7 Are There Definite Objections to Film as Philosophy?

Metaphilosophical Considerations

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I[1]

The idea that films can be philosophical goes back to, at least, the 70s, with Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971), and Gilles Deleuze's *Cinéma 1: L'image-movement* (1983) and *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* (1985).

But, the "film as philosophy" (FAP) hypothesis turned into a field in its own right during the 2000s, after Stephen Mulhall's *On Film* (2001). In this work, Mulhall defended that some films philosophize for themselves—they are not just "philosophy's raw material" but can think "seriously and systematically just the ways that philosophers do."[2]

The aforementioned caused controversy. Around the same time of *On Film*'s release, Bruce Russell published the article "The Philosophical Limits of Film" (2000). This article had one of the first attacks against FAP, posing some main objections based on metaphilosophical grounds, which were called the "generality" and the "explicitness" objections. These objections made by Russell and by Murray Smith are based on the idea that film and philosophy are too different in their purposes or ways of presentation, ideas that are grounded in implicit or explicit conceptions of philosophy.

In this chapter, I will analyze these, as well as some other metaphilosophically grounded objections, as I will try to draw a line of reasoning connecting to attempts of responding to them. After doing so, I will conclude that their metaphilosophical grounds are implausible, and, thus, they are not definite objections against FAP.

II

The generality objection is concerned with the fact that FAP's advocates are usually interested in fictional narrative films, which are fictional and particular cases.

Philosophy, on the contrary, has "universalistic aspirations,"[3] as it seeks to assert general or universal theses.

Bruce Russell defended that "film can vividly introduce philosophy problems and can solve some problems by showing us what is possible. But it cannot show us what is probable and sometimes not even what is possible."[4] According to him, a film like *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (Woody Allen, 1989) can show us a *possible* outcome of a crime, and *A Simple Plan* (Sam Raimi, 1998) can show a *probable* one.[5] According to Russell, besides its capacity to introduce philosophy and to show what is possible or probable, film can also "refute a philosophical thesis, say, that necessarily wrongdoing will make you unhappy or will be contrary to your self-interest."[6] However, the main limit film has is that it cannot establish philosophical theses since "no one can establish that something holds in all possible worlds by presenting an example or two of a possible world depicted in film."[7] Therefore, the philosophical interest one can find in film is limited.

Faced with this problem, philosophers usually appeal to thought experiments (TEs). As Noël Carroll says, thought experiments are "frequently employed by philosophers to defend and/or motivate their claims," and "if philosophy conducted by means of thought experiments is an adequate source of knowledge and education, then so literature should be."[8] Philosophers frequently use these imaginary cases, the fictional narratives that films are.

Thought experiments, in philosophy, can have several functions. Thomas E. Wartenberg identifies six kinds: TEs that function as counterexamples to a certain philosophical thesis, TEs that seek to establish possibilities, the failed TEs that demonstrate impossibilities, TEs that establish necessary connections, TEs that seek to confirm theories or TEs through which philosophers construct certain theories.[9]

As we saw, Russell accepts only that films can function as counterexamples to philosophical theses. Wartenberg, on the other hand, famously argued that *The Matrix* (Lili and Lana Wachowski, 1999) is a TE that establishes the "deception hypothesis,"[10] the possibility that what seems to be real is just a complete illusion, specifically a simulation created by super-intelligent machines. Noël Carroll too argued Ernie Gehr's *Serene Velocity* (1970) is a thought experiment that puts the hypothesis that "movement is an essential feature of cinema."[11]

This appeal still does not convince everyone, however. For example, Richard Eldridge believes an argument for cinematic thought experiments to be uninteresting since in philosophy they are minor projects.[12] Wartenberg, however, notes that although these tools are a fraction of what philosophy does, TEs are

sometimes central in philosophical texts, such as is the Evil Genius hypothesis by Descartes. Thus, Wartenberg argues that "what we need to do is emphasize the importance and vivacity of such thought experiments in philosophy proper to give the thesis that films contain philosophical thought experiments more punch and greater plausibility."[13] Here, the appeal to TEs may be more than just a

defensive strategy: it can also be something films are especially good at doing. Note, however, that if we want to argue that films philosophize as a TE (in philosophy) does, we must accept that TEs are good and important contributions to philosophy; otherwise, we will instantly relegate films to bad or unimportant philosophy. It seems that if our argument is that films can be good philosophical works, we must make some kind of argument that shows why TEs are good philosophical tools.

Even with arguments for the idea that films are cinematic TEs, some caveats have been put forward.

In philosophy, TEs do not come isolated; they are explicitly and clearly framed within a more extensive argument or philosophical work and have clear purposes explained by their authors. I link this realization to two other objections: the explicitness and the propriety objection.

The explicitness objection states that film "lacks the explicitness to formulate and defend the precise claims that are characteristic of philosophical writing."[14]

Murray Smith, for example, argues that "while philosophy seeks to clarify our understanding of the world, the vocation of art is to deliver an adventure in perception, cognition, and emotion."[15] He, furthermore, states that, if on the one hand, the value of works of art lies in properties such as "complexity, ingenuity, inventiveness, density, *ambiguity,* and profundity,"[16] philosophy is primarily valued in epistemic terms, which seems to go against film's ambiguity adequate for its artistic status. As he asserts "few criticisms are more apt to strike terror into the heart of the philosopher than the assertion that such-and-such a proposition is 'ambiguous,' while in the world of art, that term is more apt to be used as a term of praise."[17]

This idea is also defended when the "propriety objection" is posed. This Hegel-inspired objection,[18] as Paisley Livingston poses it, states that art has a proper value that is intrinsic, not instrumental. So, the artistic value should not be reduced to non-artistic purposes, such as philosophical ones.[19]

Such objections are also applied specifically to cinematic TEs. Deborah Knight, for example, argues that a cinematic TE is focused on what is aesthetically relevant, like the narrative structure, genre or characters, and not on the concepts,

as philosophical TEs do.[20] For Knight, this is because "they have different characteristics and different goals."[21]

So, if cinematic TEs lack the explicitness that philosophical TEs have, this is both a sign that cinema and philosophy have different proper values and a problem to an argument that focuses on the potential philosophical value of cinematic TEs.

This also relates to the generality objection: as we saw, Russell thinks philosophy seeks to establish general theses and to do so we should not rely on fictional narrative singular cases. To establish such general theses, philosophers resort to some kind of justification, usually to explicit

arguments. The problem here is that thought experiments are not arguments *per se*. For Russell, "thought experiments can be a stimulus to argumentation, can motivate the listener, reader, or viewer to produce an argument, but they are not arguments themselves."[22] As TEs are not arguments, they usually are framed within proper arguments,[23] and this is not what happens with cinematic TEs. We could say that TEs in philosophy are very commonly used to pose a counterexample to a supposed necessary theory; i.e., if this scenario *x* is possible, that contradicts the necessary theory *y*. On the other hand, it is possible that Russell thinks that TEs cannot establish general theses by themselves because, as they are not arguments, they do not rely on other premises, such as empirical data.

An easy way to solve this problem is to say films can present explicit arguments. Films can do so in various ways: for example, a film that is just a record of a philosophy seminar/lecture/presentation where there are philosophers making explicit arguments. Wartenberg imagines a film called *Justifying Difference* that is just a record of a lecture given by John Rawls.[24] Another example he gives is *Waking Life* (Richard Linklater, 2001), where Robert Solomon, as an animated "character," gives a lecture and talks about existentialism. Other examples could be *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (Sophie Fiennes and Slavoj Žižek, 2012), or the American TV series *The Good Place* (2016–).

Now, why are these films and TV series not philosophy?

When philosophers talk about film as philosophy, they are usually interested in fiction narrative popular films, like *The Matrix*. This is because they seem to fulfill what Livingston calls the following two conditions for defending a bold FAP thesis:

a. The "means condition," which is "a conception of which sorts of *exclusive* capacities of the cinematic *medium* are said to make a special contribution to philosophy."

b. The "results condition," which requires a "significance and independence of the latter contribution."[25]

The first condition relates to the so-called *medium* specific ity, that art forms and, in this case, cinema have specific or unique features, such as juxtaposition, editing, selective focus of the camera and correlations between soundtrack and image, among others. These film abilities, according to Livingston, offer an articulated content of a nonlinguistic, but visual form.[26] The second condition suggests that the philosophical contribution made by the specific cinematic *medium* must be "historically innovative and independent."[27]

Additionally, Livingston argues that one result of accepting such a bold thesis with these two conditions is a *dilemma of paraphrase*: if we cannot paraphrase the cinematic philosophical content into text since it is done

by exclusive cinematic means, how could we even begin to make sense of such content? On the other hand, if we can paraphrase that content, then it is not significantly independent and innovative, or, it is too trivial.[28] Several versions of a bold thesis have been defended by different philosophers to avoid this dilemma.

Cox and Levine (2012) tried to adopt a "moderate thesis" according to which "certain philosophical things are better done in film than in written texts," and "this would not require film to have unique access to its own mode of philosophizing or its own branch of philosophical insight."[29] So, even though they argue that films can do certain things better than texts, for them there is no need for any exclusive cinematic ability to defend that films philosophize, which seems to be an attempt to avoid *medium* essentialism. Now, it seems that to say films can do things (or at least unique things) better than texts, we have to say something about film's specific techniques.

Noël Carroll argued that to defend FAP we need not assume a *medium* essentialism, but the "movie-made philosophy should be *recognizably* cinematic."[30]

In this same vein, Aaron Smuts argued that we do not have to maintain the idea of kinds of exclusive cinematic abilities; we only have to recognize that those films that interest philosophers have paradigmatic techniques that "include montage, camera angles and movement, and the juxtaposition of word and image."[31]

In any case, we could agree that even if we do not require an essentialist account of the cinematic *medium*, we have to rely on some specificity; i.e., it has to be the film as a specific art form that philosophizes through its (at least) paradigmatic techniques.

As for the second condition, Carroll questioned the requirement for the film to have original and innovative philosophical content. As he states, "little philosophy, if any, could survive such a test."[32] We can, however, accept that most films do not make historically "innovative" and "original" philosophical contributions, and still find them to be unique and valuable.

It seems, however, that what Livingston is trying to argue is not that the film has to have a ground-breaking philosophical discovery, but some originality. We can understand that especially when we encounter the commonly made dichotomy between real philosophical films and films that are "mere" illustration of a philosophical theory. Mind, however, that Wartenberg rejected this dichotomy, arguing that illustration can be a valid way of finding cases of FAP.[33]

When Livingston identifies the themes addressed by Eino Kaila in Bergman's films, he does not mean to say his films are not philosophical in their own right; on the contrary, it seems his argument is that Bergman was inspired by Kaila's philosophy but did not just illustrate his positions. That is why identifying links between films to previously defended

positions in philosophy may not be a problem. And even if we want to maintain that illustration can be good philosophy too, we can support this claim by saying that by fulfilling the first condition films philosophize in their own right; i.e., films make good philosophical contributions precisely because their own specific techniques do so in a way that philosophical texts do not. What seems to be required is that the film has some kind of new perspective or insight on a philosophical issue or position.

These are the reasons the previously mentioned films that would be easy solutions to the lack of explicitness are not very satisfying to FAP advocates: in all cases, arguably there is a strong reliance on verbal means and/or without relevant innovation; such films and TV series do not make use of their specific /paradigmatic means to make new philosophical insights.[34]

Because we are interested in films that philosophize through their paradigmatic cinematic techniques that go beyond verbal means, it is hard to see how a film makes, cinematically, an explicit argument. It will always lack the kind of explicitness that traditional philosophical verbal means like texts can have. Thus, when we appeal to thought experiments as tools that philosophy uses, we are still left with a problem at hand: philosophical thought experiments, as ambiguous and as open as they may be, are usually completed by further explicit explanation.

III

One solution to this problem is to retrieve to a metaphilosophical clarification: as Wartenberg and Carroll say, not all philosophical works are that explicit, and sometimes they even are ambiguous. Wartenberg gives the example of the historical dispute over how to characterize the precise conclusion of the Transcendental Deduction of Categories in Kant, concluding that "just because an argument is philosophical, it need not be unambiguous."[35] Carroll too argues that anyone who regards Nietzsche's aphorisms or genealogies or Wittgenstein's puzzles as philosophy will not accept an argument based on such an assumption.[36]

A metaphilosophical clarification, however, does not seem very satisfying, because it retracts to a defensive position rather than an active one of positively acknowledging film's ambiguity and its own potential mode of philosophizing.

Another metaphilosophical strategy would be the "reader-response theory" where "any text [in this case, work], that gets read as philosophy, from Shakespeare to Darwin, counts as philosophy. Philosophy lies in the eye of the beholder."[37] Nevertheless, we could say that such a strategy, in Smith's words, "drains the debate of part of its lifeblood, leaving us with a rather anemic general solution: whatever someone somewhere has designated 'philosophy' can serve as a measure of whether film can philosophize," which is a "low threshold to meet."[38]

This relates to the two kinds of metaphilosophical strategies that Smith says FAP advocates can adopt: the "expansive" strategy and the "reductive" strategy. The first "begins with a looser, more inclusive conception of philosophy," and the latter "around a specific, narrow conception of philosophical activity."[39] What Smith seems to say is that when defending or objecting to FAP we need to defend specific conceptions of philosophy, normatively. This may be because the acceptance of a looser conception of philosophy facilitates the idea that every film can philosophize, and that that might not be a bullet we'd be willing to bite (although maybe some philosophers are). In such a case, how would we decide if a film is philosophy or not, or if it is bad or good philosophy? That is possible to decide only when we defend some kind of "prescriptive" or evaluative normative metaphilosophy, i.e., if we state how philosophy "*should* be done," and not just do "descriptive" metaphilosophy, which is to say how it "*has* been done" *factually*.[40]

Posed in this metaphilosophical light, we may question in what aspects can films be good philosophy. Why it is worth watching films when we have philosophical objectives in mind? This question is a version of what Livingston calls the rationality objection that we can otherwise call a rationality challenge and not so much an objection against FAP.

Livingston asks: "if we in fact believe a better (for example, more efficient) means to our goal is available, would it not indeed be irrational to pass it by?"[41] To

understand this problem, Livingston suggests an analogy with the use of a screwdriver to tighten a screw *versus* the use of a coin:

> if you know you can quickly, easily, and very effectively tighten a screw with a screwdriver that is ready to hand, or laboriously and imperfectly tighten it with a coin, would it not be irrational to prefer the coin (assuming all other conditions are equal)?[42]

Put another way, and applying the question to TEs (as, let us remember, they are said to solve the generality objection): why resort to films as TEs as they appear in an incomplete version, when we can resort to traditional philosophical means (primarily linguistic ones, like books, articles or lectures) capable of explaining the TEs' purposes, framework or conclusions? If we consider that philosophy ought to use explicit argumentation, even when it relies on TEs, would it not be irrational to watch ambiguous films instead of accessing explicit means?

So, another way of solving the explicitness objection that does not retreat to a deflationary metaphilosophy is to say that a lack of explicitness (or the existence of implicit premises in a film) can be advantageous, thus putting forward a prescriptive metaphilosophy where the argument is

that philosophy can positively benefit from the ambiguous or incomplete character of TEs.

This is what Tom McClelland tried to do with his defense of a "Socratic Model." Instead of explaining specific arguments and conclusions, films can "actively prompt us to reach the general and precise propositions characteristic of philosophy,"[43] and "without stating any philosophical conclusions, you can cleverly stimulate an audience into achieving their own insights,"[44] such as Socrates did in his philosophical dialogues. Here, it is the viewers themselves who do part of the philosophical work, and this could be advantageous especially when we are talking about TEs, given some problems that philosophical TEs are attacked for having.[45]

It seems, however, that relying on the ambiguity or incompleteness of films compared to traditional philosophical means does not maintain a FAP bold thesis, for traditional philosophical means have the same potential capacity for ambiguity and incompleteness. So, we should remind ourselves of the "means condition" and ask why we should turn to films when we have an interest in finding philosophical TEs, and not to not only traditional philosophical means but also other art forms. What do films have that specifically allows them to be better equipped to do good if not even better TEs than texts, novels or plays?

When Thomas E. Wartenberg argues that *The Matrix* philosophizes through specific cinematic techniques,[46] that is a way of saying that other artistic or traditional philosophical media could not have philosophized in the same way. The same seems to happen when Robert Sinnerbrink argues that Terrence Malick's *The New World* (2005) "cannot be reduced to any specifically philosophical theme, idea or perspective." It is so "new" that it resists any translation into a known philosophical thesis. For Sinnerbrink, in this case, philosophy only "accompanies" film.[47] Thus, he argues, there is a "distinctively *cinematic* kind of thinking."[48]

We could argue that films do not have anything special about them and that they can philosophize in just the same ways as other art forms. Still, it seems possible to think that films have some kind of *je ne sais quoi*, those cinematic features that give them the upper hand for making philosophical TEs. Maybe films are better at dramatizing ethical dilemmas or imagining and visualizing hypothetical future scenarios. This may mean that we could put any work side by side with a film and evaluate on a case-by-case basis: maybe there are films that are better philosophical TEs than some other TEs found in a traditional philosophical *medium* and vice versa, depending on various factors—it is probably wiser to go to the movies to see a TE without explicit argumentation and get the Socratic advantage out of it, and read a typical philosophical TE if explicit argumentation is required for the purpose at hand, whatever that may be. Let us keep in mind, however, that the latter does not diminish any philosophical potential that can be found in an "ambiguous" TE: ignoring the potential that cinematic TEs can have just because we want

to keep relying on explicit arguments, even for academic philosophy's own interest, can be an epistemic flaw by itself.

IV

So, now we should ask: are there definite objections to film as philosophy? Do the generality or the explicitness objections put the FAP hypothesis to rest? Posing this question seems to be the same as asking if there are definite objections to certain conceptions of philosophy. If a skeptic wants to refuse FAP, it seems adequate to do so on metaphilosophical grounds, as Russell and Smith do.

Responding to their metaphilosophical conceptions with counterexamples of philosophers who do not fi t their criteria presumes that they would worry about excluding such philosophers from their conception. Russell and Smith might respond that appealing to such counterexamples assumes a deflationary or institutional[49] metaphilosophy, one that argues that philosophy "is whatever the people who are employed *as* philosophers at universities and other institutions do,

or whatever material librarians catalog as such—end of story."[50] Such metaphilosophies as the "prototype and family resemblance" theory that thinks that philosophy is whatever that resembles Plato or Descartes' texts[51] may or may not be problematic. So, Russell and Smith seem to be defending some kind of essentialist metaphilosophy that, as we are already predicting, seems to take the risk of excluding too many, even well-known philosophers. And this is not just a problem with Smith and Russell's essentialist accounts; it may be a problem of essentialist accounts themselves.

Defending an "essentialist" metaphilosophy is "to lay down a definition, an eternal fence, so what lies within is philosophy, and what lies without is not."[52] According to Overgaard, Gilbert and Burwood, essentialist metaphilosophies are usually "topical" or "methodological": they try to define philosophy in terms of its topics/themes like the "big questions," or methods like conceptual analysis. We could say that philosophy is also sometimes defined by its objectives. For example, philosophy can be defined as aiming at discovering the true answer to one of the "big questions" in a Platonic sense, or at helping us improve morally.

The main possible problem with essentialist accounts is that they usually are too inclusive or too exclusive: an account of philosophy as conceptual analysis excludes too much, and this too seems to be the case with Smith and Russell's accounts, for they exclude too much by insisting on philosophy's supposed explicitness and generality, and an account of philosophy as thinking about the big questions includes too much.[53] This is why Overgaard et.al. argue that a good descriptive metaphilosophy takes both into account, saying that philosophy is usually concerned about the fundamental questions and addresses it by "reason and argument, *broadly conceived*" (my emphasis).[54]

Furthermore, Overgaard et.al. suggest how to confront and evaluate each metaphilosophical position: it should not be too revisionist, which would imply that "most philosophers (past and/or present) have been doing philosophy in completely the wrong way," and it should "explain the relative 'lack of progress' characteristic of philosophy relative to the natural sciences."[55] That philosophy lacks progress is a debatable idea. However, it should be said that we are talking in relative terms, contrasting with the process we see in the sciences. Eric Dietrich proposes a thought experiment in order to understand why, according to him, philosophy does not progress.

> Imagine that Aristotle … pops forward to today, on a well-known campus somewhere in some English-speaking country.... Curious about the state of knowledge, he finds a physics lecture and sits in. What he hears shocks him.

A feather and an iron ball fall at the same rate in vacuum … Sadly, he trundles off to a philosophy class—a metaphysics class, as it turns out... He knows exactly what the professor is talking about... Then Aristotle goes on an ethics class, where he learns of the current importance of what is apparently "virtue ethics." He recognises it immediately.[56]

This seems to be an indication that, contrary to science where, for example, "Darwin's conclusions are regarded as *true,*" on the other hand in philosophy we still do not know whether a philosopher's theory is right or not; for example, "Mill's conclusions are not regarded as true, but rather, interesting and important."[57] Now, as Dietrich argues, this is not to say that philosophy does not transform somehow, especially in its different methods or technical language; however, it seems undeniable that philosophy at least does not progress into an agreement about propositions as science does.

So, beyond not denying this relative lack of progress, Overgaard et.al. explain why any metaphilosophy should not be too revisionist: because they would be suggesting that philosophy should be something that "does not count as philosophy at all." They give the following example of a similar position: "consider someone who suggested that football would be better played without goalkeepers. One's reply would be that this might be an interesting game but it would not be football."[58]

V

So now, let us take a few steps back and remember Russell and Smith's metaphilosophical accounts. According to Russell, philosophy aims at establishing general theses and does so through explicit argumentation, and according to Smith philosophy is valued for its explicitness and

clarity since it has cognitive ends. More recently he also argued that philosophy follows three specific norms:

1. Rational warrant: philosophy's "attention to the rational—or nonrational or irrational underpinning of our beliefs and practices." The rational assessment of these underpinning is done, according to Smith, through the tools of logic.

2. Empirical support/soundness: we should also consider the empirical evidence at our disposal.

3. Reflective maturity: inspired by Rawls' Reflective equilibrium, Smith defends that the philosophical conclusion we reach should be "the product of a

sustained process of reflection, of testing our beliefs and assumptions by examining them from a multitude of angles."[59]

As we saw earlier, Carroll argues that philosophy is not always regulated by explicitness, and we could give counterexamples to all these norms. For one, there are lots of philosophies purely *a priori*, not recurring to empirical evidence. For example, David Chalmers relies on the conceivability of "P-Zombies" to show how physicalism is not a necessary theory of the conscious mind.[60, 61] And if we apply Overgaard et al.'s criteria, we see how problematic these conceptions can be. Russell and Smith seem to be "too parochial, too narrowly bound to an analytic conception of philosophy," as Smith puts it.[62] We can see how revisionist they are.

Furthermore, their accounts seem to be essentialist: Russell attaches philosophy to one of its methods (explicit argumentation), and Smith attaches philosophy to three of its methods, as we saw. Even so, Smith's prescriptive metaphilosophy turns philosophy into something narrow and uninteresting. Like football, philosophy has a history that includes different rules and protagonists. How interesting would it be to watch football if we only knew that its main aim is to score goals and that it has various rules to be followed, unaware of its historic and social framework? Surely, football is a game with that aim and those rules, but it's also more than that: it involves stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo, supporters' clubs, different equipments and so on. As such, philosophy does not have just one aim, nor is it subsumed under its narrow rules. We could say that if football's rules are not followed it is no longer the same game; philosophy, however, has the advantage of being able to change its own rules, as it has done throughout history with various kinds of additions.

Within the FAP debate, this seems to be what commonly happens: usually, philosophers do not think much about what they do; they just do it. Despite this, when someone poses the FAP hypothesis, that films can philosophize in their own right "in just the same ways as philosophers do," the reaction seems to be a retraction to narrow conceptions of philosophy in order to maintain professional philosophers' exclusive access to the field. So, it seems that philosophers and theorists such as Russell

and Smith would rather defend a narrow conception of philosophy, as problematic as it is, than to accept that philosophy may be something that films can do too, in order to preserve a clear categorization of disciplines. Sinnerbrink and Wartenberg argued that this derives from the Platonic prejudice against art, and results in a "philosophical disenfranchisement of film."[63]

Now, if their metaphilosophical accounts are not very adequate, then we can ask what kind of metaphilosophy we should defend when we address FAP. Let us remember that, according to Smith, a mere descriptive philosophy is not very interesting. However, it might be a starting point.

Wartenberg presented his own metaphilosophical account to defend FAP. To him, there are three conceptions we should regard inclusively:

1. Philosophy as approaching a set of "eternal questions," such as knowing what a moral action is (a topical account)[64]

2. Philosophy as a meta-discipline, i.e., as a discipline that asks questions about the nature of other disciplines, such as sciences and arts (which also seems to be a topical account)

3. Philosophy as a set of methods, as the use of explicit argumentation and formal logic, or the use of thought experiments (a methodological account)

Wartenberg argues that we should regard these conceptions in a "mutually supportive" way precisely to avoid excluding or including too much.[65] This account seems to be more adequate and have better explanatory power. Simon Blackburn argues that philosophy and literature both lack progress, which he doesn't regard as a problem, and that it is not a "sufficient answer to this to proclaim that philosophy aims at truth and literature does not." He states that "a serious work of fiction aims at truth about what matters."[66] In this case, as philosophy, a film can aim at "truth about what matters," and as in traditional philosophy we see the use of TEs as a means to achieve truth; maybe films can be such TEs, imaginary cases that aim at truth.

Mulhall's metaphilosophy seems to suffer from the opposite "problem" to Russell and Smith's, for it seems to be too inclusive. Drawing from Cavell, he argues that:

1. There is no essential break between natural human reflection and "inveterate Reflectiveness of the philosopher," the distinction being that the philosopher questions more persistently.

2. Philosophy can occur anywhere or at any time—any human who has a certain practice may question its nature and resources, and a filmmaker can make the same kind of radical questioning (or philosophy).

3. Since philosophy questions and reflects other human activities, it must do the same about itself.[67]

It seems that this would imply that every human work can be philosophy, which seems to be counterintuitive and not very helpful when we try to decide when a film philosophizes or not. It is probably more reasonable to maintain some kind of philosophical identity, something we can point at and say: "Ah! That is philosophy!"

It is also possible to say that philosophers are not very well equipped to decide if films can philosophize, and what philosophy is. As Gary Gutting puts it, the main reason metaphilosophy is not that interesting is that when philosophers defend their metaphilosophy they have a "dogmatic attitude that derives the nature of philosophy from controversial philosophical doctrines" and "an abstract, overly generalized approach that pays no attention to the details of philosophical practice."[68] Wartenberg also thinks the question of what philosophy is an "intractable" problem.[69] It can be in this line that we arrive at the idea that philosophers cannot decide what philosophy is, and that we should think about the FAP subject in non-philosophical terms, as John Ó Maoilearca defends. [70]

VI

Where does this leave us? I would suggest that we should advance from a general open and democratic attitude, which does not mean loosening or expanding our conception of philosophy, but just recognizing that philosophy is not the only human activity related to thinking. But when we engage with film analysis, when we find a film that we think philosophizes, we can try to do prescriptive metaphilosophy where we specifically say how the film thinks for itself, in which ways, why it is specifically thinking philosophically and why that is philosophically important.

So maybe we can say, first, that films *think* (and not philosophize *per se*), as philosophy and other human activities and works think. As Mulhall says, films seem to be more prone to thinking about their own means of possibility, so they are in the "condition of philosophy," in this case, philosophy of film. As he states, philosophy raises "questions about the basic techniques, resources and presuppositions of cinema."[71] However, Mulhall notes, "in theoretical writings about film films themselves are assumed to be silent with respect to such question" and assume that "at best, they provide the data in relation to which possible answers to such questions must at some point be assessed for validity."[72] When I say that films can think, or that the filmmakers think through and about film and other philosophical subjects, it is because, as Mulhall says, "films—like novels, plays and paintings—are the products of intentional human practical activity," and so they "can have representational content and can take pretty much anything as their subject matter."[73]

Let us remember that Mulhall's conception of philosophy is that it is linked to Reflectiveness and the questioning of the nature and resources of human activities and that philosophy itself seems to be a discipline or even professional field that radicalizes the questioning. Mulhall quotes Cavell on this idea when he says that philosophy is "a willingness not to think about something other than what ordinary human beings think about."[74] It is a fact that every human, at some point, thinks about the morality of certain actions, the justice of certain principles, the meaning of their existing, the nature of art and so on. These are the "big," "eternal," philosophical questions.

However, as we have seen, philosophy should not be defined by its topics, since such a definition "launches too wide of a net."[75] Thus, to have a more precise, but still not too narrow conception of philosophy, we should add the methodological side, as we saw. Philosophy uses thought experiments as one of its methods to tackle the general philosophical questions. Therefore, we can compromise with a moderate FAP: some films *think philosophically*; i.e., they think about philosophical issues through a philosophical method. This seems to be a general hypothesis, but it has to be "tested" on a case-by-case basis—or, through a particular or "local" way as Wartenberg and Mulhall defend.[76] Maybe there are films that are TEs on philosophical questions, and if there are, maybe we can see their relations to other works that do the same, whether in traditional philosophy or in other media. We can also see what said film specifically offers to the subject through its paradigmatic techniques. And if professional philosophers take this film to further develop their arguments or theories, this does not have to be seen as a problem nor does it mean that it was the philosopher who actually philosophized, since philosophy and cinema are not isolated from each other and can do the same through different means. The same inversely applies: if a filmmaker is not clearly endorsing a specific philosophical theory, it does not mean that the film is not doing philosophy at all.

This question matters because it allows us to discover new ways of philosophizing. It is possible that all of us, as well as professional philosophers, are losing some particular perspective that can, somehow, be fundamental. Maybe a film can tell us what philosophy might be, as Mulhall puts it,[77] and maybe we are not seeing a new way of thinking philosophically when we retract to a skeptical attitude and a too narrow and closed conception of philosophy. Additionally, even professional philosophers should be interested in this, since they should be open to different ideas of philosophy; otherwise, as Mulhall says, philosophy fails to do what it does about other disciplines: thinking about its own nature, limits, possibilities and so on.[78]

It seems, so far, that we are not able to decide if objections against FAP are definite or not, because that would mean deciding if there are definite narrow conceptions of philosophy. We can say, however, that

are not only non-democratic but actually implausible too. As we saw, Smith and Russell's objections against the possibility of films being able to philosophize are, for example, based on metaphilosophies that are too revisionist.

Instead of making general objections against FAP relying on problematic conceptions of philosophy, the discipline can really gain something from opening itself to other ways of thinking, and when we address a film philosophically, we can evaluate if and how it is important for our philosophical endeavor. Adding a new means to philosophize does not seem to defy our common conceptions of philosophy, for it does not seem that any advocate of FAP argues that philosophy has not been done correctly over the millennia. Film is a relatively new human activity, and arguments for FAP do not seem to question our past and present philosophy in extreme ways; they are only suggestions of how, besides traditional philosophical means, philosophy can *also* be made through other new means.

Notes

1 I would like to thank Steven Gouveia, Tom Wartenberg, Tom McClelland, Chris Rawls and Raquel Pereira for the support and encouragement, as well as for their precious help in philosophical and linguistic terms.

2 Stephen Mulhall, *On Film*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 2.

3 Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Film as Philosophy: The Pro Position." in *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Film,* ed. Katherine Thomson-Jones (New York: Routledge, 2016), 170.

4 Bruce Russell, "The Philosophical Limits of Film." *Film and Philosophy*, Special Issue on Woody Allen (2000): 163.

5 Ibid., 165.

6 Ibid., 166.

7 Ibid.

8 Noël Carroll, "The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 1 (2002): 7.

9 Thomas E. Wartenberg, *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2007), 58–65.

10 Ibid., 150.

11 Noël Carroll, "Philosophizing Through the Moving Image: The Case of *Serene* Velocity." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 1 (2006): 179.

12 Richard Eldridge, "Philosophy In/Of/As/And Film. Thomas Wartenberg's *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy*." *Projections* 13, no. 1 (2009): 114.

13 Thomas E. Wartenberg, "On the Possibility of Cinematic Philosophy." in *New Takes in Film-Philosophy,* ed. Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 21.

14 Wartenberg, *Thinking on Screen,* 16.

15 Murray Smith, "Film, Philosophy, and the Varieties of Artistic Value." in *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Film,* ed. Katherine Thomson-Jones (New York: Routledge, 2016), 185.

16 Murray Smith, "Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 1 (2006): 40.

17 Ibid.

18 This idea can be found in Hegel, who asserts, for example, that "the poetic work of art has no aim other than the production and enjoyment of beauty; in its case aim and achievement lie directly in the work itself the artistic activity is not a means to a result falling outside itself but an end which in its accomplishment directly closes together with itself." G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art,* vol. 2, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 992.

19 Paisley Livingston, *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman: On Film as Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 39–41.

20 Deborah Knight, "*The Third Man*: Ethics, Aesthetics, Irony." in *Ethics at the Cinema,* ed. Ward E. Jones and Samantha Vice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 288.

21 Ibid., 289.

22 Bruce Russell, "Film's Limits: The Sequel." *Film and Philosophy* 12 (2007): 13.

23 See, for example, Michael A. Bishop's "Why Thought Experiments are not Arguments." where it is argued that thought experiments cannot be arguments

because different philosophers draw different conclusions from the same single thought experiment.

24 Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Film as Argument." *Film Studies* 8, Summer (2006): 128.

25 Paisley Livingston, "Theses on Cinema as Philosophy." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 1 (2006): 11.

26 Ibid., 12.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Damian Cox and Michael Levine, *Thinking Through Film: Doing Philosophy, Watching Movies* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 10.

30 Noël Carroll, "Movie-Made Philosophy." in *Film as Philosophy,* ed. Bernd Berzogenrath (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 273.

31 Aaron Smuts, "Film as Philosophy: In Defense of a Bold Thesis." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 1 (2006): 410.

32 Carroll, "Movie-Made Philosophy." 274.

33 Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Beyond *Mere* Illustration: How Films Can Be Philosophy." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 1 (2006): 19–32.

34 I want to reiterate that this is arguable, and arguments can be made to prove that these films actually philosophize for themselves maintaining some kind of bold thesis.

35 Wartenberg, *Thinking on Screen,* 20.

36 Carroll, "Movie-Made Philosophy." 277.

37 Simon Blackburn, "Foreword." in *What Philosophy Is,* ed. Havi Carel and David Gamez (London: Continuum, 2004), xiii.

38 Murray Smith, "Response to Neiva." *American Society for Aesthetics Graduate E-Journal* (forthcoming).

39 Smith, "Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity." 34.

40 Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), 261.

41 Livingston, *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman,* 17.

42 Ibid., 56.

43 Tom McClelland, "The Philosophy of Film and Film as Philosophy." *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* 2 (2011): 21.

44 Ibid., 20.

45 See McClelland's chapter in this volume where he explains how these problems that philosophical TEs are attacked for having can be solved if we turn to films.

46 Thomas Wartenberg, "Philosophy Screened: Experiencing *the Matrix*." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XXVII (2003): 139–52.

47 Robert Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (London: Continuum, 2011), 181.

48 Ibid., 7.

49 Blackburn, "Foreword." xiii.

50 Søren Overgaard, Paul Gilbert and Stephen Burwood, *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 20.

51 Blackburn, "Foreword." xiii.

52 Ibid., xiii.

53 Overgaard et.al., *Introduction to Metaphilosophy,* 20–22.

54 Ibid., 23.

55 Ibid., 25.

56 Eric Dietrich, "There Is No Progress in Philosophy." *Essays in Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2011): 334.

57 Ibid., 335.

58 Overgaard et.al., *Introduction to Metaphilosophy,* 25.

59 Smith, "Film, Philosophy, and the Variety of Artistic Value." 187–89.

60 David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

61 For more on this problem with Smith's norms of philosophy, see Diana Neiva, "Can Films Philosophize?" review of *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Film,*

ed Katherine Thomson-Jones, *American Society for Aesthetics Graduate E-Journal* (forthcoming).

62 Smith, "Film, Philosophy, and the Varieties of Artistic Value." 190.

63 See Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film,* 128.

64 Wartenberg, *Thinking on Screen,* 29.

65 Ibid., 30–31.

66 Blackburn, "Foreword." xviii.

67 Stephen Mulhall, "Ways of Thinking: A Response to Andersen and Baggini." *Film and Philosophy* 9 (2005): 29.

68 Gary Gutting, *What Philosophers Know: Case Studies in Recent Analytic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

69 Wartenberg, *Thinking on Screen,* 28.

70 John Mullarkey, "Films Can't Philosophise (And Neither Can Philosophy): Introduction to a Non-Philosophy of Cinema." in *New Takes in Film- Philosophy,* ed. Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 91.

71 Mulhall, *On Film,* 130.

72 Ibid., 131.

73 Ibid.

74 Stanley Cavell, *Themes Out of School: Causes and Effects* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 9.

75 Overgaard et.al., *Introduction to Metaphilosophy,* 22.

76 Wartenberg, "Film as Argument." 131; Mulhall, *On Film,* 131.

77 Mulhall, *On Film,* 145.

78 Mulhall, "Ways of Thinking." 29.

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