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AESTHETICS in the AGE of NEW MEDIA

Edited by Lorenzo Serini and Marta Vero

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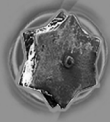
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*The Philosophy of Popular Culture and the
Unpopularity of Philosophy:*

*A Medieval Love Story with Three Acts and an
Unhappy Ending*

Stuart Dalton

Abstract

I argue that a current effort to popularize philosophy by linking it to popular culture repeats some of the same misunderstandings and mistakes that occurred in the Middle Ages when philosophy linked itself to institutional religion.

In both cases philosophy loses its identity and becomes ridiculous in the pursuit of an impossible popularity.

Act 1

Philosophy began when two ideals came together to form an unstable partnership. The first ideal is the desire to know the world on its most basic level, to understand the ultimate nature of reality, knowledge and values. The other ideal is a faith in the power of independent thinking – the confidence that humans can discover the ultimate nature of things through their own thought, without deferring to any other authorities, traditions or institutions. When pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander or Heraclitus first dared to theorize about the ultimate nature of the world, and did so without appealing to any authority other than their own thinking, a fundamentally new mode of inquiry entered human history.

Like all partnerships, the partnership between these two ideals was not without tension. Thinking about the ultimate nature of things will give you something to say – perhaps even something marketable to say – about everything. Since philosophy chooses to be a subterranean activity, a cellar dweller, devoting all its time to examining the foundations of the values and beliefs that structure the world above, it has a natural, fundamental connection to every human activity and every aspect of human culture. It has the ability to comment about everything, and so

it can if it chooses immediately go into the business of cultural commentary. So, for example, when Heraclitus theorized that ‘one cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs’¹, he could have then immediately started a book series applying his radical theories about the impermanence of the world to every manifestation of popular culture that he could find in the 6th century BCE. And this could have been a very good book series, offering genuine insights into the pop culture of the day, because Heraclitus’ philosophy did indeed offer the possibility of a radical reinterpretation of every aspect of the world.

However Heraclitus chose not to spend any time criticizing popular culture because he placed an even greater value on philosophy’s second guiding principle: the ideal of thinking for oneself. Heraclitus came to be known as ‘Heraclitus the Obscure’ because he had no interest in popularizing his philosophy or making its application clear to anyone. He completed only one book, ‘having purposely written it rather obscurely so that only those of rank and influence should have access to it, and it should not be easily despised by the populace’². Heraclitus had no inter-

1 Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), p. 53.

2 Kirk, Raven and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), p. 183. Edward Hussey provides a good discussion of the intentional obscurity of Heraclitus’ writing in his essay, ‘Heraclitus,’ in A. A. Long, ed., *The Cambri-*

est in using his philosophy to understand popular culture because he was in too much of a hurry to understand himself. He knew that the point of independent thinking is to arrive at an independent understanding that will liberate one from the mistakes of the masses. ‘I went in search of myself’, he writes³, and so should everyone else: ‘It belongs to all men to know themselves and to think well’⁴; but it won’t be easy because (as he noted) ‘nature loves to hide’⁵ and ‘the Lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign’⁶.

The tension that Heraclitus sought to mediate in his own unique way, by writing with deliberate obscurity, originates in the fact that philosophy’s two guiding principles don’t really need each other: one can think about the ultimate nature of things without making any effort to think independently; and one can think independently without making any effort to think about the ultimate nature of things. Only something like love brings these two principles together, and as in all love affairs the partnership that results is fragile and there is always the possibility of betrayal. At its best the tension inherent in this rela-

dge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 88-112. Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that the obscurity of pre-Socratic philosophers such as Heraclitus is so great that we cannot even pretend to understand them. Instead he advocates studying pre-Socratic philosophy only through Plato and Aristotle, since these authors gave us more complete texts that are not impossibly fragmentary. See his book, *The Beginning of Philosophy*, trans. Rod Coltman (New York: Continuum, 2000).

3 Charles H. Kahn, *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

4 *Ibidem*.

5 *Ivi*, p. 33.

6 *Ivi*, p. 43.

tionship is a productive tension that catalyzes a serious conversation between the individual thinker and the world in which she finds herself. This produces the phenomenon well known to anyone who reads carefully any truly great text from the history of philosophy: it becomes impossible to neatly separate the three main areas of philosophy – metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. They transgress their traditional boundaries, intersecting and melding in a way that unifies the otherwise disparate and seemingly mutually exclusive projects of understanding oneself and understanding the world.

But there are also moments in the history of philosophy when the tension between thinking for yourself and thinking about the world becomes a dysfunctional tension that sets these two principles at odds with each other and leads to a distorted mode of inquiry that is far removed from the lofty idealism that characterized philosophy when it first made its appearance with the presocratics.

Act 2

One such moment is the very long interval (roughly 1100 years) that we call ‘medieval philosophy’. In the medieval period the ideal of independent thinking vanishes almost completely. Philosophy continues to investigate the ultimate nature of reality, knowledge and values, but it does so

now under the watchful eye of religion. Theological necessity and religious authority circumscribe the limits of what can be thought and philosophy becomes a contract employee of theology, completely surrendering its own independence.

However without question philosophy is more popular in the Middle Ages than at any other time in its history. Christianity was the cultural powerhouse of this time, and by hitching its wagon to this star philosophy gained fame and influence far beyond the meager impact of any individual philosopher, such as Socrates, who was such a failure in the popular culture of his own time that his fellow Athenians agreed that he did not deserve to live. No longer the outpost of the marginal and the obscure – strange people who even Plato acknowledged are mostly ‘cranks, not to say completely vicious, while those who seem decent are rendered useless to the city because of (their) studies’⁷ – in the Middle Ages philosophy becomes a ticket to genuine influence and power. Philosophers such as Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm, Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas Aquinas enjoy the sponsorship of an extremely powerful institution. They have excellent job security, and also the respect and admiration of the world. During the Middle Ages it’s unlikely that anyone asked philosophy students what they would do with their degree because there was a clear career

7 *Republic* 487d. John M. Cooper, *Plato: Collected Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

track open to them, along with opportunities for real power, privilege and cultural authority. For one brief, shining moment philosophy was popular.

But there was a steep price to pay for this popularity. Since philosophy had to give up its autonomy and do as it was told it could no longer claim to be the love of all wisdom, without preconceived limits. In exchange for surrendering its autonomy philosophy became an arbiter and interpreter of popular culture, but this arrangement required such a blatant imbalance between its two guiding ideals that it proved unsustainable; and so eventually the unstable and unhappy marriage of philosophy and religion ended in divorce. The price of the popularity that philosophy purchased in the Middle Ages was an excessive, unproductive and ultimately unbearable tension that kept philosophy and institutional religion from ever being good friends, and that led inevitably to a nasty break up.

Act 3

There's a very interesting phenomenon in contemporary philosophy that can be understood better when we consider what happened to philosophy in the Middle Ages. I refer to a certain style of applying philosophy to popular culture that is most immediately embodied by the three different series of 'X and Philosophy' books that are now published

by Blackwell, Open Court, and the University of Kentucky. I want to be very clear that I am not criticizing the philosophy of popular culture in general; only a particular style or approach to the philosophy of popular culture that has succeeded in becoming quite popular. While it is easiest to study this phenomenon initially by referring to the many 'X and Philosophy' books that have been published in the past few years, my intention is only to use those books as a means to understand something more basic and more general about philosophy itself. The 'X and Philosophy' books represent a certain subculture within the larger field of the philosophy of popular culture, a subculture dedicated primarily to popularizing philosophy. I will argue that this approach is fundamentally flawed and destined to fail. So as I discuss these books please keep in mind that this discussion is only a means to an end, an opportunity to understand something bigger: a mistake with very deep roots in the history of philosophy, and a mistake that remains a temptation and a trap which philosophy can easily fall into. The nature of this mistake – the larger target of this criticism – will become clear shortly.

The 'X and Philosophy' subculture began with the publication of *Seinfeld and Philosophy* in 1999, and since then 'X and Philosophy' books have appeared in rapid succession on everything from *SpongeBob SquarePants* to The Atkins Diet, Facebook, The

Boston Red Sox, *Battlestar Gallactica* and golf⁸. Given the speed with which new titles appear (over 180 since 1999), and how well these books sell (*The Simpsons and Philosophy* has sold over half a million copies), the ‘X and Philosophy’ industry would seem to be one of the greatest success stories in the approximately 2600 year history of philosophy. It is at the very least an anomaly that begs to be explained, and I believe it can be explained as a fundamentally medieval project – a repetition of the experiment in popularizing philosophy that took place in the Middle Ages. What is happening in the ‘X and Philosophy’ movement is analogous to medieval philosophy in several respects.

First, like philosophy in the Middle Ages, the ‘X and Philosophy’ subculture is constrained by the limitations of dogma and ritual. There are at least three distinct dogmas, and three corresponding rituals, that constrain philosophy within this subculture.

The first dogma is the unquestioned belief in the authority of fashion. This dogma translates into the following moral imperative: It is our highest duty as philosophers to immediately publish a book of essays on whatever is currently getting the most attention in the marketplace of popular culture. And there is no time to lose because the public has a very short attention span, so we must strike quickly or risk failing in our duty – because once a piece of pop-

8 Cfr. Especially Foy, Joseph J. (2011), Heldke, Lisa, Mommer, Korri, Pineo, Cynthia (2005), Wittkower, Dylan E. (2010), Steiff, Joseph, Tamplin, Tristan D. (2008), Wible, Andy (2010).

ular culture is no longer popular there is nothing left for philosophy to say about it. The demand for haste that is entailed by this dogma results in a fascinating ritual that has become quite well known since *Seinfeld and Philosophy* was published in 1999: as soon as an artifact of pop culture breaks out of the crowded field of mass entertainment and attains a certain aura of fame, a call for papers will quickly go forth from at least one (often more than one) of the 'X and Philosophy' book series. Everything is done in great haste, and the essays that appear in the volumes that are rushed to market generally sound like they were written under the looming threat of a deadline by authors who are breathlessly sprinting to finish as quickly as possible, since it is understood that no one knows the shelf life of the public's interest, and it would be truly tragic if the book of essays didn't appear until after its subject was already starting to fade from the public's attention. There is a moral imperative to work fast before the window of opportunity that fame has opened slams shut.

The speed with which this entire process occurs makes it clear that fashion is guiding these editorial choices rather than any kind of serious reflection about the merit of the project, and from the privileged perspective of hindsight some of the pop culture ephemera that were chosen for analysis in the past now seem quite hilarious⁹. Just as in the Middle

9 For example, *iPod and Philosophy: iCon of an ePoch* edited by D. E. Wittkower (2008), *Jimmy Buffett and Philosophy: The Porpoise Driven Life*, edited by Erin McKenna and Scott L. Pratt (2009) and *Harley-Davidson and Philosophy*:

Ages philosophy became an employee of institutional religion, in the current 'X and Philosophy' subculture philosophy becomes the willing servant of whatever happens to be popular at the moment. The immediacy demanded by the dogma of fashion undermines the spirit of independent reflection in philosophy captured so well when Wittgenstein remarked, 'This is how philosophers should salute each other: 'Take your time!''¹⁰ and also, 'In philosophy the winner of the race is the one who can run most slowly. Or: the one who gets there last'¹¹.

A second dogma that limits the 'X and Philosophy' subculture is the conviction that entertainment always takes precedence over insight. The moral imperative that follows from this article of faith is this: 'The philosophy of popular culture must be just as entertaining as popular culture itself, and if possible even more so!' It is understood that first and foremost philosophy must put on a good show, that it must entertain the audience. These convictions result in another fascinating ritual that has assumed a firmly established place in the 'X and Philosophy' subculture: the sad spectacle of philosophers trying to tell jokes, craft witty puns, and generally assume the role of stand up comedians. While it is obvious

Full-Throttle Aristotle, edited by Bernard E. Rollin, Carolyn M. Gray, Kerri Mommer, and Cynthia Pineo (2006). Please see the attached appendix, which includes a list of all the pop culture and philosophy books published to date in the three series.

¹⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 80.

¹¹ *Ivi*, p. 34.

that all the writers for the ‘X and Philosophy’ books have struggled mightily to do their duty in this regard, the fruits of their labor have been meager and decidedly not entertaining. The desperate desire to entertain is evident in painful essay titles such as these: ‘Flatulence and Philosophy: A Lot of Hot Air, or the Corruption of Youth?’; ‘The Sound of One House Clapping: The Unmannerly Doctor as Zen Rhetorician’; ‘Hey-diddily-ho, Neighboreenos: Ned Flanders and Neighborly Love’; ‘A (Karl, not Groucho) Marxist in Springfield’; and ‘Alfred, the Dark Knight of Faith: Batman and Kierkegaard’. These labored efforts to entertain provide additional documentation of a fact that has long been clearly manifest in the history of philosophy: that philosophers create the best comedy unintentionally, when they are trying to be serious. So all the effort expended to entertain in the ‘X and Philosophy’ subculture is totally unnecessary, and from a practical standpoint not very successful; but more importantly the dogma that entertainment takes precedence over insight becomes a severe limitation. Here again, as in the Middle Ages, philosophy subordinates its one and only talent – independent analysis and insight – to a higher authority, in this case the authority of the entertainment industry.

A final dogma that constrains the ‘X and Philosophy’ subculture is the conviction that philosophy is a means to an end but never an end in itself. As in the Middle ages, when philosophy was transformed

into a servant of theology – a stockpile of resources that could be put to work for the greater good of religion – in the ‘X and Philosophy’ subculture the history of philosophy is treated like a warehouse of assorted ideas and arguments that can be deployed (in a hurry) to analyze the latest products of pop culture. In this enterprise philosophy is a subordinate employee that anxiously waits for something to do – for the chance to prove that it can handle the job. In the Middle Ages there was constant debate about the very idea of giving philosophy a job, of allowing it to play any role at all in the more godly enterprise of institutional religion. And when philosophy was allowed to play a part in religion it was generally treated as a strange and static collection of odd tools created and also completed by the Greeks, not as a living dialogue or a continuing conversation that is valuable as an end in itself. That same utilitarian approach is characteristic of the ‘X and Philosophy’ subculture, which treats the history of philosophy as an odd collection of ideas from the past waiting to be put to work in the service of a higher good which is far more fashionable, entertaining and important than philosophy itself could ever hope to be.

These three dogmas and their corresponding rituals which permeate the ‘X and Philosophy’ subculture enervate the productive tension between knowing yourself and knowing the world and thereby render philosophy irrelevant to individual subjects who want to understand themselves. It is

evident in all of these dogmas and rituals that, like medieval philosophy, the 'X and Philosophy' subculture relies on a version of philosophy that simplifies and distorts philosophy's true nature. As I argued at the outset of this essay, philosophy is by nature an unstable partnership of two lofty ideals that are naturally in tension. It has always been the case that philosophy could comment endlessly on any human activity, including works of pop culture, since philosophy chooses to position itself amidst the founding assumptions of all that humans care about. Every philosophical theory is a revision of the world, and so every philosopher with a new idea can immediately go into business interpreting the world in all of its minute and ephemeral details. The only thing that stands in the way of such an enterprise is the pressure exerted by the other founding demand of philosophy: to know yourself by means of independent thinking – for this leads immediately to the conclusion that time is a precious commodity, since the time of anyone's life is finite, and therefore even though I can easily do a book length philosophical analysis of golf, the Boston Red Sox, or Sponge Bob Square pants, it's probably not worth my time, because the opportunity cost is too high.

The tension that is relevant here is not the mostly imagined tension between so called high and low culture; rather it's the very real and potentially productive tension between the desire to understand myself and the desire to understand the world. The

‘X and Philosophy’ subculture tries to eliminate that tension by largely silencing the demands of independent thinking. Thinking for yourself also entails thinking about yourself – the willingness to examine and reject the beliefs and values that you have used to structure your own existence. If philosophy tries to eliminate that tension by ignoring the demands of independent thinking, it may be able to achieve unprecedented popularity but it will simultaneously become utterly irrelevant to an individual thinker who wants to understand herself.

Another religious dimension of the ‘X and Philosophy’ subculture that connects it to the Middle Ages is its evangelizing, proselytizing spirit. Defenders of the ‘X and Philosophy’ enterprise argue that their work should be seen as a kind of missionary undertaking – a way to spread the gospel of philosophy to the masses who otherwise would find it boring. Pop culture, it is argued, is just a convenient delivery mechanism, a way to get people to take their medicine¹². William Irwin, who edited the *Seinfeld and Philosophy* book, and has since served as the editor in chief of two of the three pop culture and philosophy book series currently in publication, summarizes the evangelizing argument thus: ‘As a discipline, we have had a public relations problem for a couple of centuries now, so engagement with popular culture is not an opportunity we can afford to miss’¹³. The ‘mis-

12 William Irwin, ‘Fancy Taking A Pop?’ (*The Philosophers’ Magazine*, vol. 49, issue 2, 2010, p. 49).

13 William Irwin, ‘Philosophy Engages Popular Culture: An Introduction’ in *Phi-*

sion' of the 'X and Philosophy' approach, he writes, is 'reaching as many varied people as possible with philosophy' instead of 'preaching to the converted'¹⁴.

This proselytizing paradigm seems to create an enormous blind spot in the world of 'X and Philosophy.' It seems to leave all those involved convinced, with a missionary zeal, that however arduous the task of converting the world to the value of philosophy by means of cranking out books on the latest pop culture ephemera with breakneck speed, unfortunately there is simply no other way to spre-

Philosophy and the Interpretation of Pop Culture, ed. William Irwin and Jorge J. E. Gracia (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) 3.

¹⁴ Op. cit. note 12, p. 50. Irwin has continued to defend the 'X and Philosophy' books that he began in various articles, most recently 'Writing for the Reader: A Defense of Philosophy and Popular Culture Books.' (*Essays in Philosophy*, vol. 15, issue 1, 1/31/2014, pp. 77-85.) This latest essay is quite remarkable in that the only mention that is made of the Philosophy and Popular Culture Books that Irwin claims in the title to be defending, is in the first sentence where Irwin equates these books with 'public philosophy,' which he defines as the attempt to make philosophy understandable for non-specialists. Irwin then devotes the rest of the article to the not evenly remotely controversial thesis that it is better to write clearly than to write obscurely. The false equivalency upon which the article is predicated—that the 'X and Philosophy' books are nothing more than attempts to explain philosophy in clear language—leaves out the most obvious defining characteristic of these books: that they are always first and foremost about some currently fashionable artifact of popular culture and only secondarily about philosophy. Irwin's argument in this essay will also seem quite bizarre to anyone who has read a few of the essays in the 'X and Philosophy' books, because the quality of the writing in those essays is almost universally quite bad, with abundant traces of the rush to get them published in a hurry, before the artifact in question ceases to be fashionable. It is also fascinating to note Irwin's claim that: 'The negative comments about the pop culture and philosophy series generally take the form of those made by the Pseudonymous blogger Spiros'—and he then cites a 2-paragraph blog post which basically says nothing more than 'I don't really like these books.' (See: <http://philosophersanon.blogspot.com/2009/04/doom-pop-culture-and-philosophy.html>) This suggests that there has been no substantive criticism of these books, just a few negative 'comments' from anonymous cranks. This is a straw man attack which dismisses the very possibility of any kind of substantive criticism of the 'X and Philosophy' movement.

ad the gospel. This leads to overlooking so many other means of using philosophy to engage with popular culture in profound and productive ways. Here in no particular order are six examples of philosophy applied to popular culture in a manner that respects the guiding ideals of philosophy and yields genuine insights into the world. (1) Philosophers who have created works of their own in the media of popular culture such as novels, plays, films and TV programs. Some obvious examples here are the plays and novels of Jean-Paul Sartre¹⁵, Albert Camus¹⁶, Iris Murdoch¹⁷, and Rebecca Newberger Goldstein¹⁸. (2) Philosophers who have used popular culture as a way to clarify complicated theories. The most obvious example here is Slavoj Žižek, who has produced numerous books and films that very effectively use popular culture in this way¹⁹. (3) Philosophers who have used philosophy to make sense of current events. Perhaps the most famous example of this is Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*:

15 E.g. Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage, 1989) and *Nausea*, Trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1964).

16 E.g. Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, Trans. Matthew Ward (New York: Vintage, 1989).

17 E.g. Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (New York: Penguin, 2001); *The Sea, The Sea* (New York: Penguin, 2001); *A Severed Head* (New York: Penguin, 1976).

18 E. g. Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, *36 Arguments for the Existence of God* (New York: Vintage, 2010); *Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Won't Go Away* (New York: Pantheon, 2014); *The Mind-Body Problem* (New York: Random House, 1983).

19 E.g. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan In Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 2001); *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (A Film by Sophie Fiennes) (Zeitgeist Films, 2013).

*A Report on the Banality of Evil*²⁰. Stanley Milgram's famous experiments on obedience that were inspired by Arendt's analysis also stand out in this category²¹, and Kierkegaard's *The Present Age* belongs here as well²². (4) Comic books or graphic novels which summarize philosophical theories in a way that makes them easier to understand and more obviously relevant to contemporary concerns without distorting the central ideas or arguments of these theories. Recently there have been several fine examples of this sort of work, such as *Action Philosophers* by Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey²³, *Logicomix: An Epic Search for Truth* by Apostolos Doxiadis and Christos Papadimitriou²⁴, and *Philosophy for Beginners* by Richard Osborne and Ralph Edney²⁵. (5) Every version of applied philosophy is an effort to apply philosophy to the analysis of contemporary culture. Applied ethics fields such as medical ethics, business ethics, legal ethics, etc. are the most obvious examples²⁶. (6) Finally, philosophical aesthetics has a long

20 H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the Banality of Evil*, New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

21 Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009).

22 Soren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and The Present Age*, Trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978).

23 *The More Than Complete Action Philosophers* (Brooklyn: Evil Twin Comics, 2009).

24 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009).

25 (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1992). The 'X for Beginners' books started by Writers and Readers Publishing are often quite excellent, with engaging art along with accurate and succinct summaries of various philosophical theories. These books demonstrate that philosophy can remain true to itself while also taking full advantage of a medium of popular culture.

26 Gregory Pence continually updates his *Classic Cases in Medical Ethics* text to include new developments in medicine and new 'classic cases'—case studies

history of taking popular culture seriously and using the tools of philosophy to analyze it. This is the area where philosophy and popular culture have established the most productive and mutually respectful relationship. The 'X and Philosophy' movement sometimes attempts to appropriate the aesthetic analysis of popular culture as if there were no difference between them²⁷, but they really are quite distinct forms of engagement with popular culture. Some noteworthy examples in this category are authors such as Arthur Danto²⁸ and Noël Carroll²⁹ who have a long history of thinking deeply about the aesthetic depths and dimensions of popular culture. Aesthetics textbooks, reflecting this longstanding tradition of engaging with popular culture, typically have numerous essays dealing with popular culture in all of its manifold forms³⁰.

Another problem with the proselytizing paradigm that guides the 'X and Philosophy' books is that, however noble the intentions of the project, it

that serve particularly well to crystalize a particular ethical issue in the field of modern medicine.

- 27 Rob Loftis points out that the book *Philosophy and the Interpretation of Pop Culture* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), which was intended to be something of a manifesto and exemplar for the 'X and Philosophy' movement, is largely composed of essays on the aesthetics of popular culture, and 'aesthetics has been engaged with popular culture for a long time now.' See his review of the book in *Metapsychology Online Reviews*, http://metapsychology.men-talhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=book&id=4150, retrieved 4 March 2015.
- 28 E.g. *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986); *Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Historical Present* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1990); *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in the Post Historical Perspective* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1992).
- 29 E.g. *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).
- 30 Two good examples are Kathleen M. Higgins, *Aesthetics in Perspective* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, 1996) and David Goldblatt and Lee B. Brown, *Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts* (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005).

seems clear that its practical results are very poor. If the goal is to persuade people that philosophy is something other than opportunistic sophistry it's hard to imagine how books such as: *Dungeons and Dragons and Philosophy*, *Veronica Mars and Philosophy*, *Steve Jobs and Philosophy*, and *Lady Gaga and Philosophy* – will succeed in winning any new converts. If *Lady Gaga and Philosophy* really were someone's very first exposure to philosophy what kind of conversion experience can we expect? Would someone really segue from reading *Lady Gaga and Philosophy* to a perusal of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Plato's Republic, or any other work of actual philosophy? Isn't it far more likely that a reading of *Lady Gaga and Philosophy*, especially if it were followed by some reflection on all the other titles in the various 'X and Philosophy' book series³¹, would lead one to the conclusion that philosophy is a strange kind of cultural parasite that anxiously awaits the next popular TV show or pop singer so that it can quickly produce another collection of essays to entertain the masses?

Such a project is reminiscent of the performance of the sophists Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in Plato's dialogue *Euthydemus*. Their routine is so practiced and polished that they can put on a show using whatever topic anyone might propose.

But after watching them perform Socrates comments:

31 Again, please see the appendix for a complete current list.

These things are the frivolous part of study [...] and I call these things frivolity because even if a man were to learn many or all such things he would be none the wiser as to how matters stand [...]. So you must think of their performance as having been mere play³².

Doesn't it also seem clear that the primary reason any of these books sell is because the title induces some surprise and laughter by incongruously combining something that is currently very popular with – of all things – philosophy, which has never been popular? It's as if Lady Gaga suddenly announced that she is dating a 45 year old grad student named Brad who has been writing a dissertation on Hegel for the past 13 years: the news would be surprising, perhaps even somewhat funny, and for a brief moment it would grab the public's attention. But even these incongruous and amusing titles fail to be effective proselytizing tools. They will generate surprise and laughter only for someone who already knows something about philosophy – perhaps because she once tried to read the *Critique of Pure Reason* and found it very difficult – and so any preaching that the books effect is only preaching to the choir³³. For

³² *Euthydemus* 278b. John M. Cooper, Plato: *Collected Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

³³ I will hazard a guess that the vast majority of the pop culture and philosophy books that have been printed since 1999 were given away essentially as gag gifts to people who were already dedicated fans of the pop culture in question and found it slightly funny—worth at least one short laugh—to consider their favorite TV show as the incongruous object of somber philosophical reflection. If this is true then most of these books were never read. They were purchased because their title was funny; no one paid any attention to the contents of the

those who are not already converted, this missionary undertaking seems likely to win converts only for the view that philosophy is nothing more than a sophistic spectacle meant to entertain, and perhaps earn a little money in the process.

The (Unhappy) Ending

The final analogue between the ‘X and Philosophy’ subculture and medieval philosophy has been implicit in all of the analysis so far but it now needs to be rendered completely, even painfully, explicit because this is the primary underlying problem with the ‘X and Philosophy’ style of the philosophy of popular culture. This version of the philosophy of popular culture is primarily interested in using the popularity of popular culture to make philosophy popular. Popularizing philosophy is the primary purpose of this project, not knowledge, insight or wisdom. Such a project is a misguided attempt to transform philosophy into something that it never has been, and never can be. Thus it reflects a fundamental lack of self-knowledge on the part of philosophy, which makes philosophy look rather ridiculous, and it creates only confusion about how philosophy can be used to study popular culture. I will elaborate on all of these assertions in the remainder of the paper.

First of all, it is simply an empirical fact that philosophy – when it has been true to its nature – has never been popular. Thales was the first philosopher, and also the first person to be ridiculed for being a philosopher. A witty and attractive Thracian servant-girl is said to have mocked Thales for falling into a well while he was observing the stars and gazing upwards; declaring that he was eager to know the things in the sky, but that what was behind him and just by his feet escaped his notice³⁴. The only moment in the 2600 year history of philosophy when philosophy was not regarded as a marginal, unpopular, and somewhat ridiculous activity occurred in the Middle Ages, when philosophy gave up on maintaining any kind of sustainable balance between its competing ideals and thus effectively ceased to be philosophy.

Secondly, by its very nature philosophy is precluded in principle from being popular. As Bertrand Russell explained in his oft-quoted essay, ‘The Value of Philosophy’, it is philosophy’s fate to be forever ridiculed by witty and attractive Thracian servant-girls, and everyone else who finds philosophy absurd because it yields no certain answers – because whenever some subfield within philosophy does begin to get results it is instantly spun off into the latest practical science. ‘As soon as definite knowledge concerning any subject becomes possible, this subject ceases to be called philosophy, and now becomes a separate science’³⁵. ‘Phi-

34 Forrest E. Baird, *Philosophic Classics Volume 1: Ancient Philosophy* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2011) 8-9.

35 Bertrand Russell, ‘The Value of Philosophy,’ in Forest E. Baird, *Philosophic*

losophy is to be studied', Russell continued, 'not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good'³⁶.

This is the same aspect of philosophy that Schopenhauer referred to when he argued that philosophy can never be popular because,

[t]he philosopher's work [...] tries to revolutionize the reader's whole mode of thought. It demands of him that he shall acknowledge as error all that he has hitherto learnt and believed [...] that he shall declare all his time and trouble to be wasted; and that he shall begin again at the beginning³⁷.

The self-examination entailed by independent thinking doesn't require that philosophy become a solipsistic activity with no interest in understanding the world; that would also be an unbalanced and distorted version of philosophy that tries to silence

Classics From Plato to Derrida (New York: Prentice Hall, 2011) 1093.

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 1095.

³⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On Philosophy and Its Method,' in *Parerga and Paralipomena* volume 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974) pp. 5-6.

the natural tension between the desire to know yourself and the desire to know the world. Instead, the greatest works in the history of philosophy have been created when this tension became a productive force that generated a dialogue between the individual thinker and her world.

The pursuit of popularity only serves to make philosophy ridiculous. When philosophy does this the incongruity is really quite breathtaking: philosophy, the discipline that enjoins everyone to know themselves, demonstrates that it is utterly ignorant of itself. And the blame for such a comical misunderstanding rests entirely on philosophy, not on popular culture, which got dragged into this marriage without its consent. Any attempt to use the philosophy of popular culture to make philosophy popular simply backfires and makes philosophy look quite silly. Philosophy can only be popular by selling its soul, as it did in the Middle Ages; in other words philosophy can only become popular when it ceases to be philosophy.

The 'X and Philosophy' books are a fascinating project that demonstrates the power of philosophy to talk about anything. But all of the analogues with medieval philosophy suggest that this marriage of philosophy and pop culture is not particularly healthy. Medieval philosophy was a serious and thorough experiment conducted over the course of a millennium that explored the possibility of popularizing philosophy, and the results were quite conclusive: it did not end well. I'm not suggesting

that philosophy should ignore pop culture or that there is nothing philosophical in pop culture; but the current 'X and Philosophy' subculture is too medieval in its attempts to engage with pop culture and therefore does philosophy a disservice. Though philosophy has indeed had a public relations problem for a couple of centuries now, this particular engagement with popular culture tries to turn philosophy into something that it can never be – popular – and in the process strips philosophy of its true relevance and value³⁸.

³⁸ A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 35th annual Southwest Popular/American Culture Association conference February 22, 2014 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I wish to thank the audience at that presentation for their comments and suggestions.

Appendix

Books published to date in the three current philosophy and pop culture series

(1) **The Open Court Philosophy and Pop Culture Series**

- Titles published to date

Arp, Robert, *Psych and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2013.

Arp Robert, *The Devil and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2014.

Arp Robert, *Homeland and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2014.

Auxier Randall E., *Bruce Springsteen and Philosophy: Darkness on the Edge of Truth*, Open Court, Chicago 2008.

Auxier Randall E., Seng Phil, *The Wizard of Oz and Philosophy: Wicked Wisdom of the West*, Open Court, Chicago 2008.

Baggett David, Klein Shawn, *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, Open Court, Chicago 2004.

Baggett David, Drumin William A., *Hitchcock and Philosophy: Dial M for Metaphysics*, Open Court, Chicago 2007.

Baltzer-Jaray Kimberly, Arp Robert, *The Good Wife and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2013.

Bassham Gregory, Bronson Eric, *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All*, Open Court, Chicago 2003.

Baur Michael, Baur Steven, *The Beatles and Philosophy: Nothing You Can Think That Can't Be Think*, Open Court, Chicago 2006.

Bassham Gregory, Walls Jerry L., *The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy: The Lion, the Witch, and the Worldview*, Open Court, Chicago 2005.

Bealer Tracy L., Luria Rachel, Yuen Wayne, *Neil Gaiman and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2012.

Berti Jim, Bowman Durrell, *Rush and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2011.

Botz-Bornstein Thorsten, *Inception and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2011.

Bronson Eric, *Baseball and Philosophy: Thinking Outside the Batter's Box*, Open Court, Chicago 2004.

Bronson Eric, *Poker and Philosophy: Pocket Rockets and Philosopher Kings*, Open Court, Chicago 2006.

Bzdak David, Crosby Joanna, Vannatta Seth, *The Wire and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2013.

Calef Scott, *Led Zeppelin and Philosophy: All Will Be Revealed*, Open Court, Chicago 2009.

- Carveth Rod, *Justified and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2015.
- Cogburn Jon, Silcox Mark, *Dungeons and Dragons and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2012.
- Conard Mark, Skoble Aeon, *Woody Allen and Philosophy: You Mean My Whole Fallacy is Wrong?*, Open Court, Chicago 2004.
- Cuddy Luke, *The Legend of Zelda and Philosophy: I Link Therefore I Am*, Open Court, Chicago 2008.
- Cuddy Luke, *World of Warcraft and Philosophy: Wrath of the Philosopher King*, Open Court, Chicago 2009.
- Cuddy Luke, *Halo and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2011.
- Decker Kevin S., Eberl Jason T., *Star Wars and Philosophy: More Powerful Than You Can Possibly Imagine*, Open Court, Chicago 2005.
- Darby Derrick, Shelby Tommie, *Hip Hop and Philosophy: Rhyme 2 Reason*, Open Court, Chicago 2005.
- Dick Luke, Reisch George A., *The Rolling Stones and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2011.
- Dromm Keith, Salter Heather, *The Catcher in the Rye and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2012.
- Dyer Ben, *Supervillains and Philosophy: Sometimes, Evil Is Its Own Reward*, Open Court, Chicago 2009.

Eberl Jason T., Decker Kevin S., *Star Trek and Philosophy: The Wrath of Kant*, Open Court, Chicago 2008.

Forbes Brandon W., Reisch George, *Radiohead and Philosophy: Fitter Happier More Deductive*, Open Court, Chicago 2009.

Foy Joseph J., *SpongeBob SquarePants and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2011.

Gimbel Steven, *The Grateful Dead and Philosophy: Getting High Minded about Love and Haight*, Open Court, Chicago 2007.

Gracia Jorge J., *Mel Gibson's Passion and Philosophy: The Cross, the Questions, the Controversy*, Open Court, Chicago 2004.

Greene Richard, Vernezze Peter, *The Sopranos and Philosophy: I Kill Therefore I Am*, Open Court, Chicago 2004.

Greene Richard, *Quentin Tarantino and Philosophy: How to Philosophize with a Pair of Pliers and a Blowtorch*, Open Court, Chicago 2007.

Greene Richard, *The Golden Compass and Philosophy: God Bites the Dust*, Open Court, Chicago 2009.

Greene Richard, Mohammad K. Silem, *The Undead and Philosophy: Chicken Soup for the Soulless*, Open Court, Chicago 2006.

Greene Richard, Mohammad K. Sinem, *Zombies, Vampires, and Philosophy*, Open Court Chicago 2010.

Greene Richard, Reisch George A., Robison-Greene Rachel, *Dexter and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2011.

Greene Richard, Robison-Greene Rachel, *Boardwalk Empire and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2013.

Greene Richard, Robison-Greene Rachel, *Girls and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2015.

Hanley Richard, *South Park and Philosophy: Bigger, Longer, and More Penetrating*, Open Court, Chicago 2007.

Hardcastle Gary L., Reisch George A., *Monty Python and Philosophy: Nudge Nudge, Think Think!*, Open Court, Chicago 2006.

Hardcastle Gary L., Reisch George A., *Bullshit and Philosophy: Guaranteed to Get Perfect Results Every Time*, Open Court, Chicago 2006.

Heldke Lisa, Mommer Kerri, Pineo Cynthia, *The Atkins Diet and Philosophy: Chewing the Fat with Kant and Nietzsche*, Open Court, Chicago 2005.

Holt Jason, *Leonard Cohen and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2014.

Huss John, *Johnny Cash and Philosophy: The Burning Ring of Truth*, Open Court, Chicago 2008.

Huss John, *Planet of the Apes and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2013.

Irwin William, *Seinfeld and Philosophy: A Book about Everything and Nothing*, Open Court, Chicago 2000.

Irwin, William, *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded*, Open Court, Chicago 2005.

Irwin William, Conard Mark, Skoble Aeon, *The Simpsons and Philosophy: The D'oh! of Homer*, Open Court, Chicago 2001.

Irwin William, *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Open Court, Chicago 2002.

Kave Sharon M., *The Onion and Philosophy: Fake News Story True Alleges Indignant Area Professor*, Open Court, Chicago 2010.

Koepsell David R., Arp Robert, *Breaking Bad and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2012.

Lewis Courtland, Smithka Paula, *Doctor Who and Philosophy: Bigger on the Inside*, Open Court, Chicago 2010.

Lewis Courtland, Young Shawn P., *Futurama and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2013.

Macomber Michael, *The Red Sox and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2010.

McKenna Erin, Pratt Scott L., *Jimmy Buffett and Philosophy: The Porpoise Driven Life*, Open Court, Chicago 2009.

Michaud Nicolas, *Frankenstein and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2013.

Michaud Nicolas, Watkins Jessica, *Jurassic Park and Philosophy: The Truth Is Terrifying*, Open Court, Chicago 2014.

- Morris Tom, Morris Matt, *Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way*, Open Court, Chicago 2005.
- Nicholas Jeffery, *Dune and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2011.
- Porter Carl, Vernezze Peter, *Bob Dylan and Philosophy: It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Thinking)*, Open Court, Chicago 2006.
- Priest Graham, Young Damon, *Martial Arts and Philosophy: Beating and Nothingness*, Open Court, Chicago 2010.
- Ralkowski Mark, *Curb Your Enthusiasm and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2012.
- Reisch George A., *Pink Floyd and Philosophy: Careful with that Axiom, Eugene!*, Open Court, Chicago 2007.
- Richards Ted, *Soccer and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2010.
- Rollin Bernard E., Gray Carolyn M., Mommer Kerri, Pineo Cynthia, *Harley-Davidson and Philosophy: Full-Throttle Aristotle*, Open Court, Chicago 2006.
- Schiller Aaron Allen, *Stephen Colbert and Philosophy: I Am Philosophy (And So Can You!)*, Open Court, Chicago 2009.
- Shook John R., Stillwaggon Swan Liz, *Transformers and Philosophy: More Than Meets the Mind*, Open Court, Chicago 2009.

South James B., *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*, Open Court, Chicago 2003.

South James B., Held Jacob M., *James Bond and Philosophy: Questions Are Forever*, Open Court, Chicago 2006.

Steiff Josef, Tamplin Tristan D, *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Mission Accomplished or Mission Frakked Up?*, Open Court, Chicago 2008.

Steiff Josef, Barkman Adam, *Manga and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2010.

Steiff Josef, Tamplin Tristan D., *Anime and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2010.

Steiff Josef, *Sherlock Holmes and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2011.

Vanatta Seth, *Chuck Klosterman and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2012.

Von Matterhorn Lorenzo, *How I Met Your Mother and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2013.

Wittkower D. E., *iPod and Philosophy: iCon of an ePoch*, Open Court, Chicago 2008.

Wittkower Dylan E., *Mr. Monk and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2010.

Wittkower Dylan E., *Facebook and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2010.

Wittkower Dylan E., *Philip K. Dick and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2011.

Wittkower Dylan E., Rush, Lucinda, *Ender's Game and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2013.

Wrathall Mark A., *U2 and Philosophy: How to Decipher an Atomic Band*, Open Court, Chicago 2006.

Young Shaun P., *Jeopardy! and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2012.

Yuen Wayne, *The Walking Dead and Philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2012.

(2) The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series

- Titles published to date

Arp, Robert, Decker Kevin S., Irwin William, *The Ultimate South Park and Philosophy: Respect My Philosophah!*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2013.

Cuddy Luke, Irwin, William, *BioShock and Philosophy: Irrational Game, Rational Book*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2014.

Decker Kevin S., Irwin William, *Ender's Game and Philosophy: The Logic Gate is Down*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2013.

Dunn George A., Michaud Nicolas, Irwin William, *The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.

Dunn George A., Eberl Jason T., Irwin William, *Sons of Anarchy and Philosophy: Brains Before Bullets*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2013.

Dunn George A., Irwin William, *Veronica Mars and Philosophy: Investigating the Mysteries of Life (Which is a Bitch Until You Die)*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2014.

Dunn George A. Irwin William, *Avatar and Philosophy: Learning to See*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2014.

Eberl Jason T., *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Knowledge Here Begins Out There*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2007.

Foresman Galen A., Irwin William, *Supernatural and Philosophy: Metaphysics and Monsters... for Idjits*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2013.

Hart Weed Jennifer, Davis Richard Brian, Weed Ronald, *24 and Philosophy: The World According to Jack*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken 2007.

Holt Jason, Irwin William, *The Ultimate Daily Show and Philosophy: More Moments of Zen, More Indecision Theory*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2013.

Irwin William, *Metallica and Philosophy: A Crash Course in Brain Surgery*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken 2007.

- Irwin William, White Mark D., Arp Robert, *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken 2008.
- Irwin William, Jacoby Henry, *House and Philosophy: Everybody Lies*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken 2008.
- Irwin William, White Mark D., *Watchmen and Philosophy: A Rorschach Test*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken 2009.
- Irwin William, Housel Rebecca, Wisnewski Jeremy, *X-Men and Philosophy: Astonishing Insight and Uncanny Argument in the Mutant X-Verse*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2009.
- Irwin William, Brown Richard, Decker Kevin S., *Terminator and Philosophy: I'll Be Back, Therefore I Am*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2009.
- Irwin William, Johnson David K., *Heroes and Philosophy: Buy the Book, Save the World*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2009.
- Irwin William, Housel Rebecca, Wisnewski Jeremy, *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2009.
- Irwin William, Blahuta Jason P., Beaulieu Michel S., *Final Fantasy and Philosophy: The Ultimate Walkthrough*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2009.
- Irwin William, Davis Richard Brian, *Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy: Curiouser and Curiouser*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2010.

Irwin William, White Mark D., *Iron Man and Philosophy: Facing the Stark Reality*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2010.

Irwin William, Dunn George A., Housel Rebecca, *True Blood and Philosophy: We Wanna Think Bad Things with You*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2010.

Irwin William, South James B., Carveth, Ron, *Mad Men and Philosophy: Nothing Is as It Seems*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2010.

Irwin William, *30 Rock and Philosophy: We Want to Go to There*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2010.

Irwin William, Bassham George, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2010.

Irwin William, Kaye, Sharon, *Ultimate Lost and Philosophy: Think Together, Die Alone*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2010.

Irwin William, Dryden Jane, White Mark D., *Green Lantern and Philosophy: No Evil Shall Escape this Book*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2011.

Irwin William, *True Blood and Philosophy, Expanded Edition*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2011.

Irwin William, Bronson Eric, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo and Philosophy: Everything Is Fire*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2011.

- Irwin William, Phillips Cristopher G., Wisnewski J. Jeremy, *Arrested Development and Philosophy: They've Made a Huge Mistake*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2011.
- Irwin William, White Mark D., *The Avengers and Philosophy: Earth's Mightiest Thinkers*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.
- Irwin William, Jacoby Henry, *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper Than Swords*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.
- Irwin William, Robichaud Cristopher, *The Walking Dead and Philosophy: Shotgun. Machete. Reason*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.
- Irwin William, White Mark D., *Downton Abbey and Philosophy: The Truth Is Neither Here Nor There*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.
- Irwin William, Sanford Jonathan J, *Spider-Man and Philosophy: The Web of Inquiry*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.
- Irwin William, Kowalski Dean, *The Big Bang Theory and Philosophy: Rock, Paper, Scissors, Aristotle, Locke*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.
- Irwin William, Fosl Peter S., *The Big Lebowski and Philosophy: Keeping Your Mind Limber with Abiding Wisdom*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.
- Irwin William, *Black Sabbath and Philosophy: Mastering Reality*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.

Irwin William, Bassham Gregory, Bronson Eric, *The Hobbit and Philosophy: For When You've Lost Your Dwarves, Your Wizard, and Your Way*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2012.

Irwin William, White Mark D., *Superman and Philosophy: What Would the Man of Steel Do*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2013.

Johnson David Kyle, Irwin William, *Inception and Philosophy: Because It's Never Just a Dream*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2011.

Robichaud Cristopher, Irwin William, *Dungeons and Dragons and Philosophy: Read and Gain Advantage on All Wisdom Checks*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2014.

Wisnewski Jeremy, *Family Guy and Philosophy*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken 2007.

Wisnewski Jeremy, *The Office and Philosophy: Scenes from the Unexamined Life*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken 2008.

• Forthcoming Titles

Author to define, *Minecraft and Philosophy*.

Author to define, *The Ultimate Star Trek and Philosophy*.

Author to define, *House of Cards and Philosophy*.

(3) **The University of Kentucky Philosophy of Popular Culture Series**

(This series has now come to a close but the series editor, Mark T. Conard, is starting a new *Philosophy of Popular Culture* series with Lexington Books, a Rowman & Littlefield imprint. The first title in the Lexington series is to be: *Joss Whedon, Philosopher: Wisdom from the Whedonverse*)

Abrams Jerold J., *The Philosophy of Stanley Kubrick*, Kentucky University Press, 2009.

Arp Robert, Barkman Adam, McRae, James, *The Philosophy of Ang Lee*, Kentucky University Press, 2013.

Austin Michael W., Posnanski Joe, *Football and Philosophy: Going Deep*, Kentucky University Press, 2009.

Baggett David, *Tennis and Philosophy: What the Racket is All About*, Kentucky University Press, 2010.

Brace Patricia, Arp Robert, *The Philosophy of J. J. Abrams*, Kentucky University Press, 2014.

Conard Mark T., *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, Kentucky University Press, 2007.

Conard Mark T., *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, Kentucky University Press, 2008.

Conard Mark T., *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*, Kentucky University Press, 2009.

Conard Mark T., *The Philosophy of Martin Scorsese*, Kentucky University Press, 2009.

Conard, Mark T., *The Philosophy of Spike Lee*, Kentucky University Press, 2011.

Conard Mark T., *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, updated edition, Kentucky University Press, 2012.

Devlin William J., Biderman Shai, *The Philosophy of David Lynch*, Kentucky University Press, 2011.

Elkholy Sharin N., *The Philosophy of the Beats*, Kentucky University Press, 2012.

Fahv Thomas, *The Philosophy of Horror*, Kentucky University Press, 2012.

Kowalski Dean A., *The Philosophy of The X-Files*, Kentucky University Press, 2009.

Kowalski Dean A., *Steven Spielberg and Philosophy: We're Gonna Need a Bigger Book*, Kentucky University Press, 2010.

Kowalski Dean A., *The Philosophy of The X-Files, updated edition*, Kentucky University Press, 2011.

Kowalski Dean A., Kreider S. Evan, *The Philosophy of Joss Whedon*, Kentucky University Press, 2011.

La Rocca David, *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman*, Kentucky University Press, 2011.

- McClelland Richard T., Clayton Brian B., *The Philosophy of Clint Eastwood*, Kentucky University Press, 2014.
- McMahon Jennifer L., Csaki B. Steve, *The Philosophy of the Western*, Kentucky University Press, 2010.
- McMahon Jennifer L., *The Philosophy of Tim Burton*, Kentucky University Press, 2014.
- Palmer R. Barton, Sanders Steven M., *The Philosophy of Steven Soderbergh*, Kentucky University Press, 2010.
- Reid Heather L., Austin Michael W., *The Olympics and Philosophy*, Kentucky University Press, 2012.
- Riches Simon, *The Philosophy of David Cronenberg*, Kentucky University Press, 2012.
- Sander Steven M., Skoble Aeon, *The Philosophy of TV Noir*, Kentucky University Press, 2008.
- Sanders Steven M., *The Philosophy of Science Fiction Film*, Kentucky University Press, 2009.
- Sanders Steven, Skoble Aeon J., Palmer R. Barton, *The Philosophy of Michael Mann*, Kentucky University Press, 2014.
- Tallon Philip, Bagget David, *The Philosophy of Sherlock Holmes*, Kentucky University Press, 2012.
- Walls Jerry L., Bassham Gregory, Vitale Dick, *Basketball and Philosophy: Thinking Outside the Paint*, Kentucky University Press, 2008.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF POPULAR CULTURE AND THE UNPOPULARITY OF PHILOSOPHY

Wible Andy, *Golf and Philosophy: Lessons from the Links*,
Kentucky University Press, 2010.