



2022 HAWAII UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES
ARTS, HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES, & EDUCATION JANUARY 5 - 7, 2022
PRINCE WAIKIKI RESORT, HONOLULU, HAWAII

PHILOSOPHY AND POPULAR CULTURE - A NEED FOR JUSTIFICATION



INNES, M. CHRISTOPHER
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
BOISE, IDAHO

Philosophy and Popular Culture—A Need for Justification

Christopher M. Innes

Boise State University, Boise, Idaho

Abstract

The study of philosophy and popular culture requires a philosophical discipline and a commitment to the belief that popular culture has philosophical content. This content might be fleeting or extensive philosophical dialogue, scenes, or images. It might even be examples of situations that deserve philosophical investigation but that have no philosophical intention. Matching the two is difficult to explain and justify to those who are not already persuaded that such a link exists.

This paper is a philosophical analysis of the problems involved in the linking of philosophy and popular culture.

My thrust in this paper is aided by David Hume's analysis of the problems of causation. We have the discipline of philosophy, and we have the many examples of popular culture. We have to ask how the philosophy in popular culture is brought into being. There is a gap between the discipline of philosophy and the artifacts of popular culture that for many academics is vast and insurmountable. I analyse the problem in an optimistic way. I believe there is a link. To those who do not hold such a belief, I say that it is a *reasonable* link. I may not be able to show that it is a *necessary* link, but at least I can suggest that there is a plausible relationship between philosophy and popular culture and that philosophers embarking on such study ought to be taken

seriously. Critical analysis of literature and film have come into being, and now cannot such philosophy of popular culture also come into being? At one-point metaphysics and epistemology were entrenched as the only *serious* philosophy to be studied. Now, the discipline of philosophy has overcome the internal obstacles that kept it from accepting a link between philosophy and politics, moral action, aesthetics... Could philosophy and popular culture as a discipline also come into being?

The conclusion might be for philosophy and popular culture to become another branch of philosophy, for popular culture to join philosophy studies adding a new branch of philosophy. We could, however, imagine some midway acknowledgment: providing examples from popular culture for philosophers to use to demonstrate points and even compiling an index of popular culture references for such a purpose.

Keywords: David Hume on causation, popular culture, philosophy, high culture, Hegelian dialectic, Karl Marx on production, literature studies, film studies, F. Scott Fitzgerald on literature studies, *Seinfeld*, *The Simpsons*, *Better Call Saul*, Ann E. Larabee, Gary Hoppenstand, Ray Browne on parallelity, Pierre Bourdieu on cultural capitol, Max Weber on consumption, Raymond Williams, George Orwell on boys' comics, John Storey, Pixar, Rodney King, Holt Parker and popular culture, C. J. Ducasse on causation, *The Mikado*, *Inception*.

Introduction

Philosophy and popular culture studies are in the category of an emerging discipline, with complexities and difficulties once experienced by literature studies and, later, by film studies. This implies that popular culture artifacts have philosophical content in and of themselves or that they are at least worthy of philosophical analysis. Literature studies take the same view that they are academically important and that, being in the academic arena, they face the need to justify

literature as a viable discipline. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote to his daughter condemning literature studies after she wrote telling him that she wanted to take a literature and writing course at Vassar. He said that a person is subnormal if they need instruction on how to read a novel.ⁱ It was later the turn of film studies to receive the scorn of academics for its investigation into a medium deemed by orthodox academia as needing no insight into the metaphysical wonders of the universe, simply because they had none, and like literature, deserve no serious study. Novels, poems, and films are for entertainment, and—like skittles, juke boxes, video games, caravans, and other aspects of popular culture—are not considered to be a legitimate part of a higher education curriculum. Now, it is the turn of philosophy and popular culture studies to go through the same sort of a Hegelian hurricane wherein philosophy and popular culture are drawn together and appreciated as a legitimate part of academia.

Such a melding of philosophy and popular culture has got to be seen as valid for popular culture to be viewed as a legitimate academic branch of philosophy. The union of the two would have to be appreciated as more than a mere fabrication. Many academic disciplines are a complex union of various areas of study that stand up to rigorous examination. As mentioned, literature and critical analysis had to justify its union. The two had no a priori meeting of minds and, like any synthetic union, justification was needed to suggest that the union was reasonable. The union is where the artifact (such as a film or an object like a gypsy caravan or a drinks cabinet) is considered to have philosophical content or is seen to be a possibility for philosophical analysis. For example, in television history, the situation comedy *Seinfeld* is famous for containing philosophical dialogue, meaning that it has philosophical content. The animated feature *The Simpsons* contains no philosophical content but is primed for philosophical analysis. The characters in *Seinfeld* openly discuss philosophical themes such as nihilismⁱⁱ

whereas *The Simpsons* portrays characters and events that philosophers like to discuss.ⁱⁱⁱ These are examples of plausible links between philosophy and popular culture.

My academic work has involved my writing a great number of published essays that explore philosophy in the artifact or philosophy as it is employed to analyze the artifact. I have concentrated on the examples of popular music, comedic sketches, and television drama. The comedian Dave Chappelle, the singer and songwriter Tom Petty, and the television drama *Better Call Saul* are a few examples. I have not looked at other artifacts such as, say, a gypsy caravan, a particular sport, or a video game, although these artifacts and others are well and truly included as legitimate topics for philosophy and popular culture studies.

In this discussion, I call upon David Hume's analysis of the problems of causation. We need to ask how both philosophy and popular culture came into being. The discipline of philosophy exists, and so does popular culture. Can we show a link between philosophy and popular culture? The link is not likely to be a necessary one, but if there is at least a contingent link between critical analysis and literature or such analysis and film, then perhaps the same could be said of philosophy and popular culture. Philosophy has overcome its internal obstacles to accepting the link between philosophy and politics, philosophy and moral action, philosophy and aesthetics—and this happened even with metaphysics and epistemology being entrenched in some minds as the only *serious* philosophy to be studied. Can this same progress be extended to philosophy and popular culture being part of the higher education curriculum of philosophy?

The conclusion of this essay might be that philosophy and popular culture as a discipline should not be included in philosophy studies—though I must admit that the intention of this essay *is* to suggest that philosophy and popular culture studies can be included in philosophy studies. Certainly, philosophy and popular culture could come into a philosophy department as

another string on the bow. It can be included in areas such as metaphysics and epistemology, or it can act as a complement to these areas by providing an index of examples from popular culture to use in illustration of philosophical problems. Either way, philosophy and popular culture has a role to play: as a subject on its own or as a way to illustrate philosophical problems, themes, theories, and ideas.

This paper refers to philosophers, literary critics, and examples of popular culture. I discuss the work of Ray Browne^{iv} and his initiatives in this field, include comments by George Orwell on boys' comics and literature and Ann E. Larabee^v on the use of popular culture.

An Argument that There Is a Link between Philosophy and Popular Culture

The category of popular culture is typically unappreciated for its philosophical content. Those in philosophy departments become ill-at-ease when they hear the mention of popular culture linked to their discipline. Popular culture is deemed to be mass culture entertainment and not a part of serious philosophy. Gary Hoppenstand and others write about how the discipline of literature in the 1960s and '70s was preoccupied being viewed as part of elitist culture.^{vi} Currently, I am taunted and ridiculed by members of my own philosophy department, who consider my philosophy and popular culture courses to be trivial. They say there is no link between these subjects. I say that so many popular culture artifacts are interwoven with references to philosophy—both subtle and blunt—that a rejection of this relationship has more to do with bias and insecurity than it does with academic rigor. I would say that to deny the link between philosophy and popular culture requires a willful oversight of the facts, and this needs to be addressed

One definition of “popular culture” is that it is part of low culture and is often made as an expression of something that is not recognized as “cultural.” Many academic texts and general

opinion publications state that popular culture does not cultivate knowledge of abstract notions and is more, if not totally, concerned with “knowledge of one’s near community and it is thinkers like Raymond Williams who write that for this reason that it is often seen as subversive and likely to upset mature high culture.”^{vii} Popular culture fails to cultivate abstract notions and, as John Storey^{viii} writes, popular culture is seen as the inferior leftovers of high culture and as “a reduction of high culture.”^{ix} This means that popular culture has less value than what it represents and is unworthy of much intellectual investigation. In my argument, “high culture” is philosophy and represents the notions best expressed in abstraction and with no reference to popular culture.

Such an elitist view is rejected by me, for one, and I hope in my current argument to arrive at a near post-modern view with any modernistic distinction between high and popular culture to be recognized as arbitrary and, therefore, as flawed. “So it is with examples like Jimi Hendrix playing ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ at Woodstock in 1969 and Andy Warhol turning popular items into high art, where there is an intersection between high and popular culture with the boundaries no longer present.”^x The Russian punk rock band Pussy Riot has as much power as President John F. Kennedy ever had to influence political thought, just as philosophy can be ascribed meaning in popular movies. Noam Chomsky^{xi} highlights the film *Salt of the Earth* with a complex discussion of gender roles, social class, and working conditions. This is a clear intersection between high culture and popular culture; the text and artifact share a common dialogue.

We are arguing that popular culture and philosophy have a relationship, and—as in any “serious” philosophical discipline—it is difficult to show the exact nature of this relationship. Ray Browne, like Bernard Williams and David Storey, refers to popular culture and traditional

academia together, and his academic writings contain detail and analysis of popular culture. This is known as “parallelity.” We can find complementary aspects of popular culture and philosophical texts, and, as well, it is not problematic to find them. It is Browne and his reference to popular culture studies being parallel to traditional studies that might be difficult to prove. “There is an academic and intellectual divide, and it is prominent in elitist attitudes that consider the divide warranted. This divide is also shown by writers such as George Orwell, who feared that the cinema would reduce value of literature. Simply, people would want to see a film rather than read a novel.”^{xii}

Orwell was worried that the movies would stop people reading high culture literature, though he did also perceive worth in popular fiction.^{xiii} There is a progress of opinion where a hundred years ago it was said that film should not be taught in universities, as it was also said two hundred years ago that literature should not be at university.

Gary Hoppenstand tells us that popular culture is complex and is as open to examination as “any aspect of high culture.”^{xiv} To this we can add articles like Ann E. Larabee’s, which tell us how popular culture studies, when examining the history of slavery, create “an index to human prejudice as reflected in stereotypical entertainment.”^{xv} I argued in a paper that the study of the cartoons of Pixar, Warner Brothers, and DreamWorks could at least create an index and cite examples of philosophical references in scenes, dialogues, and circumstances in the films.^{xvi} To a great extent, it is typical of both children’s and mainstream entertainment to explore complex matters, just as popular literature does. As Hoppenstand states in his reference to the “Ray Browne method” of parallelity, all culture is “worthy of scholarly examination.”^{xvii}

Hoppenstand observes that Ray Browne was one of the pioneers of the movement to consider popular culture studies as worthy of scholarly pursuit. Browne classifies the topics and

groups them into three categories—folklore, popular culture, and elite culture. Browne “does not virtualize these three areas, but rather places them side by side, not to imply any type of hierarchical order”.^{xviii} This is where detective stories and horror stories are regarded as equal to high literature. It is the detective and horror stories’ concentration on particular situations rather than on the grand and metaphysical narrative found in high literature that often gets these genres excluded from traditional study. This happens simply because an elite codification considers contextual story lines to be low literature and the metaphysical to be high literature. Ray Browne is making “an expression of popular culture reflecting the attitudes and mores of the audience.”^{xix} Browne is subversive in the way he rejects the hierarchy of high and popular culture, but most of all he transcended the criticism and “opened new paths of imagination and inquiry.”^{xx}

It is this method that supports our intention to say that popular culture is linked to philosophy and is parallel to philosophical texts. As George Orwell wrote in his essay “Boys’ Weeklies,”^{xxi} “Personally I believe that most people are influenced far more than they would care to admit by novels, serial stories, films and so forth.”^{xxii} Orwell is most concerned with boys’ comic books, many of which have an influence on “imaginative background”^{xxiii} that will remain with readers into adulthood. The influence in this analysis is philosophical. We are talking about the strong influence of high-quality philosophical content. It is like what Sarah Churchwell^{xxiv} sees as a Hegelian dialectic, where ideas are exchanged between popular culture and high culture. This is where we are going to suggest that popular culture is not only complementary to philosophy but is also parallel to philosophical texts in its content and discussion of complex philosophical problems.

David Hume and the Problems of Causation

As a philosopher, I am encouraged by the writing of George Orwell, Ray Browne, and Anne Larabee and the cheering forward of Sarah Churchwell to argue that philosophy and popular culture warrant study. Also, as a philosopher, I am under an obligation to find a method that helps demonstrate that the two are linked. This is why I have chosen the 18th-century philosopher David Hume's analysis of the problems of causation with the understanding that philosophy and popular culture constitute a field of study but that a gap exists between these two subjects. This gap is also present between critical analysis and literature studies, film studies—in fact, many of the branches of philosophy are detached from the perceived serious metaphysical and epistemological content of philosophical study. The gap can be perceived as small, medium, or vast and insurmountable. Whether the gap is seen as great or small, it must be shown that there is reason for the existence of philosophy and popular culture as a viable discipline.

For this reason, we need to look at human perception of causation and understand how it is regulated. Hume writes in 1748 in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*^{xxv} that human perception is regulated by the individual's emotional state of being and that their attitude of mind will affect their perception of causation. My essay argues for the link between philosophy and popular culture in an optimistic way and with such emotion as would predispose us to accept this discipline in academia. There is not likely to be a causal link, but literature and philosophical analysis or film and such analysis has no causal link either, and these are both academic disciplines. We simply have to convince those who have the emotional frame of mind that the distance between popular culture and philosophy indicates that there is no discipline, that there is in fact such a discipline. If literature studies, and film studies overcame such a problem, then philosophy and popular culture studies can surely be taken more seriously and can suggest that philosophy and popular culture become a part of the philosophy discipline.

Why Hume?

This is why David Hume's notion of causation is used. Hume is one who drew philosophy out of the clouds and discussed philosophy like a compère on an 18th-century variety music hall stage as he introduced a philosophical problem and discussed it in a lively fashion. Much like any other academic disciple, philosophy is an emotional enterprise in that it has the human being at its center. It's just that many academics perceive academia in a certain way and believe this to be the only way. Their emotional disposition leads them to reject the unfamiliar and often to see it as subversive.

Hume's famous billiards example illustrates the problem of the presumed general cause-and-effect relationship. Hume uses the illustration of a game of billiards, where one ball is perceived as causing another to move. The player hits this ball into other balls, presuming the first ball to be the cause of the other balls' subsequent movement. Likewise, the player will presume that a ball will move in a certain direction if they hit it at a certain angle. The player does not take into account that there are many different possible effects of which they might not be aware. Custom places the player in a frame of mind to expect the ball to go in a certain direction if it is hit in a certain way. But there is no a priori reasoning that will help predict the many different effects that could occur with a moving ball. In the same way, reasoning can help to explain past events but can provide only theorems in regard to what has happened. Science is limited, and any identification of effect is likely to be arbitrary.

According to Hume's analysis, the perception of causation is complex and requires an examination of human understanding—how the mind perceives one thing in relation to another. In this case, the question is how one thing is perceived to be caused by another. We are arguing that philosophy and popular culture would come into being if the cause and effect can be proven

beyond reasonable doubt. First, I might argue that philosophy's ubiquitous nature causes popular culture to emulate or replicate it in films, television productions, automobile names and advertising, and other artifacts. This is difficult to avoid, and the unintentional nature of these references might be the cause for a film or television production to lack philosophical depth and meaning. Second, I might argue that elements in popular culture lend themselves to philosophical analysis. This might be a character portrayal, a plot development, or a general theme. Any of these could illustrate some philosophical problem. There would be no problem in stating that philosophy and popular culture as branch in philosophy if there were a causal link and this can be proven beyond reasonable doubt, but there is no proof of such a link, proven and so there is doubt.

It is apparent that causation is unclear even though the mind of the person perceiving it believes such a cause to be apparent. It is Hume's contention that human emotion and attitude are at the center of perception. If a person sees A to be the cause of B, it is the mind that makes this claim and it does so with the involvement of emotion and attitude. These human traits are not a fault; they are what give people their perception. This leads to a rejection of any a priori reasoning of causation.

As much as I would like to place A as a necessary cause of B, a gap exists between the two and prevents any necessary link. It is not clear if A is linked to B or if B is linked to A. An equation does not solve the problem. Simply put, it is our emotional disposition that creates a link in this mental process. People often fill such a gap with many wonderful but false links. These prove to be embarrassing upon examination, and many personal disputes based on "who" did "what" and "why" can ensue—producing only mortification following the contemplation

after the fact. Any associations between A and B are made only in the mind, even in moments of detachment and indifference when emotion is presumed to be not as much in play.

The logical gap is intangible and cannot be seen. Rational thought gives the idea of regularity, in the same way that we might arrange triangles by their form, size, and number. A person wants to create order, and proving that A is the cause of B creates such an order. Anything not presented in this order will be rejected. This science is a creation, and one that is needed in order to explain the universe. It is this simple: ideas when put together create meaning, and we intuit this meaning as real and not as created by the mind. We can say intuitively that a triangle has three sides and that its three angles add up to 180 degrees. These propositions are proven and are not dependent on anyone's observation. These are learned ideas, which we perceive as intuitive—but the same cannot be said of cause-and-effect relationships.

Along these lines, we have to admit that our matter-of-fact proposition is not proven by intuition—in the same way that the matter-of-fact proposition "the sun will rise tomorrow" is not proven by independent reasoning.^{xxvi} This is a matter-of-fact understanding where the "fact" depends on its having happened or not happened. Making the proposition that "the sun will not rise tomorrow" is just as reasonable a conviction as the proposition that the sun will rise tomorrow. The "meaning or imagination introduces a certain degree of regularity."^{xxvii} There is no contradiction in the former statement with the latter. There is no intuitive proposition on which to place the claim. All reasoning concerning matters of fact are found in the relation of cause and effect. There are two ways of looking at this connection:

- Proximity, both near and remote—the cause may be near to the effect like a car crashing into another car. The first car has its front bumper next the back bumper of the other car.

There are dents in both bumpers. This is in contrast to cause being distant such as the beating up of Rodney King and the Los Angeles riots of 1993.

- Consequences, either direct or collateral—meaning the effect of one thing on another. Lightning is the direct cause of thunder, and lightning may have other collateral effects that are distant with no imagined causal relationship.^{xxviii}

Hume goes in some detail about what he calls the principles of connection.^{xxix} These principles, continuing the list, are as follows:

- Resemblance—this is where the cause resembles the effect and vice versa, such as when a child resembles their parent. If this resemblance is missing, we tend to say that there is not a cause-and-effect relationship.
- Contiguity—this is when two or more things are in close proximity. A connection is presumed to exist such as the European Union has its member states in close proximity.
- Cause and effect—this is when one thing clearly makes another thing happen. (This is seen with the car crash example.)

The "knowledge of cause and of effect" is what Hume notices when people associate one thing with another. This association is gained from experience and not from inferential reasoning. Simply stated, in these cases the effect cannot be deduced from the cause. The two are different and not the same. Two planes of marble have what we know as cohesion and gravity that is presumed to be the cause of falling objects, but these incidents spring from a something not understood by the human mind and "these ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry."^{xxx} Hume talks about Adam from the book of Genesis who would not know what is water unless he had experienced it.^{xxxi} We might add, why did he not ask where Eve came from just as the cause of the taste of a pineapple is from tasting it,

the taste is not without its presence. This example is taken from Hume's earlier work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, which he wrote in 1739 and where his empirical epistemological position is emphasized by the statement that knowledge does not come before experience. The association is made with hope that one is a clear and distinct recognition of the other.

Unfortunately, it has not been proven so far that a cause of something is linked to the effect. It is clear in the mind of the observer, but it is something not demonstrated externally to the mind. This means that we are unable to prove that philosophy is linked to popular culture. We can say that philosophical questions in popular culture media resemble those found in philosophy. There may be a similarity, but there is no proven link. Even though we have not found a link, will C. J. Ducasse and his analysis help in the quest to show philosophy and popular culture can be appreciated as a discipline?

Why There Is No Provable Link between One Thing and Another

Philosophers such as Ducasse argue that Hume has offered a workable definition of causation but, in regard to our hope that philosophy and popular culture have a connection, with severe limitations. Hume's enquiry examines and experiments with many variations of causal explanations, and it seems his first is the one that works the best. This one is seen as the "cause and effect" variety: "we may define a cause to be one object followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second."^{xxxii} Ducasse stresses that this definition clashes with some of our most confident assumptions. There is a theoretical view that an experiment will make "manifest the causation of one particular occurrence by a particular other."^{xxxiii} This is a high hope for the certainty of a cause-and-effect relationship. Ducasse refers to Thomas Reid saying that "if the cause of an occurrence is defined as its invariable antecedent, then night must be the cause of day and day the cause of night."^{xxxiv} As J.

S. Mill says, such cause and effect relationship implies an unconditional relationship that leads from a belief of necessity—namely that the cause necessarily leads to the effect and vice versa. This is a very confident assumption for the observer of a cause-and-effect situation to make. It is this note of caution we must take seriously in our investigation of popular culture and philosophy.

Ducasse continues, pointing out many of Hume's experimental examples of causation and the predominance in circularity. Nonetheless, we are going to use the definition "an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other" to that of another^{xxxxv} because of Hume's reference to human nature and its emotional component of perceiving an "appearance" of the cause gives the idea of the effect. This will help show the limitation of causal links being shown as true, but we will ask if it is still helpful.

Hume's definition is problematic, as he was aware, and we find that psychological necessity is interesting in the way the connection between the cause and the effect is never seen, and therefore, according to empirical demands, there must be no connection. As far as matters of fact are concerned, the cause does not necessitate the occurrence of the effect. Matters of fact are empirical and stand in relation to each other with "cause" and "effect" having no necessity of one with the other. There is no such necessity in matters of fact, but matter and logic contain necessary causation, because to say that P leads to C when P is true, but C is false is a contradiction. Necessity only exists in the mind, and that's where causation is found.

Nature—namely the world of facts and occurrences—is not theory and is not understood in theory. Hume, as an empiricist, rejects idealistic/rational/logical/syllogistic reasoning. "Custom" and such psychological necessities are where the mind creates causal links. The perception of P passes to the perception of Q. It will not, therefore, be a contradiction if, on a

future occurrence, P does not lead to Q. In nature, there is no contradiction. For Hume, it is no violation of any logical law to say that you do not know what you are denying when you deny a connection between cause and effect. With this, there is also no notion of what we want to know when we endeavour to know it.

And so, even if one occasion produces evidence of cause necessarily leading to an effect, it is only a belief that this will occur with regularity in the future. The reference to future tense for any empiricist will deliver only a belief—and a belief in certainty is just that, a belief. Hume adds that any causal investigation needs “the removal of foreign and superfluous circumstances.”^{xxxvi} Alas, we do not know which are “superfluous.”

Going back to Hume’s “rules by which to judge cause and effects”^{xxxvii} in relationships, he explains in his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, that rule 5 (rule 3 as it appears above) mentions resemblances of the effect to the cause in which we extend our observation of the occurrence of the same kind to everything with this similarity, without concern for the regularity of its occurrence or the timing of its first occurrence. This is a rather commonplace knowledge of cause-and-effect evaluation that gets you through your day. It is a functional appraisal of cause and effect.

Another cause-and-effect evaluation as seen in rule 4 above, is when several different objects produce the same effect because of a quality shared by all. Hume’s rules identify variants of effects and causes, but no way of dismissing any distinction between that which is taken for granted as “effect” or “cause” from that which is normally rejected as superfluous. The effect on the main is not static as we find with the causes of death, car accidents, riots, and many other social occurrences.

Ducasse's discussion helps to clarify Hume's notion of causation. The contemporary philosopher shows that "cause" is part of our language and this notion influences the way we conduct everyday activities, but that cause is unproven as a link between one thing and another. The notion of "cause" might be clear in the mind, but it is not demonstrated in the external world. This makes it difficult to demonstrate that there is a link between philosophy and popular culture. There are resemblances between them, but these resemblances cannot be shown to exist because philosophy caused them to come into being. The cause might be presumed and the resemblances might show them to be similar, but no cause can be established.

Is There a Link between Philosophy and Popular Culture?

As might be presumed, there is no discernible link between philosophy and popular culture, just as there is not a link between literature and critical analysis (sometimes referred to as philosophical analysis), and film and such analysis, and in the various branches of philosophy there is no link between philosophy and politics or moral examination. With there being no discernible link, what can be argued to show that philosophy and popular culture studies should be taken seriously as a branch of study, considering that literature studies and film studies suffered from the same problem but are nonetheless now academic disciplines?

The Application

We are going to take Holt Parker's analysis of a definition of popular culture as useful because he provides a functional definition by which we can argue that popular culture and philosophy should be taken seriously, even though there is no link between the two. Parker argues that the definitions of high and low culture in which popular culture and philosophy have been placed are more arbitrary than is reasonable. Popular culture is perceived as low culture and philosophical analysis is perceived as high culture. Is this a correct dichotomy? Parker's

methodology is useful. We are looking for ways to suggest that philosophy and popular culture might be taken seriously. In evaluating the status of popular culture, Parker sets aside a Marxian analysis of production and adopts instead a Weberian analysis of consumption.^{xxxviii} It is this understanding that might link philosophy and popular culture by bringing us to an understanding that the cultural divide between them was created arbitrarily.

Karl Marx talks of class, but it is not fitting to place popular culture in such a class as this. Max Weber shows us the very nature of class status with his observation that classes can be seen as consumers of what he refers to as different “styles of life.”^{xxxix} It is here that we see the parallel between philosophical texts and popular culture. In a Marxian sense both are produced, yet it is in the light of Weberian consumption that one stands in opposition to the other, showing the status of one compared with the other. We can see both the consumption and those executing the consumption, and this might give us more insight into the link between popular culture and the philosophical text than a mere Marxian analysis of production.

Here, we can bring back Hume’s analysis and consider a collateral linking of philosophy and popular culture. It is like the billiard ball’s ricochet, hitting other balls and sending them in all directions. There is little chance of our taking in the full effect, but we can see the form things take with “the social life of things” and what sort of people are associated afterward. As Parker writes, “we look at the overlapping groups of objects, material-cultural assemblages, and try to understand what they tell us about the culture of the people who used them as symbolic counters.”^{xl} This is the way we can notice how people codify and rigorously enforce status differences, in this case between the philosophical text and popular culture, which we are seeing more and more as collaterally linked with, and later arbitrary codification based on, status.

Max Weber is a help, and Holt Parker makes it clear that what we call “culture” is an arbitrary gathering of likes and dislikes such as we might see with billiard balls sorted into groups, even though the cause of this sorting may not be clear. How can we say that one group is better than another? In the same way, the philosophical text and the philosophy of artifacts of popular culture are difficult to assess in terms of relative worth. How can we say that one is more serious than the other? By what means would we codify philosophical texts and philosophy of relics of popular culture, with one defined as being of a higher status than the other? It is in regard to this issue of distinction that Parker turns to the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu^{xli}.

Bourdieu develops the notion of “cultural capital.” This is like any other form of capital in that it differentiates which of its characteristics are valued and which are not—namely, in this case, that the philosophical texts are deemed of higher status than popular culture artifacts. As Parker cites Bourdieu, cultural capital is “the structure of the distribution of instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and proceeded.”^{xlii} Of these, there are three states:

- Embodied—in both the mind and the physical body, consisting of attitude and manner as well as manner of dress, manner of speaking, and so forth.
- Objectified—in the form of cultural goods such as books and our philosophical texts.
- Institutionalized—which includes objectified examples of cultural capital such as academic qualifications.

It is this cultural capital in its “high” form that helps promote the interests of an individual in their given social class. “Lower” versions of cultural capital are plausibly valuable but do not promote success in the higher status social classes. Watching Pixar cartoons and going on a family holiday in a caravan is suited to middle-class lifestyle, and will provide you the status for

that class, while reading Kant for fun and going to Bermuda on a winter break is suited to more upper-class status.

Middle-class popular pastimes are what give that class its particular status, and this is where Parker offers a tentative definition of popular culture as those aspects of culture that come into being without cultural capital. Popular culture does not require a long-term commitment, access to embodied cultural capital, or the investment of objectified cultural capital. In other words, watching movies and participating in other popular pastimes requires no training and also does not need an institution to bless its existence.

For our analysis, Parker has identified some interesting "intersections."^{xliii} For instance, using one of our examples, he points out that it takes a great deal of cultural capital to produce a movie but little to watch it, whereas very few things need little cultural capital to produce and a high level to appreciate them. Parker makes it clear that he has avoided Bennett^{xliv} and Storey's^{xlv} definition that popular culture is that which is "left over after we have decided what is high culture,"^{xlvi} and Parker also makes the point that aesthetic value can exist independently of capital investment.

Parker's subsequent discussion of art and what turns popular objects into high culture art is additionally useful in that the process occurs when institutions give credence to certain artifacts. For our analysis, this is one more example to support the view that any distinction between popular culture and philosophy is based on arbitrary judgment. In this case, films, objects, and other low culture artifacts are elevated to middle and high culture at the drop of an institutionalized hat. It is also within our use of Hume's billiards analogy where causation is ambiguous and requires analysis. In Parker's reference to Dickie's^{xlvii} analysis, the only reason a particular film or object is not considered art is that no gallery of experts has voiced its expert

opinion that it is art.^{xlvi} This is where Parker expresses the view that popular culture is that which has not been confirmed by the institutions.

As Parker says, the designation of cultural capital by institutional power needs examination. To be accurate and precise in our own examination of this issue, we need also to consider Parker's emphasis that there are different types of popular culture artifacts—different genres in film and literature, for example—and these receive different sorts of attention. The Boston Pops Orchestra is an ambiguous popular presenter of music by a high culture medium: bedlam to watch for many and a festive Christmas joy to others. We might say that “popular” is that which takes little effort and expense to make and little effort, skill, and expense to enjoy. *The Mikado* is an operetta, a popular musical form; it took a great deal of effort to create, and the script is complex, but the performance requires less skill than with high opera. Though a good production of *The Mikado* might be costly, a large financial outlay is no guarantee that the production would be good. In the same way a film can cost hundreds of millions to make and very little effort to understand. There are, however, some films that are so subtle and complex—like, for instance, *Inception*—that a cinephile might be needed for full understanding.

Conclusion

So, it seems there is no discernible link between philosophy and popular culture to let us say that philosophy and popular culture studies should be taken seriously as an academic area. This would then apply to any combination of subjects such as literature and critical analysis or the study of political philosophy. Here, there is a central field of study such as philosophy with metaphysics and epistemology being its sole focus. Any other social or political areas would have no role to play in philosophy. This, of course, is not how academia functions. There are

areas that gain attention and then have philosophical analysis applied to them. This happened in literature, and such a field came into being. Film and critical analysis also came into being. This is now happening in philosophy with popular culture having philosophical analysis applied to it. The Weberian notion of “styles of life” offers a compelling Marxian outcome where displays of wealth establish what Bourdieu coined as “cultural capital.” The outcome is either, according to Weber, a show of wealth as a lifestyle or, to Bourdieu, a means of identifying it to others for the social and economic retention of class dominance. There is no reason to suggest that any cultural capital is worthy in and of itself. The popular cultural artifact is perhaps less difficult to understand than a Wagnerian opera, but one could retort that the Wagnerian opera goer is nothing more than a dilettante who pretends that the opera expresses lofty ideals that are difficult to understand whereas, in fact, the opera’s meaning is simplistic and the values expressed are jaded and decadent. On the other hand, watching a popular film—*Inception* or even Pixar’s *The Incredibles*—can require subtle perception and a profound understanding of themes that are relevant to the social concerns of today.

References

- Cohen, Ted. (1999, Spring). High and low art, and high and low audiences. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. VI. 57, No. 2. Aesthetics and Popular Culture. Wiley.
- Ducasse, C. J. (1966, March 17). Critique of Hume's conception of causality. *The Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 63, No. 6.
- Freccero, Carla. (1999). *Popular Culture: An Introduction*. New York University Press.
- Guyer, Paul. (2003, spring and fall). Kant's Answer to Hume? *Philosophical Topics*. Vol. 31, No. ½. Modern Philosophy. University of Arkansas Press.
- Hibbs, Thomas, S. (1999). *Shows about nothing: Nihilism in popular culture*. Baylor University Press.
- Hoppenstand, Gary. (2020). Reading that stuff may be harmful to your aesthetic tastes: Ray Browne's subversive vision and popular fiction as subversive culture in Karl Edward Wagner's "Reflections for the winter of my soul." *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol. 53, No. 6. ©2021 Wiley Periodicals, LLC.
- Hume, David. <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9662/pg9662-images.html>

Karp, Ivan. (1991, summer). Another perspective: High and low revisited. *American Art*, Vol. 5, No. 3.

The University of Chicago Press Journals.

Kline, A. David. (1985, October), Humean causation and the necessity of temporal discontinuity. *New*

Series, Vol. 94, No. 376 Oxford University Press.

Knüsel, Ariane. (2017, February). Facing the dragon: Teaching the boxer uprising through cartoons, *The*

History Teacher. Vol. 50, No. 2. Society for History Education.

Langsam, Harold. (1994, September). Hume, and our ordinary conception of causation, *Philosophy and*

Phenomenological Research. Vol 54, No. 3. International Phenomenological Society,

Larabee, Ann. (2019). Slavery and popular studies. *Journal of Popular Culture*, Journal of Popular

Culture Association. Vol. 52, No. 5. Wiley Periodicals, LLC.

Marcotte, Edward. (1975, summer). Reviews of books: High/low dichotomy of culture taste: [reviewed

work] Popular culture and high culture by Herbert J Gans. *Southwest Review*. Vol. 60, No. 3.

Southern Methodist University.

Nachbar, Jack and Lause, Kevin. (1992). Popular culture: An introductory text. Popular Press.

Parker, Holt N. (2011, May). Toward a definition of high culture. *History and Theory*. Vol. 50, No. 2.

Wiley for Wesleyan University.

Sanford, David H. (1994, January). Causation and intelligibility. *Philosophy*. Vol. 69. Cambridge University Press.

Schwartz, Lawrence, H. (1980). *Marxism and culture; The CPUSA and aesthetics in the 1930s*. National University Publications.

Storey, John. (2021). *Cultural theory and popular culture: An introduction*, 9th edition. Routledge

ⁱ Churchwell, Sarah. 2015. Literary Festival: High Culture and the Western Canon: has the fightback begun? Churchwell gives the example of F. Scott Fitzgerald letter to his daughter to show academic bias. His was against literature as a serious academic discipline.

ⁱⁱ Hibbs, Thomas, S. 1999. *Shows about Nothing: Nihilism in Popular Culture*. Baylor University Press

ⁱⁱⁱ Halwani, Raja. Homer and Aristotle. Irwin, William (Ed). *Philosophy and The Simpsons*. Open Court. This essay is on Homer being the most virtuous, some of the time, which is more than anyone else in *The Simpsons*.

^{iv} Hoppenstand, Gary. Reading that Stuff May Be Harmful to your Aesthetic Tastes: Ray Browne's Subversive Vision and Popular Fiction as Subversive Culture in Karl Edward Wagner's "Reflections for the Winter of my Soul. 2020. *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol. 53, No 6. ©2021 Wiley Periodicals, LLC

^v Larabee, Ann. 2019. Slavery and Popular Studies. *Journal of Popular Culture*, *Journal of Popular Culture Association*. Vol. 52, No. 5. Wiley Periodicals, LLC

^{vi} Hoppenstand, Gary. Reading that Stuff May Be Harmful to your Aesthetic Tastes: Ray Browne's Subversive Vision and Popular Fiction as Subversive Culture in Karl Edward Wagner's "Reflections for the Winter of my Soul. 2020. *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol. 53, No 6. ©2021 Wiley Periodicals, LLC

^{vii} Innes, Christopher, M. Pixar – The Popular World Joining the High Culture World of Philosophy. Presentation. 2021. Midwest Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association

^{viii} Storey, John. 2021. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, An Introduction*, 9th Edition. Routledge

^{ix} Ibid

^x Innes, Christopher, M. Pixar – The Popular World Joining the High Culture World of Philosophy. Presentation. 2021. Midwest Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association

^{xi} Chomsky, Noam. [The Žižek/Chomsky Times](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEzTnS-m-JA&t=3s), Noam Chomsky on high culture and popular culture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEzTnS-m-JA&t=3s>

^{xii} Innes, Christopher, M. Pixar – The Popular World Joining the High Culture World of Philosophy. Presentation. 2021. Midwest Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association

^{xiii} Orwell, George. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Penguin, 1936

^{xiv} Hoppenstand, Gary. Reading that Stuff May Be Harmful to your Aesthetic Tastes: Ray Browne's Subversive Vision and Popular Fiction as Subversive Culture in Karl Edward Wagner's "Reflections for the Winter of my Soul. 2020. *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol. 53, No 6. ©2021 Wiley Periodicals, LLC

^{xv} Larabee, Ann. 2019. Slavery and Popular Studies. *Journal of Popular Culture*, *Journal of Popular Culture Association*. Vol. 52, No. 5. Wiley Periodicals, LLC

^{xvi} Innes, Christopher, M. Pixar – The Popular World Joining the High Culture World of Philosophy. Presentation. 2021. Midwest Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association

^{xvii} Hoppenstand, Gary. Reading that Stuff May Be Harmful to your Aesthetic Tastes: Ray Browne's Subversive Vision and Popular Fiction as Subversive Culture in Karl Edward Wagner's "Reflections for the Winter of my Soul. 2020. *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol. 53, No 6. ©2021 Wiley Periodicals, LLC. page 1241

^{xviii} Ibid., 1242

^{xix} Ibid., 1241

^{xx} Ibid., 1250

^{xxi} Ibid

^{xxii} Orwell, George. 1958. *Boy's Weeklies*. Heinemann Educational Books. p141

-
- xxiii Ibid
- xxiv Churchwell, Sarah. 2015. Literary Festival: High Culture and the Western Canon: has the fightback begun?
- xxv Hume, David. 1777. A Enquiry Concerning Human Nature. <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9662/pg9662-images.html>
- xxvi Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding 4.1.21: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9662/pg9662-images.html#section4>
- xxvii Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding 1.3: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9662/pg9662-images.html#section1>
- xxviii Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding 4.1.22: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9662/pg9662-images.html#section4>
- xxix Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding 3.19: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9662/pg9662-images.html#section3>
- xxx Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding 4.1.22: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9662/pg9662-images.html#section4>
- xxxi Ibid
- xxxii Ducasse, C. J. (Mar. 17, 1966). Critique of Hume's Conception of Causality. The Journal of Philosophy. Vol. 63, No. 6. Quoting Hume
- xxxiii Ibid., page 148
- xxxiv Ibid
- xxxv Ibid., 142
- xxxvi Ibid., 145
- xxxvii Ibid
- xxxviii Parker, Holt N. (May 2011). Toward A Definition of High Culture, History and Theory. Vol. 50, No. 2. pp. 147-170. Wiley for Wesleyan University. page 158
- xxxix Ibid., 158
- xl Ibid., 159-160
- xli Ibid., 160
- xlii Ibid
- xliii Ibid., 156
- xliv Ibid., 157
- xlv Ibid., 158
- xlvi Ibid., 157
- xlvii Ibid., 164
- xlviii Ibid., 165