

-Research Article-

Looking at Cinema through the Perspective of Kant's Ethics

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Abstract

It is rather true that during this postmodern pandemic time, philosophy tends to be considered as counterproductive and is unfortunately not suggested to enter into a tangible link with reality. This is why the search for alternative propagation of philosophical principles is a modern proposal; during this time of total crisis of any moral system, it is imperative that the average citizen as a philosophical agent becomes acquainted with the kantian moral principles. The importance of this case is underlined by the imperative view of philosophy in the overall context of the social sciences, in order to successfully integrate the traditional into the current post-modern philosophical perspective.

On the other hand, the possibility of enrolling ethical philosophy in art is explored as a means of its dissemination and evolution. In particular, when the kind of art is the cinema and the terms of ethics are described through traditional philosophical references, it is not certain whether the classical philosophical conception of ethics can be reconciled with the advanced form of art, that is, whether philosophy can be written in the field of art in the form of a means of "here and now" direct mass communication. And when the framework of moral philosophy is selectively limited to kantian moral philosophy, the required reduction reaches the limit of transcendence: is modern art in the form of cinema able to serve the principles of philosophy of one of the greatest -in objective terms- thinkers of all times, Immanuel Kant? Using a variety of cinematic examples, in order to ensure the objectivity and timelessness of the possible philosophical effect, a practical description of the categorical imperative will be delivered, bringing the viewer in contact with the Kantian theoretical point of view.

Keywords: ethics, duty, autonomy, Immanuel Kant, art, cinema.

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-Araştırma Makalesi-

Kant Etik Perspektifinden Sinemaya Bakmak

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Özet

Bu postmodern pandemi döneminde, felsefenin verimsiz olarak görülme eğiliminde olduğu ve ne yazık ki gerçeklikle somut bir bağa girmesi önerilmediği doğrudur. Bu nedenle felsefi ilkelerin alternatif yayılımı arayışı modern bir öneridir; Herhangi bir ahlaki sistemin topyekün kriz döneminde, felsefi bir fail olarak ortalama vatandaşın kantçı ahlaki ilkelerle tanışması zorunludur.

Bu vakanın önemi, geleneksel olanı mevcut post-modern felsefi perspektife başarılı bir şekilde entegre etmek için, sosyal bilimlerin genel bağlamındaki zorunlu felsefe görüşü tarafından vurgulanmaktadır.

Öte yandan, sanatta etik felsefenin yer alma olasılığı, onun yayılması ve evrimi için bir araç olarak araştırılır. Özellikle sanatın türü sinema olduğunda ve etik terimleri geleneksel felsefi referanslarla tanımlandığında, klasik felsefi etik anlayışının ileri sanat biçimiyle uzlaştırılıp uzlaştırılmayacağı, yani felsefenin bunu gerçekleştirip gerçekleştiremeyeceği kesin değildir. sanat alanında "şimdi ve burada" doğrudan kitle iletişim aracı şeklinde yazılmalıdır. Ve ahlak felsefesinin çerçevesi seçici olarak Kantçı ahlak felsefesiyle sınırlandırıldığında, gereken indirgeme aşkınlık sınırına ulaşır: sinema biçimindeki modern sanat, en büyük -nesnel anlamda- düşünürlerden birinin felsefe ilkelerine hizmet edebilir mi? tüm zamanların, Immanuel Kant?

Çeşitli sinema örnekleri kullanılarak, olası felsefi etkinin nesnelliğini ve zamansızlığını sağlamak için, izleyiciyi Kantçı teorik bakış açısıyla temasa geçirerek, kategorik buyruğun pratik bir açıklaması sunulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: etik, görev, özerklik, Immanuel Kant, sanat, sinema.

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Introduction

The problem of recognizing and managing philosophical thought in the age of postmodernism lies in its multifaceted nature and, sometimes, in the multiplicity of concepts that make it up. The deconstruction of authentic concepts and the rejection of the enlightening modern demands for the autonomy of the scientific fields have redrafted the modern postmodern project into a demand in favor of liquidity, multiplicity and diversity - the diffusion of one field into another within the wider sphere of cultural production, makes the boundaries of traditional concepts illegible, often devaluing the philosophical marathon through the centuries to separate and clarify specific concepts (Mouriki, 2005, p. 11). The modern misunderstanding of philosophy and its identification with a vast field of theoretical references that lacks a tangible framework of applications, is probably also based on the "morals" of the post-modern era, which does not train the agent to use the in-depth study and consideration of a specific issue, but usually fragment the cognitive objects in terms of economics. After all, the "postmodern state", as defined by David Harvey (Harvey, 2009) or, years earlier, by the concept rapporteur Jean Francois Lyotard (Lyotard, 2008), brings a kind of fragmented knowledge, impossible to reconstruct into a whole. This fact, although it allows the agents to acquire specialized knowledge in different fields, although it allows us to understand the unique representation of each separate doctrine, prevents us from asking any question on a universal and unified understanding of reality. Traditional philosophical terminology, the concepts of morality or aesthetics, of good or beautiful, are in danger of being exiled as abstractions of "rusty" metaphysics.

The real stake and the modern draft of this research study is the probable proof that Philosophy in general and the classical Kantian view in particular, are not necessarily far removed from our modern age and can be included in the most advanced - in terms of material requirements - form of art. At a time when the in-depth study of Philosophy tends to be characterized as counterproductive and is unfortunately not suggested to enter into a tangible link with reality, the search for alternative propagation of philosophical principles is a modern proposal; during this time of total crisis of any moral system, it is imperative that the average citizen as a philosophical agent becomes acquainted with the Kantian moral principles. The importance of research is underlined by the imperative view of Philosophy in the overall context of the social sciences, in order to successfully integrate the traditional into the current post-modern philosophical perspective. On the other hand, the possibility of enrolling ethical philosophy in art is explored as a means of its dissemination and evolution. In particular, when the kind of art is the cinema and the terms of ethics are described through traditional philosophical references, it is not certain whether the classical philosophical conception of ethics can be reconciled with the advanced form of art, that is, whether philosophy can be written in the field of art in the form of a means of "here and now" direct mass communication (Sinnerbrink, 2016, p. 3-10). And when the framework of moral philosophy is selectively limited to Kantian moral philosophy, the required reduction reaches the limit of transcendence: is modern art able to serve the principles of philosophy of one of the greatest -in objective terms- thinkers of all times , Immanuel Kant?

The stakes are not really so limited: this question is really about the possibility of modern aesthetics and art to host and spread principles of philosophy with which the average citizen - spectator is not familiar. Over the centuries, there have been specific philosophical movements that have raised the question of whether and to what extent art is the place or the instrument of truth, defining the boundaries between intellect and aesthetics. The question in the current era of the development of the cultural industry is, on the one hand, how artistic creation can go beyond the narrow confines of the established reality and, on the other hand, how it will be possible to reintegrate the recipient of the work of art into an educational process and restore his contact with the project in order to seek qualitative differences.

As in life, so in art and so in cinema, ethics is an important issue that determines the work of the creator and affects the character and psychosynthesis of the recipients. Especially in modern cinema, the moral dilemmas that plague film heroes essentially reflect the anguish of the creator and society as a whole over the determination of the moral right and debt, and the judgment of the moral acts in general.

Cinema is a relatively new medium of communication, the wide repercussion of which the great philosophers of the past centuries certainly did not have in mind when formulating their philosophical theories about ethics. The beginnings of cinema could be traced back to the birth of the moving image in the first decades of the nineteenth century, but in reality cinema as a mass and organized phantasmagoria can only be placed a century later and more specifically in the first decades of the twentieth century. It is then that cinema becomes a means of representing both ideology or propaganda, as well as everyday life scenes. Movies are then, for the first time, a massive product of art, making thousands of people around the world to line up in huge queues to get a ticket, fall in love with movie characters, mimic scenes and memorize jokes. Unknown to most of the audience references to classic film masterpieces or even commercial film producers, the unknown references to classic philosophical questions therefore raise the question of whether and to what extent this medium can be a field of application of traditional philosophy.

Basic points of Kantian ethics

Immanuel Kant's contribution to the field of ethics has been fundamental and radical, due to his pioneering approach to the issues of ethical behavior: in the context of his ethical philosophy and in parallel with the Critique of Practical Reason, he presents his major philosophical work of the Metaphysics of Morals; the so-called formula of humanity through the formulations of categorical imperatives (Kant, 1984, pp. 51-105) and seals the moral thought of all later philosophers. Kant launches a new approach that proposes Reason and Logic, and forms an ethical rather than a teleological moral philosophy: the moral debt, the duty, is dictated only by Reason and Logic and not by the results or the feelings, even if they are pure or well-intentioned.

Without reasonable or logic judgement, there is no morality. Morality as a product of logic is according to Kant, the main feature of human nature. Man's ability to comprehend the world through logic is what makes him human. Animals are not able to act with moral criteria, because they are dominated solely by their instincts, without ethics interfering in their actions. In Kantian thought it is not disputed that animals feel pleasure and happiness when they satisfy these instincts, but it is emphasized that happiness and emotions in general have nothing to do with what Kant calls morality. Animals feel, but as they do not have access to speech they cannot be treated as moral agents. (Kant, 2006, p. 44). In the same vein, Kant does not demonize emotion, nor does he believe that its elimination should be sought; he believes that emotions may aid or hinder a moral behavior, but they are certainly not considered a solid basis for his philosophical basis.

For the first time there is a clear distance from naturalistic conceptions, which dictate that morality is a natural property of the human condition; Kant speaks of the dolor of moral debt, since what Practical Reason demands is not always easy or pleasant and certainly not always in harmony with emotion and desire. Making a first contact with Kantian ethics, It is useful to mention the example of the kind-hearted man, who acts out of pure instincts and innate benevolence: he is also recognized as such by Kant, but not necessarily as a moral, since what moves him in action is not devotion to duty but his natural inclination towards good.

The fundamental idea of Kant's ethics is related to the strict distinction between the categorical precept of moral law and the hypothetical precept of purely indirect purposes, with complete clarity and purity. As for the content of absolute moral law, it certainly includes a fundamental moral certainty as an unproven official element: just as good exists or rather

must exist by itself and not by or due to anything else, so pure morality claims as facts and not reducible its fundamental parts. As there is the pure a priori of knowledge, there is also the a priori of morality: morality is rooted in a primary self-action of the mind, in an actus animi of autonomy, detached from every sensory emotion (Kant, 1984, pp. 87-88).

This is a total rupture with any utilitarianistic conception of ethics: satisfaction (but also dissatisfaction) cannot be recorded according to Kant in the field of ethics (Fitzpatrick, 2008, 45-63 and Wood, 2008, 259-268). Pleasure can roughly be described as an impression that varies in proportion to the external stimulus and is therefore infinitely variable. Naturalistic metaphysics is based on the ethics of the principle of pleasure, systematically and deliberately ignoring the above variable property. It is right and generally accepted that all agents own an innate drive for actions that is consistent with pleasure. However, taking all these impulses under serious consideration, one will probably find a chaotic mass of different, intersecting and repulsive tendencies, each of which, even when seemingly directed towards the same object, are qualitatively completely opposite. The desired universality that serves world harmony is obviously not about the universality of the desire for pleasure, but the free will to submit to a universal law.

The concluding proposition of the fundamental principle of critical ethics is the so-called type of categorical imperative (categorical because it refers to nothing but appears as a self-existent claim). The foundation of Kant's moral theory is the categorical imperative, which is defined through several - possibly overlapping in some fields - formulations, from which the following basic ones are selected for the purposes of this article:

- a) The agent of the act must always act on the basis of such a principle, that at the same time he (the agent) may want this principle to become a universal law.
- b) The agent must act in such a way that the guide of his act becomes voluntarily a universal law of nature.
- c) Every act must highlight the will that considers itself at the same time a regular legislator.
- d) Every agent must act in such a way that he always treats humanity never only as a means but also as an end at the same time (it is not bad for someone to be the means to an end, as long as he is at the same time an end).
- e) In this context, the agent must act as if he were always aware of a legislative member of the "state of ends in themselves".

According to this multilateral proposition, the order of means coincides with the order of natural things, while the order of purposes is equated with the order of pure and self-determined minds (Kant, 1984, pp. 80-83). If all rational beings, constituted as personalities, are subject to the law to refer to the moral individuality of all others, that is, to claim from other subjects the fundamental value they attach to themselves, the systematic connection of rational beings will result from common objective laws (Wood, 2005, 142) of which Kant speaks, that is, a "state of ends" (Kant, 1984, pp. 87-88), since individuals as ends are identified conceptually and practically with individuals as means.

Free will is introduced by Kant as the basic principle of the existence of categorical imperative, freedom is comprehended as a capricious kind of causality (Kant, 2006, p. 31), as autonomy, that is, the property of the will itself to be a law for itself: the will is in all acts a law of itself and leads through logic to the principle according to which we should not act with any other guide other than the form of a universal law (Kant, 1984, pp. 121-124) .

Herein lies the very essence of categorical imperative and the principle of morality: free will and will complied with moral laws mean the same thing and are absolutely identical (Kant,

2006, pp. 109–110). On the contrary, will and action are not free when they are determined by an individual given object of desire, by a particular material stimulus. The freedom of will and moral act consists in the idea of the totality of the determinations of the purpose and with the claim that they are unified.

Therefore, “good” for Kant is only the good will that come from contemplating duty, moral duty: skills, luck, and even happiness could be used even for evil. Only pure will makes the human freedom possible, the free action of man as a moral agent. His actions are at the same time acts of freedom and commitment to the requirements of Kantian Practical Reason. Instincts are clearly aimed at individual happiness; good will is not only orientated towards this direction but is driven by moral obligation as the universal legislator of humanity (Kant, 1984, pp. 96-97).

Understanding Kantian ethics therefore presupposes the complete separation of the good, with the daily use of the term, from the right. The morality that is dominated by compliance with reasoning and logic seeks the right - moral love is expressed by the concept of duty to humanity. On the contrary, love that springs from emotion is, according to Kant, a pathological kind of love and has nothing to do with any form of moral act (Kant, 1984, pp. 41-42).

Given the Kantian formula of humanity inductively, many commendable and heroic acts of cinematic characters may now be viewed under a different light, with the possible result of the deconstruction of the heroes and the questioning of their morality. Starting with the question of whether Kant’s absolute, super-social, superclass moral law may apply to the contemporary art of cinema, examples of the application of Kantian ethics to cinematic practice through references to classical or modern cinematic creations will be used.

Cases of moral dilemmas in cinematography are not uncommon; in Kantian light they do not even seem accidental. Seen from the point of view of Kantian ethics, the deeds that elevate the heroes and bring about purification could potentially turn into unethical acts that do justify the feeling but, on a macroethical level, if applied as a universal law, would harm humanity. For example, the crushing of the heroes may finally be a classic example of obedience to the categorical imperative, while, on the contrary, the self-sacrifice of the heroes for their personal redemption falls, seemingly paradoxically but in complete agreement with Kant’s ethics, in the field of immoral acts. A relative variety of examples will be used to represent cases of Kantian categorical precepts.

Saving Private Ryan: Kantian aversion to utilitarian theory and ideological shift to action based on duty through war drama.

In the case of the film *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg, 1998) the value of sending a military unit under the command of Captain John Miller (Tom Hanks) to Normandy in order to locate and rescue a soldier whose three brothers have been killed during the war, is disputed on the basis of the principle of benefit even by the members of the mission themselves (Doxiades, 2001, pp. 174–175). In harmony with Cavell’s view that according to Kant’s philosophy disobedience in general is a natural tendency of rational beings (Cavell, 2015, p. 161), the soldiers, faced with the growing dangers of the mission, wonder why seven people have to go at risk with their lives for a single stranger. The mission leader -Miller- himself exclaims at one point: “I hope this Ryan is worth it. He ‘d better come back home and cure some disease or invent something unique “. Miller’s reasoning seems purely utilitarian, but we realize that weighing the benefit on a hypothetical basis is not enough for the moral basis that a suicide mission needs in hostile lands. If we assume that Ryan will deliver more happiness compared to the hardships and misery caused by the mission to rescue him, then the mission is considered morally justified. Who can discount this outcome? The practical difficulties of this calculation, the impossibility of quantitative comparison of qualitative quantities (such as happiness and misery) shake the basic argument of utilitarianism, that is, the absolute principle of happiness as a basic moral

principle. In addition, defining the concept of happiness as opposed to the concept of pleasure, creates further obstacles to the practical application of this moral theory to realistic data. But if the mission is approached in terms of its moral part based on different types of questions, such as: “Is a world, in which human life is evaluated numerically in terms of its rescue, moral?” or “Is it a moral state, whenever a person is in danger to be left on his own for fear of collateral loss during his rescue?”

On the basis of similar mental questions and experiments, a multifaceted philosophical dialogue has been developed. Using a well-known paradigm, the ease or obligation to rescue the largest group of potential victims against whom a railway vehicle is headed, directing it to an alternative route where the victim is one innocent person (Foot, 1988, pp. 3–4), is a popular field of philosophical discussion (Trolley Problem) in the context of dual effect theory. The moral agent is called upon to make a choice with a discounted result, that is, to judge on the basis of the consequences, which in this case are given and cannot be disputed: the moral agent has two options, to let the railway vehicle follow its course (costing the life of five people) or to use a lever in order to divert the vehicle from the course and follow an alternative path, which will fatally cost a person’s life. Subsequently, after the moral agent has ruled in favor of one or the other choice, the hypothesis varies: this time the moral subject is placed on a bridge, where a second person is also standing. This time the railway vehicle is moving under the bridge and is directed to the five people tied to the rails. So, the moral agent is given the opportunity to stop the course of the vehicle, by throwing the second person from the bridge to stop the train and avoid the death of five people. This is an inverted type of case that takes place in the Rescue of Soldier Ryan, that tries to make a moral assessment with quantitative criteria. This example of utilitarian rationalism rather complicates than solves the ethical issues that arise in relation to the numerical quantities of each utility.

This, or any other question of a similar nature, could in itself be considered immoral (as a kind of moral provocation); however, this is not the only problem that concerns this question. The state of emergency that is passed on to the moral agent, seems to be placed before the absent critical moral parameters and possibly addicts it to a pseudo-scientific way of moral thinking and argumentation (Vasiloyannis, 2019, p. 154). This is a case of the examples’ misuse and it is opposed to the examples that Kant uses only under certain conditions in his philosophical discourse. The dividing line between the example as a “wheelbarrow of perception” and the example as an arbitrary standard prohibits the invocation of fixed examples to guide behavior:

“In the moral realm there is no imitation at all, and the examples serve only as encouragement; with supervising what the practical rule expresses in general, but can never justify the abandonment of their true original, which exists in Reason, and our guidance according to examples ”(Kant, 1984, p. 47).

If we ignore the irrelevant nature of invoking such mental experiments and enter into the process of further analysis, we realize that the figures are rather disorienting the moral direction of actions, although the moral principle in favor of most has several supporters. However, from the Kantian point of view, and specifically on the basis of the distinction between dignity and price as a replacement value, it is impossible for the person to be reduced to a substitute. In fact, even the case of using at least one as a means of defense or rescue of most, it is doubtful whether it can be distinguished from homicide. If we have to make a distinction in this regard, it will simply be a gradation of the unworthiness of using the face as a means. The consequentialist nature of the question is at odds with the Kantian view, while coercive moral blackmail, on the one hand, attacks our integrity and, on the other, is rejected as untestable, as it presupposes a misleading conflict of duties, based on the Kantian sense of duty Law (Kant, 2013, p. 34).

In the case of this example, there are no conditions for holding duties in this strict but clear sense. The scientific validity of such methodological questions is therefore questioned, as they place the moral judgment at the basis of the result.

The departure from the consequentialist perception

Kant's theory replaces the popular moral approaches and redefines the basis of moral judgment: we are not concerned with further information on the outcome of the present case. Everything needed to examine the morality of the act is already given and anything other than the inner motivation of the act is irrelevant. Captain Miller, whether he hesitates or succumbs to the temptations of utilitarian crises, is doing his duty; kantianly speaking, his acts are already judged as moral.

It is understood that categorical precepts under certain conditions complement each other and usually certify each other's validity. This means that, when the condition of the fundamental expression of the Kantian imperative is not fulfilled, the chances increase that the other imperatives are not generally satisfied.

The difference between the Kantian method and previous ethical evaluation practices is that it does not need to consider unknown or hypothetical parameters in order to render ethical value. The borders are strictly encircled and therefore inviolable. Any act might not be considered moral, but not because it is unpleasant, nor because it causes more misery than happiness (after all, this claim is not at all certain and is obviously subjected to successive hypothesis); this failure to meet the conditions of at least two categorical imperatives is what makes the act immoral and not a vague insult to common sense.

Intertwined Kantian imperatives in movies

However, not all cases are clear and transparent from the outset. In the case of the film *Gone Baby, Gone* (Affleck, 2007) neither the motivation nor the quality of the act is obvious at the first film reading. This film is also an exceptional study of kantian moral theory, without knowing whether the creator's intention was intended to do so; but this is a minor detail. The important element is the ascertainment of the inscription of kantian ethics in the cinematic creation.

The plot of this film takes place in an urban environment plagued by corruption and revolves around the disappearance of the four-year-old Amanda Mc Cready (Madeline O'Brien). Amanda's mother, Helen (Amy Ryan), is a woman addicted to alcohol and various drugs, obviously unsuitable for a mother. Helen's brother's wife, Bea (Amy Madigan), hires private investigator Patrick (Casey Affleck) and assigns him and his wife Angie (Michelle Monaghan) to investigate Amanda's disappearance. From the very beginning, the couple of researchers hesitate to undertake the case of the disappearance, as they realize that the development will probably not be pleasant. However, re-evaluating his moral duty, Patrick realizes that this is not a matter of pleasure or interest; moral obligation arises strictly from internal duty and not from the pressures of external factors. The introductory plot therefore reflects in any case the basic principles of the kantian theory of the unsatisfactory natural momentum of the will in relation to the moral act (Kant, 1984, pp. 39-40); this is a case of coercion related to the concept of duty (Kant, 2013, p. 229). In the course of the film, Patrick is hesitant about whether his job involves circumventing or obeying the law: "Can or should we obey the law to protect someone?" he wonders, when during his investigation he encounters the dangerous pedophile Corwin (Mathew Maher). Patrick kills this person in order not to harm any other child, but at the same time knows that he has violated both criminal law, and also an unidentified kind of moral law, which he detects to be determined by his conscience. Of course, Kant is adamant about this case: acting on duty is not enough. Only the respect for the law enacting the duty gives the action inherent moral value (Kant, 1984, p. 43). So, while Angie praises him for his act, Patrick is aware that he may have acted altruistically in favor of protecting other children from future exposure to danger, but by no means morally towards his victim, in proportion to kantian moral discredit of the act emanating from a charitable disposition (Kant, 1984, pp. 39-40).

Contrary to his unwilling decision to undertake the search for the missing child, where Patrick adheres to the rules of kantian ethics, Corwin's assassination breaks with the spirit that pervades all kantian moral philosophy. A murder could never be raised to a universal principle of conduct, which could be adopted as common practice without exception. Patrick, having committed the act of murder, acknowledges that there is no mitigation depending on the quality of the victim's character. He seems to be gradually moving away from the common feeling that is formed through emotional factors, considering revenge as a performance of justice due to a distorted reading of the moral code. He is absolute in his view of right and wrong, unconsciously highlighting the rule of categorical imperative in every case; when he discovers that his police colleague Pollack has lied to him, he does not simply overcome it as a sign of human weakness, but realizes the kantian reduction by attributing to Pollack the ability to lie whenever he considers it necessary and is therefore unworthy of his trust. Murder and lying in Patrick's reasoning through internal practice become morally impermissible without exception and therefore in no alignment with kantian moral theory.

Throughout the film, the protagonist struggles to identify the moral choice and to act in each case in accordance with the duty and the universal moral law. At the end of the film, an unexpected moral dilemma arises, as despite the ominous predictions that four-year-old Amanda has fallen victim to a criminal, Patrick discovers that the respected police chief Jack Doyle (Morgan Freeman) is the person behind her disappearance. Jack's intentions are really not bad: both he and those around Patrick consider it a great fortune for Amanda to be raised by Jack and his wife, instead of growing up on the same roof as the irresponsible and obviously inappropriate biological mother. The motives of Jack's act are considered by those around him and also by Patrick himself, as pure and honest, and all together they push Patrick to offer the girl a better future, along with bringing happiness to Jack as well as to avoid, among other things, criminal liability corresponding to him for abducting Amanda. But according to Kant,

"Criminal law is an unequivocal principle, and woe to him who crawls among the serpentine maneuvers of the theory of bliss to discover something that, because of the promise it promises, will relieve him of his punishment or even some degree of it. If justice collapses, it has no value for people to live on earth" (Kant, 2013, p. 170).

Even if the criminal case is ignored, a number of questions arise: is the abduction - even if carried out with extreme motives - an expression of goodwill? Jack may have taken into account Amanda's own well-being in addition to his own well-being, so he did not treat her purely as a means of satisfying his desire to become a father, but here is a case of a categorical imperative that does not affirm the rest: is it a moral world where all the good-intended people abduct children from their unsuitable parents and raise them as their own? Can this behavior be universally accepted and applied in the context of the general interest? Patrick weighs the answers to all the above questions, but the promise he made to the mother of the child when he took over the case, despite his desire not to get involved initially, weighs more in his conscience. Patrick promised the mother to return her child. Once the child has been located and is alive, does Patrick have the right to ignore his promise?

Promise is not an accidental act, but according to Aristotle it is a fundamental political act among very few, who support the edifice of human civilization (Arendt, 1986, 330-3). Patrick cannot ignore his inner imperative that dictates him to keep his promise, despite the psychological pressure that exists from external factors and will certainly cost his personal happiness: his wife states that if Patrick returns Amanda to her drug-addicted mother, she will abandon him. However, Patrick is now able to distinguish the fine line between good as self-interest and good as moral. He decides to return the child to his mother applying the rule of the categorical imperative a) as to the fulfillment of his promise, b) despite his urge to act altruistically, leaving the child in Jack's care, and c) not calculating the consequences of his choice on himself or the child.

The plot of the film leads the protagonist to a choice that is an epitome of the categorical imperative, which can be practically unpleasant or incomprehensible in relation to its results. The fact is that if the audience of the film were familiar with the basic rules of kantian ethics, they would certainly treat it differently based on Patrick's unexpected choice, which may disappoint the public's sense of justice. Even so, this film is a great cinematic example of familiarizing the viewers with a different type of moral choice than the one usually sought in film productions to the delight of the audience.

A similar case of research on the cinematic ethics of fulfilling a promise can be found in the film *The English Patient* (Minghella 1996). The film takes place before World War II, in the territories of British colonialism in North Africa. Hungarian Earl Laszlo de Almasy (Ralph Pheinnnes), a cartographer by profession, is asked by the British Royal Geographical Society to map vast areas of the Sahara Desert, with the help of British military officials. Laszlo creates an extramarital affair with the wife of his work partner, Geoffrey Clifton (Colin Firth,) Catherine Clifton (Christine Scott Thomas). Despite Catherine's efforts to end this relationship, as she is tormented by guilt over the disloyalty she is showing towards her marriage, her feelings are beyond reason and the relationship continues until it is revealed to Geoffrey by accident. Blurred by jealousy, Geoffrey takes a vengeful step: he locates the current point of Laszlo's mission and gets on a plane (which he pilots himself) with Catherine. As they approach Laszlo, Geoffrey deliberately crashes the plane, killing himself instantly and seriously injuring Catherine. Laszlo is forced to leave Catherine to seek medical help; but before he leaves, he makes an explicit and unequivocal promise to return at all costs to save her. But on his way to seek help, his British compatriots, in the absence of Laszlo's identification documents, not only do they not help him, but they arrest him, delaying his return and putting Catherine's life in immense danger. Laszlo escapes and commits an act of treason, handing over geographical maps he had drawn on behalf of the British to the enemy German army corps. In return, the Germans give him an aircraft that allows him to return to the place where he was forced to leave his beloved.

Admittedly there is a huge ethical issue, since the national interest must take precedence over the personal one. In strictly kantian terms, however, we must refer to the act, which comes down to the promise: from the moment Laszlo promised Catherine that he would return for her, he was morally obliged to keep his promise. His act could therefore be kantianly interpreted as moral, since the promise is primary to human civilization, a primary social contract. Responding again to the kantian claim to universality, if Laszlo did not keep his promise it would be like admitting that people only have to keep their promises on a case-by-case basis. By his choice, however, he gives an unexpected moral touch to an otherwise blatantly immoral act. Finally, the choice to deliver on the promise may have been a moral one from the beginning, as paradoxical as it may sound: after all, treason was neither the obvious nor the easy choice. On the contrary, it is obvious that the hero is overwhelmed by his decision, in the development of which he even takes into account that Catherine is already dead. This dimension adds an extra moral weight to his act: it is not love, compassion or selfishness that motivate him. Catherine is dead, no amount of happiness whatsoever may be extracted by this action anymore. On the contrary, his choice will stigmatize him as a lifelong dossier and will be a source of constant misery for him. Therefore, in conclusion, the sense of moral duty to fulfill the promise is the driving force behind Laszlo's act and, in this respect, can only be awarded as moral. Love and the rest of Laszlo's emotions are actually irrelevant with moral evaluation.

Related to the content of *Gone Baby, Gone* and also reproductive of kantian morality is the film *The Light Between The Oceans* (Cianfrance, 2016): lighthouse keeper Tom Sherbourne (Michael Fassbender) and his wife Isabel Graysmark (Alicia Vikander) are unique inhabitants of the island of Janus Rock. Isabel has already suffered two failed pregnancies and an equal number of miscarriages in difficult conditions, due to organic problems and forced isolation. Unexpectedly, a boat with an adult dead and a living baby runs aground on their island.

Isabel's automatic reaction is to raise this child as a godsend and convince her husband that probably no one is looking for this baby. Influenced by his love for his wife, Tom agrees to keep the child with them and present it to the local remote community as their own. Years later, the family learns of the case of Hannah (Rachel Weisz), a mother from the wider area, who is mourning the loss of her child, who was just a few months old, at sea; Tom retreats from his original position, that his choice with Isabel to raise the child found on their island as their own, is morally appropriate. In fact, the plot of the drama proves that the child undoubtedly belongs to Hannah, so Tom is trapped in a huge moral dilemma and even blackmail, since Isabel on the one hand presents the choice of returning the child to his biological mother as a consul of misery for the confused infant, on the other hand threatens Tom that if he confesses the truth, their relationship will change permanently.

Tom decides to return the child to his biological mother with very unpleasant consequences for himself, his wife and the child itself, who cannot bond with its biological mother and seeks Isabel. From a utilitarian / teleological point of view, Tom has failed miserably in his moral choice; but from the kantian point of view, he has done the right thing since (a) did not inculcate the lie for the sake of his family benefit; (b) did not calculate the consequences at any level; legitimizes for no reason the adoption of a child by third parties without the consent of the biological parents), d) refused to further use the child as a means of personal and family happiness and completion. It is undeniable that at first Tom falls into a moral slip of first magnitude, since he agreed and concealed his wife's plan. As in the case of Patrick, it seems possible, through inner exercise, for the rational being to mentally process his past behavior and finally choose the path of morality, regardless of desire or emotional cost. Thus, while the protagonist's initial choice does not coincide with the spirit of kantian ethics, his critical final choice is a true example of the kantian model of behavior, which meets the meaning and the very essence of the fundamental categorical imperative.

At the same time, there are cases of didactic films, which lead the viewer to conclude the function of ethics with the power of categorical precepts. For the purposes of this article, the film *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993) will be used. In the case of this particular film, the greedy selfish meteorologist Phil Connors (Bill Murray) finds himself in an inexplicable situation, where under unclear circumstances he constantly lives the same day on and on, which includes the same events, meetings with the same people and generally always faithfully follows the same motif. As soon as Phil realizes the new paradoxical reality, he decides to manage it to his advantage by indulging in physical pleasures and violating basic moral rules: thinking of his own interest, he uses his situation to bring other people under his control: he extracts information that uses the next day to benefit himself personally, manipulates their actions and blackmails their emotions. In addition, he believes that he is lucky not to have to mind about the consequences, because every day all the recipients of his behavior have deleted the previous one and he never has any personal cost for his actions.

And yet, under these ideal conditions for maximum benefit, the film describes every selfish choice of Phil as having mathematically negative consequences that turn each day into a personal failure and overwhelm the protagonist with negative emotions. Only when Phil realizes that he must abandon the hedonistic mentality and make a moral shift that includes the kantian imperatives, abandoning vanity as a perverted form of ambition (Kupfer, 2021, p. 103-4), does his situation begin to improve, initially simply for the better being and finally, when he seems to have internalized the moral code that dictates that he should not use any man simply as a means, he is rewarded with a return to his normal life, which he is supposed to continue with a new perspective. So, even through a comic script, there is again the accuracy of the theory, that dictates moral behavior to be based on certain rules of general acceptance and not on calculating the consequences or maximizing the benefit, is highlighted (Kupfer, 1999, p. 35-60). It is also underlined that, even if human actions did not lead to some kind of punishment or were not subject to any control or evaluation, this would still not be enough to achieve happiness. Because, according to Kant:

“Whatever harm you cause to another fellow citizen without his guilt, you cause it to yourself. If you insult him, you insult yourself; if you steal from him, you steal from yourself; if you kill him, you kill yourself” (Kant, 2013, p. 171).

Realistically, we can only recognize that immoral behavior can not only go unnoticed or even be punished, but there are many examples in everyday life where immoral behavior is rewarded and often constitute a role model. After all, is it the fear of punishment that keeps the average person from committing successive minor or major crimes to serve its purposes? Or is it an inner voice that is not silent even when there is no external consequence, but torments the rational being in the form of guilt and remorse? Human history has unfortunately shown that humanity is not completely - or even satisfactorily - bound by the voice of conscience as to its moral dimension. Therefore, the existence of external laws based on the principle of equality (Kant, 2013, p. 171) is absolutely necessary - Kant himself, as we have seen, considers obedience to the law to be paramount; in kantian ethics, law is understood as the product of the moral agent himself, who, as a rational being, legislates for himself, and does not deviate from its very own observance in any case.

As for the pursuit of happiness, we must take into account the concordance of the kantian with the Platonic theory (at least to some extent) : the whole Republic pursues the question of the usefulness of the existence of morality, as it often does not serve the objective interests. However, as in Phil’s mind, there is a shift in the conflict of morality and interest that, if taken as a whole, puts an end to this very conflict. Our morality does not really oppose our interest, but a false conception of interest (Plato, 2002, pp. 105-173), in analogy to the kantian conception of the unilateral pursuit of individual well-being as a safe point of heteronomy of the will (Kant, 2013, pp. 98-99). Plato explains that he perceives the individual as a three-part system consisting of reason, desire and spirit, which have their own distinct functions. In a balanced existence, reason prevails over the other parts of the personality and with the help of the spiritual part rules and directs the desires. Desires, moving outside the realm of logic/ reason, cannot be considered solely credible in the pursuit of one’s own self-interests (I may want to drink a glass of water, but my logic, which knows that water is poisoned, is credible in deciding on my own interest and ultimately preventing me from drinking the water). Reason is responsible and worthy of supervising the overall picture and deciding both the individual and the general good. Therefore, the person who really wants his interest, must be guided by his logic. The inner harmony achieved through the domination of reason and the co-operation of spirit and desire constitutes, according to Plato - and to Kant in general - morality. So, morality is not opposed to the individual interest, but rather benefits the individual (Plato, 2002, pp. 260-336). Being moral, one necessarily has a balanced and harmonious nature that is organized by logic and works for the good of every part of the soul as well as the overall good of the individual. Thus, morality raises to a kind of mental health and balance without which the social agent could not be happy under any conditions. The morality of the self is therefore not only necessary but also desirable, since it is the only one that can offer the person individual benefit in combination with happiness.

Morality is therefore the element that through harmony ensures the real interest, instead of pursuing it, as is the common perception that tends to corrupt moral agents meant. Were it not for this necessary and desirable balance of power, the individual interest could not be served, since the individual was merely a slave to the tyrannical demands of desires, which uncontrollably and beyond any proportion would lead the individual to confusion and loss of contact with the reality.

Symbolically, the repetition of the same day on Groundhog Day could mean the complete loss of selfish Phil’s contact with external reality, which does not revolve around him as he believes, but consists of a dense web of beings, which he owes to recognize and respect, if he wants to return to a normal flow that will allow him to pursue his happiness, this time in the appropriate way.

Apart from the person itself, who would be unnecessarily misled in the midst of its mental imbalance, the other people that he would associate with would also suffer (see Phil's social circle who is unwittingly forced to deal with his behavior every day), since it would be clear to them that he was focused above all on satisfying his desires and would not give them due respect. Persistent desires - without the intervention of logic - would distance the non-moral agent from the desires and needs of others, whom he would classify as objects to be used, since nothing would separate them from simple material anymore: since the social environment exists only as a means to the pursuit of individual ends and is not an end in itself (in all its members separately), it automatically falls into a state of deprivation of dignity resembling that of the simple object.

Platonic theory, like kantian theory, places great emphasis on the universality and objectivity dictated by reason. The concept of prosperity may not be relative but is first of all official and followed by rules: the existence of rules that mathematically lead to virtue is acceptable in both theories. Through perception and knowledge, which are definitely based on the forms that Plato uses to incorporate the timeless essence, logic elaborates the concept of prosperity and real interest. On the basis of this knowledge, as perception, he looks upon the unity of virtues "not as a product of nature but as an object of a direct view" (Arampatzis, 2002, p. 215). Plato's emphasis on logic, however, can be conditionally considered authoritarian and oppressive in terms of human instincts, as well as hostile to human desire. Ascetic morality (which bears many similarities to christian morality, at least as it was dictated during certain periods of time) which presupposes the constant control of desires for the sake of inner harmony, could be the very source of mental health disorder.

This is where the connection between platonic and kantian theory stops: with Kant's theory, the rational mind is introduced as a universal legislator without the need for an external form of ethics that will be better understood in the intellect: here the basis of the moral edifice is only rational thought, the moral rules are identified with the logical rules. The value of moral behavior is not evaluated on the basis of the platonic prosperity approach but is upgraded to indicative of the human personality: morality does not guarantee any kind of happiness, but is essential for the recognition of the moral agent and his or her deserving happiness through fulfillment of duty. A completely different cinematic sample is used as an example to negotiate this very point of Kantian ethics: The film *High Noon* (Zimmerman, 1952) deals with the insistence of a small town sheriff Will Kane (Gary Cooper) to confront a criminal who had previously been imprisoned. While the city is deserted for the fear of the arrival of the dangerous criminal and despite the urgings of his wife, Kane refuses to leave the city at the mercy of the criminal, knowing that his physical integrity is at stake. So, in this case happiness is not sought through self-denial; on the contrary, it is the recognition of the unpleasant task that forces Kane to activate the mechanisms of the categorical imperative that hold him in place: when his wife angrily asks him if he is trying to become a hero behaving as he does, he replies: "I am not trying to become a hero. "If you think I like it all, you're crazy." Neither does the protagonist seek moral justification, whose spontaneous reaction would surely have removed him from danger as well: throughout the film he tries to appease the voice that tells him to leave to be saved, so he is aware of the danger. Having ruled out the other possibilities, it is understood that the task is solely the guide of Kane's act, which has already been judged from a moral point of view, whether the sheriff succeeds in his mission or not. Even if Kane had been killed and had not eventually protected the town he was responsible for, he would have made the moral choice - just as he does not calculate the consequences of his action on himself, so the viewer is called upon to evaluate his action before its happy outcome. The reluctant observance of the law strengthens the moral motivation, since the internal determination of the will alone imposes the moral agent on the duty, where no kind of coercion can be included except self-coercion (Kant, 2013, p. 230). In fact, resisting physical impulses (in this case, the self-preservation instinct), Kane overcomes the psychological obstacles of performing the task (Kant, 2013, p. 230) and throws himself into a double battle, because not only does he

resist a strong and unjust opponent (the criminal), but also conflicts with his spontaneous desire to consolidate his moral mind. In the first case we speak of bravery, while in the second, we speak of virtue, as they are contained in Kantian orthology (Kant, 2013, pp. 229–247). Kane acted morally on duty and is contrasted as a character with his friend and deputy Harvey (Lloyd Bridges), who offers to help him in return for a personal favor and not out of devotion to duty. Consequently, even if he remained to support Kane hoping for some reward and even if he might lose his life, his act is by definition included in the category of non-moral acts, since the acts of interest and the acts to satisfy the desires or natural moments in a certain type of behavior (such as, to show submission but without sincere respect for his superior) from the moral field are excluded - and of course we reiterate that even in this case the consequences of the actions are not taken into account in the moral evaluation. Inductively, a large number of acts are automatically deleted or permanently introduced into the field of ethics: Kane, whatever the outcome of the battle, made the moral choice because he acted with free will based on duty, to no avail and without calculating the consequences; and Harvey, as the story unfolds, remains a negative moral example of character, which promotes selfishness at the critical moment of the choice of the act by not confirming the pure quality of the dignified person, that is, its moral dimension. Coincidentally or not, Kane's character in the film is the representative of the law: according to the kantian view, rational beings obey laws, but these laws are enacted by rational beings themselves through their intellect and are not dictated by external bodies. Next, obedience to the law is essentially a sign of absolute freedom and autonomy of rational beings: Kane enacts the law that binds him and serves him in faith as a free choice. Harvey is not free to choose to help Kane - on the contrary, his backward thinking is a product of heteronomous will and therefore puts him directly out of the moral context.

Conclusion

In view of this presented material, the question of whether philosophical theory finds potential application in any type of film production (Bordwell & Thompson, 2009, pp. 136–138), beyond the “commonly accepted” as quality and respectable cinematic genres, no longer seems to have an easy answer. Certainly, philosophical references find a richer field of application in the category of films that have been supervised by intellectual directors with a similar background. However, this reality encloses rather than excludes a plethora of “mainstream” cinematic creations that paradoxically (?) as well as effortlessly raise a number of the most important philosophical questions of all time. The logically next assertion that perhaps a rudimentary ingenuity would suffice for any film to be connected to philosophy, is not entirely unfounded; in these cases, the extortionate attempt to diagnose a (pseudo) philosophical background is rather obvious (Wartenberg 2007: 25). Of course, it is not necessary to impose a meaning on a film that does not aspire but to visually represent an elementary script; it always takes precedence to read the content of the film itself. In fact, the question of whether the creator intended from the beginning to raise philosophical issues through the film is ultimately minor (Cox and Levine 2012: 14-15).

The real significance and value lies in the fact that, even unintentionally, it seems that it is possible to read traditional kantian philosophy in the often disputed, popular (pop) Hollywood movies. And this opens a double window for both the modernization of philosophy and the future use of cinema, even in education fields.

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The author of the article declared that there is no conflict of interest.

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Filmography

Gone Baby, Gone (Affleck, 2007)

Saving Private Ryan (Spielberg, 1998)

The Light Between The Oceans (Cianfrance, 2016)

The English Patient (Minghella, 1996)

Groundhog Day (Ramis, 1993)

High Noon (Zimmerman, 1952)