

## **Minority Report Movie Discussion Questions**

### **MINORITY REPORT (2002)**

PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES: Future Technology, Determinism/Free will debate, Crime control and Civil Rights.

MAIN CHARACTERS: John Anderton (Tom Cruise), Danny Whitmore (Collin Farrell), Lamar Burgees (Max Von Sydow).

SYNOPSIS: In the year 2054, John Anderton is the leader of a crime fighting organization known as Pre-Crime. This organization predicts future murders with the help of “pre-cogs” that envision the murders before they occur. The organization comes under suspicion by the federal government when they send Danny Whitmore to investigate and shut them down if he finds anything fishy. Also, the system itself is challenged when Anderton is envisioned murdering a man by the name of “Crowe.” Danny takes over, and persecutes the organization’s former leader. The idea behind the movie explores a belief in the philosophy of determinism (or at least compatibilism) in human actions. In the end, determinism is supposedly defeated when Lamar Burgeese, one of the founders of pre-crime, must choose between shooting John (pre crime works) or choosing his “alternate future” (pre crime fails).

After viewing the movie, choose 4 of the following questions to answer. Your answers need to be typed using 12 point font, Times New Roman, double spaced (MLA FORMAT). To answer each question completely, your answers will be anywhere from 1/3 of a page to 2/3 of a page. When in doubt, add more specific detail from the movie. Make sure that you indicate which number you are answering.

1. Overall, what were some of the major differences between the short story and the movie? Did these changes affect the themes? How so? Which did you prefer? Why?

2. Eyes were a huge symbol in the movie? First, where do eyes come up in the film (describe the shots or scenes)? Second, what do they symbolize? Why might eyes be such an important symbol in Science Fiction?

3. Same question as above but with water

4. Same question as above but with religion (emphasis here on why religion is an important issue to address in Science Fiction)

5. Do you agree with the founder of the Precogs when she says, “In order to see the light, you must risk the dark”? What exactly is meant by this? How is this shown in the film?

6. Why does the “system” end up failing? What is the problem? Do you think a system like this could work? Is a system like this moral/ethical?

7. This is a little out of order, but what did you make of the film techniques used? Think specifically about special effects and camera techniques/color. Make sure to identify specific special effects that are used and how they influence the meaning of the movie.

8. Select one scene from the movie and, you know, analyze it.

9. The first individual arrested for the future murder of his wife seemed to be suffering from “a short fit of madness” as Thomas Reid would describe it, considering he discovered his wife was cheating on him. In today’s society, we tend to be more lenient for such a circumstance. We even have different sentences for the different situations surrounding a crime ex. Murder 1, 2, Rape, Statutory rape. In the movie, the punishment is the same for all, isolation from society, and life in general. Could a society today accept a standard punishment for all crimes? What about for certain crimes, such as murder?

10. At the beginning of the movie, the drug dealer appears with both eyes removed, and says “my daddy always said in the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king.” Not only is the fact that his eyes are cut out significant, but how significant is his claim? Do you think its true? Does it apply to society today, and if so, how can it be proven?

11. The movie play on the idea of determinism being true. For instance, the system of predicting murders must hold that actions are determined by outside forces that can be measured. However, the determinist might have a problem. If all actions are determined, then it doesn’t follow that actions could be controllable and therefore punishable? But they do in fact punish the perpetrators with a halo device that removes them from existence almost. How might a determinist respond?

12. The idea behind Christianity is that God is omnipotent, that is he knows all. This seems to hint that actions are determined, considering he already has a plan and he knows what it is. First of all, does this have any bearing on the choices we make? Second, does your “knowing” God’s “all knowing” affect the decisions we make?

13. Suppose you know someone is going to perform x action, does that impact that someone’s choice to do x action? In the movie, Danny dive’s into the issue saying “we arrest individual’s who have broken no law.” Fletch responds: “but they will.” Danny counter’s saying “but it’s not the future if you stop it . . . isn’t that a fundamental paradox?” John enters and demonstrates his answer. He rolls the ball across the workstation, and Danny catches it before it falls to the ground. Did his preventing the ball from hitting the floor change or prevent its future? How does this affect the deterministic outlook? How might Danny or any freewill advocate respond?

14. At the end of the movie, Lamaar is forced to make a decision. If he shoots John, then precognition works, and the system continues. If he doesn’t, it proves people do have an alternate choice, but the system has failed. But would his decision really prove that it works or fails? Think about Christianity in particular, referring back to the omnipotence example.

15. Danny does responds by asking to “do you ever get any false positives” or someone who was intending to do something, but didn’t go through with it. Anderton answers “well the precog’s don’t see what you intend to do; only what you will do.” But has he closed the case? Consider Anderton was “supposed” to shoot Crowe, but instead Crowe gets shot, and falls out the window in quite a different way than the precogs envisioned. How does this affect either the free will or determinism case?

16. When they visit the temple, John states that “its better to not think of [the precog’s] as human.” This is a dehumanizing statement, and sort of seems like these children are robots, undeserving of humane treatment. Do you think this would be an accurate assessment? Do you think its worth dehumanizing 3 children (or anyone for that matter) to achieve a system of crime control of this magnitude?

17. John escape’s to a house of a woman who he says “invented pre-crime.” He wants some sort of explanation of his predicament. She tells him that “the precogs are never wrong, but they sometimes disagree” and “sometimes someone might have an alternate future,” but that precog could not function “with a hint of fallibility.” If the precogs disagree sometime, does that hamper the deterministic foundation pre-crime is founded on?

18. Our current criminal justice system fallible in the sense that innocent people are often convicted of crimes that they

didn't commit. Also, our current system does not adequately deter would-be criminals. In the movie, there had not been a murder in 6 years. However, they cancelled the program over one incident of a supposed "fallibility" in the system. Further, they release thousands of people that were "going" to murder someone and were predicted to commit a crime. What is the right balance between fallibility and deterrence?

19. The plant lady says that the basic instinct is survival. "When the chips are down every creature is interested in one thing, and one thing only, its own survival." Do you think she's right? Do humans only "survive" or do we strive for some other end.

20. The movie identifies people with eye scanning and retina identification. For instance, in the GAP store, everyone that walked in would get scanned and then greeted with advertisements suited to their previous tastes, sort of like running personal setups on a computer. If a system like this could be created, would how might this affect our civil rights?

21. Does "knowing" an outcome to an action change your reactions? For instance, if you knew that the ball was not going to fall, but would float instead, would you prevent it from falling? Might Anderton, or any of the others, have an alternate choice, if they were not informed of it or their future?