Editor's Notebook: Keeping the Home Fires Burning

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What possible value to philosophy is popular culture? That question is put to me as often by non-philosophers as by philosophers, but for the most part it is academics and intellectuals who ask it. Non-academics tend to ask the opposite question: what relevance to popular culture is philosophy? As a co-editor of philosophical books on the television program The Simpsons and on the films of Woody Allen, and a contributor to similar volumes on J.R.R. Tolkien and on the television program Seinfeld, I need to have an answer for these questions.

There are different ways of connecting philosophy to popular culture. One way is to act as though popular culture objects are no different from high-culture objects, and thus...