to those of Aristophanes. Both an overview of Allen's work and a philosophical analysis of laughter, Hösle's study demonstrates why Allen's films have more to offer us -- morally, philosophically, and artistically -- than just a few laughs.

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