

Truth and Reconciliation: The Philosophy of Film

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August 26th, 2021

Introduction

The fundamental nature of knowledge that leads us to question human existence, reality, and experience has been studied for centuries. This field, colloquially known as philosophy, has stretched from ideologies of platonism to stoicism to existentialism to many more schools of thought. Historically, experts have written philosophy in ethics, morality, psychology, and even mathematics in manners that concentrate on logic and facts. Since the start of the 20th-century, film has been a subject of debate surrounding its philosophical capabilities. From the 1980s until the present day, the subdiscipline "Film and Philosophy" has grown monumentally. Filmmakers and philosophers alike use the medium of cinema to discuss and even create distinct philosophical insights that can be observed and studied like no other traditional philosophy. Specifically, the concept of philosophy *through* film, which examines the display of philosophy in cinema and why it generates emotional and thought-provoking responses from the audience in a unique manner has amassed discussion. The topic formulates many overarching questions for conversation. For example, how does sense perception heighten and produce philosophical ideas compared to using pure logic? What is novel about film's offerings to philosophy as opposed to traditional contributions? To understand these salient questions above, it is imperative to analyze industry experts' different ideologies and perspectives.

Discussion in Progress

Prompted by the topic of philosophy *through* film, many established authors have provided insights into ongoing debates that catalyze the entire discipline. The first discussion revolves around Plato's theory of philosophy which states, "to grasp the true nature of reality, which is the proper task of philosophy, we have to break free from dependence on sense

experience and use reason alone" (Falzon, 4). Professor of film Murray Smith reasons in favor of Plato's logic. In his excerpt from *Film Art, Argument, and Ambiguity*, he examines Plato's ideas, concentrating on the exactness of textual philosophy. Smith argues that the ambiguity of films causes a lack of logical precision vital for communicating philosophical reasoning (17). Smith expands on his rationalization when studying the film *All of Me*, which Christopher Falzon deems as a movie that is straightforwardly promoting dualism. Falzon believes Descartes' dualism is present in the movie as the characters' minds switch, but their bodies stay the same. However, Smith disagrees citing the hierarchical structure of film prioritizes art over philosophy. Smith argues that instead of *All of Me* focusing on the philosophical theme of dualism, it simply uses ambiguous concepts to present its primary objective of physical comedy rather than promoting intellectual insights. Smith writes, "art is a form of ambiguity that is praised, when mixing art [cinema] with philosophical themes we end up making the philosophy ambiguous. We should take films seriously as a form of art, not as philosophy" (40). Thus, the structure of philosophy in film has artistic priorities that engender ambiguous arguments compared to traditional means.

On the other hand, philosophy professor Thomas Wartenberg writes in his book *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy* on the intersection between philosophy and popular culture. Most notably, his logic driven by sense perception brings forth the concept of "thought experiments" as an argument against Plato's rationale. Wartenberg claims that "thought experiments" (imaginary scenarios, hypothetical situations) play a role, especially in fictional narratives, in initiating philosophical reflection, allowing salient points to be made through film (56-65). Wartenberg synthesizes this claim with an example from the *Matrix*, which displays Descartes' "deception hypothesis" (that all of our beliefs about reality might be false). As the audience, we watch a

situation where Neo learns his society is false and belongs to the Matrix. Wartenberg summarizes the impact of this revelation as a thought experiment that provokes the audience to connect with the movie in a way that produces additional philosophical inquiries about themselves. This realization causes the audience to question their existence. Do we live in a matrix in the external world? Is it possible all our beliefs are false? Pondering these questions is a fundamental example of thought experiments in the *Matrix* that meaningfully advances philosophical ideas regarding Decartes' insights.

Furthermore, a substantial point of academic discourse in philosophy *through* film considers whether film can engage and raise philosophical questions beyond traditional texts. Philosophy professor Paisley Livingston argues that film is merely an illustration for philosophical thought in his *Theses on Cinema as Philosophy*. He claims that while films can be used as a medium to illustrate philosophically-informed positions, they cannot produce unique philosophical content (12). Livingston uses Ingmar Bergman's *Seventh Seal* to support the idea that film demonstrates written philosophy in a new medium, but fails to advance the philosophy itself. In the movie, while confessing in church, Antonius Block reveals his strategy of chess to Death (his opponent). Simultaneously, there is a shadow of a square grid above Block's head, symbolizing that the game of chess between Death is always playing. Livingston asserts that the film helps visually display existential philosophical ideas (what is the meaning of life?) that traditional philosophers including Sarte and Camus have discussed, but cannot generate new substance. Therefore, the philosophy present in the film stems from traditional written philosophy, which shows that film has a strictly pedagogical relationship with philosophy.

Contrastingly, professor in philosophy, Christopher Falzon, argues in support of the notion that films themselves can advance philosophy. In his book *Philosophy Goes to the*

Movies, Falzon studies the impact the immersive medium of film has on creating philosophy. Falzon asserts that films construct a universe of representation emulating experiences in life, which unearth tangible ideas provoking philosophical thought (5). Falzon argues, "to identify philosophical positions, themes, or questions that are being presented or worked through in particular films is also to understand something important about what is going on within these films, to say something about their intellectual and philosophical content" (9). Once these topics are identified, one can comprehend the philosophically distinctive use of an image as a thought experiment. Utilizing Wartenberg's thought experiments as a complement to film's visual nature helps films uniquely contribute to philosophical discussion.

Moreover, philosopher Stephen Mulhall inspects the disputed assertion that films themselves can pose philosophical thoughts beyond the scope of traditional works in his book *On Film*. Mulhall claims that movies are not as philosophically raw as traditional writings but reflect on arguments analogously to philosophers. Mulhall calls upon Ridley Scott's work in the *Alien* movies to display his rationale that films meaningfully contribute to philosophy. Mulhall describes what he believes as a central theme in the movies: "the relation of human identity to embodiment" (36). This topic, he argues, "has been central to philosophical reflection in the modern period since Descartes" (36), an assertion that furthers his reasoning that the *Alien* trilogy is actively participating in philosophical rumination. Mulhall writes,

I do not look to these films as popular illustrations of views and arguments properly developed by philosophers; I see them rather as themselves reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them in just the same ways that philosophers do. The sophistication and self-awareness with which these

films deploy and develop that issue ... suggest to me that they should themselves be taken as making real contributions to these [i.e. philosophy's] intellectual debates (37).

The film's systematic reflection of key philosophical themes sincerely generates new ideas into existing debates. Thus, films can provide insight into discussions that develop philosophical arguments similarly to traditional philosophers.

Lastly, a third aspect of the discussion in the discipline of film and philosophy contemplates the question: What are cinema's unique offerings to philosophy? Philosophy professor Irving Singer investigates how film's audiovisual medium distinctly creates an environment for examining the nature of real-life perceptions in his book *Cinematic Mythmaking: Philosophy in Film*. Specifically, Irving's theory stems from studying the sensory impact films have on the audience. Irving writes, "watching cinema is like dreaming in several ways... It is as if we are a bemused audience that watches our own dreams" (5). Consciously watching life-like dreams contributes to philosophy because it helps the audience connect to the stories in a deeper, and often emotionally grounded manner. This is possible through the unique sensory experience of film, which projects philosophical insights driven by connection, rather than pure Platonic textual ideas.

Building on top of Irving's ideas, Wartenberg presents a refreshing take on why the medium of film is crucial for modern philosophical thought. In an entry from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Wartenberg theorizes that the emotional significance of the audience identifying with characters and situations feeds into the unique offerings cinema has on philosophy (Section 4). Wartenberg defends this idea by answering the question: Why should we care about fictional characters?

We care about what happens to some fictional characters because we identify with them...once we see the characters as versions of ourselves, their fates matter to us, for we see ourselves as wrapped up in their stories (Section 4).

Therefore, film uniquely offers an audiovisual representation of identifiable situations and characters that we as the audience gain an emotional connection with. This inspires questions led by emotion that relate to the philosophy presented in films, which facilitates outsized philosophical growth past traditional ideas.

Project Proposal

My RBA will investigate the importance of emotional relatability, thought experiments, and traditional philosophy in allowing films to promote philosophical insights that surpass conventional channels of philosophy. All these objects of inquiry above correlate to the discussion in progress because they investigate precise claims made by experts in the field: Can cinema be a medium for insight into unique philosophical ideas? Why does film offer unique insights into philosophy?

The primary source that I will use to carry out my analysis is the film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (ESSM) directed by Michel Gondry. ESSM will be systematically broken down into pieces that illustrate its unique philosophical nature intending to disprove ideas from the DiP that film cannot inspire philosophical contemplation driven by emotion and ambiguity. This will persuade readers to realize the significance of philosophy *through* film because it provides a concrete example that film can meaningfully contribute to philosophy beyond the narrow limits of traditional ideologies. However, a perusal of written philosophical excerpts such as John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bernard Williams' *Persons*,

Character, and Morality, and Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork* will be used as secondary sources to provide philosophical context and insights that ESSM draws upon. This is essential in showing that philosophy in films does draw on traditional written philosophy that highlights underlying philosophical ideologies. This illustration will be a complement to ESSM's advancement of philosophy rather than an impediment.

Explicitly, the goal of my RBA is to answer the questions: How could anyone think that film doesn't contribute meaningfully to philosophy? How does emotional connection from relatable situations generate philosophical inquiries that surpass traditional textual ideas?

Claim

Film can be a meaningful contributor to philosophy by drawing on traditional texts while producing emotional conversation that sparks new insights from the audience regarding the philosophical themes presented. To display this, it is imperative to show that ESSM draws on established written philosophy that highlights overarching ideas. After a perusal of these written texts, there will be an investigation into how film simultaneously inspires philosophical thoughts beyond the medium of conservative written philosophy through thought experiments that identify with the audience by eliciting emotional reflection

Personal Identity in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

The first major component when analyzing whether a film can meaningfully advance philosophical insights relies on ESSM drawing on written texts. By studying traditional written philosophy we can examine situations using Platonic logic. Specifically, in ESSM, there are notable references to different perspectives of traditional philosophy regarding personal identity

and moral decision-making. From a strictly traditional philosophical standpoint, when examining the film *ESSM* written by Charlie Kaufman, it becomes clear that while memory is an integral part of one's identity, it is not the only factor determining one's individuality. In John Locke's famous work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he defines memory as "repeating the idea of any past action with the same consciousness (Locke, 303)," arguing that memory is the basis of personal identity. Therefore, Locke argues from a moral standpoint, a person should be exonerated of their mistakes if their loss of memory or consciousness makes them a new person. This relates directly to *ESSM* as in the film the two main characters undergo a procedure that erases their memory of each other after a falling out in their relationship. The theme of personal identity raises two quintessential questions: what defines a person, and can we hold someone accountable for their actions if their consciousness is altered? Traditional philosophical texts aid us in comprehending these big-picture questions through Platonic logic. Moreover, the film itself serves as a thought experiment showcasing Locke's ideas in action, while promoting additional discussion that advances the discussion of personal identity.

To defend the argument that personal identity is not wholly reliant on memory and the consistency of consciousness through time, one needs to establish the definition of a person. In the Lockean sense, a person is defined as "a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places.... (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 303)." Applying Locke's definition, I will present an example of this concept from *ESSM*. Following Joel, a main character from the film, he remarks, "one of my favorite things, when I was a kid, was my Huckleberry Hound doll (1:26:00)". Joel can remember himself as a kid and that this toy makes up part of his person. However, when Joel erases his memories of Clementine after learning she

erased him from her memories, Joel loses his memory of this childhood doll. This is apparent when we observe Clementine and Joel's dialogue after the procedure: Clementine questions, "Huckleberry Hound?" to which Joel responds, "I don't know what that means (00:07:24)." Clearly, Joel does not have any memory of his childhood toy, which means, according to Locke, that the Joel from before and after the procedure are different people. This stems from the fact that each version of Joel has its own set of consciousness and memories. Locke summarizes this as "whatsoever any substance has thought or done, which I cannot recollect, and by my consciousness make my own thought and action, it will no more belong to me (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 311)". Put simply, Joel cannot be the same person because his lost memories altered his consciousness. Although Locke presents a strong argument for Joel becoming a different person, ESSM presents a second philosophical way to determine personal identity.

While there is some merit to John Locke's idea of personal identity, one can argue with his definition of a person because he fails to consider a more holistic approach to identity. A more modern conception of what makes someone a person combines John Locke's conception of memory and Bernard Williams' beliefs about agents. Bernard Williams challenges Locke's ideas about personal identity by defining people as the continuity of their agency in his essay *Persons, Character, and Morality* (Williams, 12). Simply put, a person is the sum of their intentions, projects, desires, and goals in life. Therefore, it follows that personhood is sustained by an individual's continuous agency and desires even when memory is lost. Consequently, one must lose enough memory to alter their characteristics of agency to be considered a new person. This idea is demonstrated by ESSM through Clementine's transformation that results from her procedure. Before Clementine erases her memories of Joel, she describes herself in a rant, "guys

think I'm a concept, or I complete them, or I'm going to make them alive. But I'm just a fucked-up girl who's looking for my own peace of mind. Don't assign me yours (01:22:28)."

Since Clementine certainly knows who she is before the procedure and preserves her agency, Locke would agree that she is the same person here. However, Locke would frame Clementine after having her memory erased as a new person because she has a consciousness different from what she had prior, a consciousness completely void of memories with Joel. On the contrary, Willams objects to this claim as Clementine still retains her beliefs and characteristics that make up her agent. ESSM exemplifies this claim through a scene towards the end of the film where Clementine re-introduces herself to Joel, again, ranting, "I'm not a concept, Joel. I'm just a fucked-up girl who's looking for my own peace of mind (01:42:57)." Clementine shows that her perception of self is almost identical to her description of herself before the procedure, proving that Clementine is a fundamentally different person, but retains her core original traits, even after losing her memories of Joel. Therefore, Clementine is the same person, just with a slightly altered consciousness. Referring to her as two different people is absurd, considering that Clementine's self-perception remains unchanged, signifying that her agency is untouched. The movie itself persists in sustaining William's view as Joel (like Clementine) seems to retain his personal identity even after his consciousness is altered by the procedure. This becomes apparent when the couple meets at the place they fell in love (Montauk) after they erased each other from memory and instantly become infatuated with each other, in an almost identical manner to when they first met as shown previously in the movie. Ultimately, ESSM challenges Locke's idea that memory and uniform consciousness are the basis for personal identity by providing examples that undermine the argument using William's view on identity.

This analysis of personal identity in ESSM illustrates the traditional philosophy being explored in the film. This at the very least shows that the film exhibits written philosophical aspects that display Platonic rationale. The concept is purely logical because the audience can comprehend the philosophy solely from written texts. However, this is simply an example of a film illustrating philosophy, not advancing conversation past conventional ideas. ESSM needs to provoke thought from the audience that relates to the ideas being presented, but in a distinct manner that is driven by emotional connection. Thus, if ESSM accomplishes this, then it will facilitate increased exploration in the philosophical ideas regarding personal identity displayed beyond that of William and Locke. Numerous emotional questions surrounding personal identity are brought to light throughout the movie. For instance, although Clementine can be seen as the same person, it is inferred that parts of her past have disappeared, leaving her mind with empty holes. This is exhibited in scenes where Clementine seems lost and confused after the breakup with Joel and the procedure. She starts dating a man named Patrick (an employee at Lacuna, the memory erasure clinic), who uses Joel's possessions and notes about Clementine to seduce her. Clementine quickly becomes overwhelmed with the knowledge Patrick has on her, almost as if Patrick recognizes the real Clementine more than herself. Therefore, we see Clementine in a situation that can be seen in ourselves, namely the struggle to understand one's personal identity and characteristics. What traits make you, yourself? Is self-perception independently related to one's memories or can someone else affect them? These are examples of exploratory thoughts the audience might have regarding the philosophical topic of identity that goes beyond pure definitions of personhood and is guided by an emotional connection to the relatable nature of the scene. *Entertainment Weekly's* Owen Gleiberman explains the impact the film had on him by saying, "it may be the first movie I've seen that bends your brain and breaks your heart at the

same time.” Moreover, emotional questions might be elicited from the scene of Joel before and after the procedure as he loses the memory of something special to his heart (childhood toy). Do we become hollow shells of ourselves without our innocent childhood? While these questions are based on conventional ideas about personhood, there is an added layer of analysis that is produced from the audience examining themselves in the external world. This internalized self-investigation is not led by the logical definitions that Locke and Williams state, but rather from ESSM using the modern medium of film to portray situations that are identifiable to us. Thus, ESSM itself meaningfully contributes to philosophy regarding personal identity by provoking the audience to ruminate about their own lives through thought experiments beyond the scope of conventional philosophical ideologies

Moral Decision Making in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

Previously, I addressed the question posed earlier: What defines a human? Now, I want to connect this to a discussion about morality. ESSM draws on written moral philosophy and expands on the philosophical conversation surrounding decision-making by inducing emotional contemplation from the audience connecting with recognizable events. To study the moral implications of people's actions, we must first understand what determines morality. Famously, philosopher Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork* argues what he calls the "Categorical Imperative": Every immoral action is an irrational action (47). But what makes something a rational decision? Kant claims that human reasoning does. Essentially, our efforts should be guided by what is required of us in life, which is our duties. Thus, duties are obligatory actions that are imperative to be carried out, founded purely by reason. Through thought experiments, we can relate these Kantian ideas to ESSM by focusing on the characters' decisions to alter their memory. Does

reason guide their decisions or is it passion and emotion? Joel and Clementine both showcase this transparent decision-making process of acting governed by sentiment not obligatory need. They impulsively decide to erase their memories of each other without considering the consequences associated with their actions. Notably, Joel's friend Carrie states, "Clementine's just like that. She's impulsive. She decided to erase you almost as a lark (00:27:38)." Presumably, this behavior hurt Joel as he still loved Clementine, and drove him to rapidly repeat Clementine's mistake as a result of his emotions of resentment. Their selfish actions extend past themselves and can hurt those around them as the characters cannot learn from their past mistakes (memory of mistakes erased). Why do Clementine and Joel's decision to get their memories erased not align with their moral duty?

Throughout the film, we see that the people who actively choose to alter their memories do not learn lessons from their blunders. For instance, we see Mary become re-infatuated with Dr. Howard after the fact that she already erased the memory of their affair in the past. When Mary realizes this disappointment, she heartbreakingly concludes, "I've since decided it's a horribly sad procedure (01:37:31)." She admits that her (irrational) decision to alter her memory impeded her from learning from her mistakes. Similarly, Joel and Clementine selfishly decide to use the memory procedure as a coping mechanism instead of learning from their relationship. Thus, we understand that decisions to modify memory based on emotion have immoral prudential ramifications. The characters suffer negative consequences for their lapses in reason, ultimately concurring with Kant's moral philosophy.

We have now analyzed part of Kant's moral philosophy displayed in the movie, but how has the film created distinct insights for the audience that does not relate to written works? We as the audience watch as Clementine and Joel's entire relationship transpires in front of us. We see

their love, their regret, and their mistakes. This relationship connects to many of the audience members because we can all see shades of their fictional relationships in our past or present relationships. In a *Focus Feature* article the *A. V. Club* noted, "It's the rare film that shows us who we are now and who we're likely, for better or worse, forever to be." Should Joel and Clementine be morally punished because of their emotions? If one is in agonizing despondency that is inconceivably difficult to cope with and is offered a way to selfishly alleviate the pain, is this a moral option to choose? This is a unique thought that relates to people in the external world, showcasing the film has transcended its medium and has philosophical insights to say in response to Kant.

Moreover, it is important to understand the link between moral reasoning and eudaimonistic implications related to memory alteration. Remembering the definitions of personal identity discussed above, we know that recollection is still a fundamental part of identity consisting of both *good* and *bad* memories. Specifically, the memories founded in deep-rooted emotions, creative passions, and free choices engender core aspects of one's identity. Joel and Clementine mistakenly believe that deleting their memories of each other will relieve them of their shared burdensome experiences together. However, they fail to realize that they will also remove their radiant love when eliminating their painful memories, forcing them to suffer through unanticipated collateral damage. For instance, when Joel is dating Clementine, he remarks, "I could die right now... I'm just so happy. I've never felt that before. I'm just exactly where I want to be (00:53:58)." Sadly after the procedure, while Joel is still the same person because he sustains his agency (introverted, reserved), we can infer that he devastatingly loses several of his happy memories, including this memory of Clementine and him laying down on the ice. Tragically, it seems multiple of Joel's pleasant memories were associated with

Clementine, so his choice to not preserve his painful memories comes at the cost of losing all his beloved memories connected to happiness. Additionally, the audience understands that Joel regrets his decision to alter his memory almost instantly as he tries his best to preserve his memory of Clementine during the procedure.

Thus, ESSM provides a second example from Kant's rationale. People generate their identity based on the preservation of memories and agency. Sadly, in this case, Joel does not foresee that losing his painful memories of Clementine will cost him all his blissful memories, most likely leaving him a hollowed-out version of himself. This situation can resonate heavily with the audience, providing a slew of new philosophical insights driven by emotion concerning moral decision-making. Is it morally right to repress dark memories about past relationships to move on? The idea of losing your happy memories also feeds into the general theme of regret inspired by the movie. Is any amount of pain worth losing at the cost of certain happiness? The film ultimately argues that the characters regret their decisions to undergo the memory erasure procedure because the loss of their joyous memories outweighs the pain they alleviate. All of these thoughts are drawn from written moral philosophy exhibited in ESSM but are driven by emotion stemming from the thought experiments presented. Thus, ESSM successfully pushes beyond the narrow confines of Kant's moral philosophy, thereby expanding the field for philosophical inquiry.

Final Thoughts: Truth and Reconciliation

Not only does ESSM meaningfully contribute to philosophy by expanding traditional ideas through thought experiments, but also serves as an argument against philosophy being contained in a purely Platonic view. ESSM meaningfully develops philosophy by seriously

taking into consideration Kant's, Locke's, and Williams' ideas, but then forcing us to grapple with questions that are beyond the scope of conventional philosophy. This accentuates the notion that illustrating outside philosophical texts is not an impediment, but a complement to insights film generates through thought experiments. Additionally, we see how emotionality becomes a plus for films rather than an abstraction or ambiguity in producing philosophical meaning because it facilitates unique conversations from the audience.

In Plato's time, logical philosophy assisted to legitimize a structure of thought that protected institutionalization such as slavery. Moreover, in Kant's time, conventional philosophy aided in defending imperialistic world views. However, today philosophy seeks a new agenda: one that focuses on justice, promoting truth and reconciliation. Film helps broaden the view of philosophy, inspiring creativity and emotion to play a part in understanding humanistic values. Thus, we can see Plato was being curiously incurious in his definition of philosophy.

All in all, philosophy through the film is a step in the right direction: one that values adopting a non-purely Platonic view.

Annotated Bibliography

Wartenberg, Thomas, "Philosophy of Film", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/film/>.

Written by philosophy professor at Mount Holyoke Thomas Wartenberg, this article from *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2015 edited volume by Edward Zalta focuses on the general opinions in the field of Film and Philosophy and the importance of cinema as a medium that elicits strong emotional responses. Wartenberg's contribution brings to light the contested debates in the field, most notably the extent to which film can philosophize. Wartenberg presents ideas from Platonic arguments that film is at most pedagogical to claims that films generate unique philosophical content (Wartenberg 1, Section 7). The source offers prominent examples of academic authors putting text in conversation. First, virtually all academic authors that have voiced opinions about any idea in the field were cited including Stanley Cavell, Stephen Mulhall, Noel Carroll, Murray Smith, Seymour Chatman, Plato, Irving Singer, Michael Levine Cox, Christopher Falzon, and many others, to create an overall picture of the various claims made in the discipline. Second, an interesting point of discussion revolves around the emotional significance of the audience identifying with characters and situations and how this feeds into the philosophical impact of cinema.

Mulhall, Stephen. 2002. *On Film*. London: Routledge.

Written by philosopher and Fellow of New College (Oxford) Stephen Mulhall, chapter one from *On Film* inspects the disputed assertion that films themselves can philosophize. Mulhall's contribution focuses on the relationship between philosophers' work and film's impact. Mulhall claims that films are not as philosophically raw as traditional writings, but films reflect on arguments analogously to philosophers. Explicitly writing, "Films are... philosophical exercises, philosophy in action – film as philosophizing" (Mulhall, 2). The source offers prominent examples of academic authors putting text in conversation. Most notably, Mulhall, calls upon Ridley Scott's work in the alien movies and fellow philosopher Robert Sinnerbrink in order to further the conversation that films can generate philosophy. Mulhall, rejects certain ideological principles of Murray, who argue against the idea that the medium of film can create unique philosophical content.

Wartenberg, Thomas E. *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy*. United Kingdom, Taylor & Francis, 2007.

Written by philosophy professor at Mount Holyoke Thomas Wartenberg, the chapter *Illustrating a Philosophical Theory* from the 2007 original volume concentrates on the intersection between philosophy and popular culture. Wartenberg's contribution brings forth the concept of "thought experiments" in relation to cinema. Wartenberg argues that "thought

experiments" (imaginary scenarios, hypothetical situations) play a role, especially in fictional narratives, in initiating philosophical reflection, allowing salient points to be made through film (Wartenberg, 56-65). The source offers prominent examples of academic authors putting text in conversation. Importantly, Wartenberg presents a counter argument to Plato's historical ideology towards philosophy, while defending philosophy in cinema from newer claims from Murray Smith, Paisley Livingston, and more. He synthesizes claims from Stanley Cavell, Stephen Mullhall, Noel Carroll, and Hugo Münsterberg into analysis of how all films have philosophical concerns at their centers, regardless of their genres because the audience can identify with the content. This further stirs conversation about how the emotional effect cinema engenders through its medium can be philosophical.

Smith, Murray 'Film Art, Argument and Ambiguity'. 2006, in Murray Smith and Thomas E. Wartenberg (eds). 2006. *Thinking Through Cinema: Film as Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Written by professor of film and co-director of the Aesthetics Research Centre (University of Kent) film theorist Murray Smith, this excerpt from his 2006 journal article, *Film Art, Argument and Ambiguity* examines Plato's theory of philosophy in relation to film. Smith's contribution concentrates on the exactness of textual philosophy. Smith argues that the ambiguity of films causes a lack of logical precision vital for communicating philosophical reasoning (Smith, 17). The source offers prominent examples of academic authors putting text in conversation. Most notably, Smith expands on his reasoning through the works of Plato, who repudiates the notion that fictitious works can reveal truth. He further calls upon the ideas of other authors such as Thomas Wartenberg, Stephan Mullhall, Noel Carroll, and Andre Bazin, while attempting to explain how the presentation of philosophical thought experiments in cinema were overshadowed by the artistic concerns of the medium.

Falzon, Christopher. *Philosophy Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Routledge, 2015.

Written by senior lecturer in philosophy at the University of Newcastle (Australia) Christopher Falzon, the first chapter *Plato's Picture Show* from *Philosophy Goes to the Movies*, studies the impact cinema's world building has on creating philosophy. Falzon's contribution focuses on why the immersive medium of film is vital in presenting unique philosophical experiences. Falzon reasons that films construct a universe of representation emulating experiences in life, which unearth tangible ideas provoking philosophical thought (Falzon, 5). The source offers prominent examples of academic authors putting text in conversation. Specifically, supplementing ideas from Michele Le Doeuff, V.F. Perkins, Plato, Jay Rosenberg, and Thomas Wartenberg to investigate the medium of film and the role it plays in manufacturing distinctive philosophical insights. Additionally, Falzon implicitly contributes to the highly contested overarching debate about the ability for film to produce philosophy (Stanley Cavell,

Noel Carroll, Paisley Livingston, Plato, Stephen Mulhall).

Livingston, Paisley. "Theses on Cinema as Philosophy." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2006, pp. 11–18. *JSTOR*.

Written by philosophy professor Paisley Livingston (Lingnan University), this excerpt from his 2006 journal article *Theses on Cinema as Philosophy* published by Wiley on behalf of The American Society for Aesthetics investigates the extent to which films create an impact on philosophy. Livingston's contribution hones in on the pedagogical relationship between film and philosophy. He argues that, while films can be used as a medium to illustrate philosophically informed positions and perspectives, they lack the ability to produce their own unique philosophical content in that medium (Livingston, 12). The source offers prominent examples of academic authors putting text in conversation. Most notably, Livingston defends against clashing rhetorical ideas from Noel Carrell, Thomas Wartenberg, and Seymour Chatman, who argue in favor that film produces philosophy. On the other hand, to strengthen his claim Livingston cites other distinguished authors such as Decartes, St. Augustine, and Murray Smith in order to examine the heuristic relationship between cinema and philosophy.

Singer, Irving. "Philosophical Dimensions of Myth and Cinema." *Cinematic Mythmaking: Philosophy in Film*, MIT Press, 2010.

Written by Harvard and MIT philosophy professor Irving Singer, the introductory chapter *Philosophical Dimensions of Myth and Cinema* from *Cinematic Mythmaking: Philosophy in Film* published by MIT Press examines how films can help explain the nature of real-life perceptions through its aesthetic audiovisual medium. Irving's contribution stems from studying the sensory impact films have on the audience. Irving writes, "watching cinema is like dreaming in several ways... It is as if we are a bemused audience that watches our own dreams as we might watch a film being projected privately for us alone" (Singer, 5). The source offers prominent examples of academic authors putting text in conversation. Specifically, he connects works from Stanley Cavell and Sigmund Freud to emphasize the importance of cinema's sensory experience on projecting philosophical insights to the audience.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690

John Locke, widely regarded as one of the most influential philosophers of the enlightenment, discusses his famous 'theory of mind' in his paper, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke's contributions have been widely accredited for paving the way for modern conceptions about personal identity and self. Locke argues that the self is a continuation of one's consciousness. Locke summarizes this idea as "whatsoever any substance has thought or done, which I cannot recollect, and by my consciousness make my own thought and action, it

will no more belong to me (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 311)”. To put simply, if there is a gap in an organism's memory then that organism is not the same self as it was in the past. This philosophical ideology serves as one interpretation of human identity, which can help justify and comprehend our expression of self. This source will serve as a traditional philosophical text that can explain the philosophy behind personal identity in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Are Joel and Clementine the same people before and after the procedure?

Williams, Bernard. “Persons, Character and Morality.” *Moral Luck*, 1981, pp. 1–19.

Bernard Williams, a twentieth-century philosopher poses his theory of personal identity in his essay, *Persons, Character, and Morality*. Bernard Williams’ theories about personal identity have incited debate in the field as it challenges prominent philosopher John Locke's ideas about the self. Williams claims that personal identity is defined in people as the continuity of their agency (12). Simply put, a person is the sum of their intentions, projects, desires, and goals in life. Therefore, it follows that a person's identity is attributed to their memories and agency through time, not one without the other. This is an important source because it offers a secondary perspective into the philosophy of personal identity in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Have the motivations and general frameworks of Joel and Clementine changed after the procedure?

Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Immanuel Kant, a renowned philosopher of ethics/morality was a central enlightenment thinker, who sheds his insights on rational and just decision making in his book *Groundwork*. Kant’s contributions to philosophy have been immensely influential especially in his arguments for what he calls the "Categorical Imperative": Every immoral action is an irrational action. Kant claims rational decision making stems from human reasoning. Essentially, our efforts should be guided by what is required of us in life, which is our duties. Thus, duties are obligatory actions that are imperative to be carried out, founded purely by reason (47). This argumentative source will serve as an example of traditional philosophical thought being shown in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. This will be fundamental in helping prove that *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* itself philosophizes, as a film must draw on textual philosophy and use its modern medium to convey unique insights through thought experiments.

Gondry, Michel, director. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Momentum Pictures, 2004.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind directed by Michel Gondry and written by Charlie Kaufman is a movie that follows an alienated couple who have expunged each other from their memories. The psychological thriller helps create a narrative that explores the relationship between identity and romance. The title of the film is a quotation from the 1717 poem *Eloisa to Abelard* by Alexander Pope. “How happy is the blameless vestal's lot! / The world forgetting, by

the world forgot / Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind! / Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd." This quote symbolizes the idea of ignorance when we choose to suppress or forget past mistakes. The movie revolves around this notion, but does not answer whether or not one would be better off forgetting their blunders and living in a limbo state of happiness or learning from their mistakes and not having a spotless mind.

Sciretta, Peter. "Interview with Charlie Kaufman." *Film*, 25 Oct. 2008, www.slashfilm.com/interview-with-charlie-kaufman/.

In an interview with Peter Sciretta from Slashfilm, Charlie Kaufman the writer of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (ESSM)* explains his goals when creating stories. Kaufman claims that "my movies don't offer lessons. . . . my goal when I do something is to have a conversation with the audience rather than to lecture them." Kaufman writes with the hope of fueling inciting debate about external topics, by purposefully leaving the audience without answers. This writing choice makes audience members need to converse with others to attempt to dissect the film they watched and realize its message. Moreover, Kaufman seems to keep his thoughts grounded in reality, even though it is a science fictional film. Kaufman says "Every emotion is a real emotion. And that's how I work when I'm writing it, and that's how I work with the actors, and we placed ourselves in those moments when they performed them, as if this were reality, and the issues are real issues to me." The authenticity of the philosophical situations is directly related to the fact that Kaufman's goal is to treat the fictional situation as real.

"After 13 YEARS, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind Still Blows Our Minds." *Focus Features*, www.focusfeatures.com/article/legacy_eternal-sunshine_13-year-anniversary.

In a news article published by Focus Features entitled "After 13 Years, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* Still Blows Our Minds" it breaks down the emotional effect of the film. Specifically, the article highlights the fact that the movie stimulated deep thoughts, while simultaneously provoking emotional responses from the audience. *Entertainment Weekly*'s Owen Gleiberman explains the impact the film had on him by saying, "it may be the first movie I've seen that bends your brain and breaks your heart at the same time." Moreover, the article investigates the connection to situations and characters the audience members felt resembled real events and feelings in their lives. For example, *A. V. Club* noted, "It's the rare film that shows us who we are now and who we're likely, for better or worse, forever to be."