Chapter 12

Cinephilia and Philosophia: Or, Why I Don't Show *The Matrix* in Philosophy 101

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<A>Introduction<\>

Philosophy has discovered film.

More precisely but less pithily, academic philosophers who have not been significantly

influenced by French intellectual movements of the last forty years have suddenly begun

publishing books and essays about film in unprecedented numbers. Open Court has ninety-nine

published volumes in their "Popular Culture and Philosophy" series, with thirteen more volumes

announced.[1] Blackwell currently has forty-four titles in their "And Philosophy" series.[2] Not all of

these volumes are about films, but, given that these volumes started in 2000, the trend is notable.

Additionally, there is a new academic market for philosophy and film. Specifically designed to

provide "dependable resources for those studying and teaching philosophy and film," Routledge

has a "Philosophers on Film" series with eight edited volumes focusing mostly on recent films,

as well as multiple books introducing "philosophy and film" and "philosophy through film."[3] In

the last twenty years, at least three journals (*Film-Philosophy* [1996], *Film and Philosophy*

[1997], and *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* [2010]) and one organization

(Society for the Philosophic Study of the Contemporary Visual Arts) specifically devoted to the

connections between film and philosophy have appeared. This is in addition to the numerous

monographs written by philosophers about films, filmmakers, and genres, as well as traditional issues in aesthetics.

These latter resources are primarily geared toward scholars and "philosophy of film" courses. The shelves of film and philosophy books should have made it considerably easier to teach with films in introductory philosophy classes, and certainly many philosophers have found them useful. However, shortcomings of many of these pop culture volumes (which I discuss in the next section) make these works rarely useful in the classroom. I propose instead a new model for how to teach film in a philosophy class. The model develops the virtues inherent in cinephilia and connects these virtues to the good life. Discussions of the good life are some of the oldest recognizably philosophical questions. According to a common taxonomy, the three traditional questions of philosophy are "what is there?," "what can I know?," and "how should I live?" The third question is the question of the good life; it prompts the questioner to reflect on who she is, her place in the world, her values, and how to attain a life that embodies those values. In the third section, I expand and situate this question more fully. This question has been and should continue to be an important part of philosophy, and this opens a space for cinephilia to inform teaching philosophy by posing an appreciable approach to life, love, and art while avoiding some problems with the more popular methods of using films and film clips in philosophy classes. Finally, I address and respond to two objections to my proposal, then conclude by sharing my experiences enacting this pedagogy.

<A>The Problem of "Philosophy through Film"<\>

The *pop culture and philosophy* books that dominate the philosophy shelves at bookstores have three major shortcomings. These books are written with fans already in mind, so they assume that you already love the Harry Potter books or *Doctor Who* or Woody Allen, and

proceed from there to draw out a philosophical point or two. The goal is often minimal (such as to inform fans that some philosophers have also written about the themes or ideas that lurk in their work), so too frequently these book chapters fail to engage their objects in a philosophically sophisticated manner. Many people writing in the pop culture and philosophy books really do love their subjects. Many are knowledgeable about their subjects. Yet very few manage to engage with anything else written on the subject, and almost never with anything from film or media studies. By setting minimal goals, failing to do interesting philosophy, and failing to engage broadly and reflectively, these essays too often have limited value for the classroom.

More thoughtful and more rigorous work is being done by those interested in *philosophy through film*. In these articles and books, it is claimed that a film does or is philosophy, and it is our role as viewers to discover and evaluate this philosophical idea or argument. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* prompts a discussion of whether history progresses and has meaning. *Crimes and Misdemeanors* advocates moral relativism. *12 Monkeys* contains a thesis about determinism, free will, and time travel. In each case, the philosopher poses either that the film (1) embodies a position or, in some stronger versions of the philosophy through film thesis, (2) presents an argument for a thesis. These approaches share a commitment to treating films as *content-bearers*. The viewer is expected to treat films as advancing, holding, or assuming a theoretical position; in the classroom, we could uncover this meaning through priming in the readings or through classroom discussion.

While this isn't the case in the best of the philosophy through film texts, in teaching it is tempting to treat the film as an accessible and less sophisticated text that gently ushers the student into a more complex engagement with written texts or a discussion predetermined by a professor. To pull a common example, say you are teaching skepticism in Philosophy 101. The

anthology has a selection from Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and G. E. Moore's "Certainty." You're thinking about how to introduce global skepticism to undergraduates, and you decide *The Matrix* would serve nicely. After running through the reasons for doubt from the *Meditations*, you pull up a YouTube clip of Morpheus explaining to Neo how the matrix works, then ask students to consider whether there is any way to tell if they are in the matrix. If students begin to discuss how the film employs *déjà vu* as a technique to determine that there is a glitch in the matrix, you gently correct them to say that, no, you are not asking how to tell if you are in the matrix according to the rules of the movie but how to tell if you are in a simulation right now. You never considered *The Matrix* as a film but simply as way of illustrating or highlighting or delaying a point that you wanted to make. One danger of treating films as content-bearers is that they can be too easily contorted away from the film and toward some further point.

Using film clips to make some point beyond what is happening in the film is not a great harm. Films, like written texts, do not have only one legitimate, predetermined use. However, using films only in this way is too limiting. When we consider the possibilities contained within cinephilia to encourage students to develop curiosity, seek out new experiences, and appreciate artistic achievement, we find a way to go further.

A second and related danger is turning films into mere illustrations. Thomas Wartenberg has argued that illustrations can be philosophical and thus treating films as illustrations can be a way of treating them as philosophical works.[4] In this and other ways, proponents of philosophy through film, screened philosophy, or film-philosophy argue that films should be taken seriously as philosophical texts. I have various concerns about these claims, but we can set those aside for now. Pedagogically, using films as illustrations or thought experiments may have some use, but

these are one-off opportunities. Students watch a film clip (or a whole film) and are told that it poses a problem or possible solution; then, the lecture or discussion continues. *La Jetée* or *12 Monkeys* illustrates a coherent theory of time travel, for instance, while discussing what theories of personal identity are consistent with time travel narratives. The film itself is illustrative at best and redundant at worst. If it succeeds at illustrating time travel, or the cost to embracing utilitarianism, or the notion that violent protection of the community inevitably turns back on the community, it does so only be reducing the film to a single example, idea, or argument. Illustrations can easily narrow, simplify, or distort. Furthermore, to have pedagogical value, the instructor may need to introduce sophisticated interpretative techniques that students may not yet possess, a defense of his or her preferred interpretation, and the complex debates that the film can be seen as addressing. The realities of limited time during the semester make this prospect unappealing if the film is doing something that can be done without the film.

In cinephilia we can consider how students might learn to ask their own questions, seek their own problems, and find their own things to appreciate. The long-term value of this is missing from the illustrative model. Put another way, a philosopher could use *Freaky Friday* to address theories of personal identity, but helping students become intellectually curious will allow them to pose their own questions about *Freaky Friday* or *The Loneliest Planet* or *Metropolis*. In the next two sections, I develop a model of using film in philosophy classes that connects the cinephiliac's passionate approach to films with the philosopher's intellectual and lived pursuit of the good life. This model doesn't extinguish the goods of the content-bearer model, but it provides further goods that can justify and enrich the screening and discussing of films.[5]

<A>What Are We Talking About?<\>

I will be arguing that cinephilia provides a model of engaged teaching in philosophy and related disciplines. Before proceeding to the argument, I will introduce the major concepts I'm addressing: cinephilia and the good life.

Cinephilia evolves, yet it is still linked to its etymological origin--the love of film, of cinema. Much of what has been written about cinephilia focuses on its emergence and the related development of the auteur theory among French critics and filmmakers of the 1960s. The debate about cinephilia in the last two decades has often focused on the extent to which the two concepts are separable or should be separated, or whether there is an American cinephilia distinct from French cinephilia (and so on for each nation or region). Rather than return to this topic, about which many others have written ably, I will simply note that a reasonably robust notion of cinephilia can be maintained that does not require the impossible task of turning ourselves into late 1960s cinema-goers. Furthermore, teaching others to be cinephiles does not obviously require turning them into auteurists. My intentionally broad characterization of cinephilia is not meant to dislodge it from any of its historical manifestations but rather to capture a recurring tendency of some people to love film inordinately and find like-minded folks to share that love. Thus, I am not assuming at the outset that there is some late, great period of cinephilia that we should mourn, as Susan Sontag and Andrew O'Hehir have claimed.[6] Nor am I assuming that cinephilia can't ebb and flow or look different over time or be tied to various other historical trends like auteurism or the rise of online film discussion sites. However, if one wants to confine cinephilia to a narrower historical phenomenon, teaching students to be cinephiles will be impossible (because it requires becoming uprooted from one's own historical moment) or one will have to consider whether my claims about cinephilia match the alternative conception of

cinephilia that the reader endorses.

Cinephilia, as I will use it, has two aspects: a set of practices and a cluster of virtues that arise out of those practices. For some readers the term "virtues" calls up associations with *purity* and *humility* and other concepts that Nietzsche dismissed as "slave morality."[7] However, nothing so narrow or puritanical is intended or warranted. Virtues are the habits necessary to pursue the practices from which they arise or to pursue a life that on reflection seems best.[8] The key point is that to engage in certain practices one must develop character traits to perform well at those practices; these are the virtues.[9]

My approach is grounded in the practices of cinephiles. To be a cinephile one mustn't just watch films or love a particular sort of movie. Someone who only loves musicals or horror movies is not a cinephile. Cinephiles are omnivores, consuming studio and independent features, new and old, domestic and international.[10] They might be academics, but their interest in film is not limited to their academic research. They might not be academics, but they take thoughtful writing on cinema seriously, whether it is based in the academy or not.[11] Recently, many cinephiles have migrated online, prompting reflection about the new era of cinephilia and its relation to technology, criticism, production, and viewing platforms. Historically, cinephiles have valorized the experience of watching a film in a theater, and many continue to support the screening of films in their original format (a projected film print when possible, a carefully restored digital copy when available, and always in the original aspect ratio).[12] In the next section, I will address the virtues that arise out of these practices.

While readers of this volume are likely to have some interest or stake in the definition of cinephilia and be familiar with the many recent volumes discussing it, they might not be as familiar with discussions of the good life, the second concept to play a large role in what follows.

So I will briefly lay out a conceptual and historical map to orient readers.

The problem of the good life is the problem of how to live. What should I do? How should I act toward someone who has wronged me? Would I be happier in a bustling city, in the suburbs, or in the country? Should I become a doctor or a professor or a professional snowboarder? To answer these questions (especially the latter two) requires judgments based on knowing particulars about oneself. To answer these questions also requires making judgments about what *any* person should do, or what *any person with my interests, abilities, etc.*, should do. Philosophers typically focus on this second set of judgments. In doing so, we consider whether there are certain features that any life must have to be called good (say, close friendships, or work one finds fulfilling) or whether there are many different kinds of good life.

A problem with any discussion of the good life is that there are a number of issues that run together that might plausibly be kept distinct. Roughly, we could distinguish among living a morally good life, a happy life, and a meaningful life. A morally good life is one that achieves excellence in developing character, or acting meritoriously, or having good consequences follow from one's attitudes and actions.[13] A happy life is one that has the maximum amount of pleasure and the least amount of pain, or whatever the correct account of well-being is.[14] A meaningful life is harder to define, but the concept is meant to capture a potential third set of questions we might ask about our lives, questions like, "Did my life make a difference?" and "Is this the kind of life I want to be living?" One might be happy from moment to moment but still feel that something is missing; whatever is missing is what would make for a meaningful life. For instance, Susan Wolf argues that two popular claims about the meaningfulness of life is that one should live passionately (you should do what you love) and one should be involved in a project larger than oneself (your life should impact others), and she articulates a theory of the

meaningfulness of life that combines these two qualities.[15]

In addition to those three axes of evaluation, we could also consider a few historically important questions relating to the good life. First, is happiness an emotion, a mood, or a state of being? The ancient Greek discussion of *eudaimonia*, sometimes translated into English as "happiness," usually focused on this third definition. Beginning with Plato's Socratic dialogues, *eudaimonia* is a life well lived; it is well-being or flourishing. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle claim that *eudaimonia* includes virtue, so a morally good life is necessary for the happy (eudaimonistic) life. This introduces the second major question: Is being virtuous part of what it is to lead a happy life, or could one be virtuous and still be unhappy (in the rich sense of flourishing)? For Plato, the virtuous life is the happy life; the virtuous person is flourishing, even if hated, slandered, and pained. For Aristotle, virtue is required for happiness, but it is not sufficient for it (that is, one cannot be truly happy unless one is virtuous, but being virtuous does not guarantee a happy life).

Returning to the issue of what happiness is, Epicurus is the most famous proponent of hedonism, the view that happiness can be reduced to experiences of pleasure and pain. Virtue allows one to be happy (by allowing one to practice self-control to reach delayed pleasures, for instance), but virtue is not identical to happiness, says Epicurus. Medieval philosophers tended to reorient happiness around knowing God (especially in the beatific vision), and they emphasized mercy, forgiveness, and especially love as virtues, which ancient philosophers (especially the Stoics) tended to downplay or outright disdain.

Starting in the seventeenth century, questions of rightness (how one should act) were typically separated from questions of goodness (what is valuable). This directly affects questions about the nature of the good life, because it was no longer assumed that doing what is right will

promote one's own or others' well-being. So for Kant, happiness is a fleeting psychological state dependent on external circumstances and thus poorly suited for a universal, necessary theory of right action, which could only be based on rationality. However, for hedonists like John Stuart Mill and Henry Sidgwick, pleasure is valuable and pain is disvaluable, and they argue that right action is promoting pleasure and minimizing pain for all. By explicitly casting moral theory as universal (treating all persons as moral subjects) and independent of one's own well-being, modern ethicists faced a problem of illustrating the motivating reasons for acting for the sake of others when that disadvantages one's own well-being. That is, "why be moral?" takes on new importance. (Ancient eudaimonistic theories do not face a strong version of this because it is rational and good to act in one's self-interest, and medieval theists identified one's self-interest with God's plan for one's life.) Additionally, fewer modern than medieval philosophers identify the good life with knowledge or love of God.

Among the critics of modern moral theory (as I've glossed it), Nietzsche opposed its reliance on "slave" virtues, its reliance on a false theory of agency, and its denial of life; Leo Tolstoy opposed its displacement of faith from the core of living; and Elizabeth Anscombe argued that secular, modern moral theories failed to give an adequate basis for their frequent use of "ought" and "right." Tolstoy is particularly interesting because he formulates a question that dominated the twentieth century discussions. Even if one is in a psychological state of happiness, there seems to be a question that remains: "Is this all there is?" Or in Tolstoy's phrasing, "What is it for? What does it lead to?" Tolstoy's question (and Nietzsche's answer) was picked up by Sartre, Camus, and others who thought that there was no answer to Tolstoy's question. Sartre, for instance, says existentialism begins with the realization that there is no creator God, and thus there is no design or purpose or human nature that could provide meaning or ground ethics.[16]

Recently there has been an influx of new philosophical writing on the meaning of life, but no obvious trends have emerged.[17]

To summarize, in discussing the good life, we could focus on one of three axes of evaluation: goodness, happiness, and meaningfulness. These might be distinct, or they might be overlapping, or they might be identical. Some define goodness as what leads to one's happiness, some argue that meaningfulness reduces to goodness, and so on. When discussing the connection between cinephilia and the good life, I am using "good life" in the broadest sense, which includes the morally good life, the happy life, and the meaningful life. My pedagogical model posits cinephilia's potential contribution to university instructors' attempts to encourage students to seek lives that are meaningful, happy, and good.

<A>Cinephilia and the Good Life<\>

Let's assume for the moment that one of the goals of instruction in philosophy is to encourage students to reflect on, explore, and attempt to live a life that is happy, meaningful, and good. (I address objections to this assumption in the next section.) What can cinephilia contribute? We don't need to make all students into cinephiles, but by exhibiting our own cinephilia and encouraging it in our students, we can develop transferable virtues, by which I mean those character traits that cinephiles exhibit but which would serve anyone well.

Cinephiles take joy in discovering new things. They enjoy not just new films or recognized classics, but forgotten films, actors whose work is no longer appreciated, cinematographers who capture surprising moments, and other talents who contributed to making films. Cinephiles are fond of treading off the beaten path, looking for hidden gems, or simply enjoying the small pleasures of a mediocre film. They wonder why others love what they love, so they pursue new experiences to see if they can love it, too. Curiosity and adventurousness are

what I am calling transferable virtues. People who are curious and adventurous in their tastes are more likely to live lives that are happy, good, and meaningful. So even if our students never fall in love with film, they will have seen what it is like to be curious and adventurous in one's tastes and with those attributes modeled they can transfer them into their own passions. Other transferable virtues of the cinephile are careful attention, joy in exploration, appreciation of beauty and achievement and innovation in art, and desire for understanding. These are some of the most useful traits to develop because they lead to other valuable goods.

In addition to practicing these virtues, cinephiles form communities to share their discoveries. Cinephilia drives one to seek out like-minded persons, and, as Jonathan Rosenbaum reminds us in his calls for a stronger cinephiliac community, it should also encourage information sharing that crosses affiliations (e.g., academics, journalists, filmmakers).[18] To turn to one of Rosenbaum's *Movie Mutations* correspondents, Adrian Martin advocates a cinephilia that embodies "mutual reflection," "cross-cultural understanding," and looks "to find certain insights into our own situations whenever we can."[19] I doubt that I am alone in wishing my students would find ways of navigating beyond their own experiences with curiosity and reflection. This is a partial list of the character traits that cinephilia develops, and it doesn't yet include the pursuit of and appreciation of beauty or resonant stories and characters. If we can find a way to have students become cinephiles--or if not become cinephiles, at least see these virtues modeled by cinephiles--then our students have an opportunity to evaluate those traits and decide if they want to pursue them.

Would turning our students into cinephiles make them happier? There's no reason to think that cinephiles are any more or less happy from moment to moment than other people, but we probably don't need to make these interpersonal judgments. Instead, we can demonstrate to

students what it is like to have short-term and long-term goals that are united around a conception of the sort of life we want to live. While modeling that life, we need not impose our goals on them, but we can show how a life involving those goals creates benchmarks by which we can measure our pursuit of a happy, meaningful life. Even if our goals are set for purely subjective reasons, our lives are objectively worse when we do not achieve the goals that are important to us.

For instance, I am waiting to watch Jacques Tati's *Playtime* until I can see it projected in 70mm. However, with the conversion of commercial theaters to digital projectors, the destruction and decay of most of the film prints ever made, and the fact that I probably live a thousand miles from the nearest active, working 70mm projector, it is unlikely that I will ever attain this goal. Now, would my life be some great failure if I never saw this? No, not a great failure. But would it be a little worse? Yes, I think so. That I care about this goal makes it modestly important in a way that it wouldn't be modestly important to someone who didn't have this care. Philosophers often focus on whether there are particular objective goods that all people should have, but I will make only the more modest claim that it is plausible that some things are good for a person at least partly because the individual values them, so we can objectively evaluate lives based on whether they achieve goals that they have set. If someone wants to have children and they do have children, their lives can be judged as better than if they never had children. If someone wants to be remembered as a kind and generous person, but they are remembered as a cruel and selfish person, then their life is worse by a standard that mattered to them.[20]

With this objective standard of meeting subjectively determined goals, we can determine what sort of life would be the most likely to make us happy, help us find meaning, and develop

the character traits necessary for this life. By modeling this for students, they may become cinephiles who adopt those same goals and virtues, or (more likely) they find their own communities, practices, and goals that they can use to organize their life. This is a much richer, more long-lasting, and more important set of goals than the content-bearer assumption connected to the philosophy through film model. In cinephilia, *what the film says, illustrates, or argues* is but one of many worthwhile ways of engaging with a film. Loving films, searching out new experiences, having transformative aesthetic experiences, appreciating unexpected moments of wonder in otherwise unremarkable films--these and others suggest a more comprehensive approach to films and a more comprehensive approach to life. These further ways of engaging with films are also more in line with the long-term goals we should be considering when we are teaching. If we want students who don't just learn what's on the syllabus, but who learn to love learning itself; if we want students who don't just read the assignments, but who seek out new information; if we want students who don't expect to receive passively content provided by the instructor, but who make their education their own; then we will want to develop those character traits like curiosity, ingenuity, humility, self-reliance, and artistic appreciation. These traits aren't just valuable for the cinephile, but for everyone.

To clarify, my argument has not been that cinephilia is required to live a good life. One ugly consequence of such a strong view would be that anyone who had lived without access to cinema could not have lived a good life, an absurd thesis that would mean 99% of the people ever to have lived could not have lived a good life. My claim is that the qualities distinctive of cinephilia are those very qualities that plausibly contribute to a good life or, at least, provide one model for students of how to pursue a life of their choosing. The precise object of those qualities (what is loved, what is appreciated, what arouses curiosity) could be most anything. (I do think

there are some restrictions on what one could love in living a good life; loving the torture of animals is off-limits, for instance.) What matters for the argument is (1) that cinephilia exhibits these virtues and (2) that students often arrive in college aware of film, engaged with film, and primed to fall further in love with film, which makes cinephilia an excellent entry point for the discussion of the good life.

<A>The Good Life? Really?<\>

Some readers might be surprised by the emphasis I have placed on the role of the good life within academic philosophy. Many now think that such questions are no longer discussed. I am happy to report that the academic study of philosophy, despite recent reports to the contrary, still asks the classical question, "what is a good life?" Despite this, a cottage industry has developed out of the claim that universities in general, and the humanities in particular, have given up on the big questions about humans' place in the universe and the meaning or meanings of the lives we lead.

The ur-text for these discussions over the last twenty-five years is Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*. In detailing the "decomposition of the university," he claims, "In it [the humanities] there is no semblance of order, no serious account of what should and should not belong, or of what its disciplines are trying to accomplish or how."[21] Thus, students are left adrift without the texts or the tools to answer the big questions to which they seek answers. Many more books and articles followed in Bloom's wake, often explicitly political in nature.[22] Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* (which went through three editions) and Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* (which launched his public career), to name two prominent examples, combined Bloom's criticism that universities had stopped asking the big questions with the politicized polemics that recalled *God and Man at Yale* by William F. Buckley, Jr.[23] Such jeremiads often

focus on perceived threats to established disciplines and methods. Kimball names the purported threats. "It is no secret that the academic study of the humanities in this country is in a state of crisis. Proponents of deconstruction, feminist studies, and other politically motivated challenges to the traditional tenets of humanistic study have by now become the dominant voice in the humanities departments of many of our best colleges and universities."[24] These perceived challenges were often tied to concerns over political correctness, which was said to have a chilling effect on universities.[25]

These stories often focus on departments other than philosophy because these trends have been less pronounced in philosophy than in other humanities departments. The decline in writing about the good life in Anglo-American philosophy is largely due to a twentieth-century movement known as analytic philosophy. This family of movements within academic philosophy emphasized conceptual analysis, valorized science as the only route to understanding the world, posed (then later rejected, then still later reconsidered) a deep logical grammar discoverable within language, and dismissed aesthetic, religious, and ethical claims as either without meaning or simply expressions of emotional states with no cognitive content. Elements of this approach live on, particularly in what is increasingly called "naturalist" philosophy. For many of those linked to this family of traditions, questions about the good life appeared meaningless, irresolvable, or (minimally) not philosophy's primary aim. As Scott Soames writes in his important history of the period,

<EXT>In general, philosophy done in the analytic tradition aims at truth and knowledge, as opposed to moral or spiritual improvement. There is very little in the way of practical or inspirational guides in the art of living to be found, and very much in the way of philosophical theories that purport to reveal the truth

about a given domain of inquiry. In general, the goal in analytic philosophy is to

discover what is true, not to provide a useful recipe for living one's life.[26]<\>

Given the philosophers that Soames focuses on (a coterie of very influential German, British,

American, and Australian philosophers), this is largely right.[27] Put succinctly, it was not so much

the rise of cultural studies, deconstruction, or other late-twentieth-century movements that

redirected *philosophy* away from asking about the good life, but a commitment to philosophy as

a science or as a preparation for a scientific understanding of the world that displaced this

question.[28]

Even though this was the major trend in English-language philosophy for much of the

twentieth century, it is not as though the question was ever too far from philosophers' minds.

Even restricting ourselves to England and America, pragmatists like William James, John

Dewey, and Jane Addams, neo-Thomists influenced by Étienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain,

and of course the many existentialists, phenomenologists, postmodernists, idealists, and

historians of philosophy continued asking the classical questions. Saying that philosophy in the

twentieth century ignored questions about the meaning of life conflates analytic philosophy with

all of English-language philosophy.

Expanding beyond philosophy again, there is something troubling about these critics'

claim that rise of cultural studies somehow diminished or removed the central questions of how

we should live. In fact, one of the recurring themes of cultural studies is that any attempted

depiction of the goodness or meaningfulness of life that restricts itself to only a few voices is

unlikely to capture what is good or meaningful about people's experiences. Studies of class,

sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and more provide new ways of thinking about lives, not the

suffocation of the most important questions. Other trends in the humanities, such as

deconstruction, are also meant to be individually liberating as one recognizes the problems inherent in the system one receives and employs tools to overcome those problems. Whether one restricts oneself to the trends within philosophy or within the humanities generally, it was never the case that questions of the good life were absent. Perhaps more importantly, so what if they were? They need not be now.

<A>Is This Our Role as Educators?<\>

A second criticism is that, regardless of what has been taught, the good life, or cinephilia, or both *should not* be part of what philosophy departments teach. My focus on laying out the theoretical space and showing that cinephilia has a place in academic pedagogy in philosophy is very odd in a certain way. Cinephilia is, etymologically, historically, and avowedly, a *love* of cinema; perhaps, too, instructing someone in the good life is similarly paternalistic. What I have been advocating is thus something strange: we should teach students to love or tell them how to live. Objections to this idea are of two general sorts: love cannot be taught, and love ought not be taught. I'll start with the latter.

On a particular construal of the purpose of education, love has no place. Education exists to create citizens, or future job-holders, or future job-creators. Or, as it is sometimes more narrowly cast, *publicly funded* education should serve the public good, which is then typically defined in terms of "job skills."[29] On this view of education, teaching students to love anything is off-point at best and counterproductive at worst. I cannot respond adequately to this line of thought, but, although ubiquitous, this view is both false and pernicious. Even on the assumption that this narrow view of education is correct, developing a love of learning, facility with cultural difference, and careful attention are precisely the sort of skills that will make for successful citizens, employees, and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, as some of the considerations of the good

life draw out, having a job and participating in society are instrumental goods that bring about those things that are truly valuable: happiness, goodness, meaning. To focus only on those instrumental goods would be a potentially devastating mistake.

On the point that love cannot be taught, surely this is right in some strict sense. It would be very odd for me to evaluate my students at the end of the semester according to how much they love my partner or their partner or God or science or *The Court Jester* or Juliette Binoche. We can't both "teach to the test" and require that our students love. We don't list "love" under Course Objectives on the syllabus. (Although perhaps words like "appreciate," "deepen," and "engage" might sneak the idea in surreptitiously.) This narrow understanding of teaching, though, is not the only way to teach. We can, to use terms I have repeated throughout, *model* love for our students and *encourage* them to find something they love and pursue it. We are fostering an ability to love and the ability to choose (or be chosen by) what they will love. Many of them, sadly, won't love *films* as we do, but we can show them the benefits of passionately loving something so that your whole person is engaged in the pursuit of it.

<A>Applications and Conclusions<\>

How does teaching philosophy of film in the cinephiliac mode look? In this final section, I will discuss specifics of how I have used this approach in introduction to philosophy (100-level) and philosophy of film (300-level) courses. After motivating this approach further, I turn to specifics. Some of what I say here will be relevant to anyone teaching film outside of cinema studies departments, who wants to blend their discipline's methods and questions with those from cinema studies. These hurdles are lessened somewhat for departments with strong institutional, historical, and methodological connections to cinema studies, such as communication studies, American studies, and comparative literature; students are more likely to

be familiar with the tools, readings, and approaches that often developed in communication between these disciplines. The pedagogical problem, for those of us who teach with films but are not housed in cinema studies departments, is double-edged: increase students' theoretical and affective engagement with films, while also introducing them to our own discipline's questions and methods. For those of us committed to incorporating the insights and perspectives of cinema studies in our courses, the time constraints of a semester are real. Furthermore, it is pedagogically imprudent to delay the material that students came to study by introducing a lot of theoretical groundwork whose value will only become apparent later.

On these very real teaching concerns, the *philosophy and pop culture* books are little help. *Philosophy through film* essays and books rarely engage with writing from outside of philosophy, so teaching from them does little to introduce students to the questions and methods of other disciplines. Those who teach and write with the *philosophy of film* approach often downplay or dismiss scholarship in cinema studies, which has created an information silo, with philosophical writing separated from film historical and theoretical writing.

One option would be to leave films out of the curriculum. However, it is not in the best interests of our students or ourselves to teach films only in cinema studies courses. No discipline should have exclusive claim to a set of texts or cultural objects, even if the discipline is as methodologically diverse as cinema studies. Additionally, cinema studies thrives on interdisciplinarity. The field benefits from the work done in adjacent disciplines to illuminate concepts, generate ideas, and refine approaches. Finally, students are often very familiar with filmic texts, even if their filmic literacy is underdeveloped, so other disciplines can provide richer educational experiences by incorporating films. The ubiquity of films, their affective potential, their social importance, their interest to students--there are simply too many

pedagogical reasons to teach with films for us to ignore them completely.

As a potential solution for philosophers who love film, want to use films in our teaching, but are wary of or disappointed in the existing methods, I have suggested that modeling cinephilia encourages students to reflect on those practices and character traits that are possibly constitutive of a life that is happy, meaningful, and good. In connecting cinephilia to the good life, we offer a richer approach to the use of films in the philosophy classroom and connect the theoretical questions of the good life to a practical instantiation of one answer to them. How might the model I have described work in the classroom? To extend and apply the approach I have described and defended to this point, I will lay out two examples from my own teaching. The first is from a 300-level Philosophy of Film course; the second is from a 100-level Introduction to Philosophy course.

Early in my 300-level Philosophy of Film course, taught at a state university to students who often have little or no background in either philosophy or cinema studies, we watch an entire film together. The last two years, I have screened *Coherence*, a 2012 micro-budget narrative feature from writer-director James Ward Byrkit and producer Lene Bausager. After giving students the title and no further information, after the opening credits sequence, at approximately the 20-minute mark, at the 40-minute mark, and at the end of the film, I pause the film and ask students to write down every question they can think of. I then collect their questions (usually by e-mail), collate them, and then as a class project I put the questions up on the screen in an editable document. Together we group the questions into categories, discussing which ones can be answered by later events or close watching of the film and which need additional thought or research.

The point of watching the film together is not to get them to ask philosophers' standard

questions of what the film is *saying* or *arguing*. In fact, I choose *Coherence* in part because it refuses to answer philosophical questions like "what is the explanation for these events?" and "is this metaphysically possible?" and "does this character make the ethically correct choice?" Rather, I encourage students to ask as many different questions as they can. Typically, most of their questions regard plotting (what will happen next?) or request clarification (e.g., what's the relationship between these two characters?). Some questions open up further discussion: why did the filmmakers choose a particular aesthetic, how did they achieve that aesthetic, why do certain filmmaking roles show up in opening credits, how are we encouraged to empathize or identify with certain characters, what should we make of viewers' moral objections to characters' behavior, does the film settle questions about multiverses and branching spacetimes, what are we expected to assume about the rules in fictional universes, how does the film's independent production and lack of A-list stars affect the way that we view the film, and so on. Encouraging students to ask their own questions of films and learning from the questions that others ask are two of the best ways I know to help students understand how and why to love films.

My ultimate goal in this course assignment is to show how the tools, methods, and questions of philosophy and related disciplines can help students pose and answer their own questions and the questions they had never thought to ask before. It is important not to set the bounds too early of what is or is not a legitimate question (or a legitimate philosophical question). With questions that matter to them (because they asked them), we then ask figure out how to answer them. What new knowledge do we need? What tools do we need? By not limiting ourselves at the outset to only the question of what a film is arguing or claiming, students realize that to learn what they want to learn and to view films in exciting new ways, they will need to read and discuss much more widely than what philosophers or critics have written about a

particular film. Unlike the *philosophy through film* approach, which encourages students to focus on a single thematic or narrative element, this approach is both student-started and wide-ranging. Unlike another common *philosophy of film* approach, this assignment requires students to pay close attention to a particular film, rather than discuss structural elements common to groups of films. By posing questions before covering topics, students can be encouraged to see how later class sessions will build off questions they already have while also posing new questions they hadn't thought to ask. Ideally, the course topics can even be amended to focus on the questions that students raised in these opening sessions.

For subsequent class sessions, I assign readings from philosophers, historians, film theorists, journalists, critics, and filmmakers to help students see how people with diverse professional interests can approach questions regarding medium-specificity or the sanctity of the theater or auteurism in divergent and overlapping ways. The questions I ask in each class session contain a mixture of standard philosophical questions (such as the role of a filmmaker's intentions in determining a film's meaning and whether narratives can make arguments) and questions that students are familiar with but are unlikely to have posed in a classroom (such as the ethics of spoiling a movie's end and of texting in theaters, what obligations "based on a true story" claims create for the filmmakers and the audience, and what makes a film performance distinct from other types of performance).[30] This models active scholarship that doesn't stop at disciplinary boundaries or even at the classroom door, while broadening students' perspective on what can be thought and done.

Blending methods, viewpoints, and issues from diverse sources is more difficult in an introductory philosophy class. I have experimented with using films in the way described, but I find that only in classes with small numbers and alternative schedules (such as intensive,

between-semester courses common at some American schools) is it effective. However, a simpler version can work in a standard semester-long introduction to philosophy course. Rather than use films as illustrations of the theories we discuss (*The Matrix* as skeptical scenario, for instance), we can model cinephiliac virtues through how we present films. To give one example, when discussing what activities or experiences would make for the best sort of life, students inevitably raise the question of whether there are objectively true, interpersonal judgments about what sort of experiences are best. At this point, I might show a favorite Buster Keaton short, such as *The Goat*. Few of my students are familiar with films from the silent (pre-synchronized sound) era, so not only do they have a new experience (which lends itself to talking about whether seeking out new experiences is part of living a good life) but I can ramble on passionately about the genius of Keaton and his stock cast and crew, the value of laughing, learning to appreciate how technology and film style interrelate, and any number of seeming digressions. Students don't just discuss the value of new experiences; they have a new experience (a positive one, I would hope, with Keaton). Curiosity and joy in discovery are key cinephiliac virtues, and creating an environment in which students can experience those is an important part of education. Exhibiting how to harness one's passions for film, or anything else (within limit), into worthwhile pursuits is part of what we can do as educators.

One of my emphases in this final section has been displacing a topic-based approach to a question-encouraging model of teaching with film. Both new and experienced teachers can fall into the trap of teaching so as to cover the material. In our attempts to cover the material, we shift the focus from students learning, exploring, and improving to checking items off a list. There are often sound pedagogical reasons for teaching the material we do (e.g., students need proficiency at a skill or familiarity with a topic to take the next course in a sequence), but there

are ways to fight the urge to fill the course with topics to cover (and thus items to check off a list) rather than on student-focused educational goals. Rediscovering our own love for what we teach, reflecting on that, then finding ways to encourage our students to love and pursue what interests them is one of the joys and challenges of teaching—and surely must urge us toward our own cultivations of the good life.

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1 "Popular Culture and Philosophy® Series," *Open Court Publishing Company*, accessed May 30, 2016, http://www.opencourtbooks.com/categories/pcp.htm.

2 "Wiley: The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series," accessed May 30, 2016, www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-32435.html

3 "Philosophers on Film," *Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group*, accessed May 30, 2016, http://www.routledge.com/books/series/philosophers_on_film_PHILFILM/.

4 Thomas E Wartenberg, *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2007), 32-54.

5 The model I propose need not completely displace the philosophy through film approach; it could supplement it. I am not providing a sustained critique of specific arguments for film as philosophy, but merely pointing out their pedagogical shortcomings. For this reason, I am focusing on the advantages of the richer cinephiliac model rather than arguing that we should never use the film as philosophy model.

6 Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 1996, sec. Books, http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/03/12/specials/sontag-cinema.html; Andrew O'Hehir, "Is Movie Culture Dead?," *Salon*, n.d.,

http://www.salon.com/2012/09/28/is_movie_culture_dead/.

7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1887).

8 Aristotle defended such a view, as did medieval Aristotelians like Thomas Aquinas, and neo-Aristotelians like Alasdair MacIntyre, but the approach is broader than anything Aristotle wrote or directly influenced. For instance, even Nietzsche's historical account of the ways in which moral concepts and attitudes are embedded in cultural practices fits this broad description.

9 I do not address many of the philosophical questions lingering, such as whether some virtues are required for success at any practice or whether some practices are illegitimate. My account is incomplete, perhaps necessarily so, but it is true enough and sufficient for the argument that follows.

10 I'm reminded of a conversation I had with an acquaintance. He described himself as someone who loves "all sorts of movies, except the ones with those little angel wings." (He was referring to the laurel wreaths used in promotional materials to signify film festival awards or selections.) Further questions revealed that he was only interested in recent, Hollywood studio-financed films in a variety of popular genres. He would not qualify as a cinephile by the definition I am using.

11 On the rift between academic scholars and "cinephiliac intellectuals" and the possibility of complementary work, see David Bordwell, "Academics Vs. Critics," *FilmComment*, accessed December 28, 2013, http://www.filmcomment.com/article/never-the-twain-shall-meet.

12 Molly Haskell's reflection on changing movie theater experiences is typical in some ways but without a thick residue of nostalgia: Molly Haskell, "It Used to Be So Easy. I Remember

When...," *New York Times*, March 14, 2003,

http://www.mollyhaskell.com/it_used_to_be_so_easy__i_remember_when____39111.htm.

13 This roughly follows the distinction within ethics between theories that focus on the virtues (virtue theories), those that focus on conformity of actions to a set of moral rules (deontological theories), and those that focus on the consequences of one's actions (consequentialist theories). Nothing I say turns on defending one of these over another. I talk about developing specific virtues (positive character traits), but most moral theories from each of the three categories accept that it is good to develop these character traits. For instance, a consequentialist would accept that we should be generous or fair or courageous because these lead us to act in ways that produce the best consequences. A deontologist like Immanuel Kant defends virtues as allowing one to do one's duty.

14 Reducing happiness (also called "well-being" or "welfare") to pleasure and pain is known as *hedonism*. Hedonism does not, as often thought, require seeking peak pleasures. For instance, some hedonists, like Epicurus, focus on minimizing pain. Alternative theories of happiness include *mental statism* (happiness reduces to experiences, but experiences do not reduce to pleasure and pain alone), *desire satisfaction theory* (happiness is having one's desires satisfied), *objective list theories* (happiness is meeting a living a life that meets a set of criteria that apply to all people), and *perfectionism* (happiness is fulfilling one's purpose as a human being or fulfilling one's nature.) For a summary of arguments for and against these theories, see Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), 29ff. Nothing in our discussion turns on one of these being the correct theory, but note that perfectionistic theories typically deny a distinction between a happy life, a meaningful life, and a good life.

15 Susan Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*, University Center for Human Values

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 10-11. "According to the conception of meaningfulness I wish to propose, meaning arises from loving objects worthy of love and engaging with them in a positive way." Ibid., 8.

16 Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession* (Ægypan Press, 1879); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (Yale University Press, 2007); Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33:124, 1958.

17 For some examples, see John Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003); Julian Baggini, *What's It All About? Philosophy and the Meaning of Life* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Terry Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*.

18 Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin, eds., *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), ix.

19 Ibid.

20 That a goal or experience matters to a person elevates its importance, but there are limits to this. For instance, a person who finds pleasure in torturing others and who wants to torture a human being born in every country has a subjectively provided goal but one that seems to be impermissible. While some might say their life goes better because they achieved this goal, I think we ought to conclude that their goal was so misguided that their life actually was worse because they achieved it. Provided that cinephilia does not violate some sort of prohibition like this, then we should think that achieving their goals and sustaining the life they've chosen contributes to their living the good life.

21 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (Simon Schuster Trade, 1987), 371.

22 For two examples of books that follow Bloom's lead in arguing that universities have lost sight of their mission to transform teenagers into thoughtful adults, but without the belabored attacks on political correctness and cultural studies, see Alexander W Astin, Helen S Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010). and Harry R Lewis, *Excellence Without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006).

23 Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (Chicago, Ill.: Ivan R. Dee, 2008); Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York; Toronto; New York: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan Canada ; Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991); William F Buckley, *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of "Academic Freedom"* (South Bend, Ind.: Gateway Editions, 1977).

24 Kimball, *Tenured Radicals*, 1.

25 The books that I have referenced as representative were published in the late 1980s and 1990s. For a recent collection of essays focused on the way that political correctness is claimed to be harming universities, see Robert Maranto et al., *The Politically Correct University: Problems, Scope, and Reforms* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 2009).

26 Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century: The Dawn of Analysis*, vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), xiv.

27 One exception is Ludwig Wittgenstein, who plays an important role in Soames' story (and in most histories of the period), but who certainly saw philosophy as intimately tied to living life well, although he did not believe that philosophy's contribution is always positive.

28 If we narrow from "what is the good life?" to "what makes a life meaningful?" there is even less written. Robert Adams similarly claims, "Philosophers, at least in the English-speaking

world, have published relatively little about meaningfulness in life, despite its apparently profound human importance. We have found the concept of it a tough nut to crack and pry open" (Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*, 75).

29 This is the new "crisis of the humanities," in which students are said to be voting with their feet and fleeing humanities disciplines since the 1970s, or are entering a job market for which they are unprepared, or are attending universities that are financially unsustainable For a general statement of the concern, see Tamar Lewin, "As Interest Fades in the Humanities, Colleges Worry," *The New York Times*, October 30, 2013, sec. Education, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/31/education/as-interest-fades-in-the-humanities-colleges-worry.html. and Jennifer Levitz and Douglas Belkin, "Humanities Fall From Favor," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2013, sec. U.S. News, http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324069104578527642373232184. This narrative of crisis is not born out by the data, however, as shown by David Silbey, "A Crisis in the Humanities? - The Edge of the American West," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, accessed December 21, 2013, http://chronicle.com/blognetwork/edgeofthewest/2013/06/10/the-humanities-crisis/. and Michael Bérubé, "The Humanities, Declining? Not According to the Numbers.," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 1, 2013, http://chronicle.com/article/The-Humanities-Declining-Not/140093/. and Nate Silver, "As More Attend College, Majors Become More Career-Focused," *FiveThirtyEight*, accessed December 21, 2013, http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/25/as-more-attend-college-majors-become-more-career-focused/. Additional important points are made by Gary Gutting, "The Real Humanities Crisis," *Opinionator*, accessed December 21, 2013, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/30/the-real-humanities-crisis/.

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[30] In Philosophy of Film, we spend about 5% of our total class time on the philosophy through film approach. Through associated readings and a very brief lecture, I introduce key positions and arguments about whether films can make philosophical arguments or claims. Students do one required class presentation on a reading that their classmates have not read, and a couple of the options are philosophy through film essays.