“Paths of Glory” [1957] The film was made in Germany by the production company of Kirk Douglas, who plays Colonel Dax. Douglas, father of Michael Douglas, was one of the first of the big Hollywood stars of the 1940s and 1950s to set up an independent production company. The director is Stanley Kubrick who was 28 when he started the project and who then went on to direct such important films as “Spartacus,” “Lolita,” “Dr. Strangelove,” “2001: A Space Odyssey,” and “Clockwork Orange.” Kubrick is dead but Douglas is still alive.

There is the stereotypical story about all the studios passing on the film which, in fact, did lose money when first released. Douglas was a gutsy Hollywood mover and shaker [went to college on a wrestling scholarship] and that made a difference. Later, when he and Kubrick made “Spartacus,” he decided to have the scriptwriter, Dalton Trumbo, use his real name on the credits. Trumbo had been blacklisted for years as an alleged communist and had submitted scripts under a pseudonym. Douglas was told he, Douglas, would get into big trouble, but he went ahead anyway and, perhaps not surprisingly, there was no trouble. “Paths of Glory” is based on events that took place in the French army during World War I at Verdun, the site of a huge and endless battle. Perceived by the French authorities as being an insult to their national and military honor, the film was officially banned in France for many years; this in a world without VCRs or DVDs.

It is important to note that when this film came out, the US was not involved in any war and it was a time of considerable satisfaction, contentment, and optimism in the US. There was still considerable pride over what we had done in World War II—which ended twelve years before—and no anti-war culture [or sub-culture] to speak of. In considering the film, think about whether it is more anti-war or more anti-military [or -military mind]. Is there evil or just incompetence, especially among the high command? Also, is the focus the specific sins of the First World War or war in general? Does the film represent an attack on patriotism? What do you make of the final sequence of the film? Are there social class issues raised in the film? The film was made almost fifty years ago. Does it have any application to what is going on in 2010?