

Judgment and the Joker: The Relationship between Moral Nihilism and Law and Order in *Joker*

Ella Bunn¹, Mrs. Oliva[#]

¹Lake Highland Preparatory School, Orlando, FL, USA

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on Todd Phillip's 2019 film, *Joker*, in which the main antagonist, Arthur Fleck, is analyzed through the philosophical lens of Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of Moral Nihilism. The researcher used peer-reviewed academic sources to gain an understanding of the predetermined relationship between Moral Nihilism and the disturbance of Law and Order. A qualitative thematic content analysis was conducted to analyze the presence of disturbed Law and Order and Moral Nihilism in scenes throughout *Joker* through the coding categories of amoralism, moral subjectivism, egoism, lack of attachment to consequences, lack of empathy, violence/destruction, riots, and lack of political control, which were determined through extensive preliminary research. The collected scenes from both the researcher and cocoder were then analyzed for interrater reliability. After following through with the selected methodology, it was determined that in *Joker*, both Moral Nihilism and a disturbance of Law and Order were present. It can be concluded that Nihilism and Law and Order are not a direct cause and effect relationship but are mutually reinforcing of one another as time progresses as both Arthur Fleck and the city of Gotham fell into chaos simultaneously throughout this specific film.

Introduction

Cinema is consistently employed to unveil ideologies and possibilities in society through an artistic experience including the characters, setting, or any other factor incorporated in a film as noted by Mary Litch, a Director of Academic Technology and Digital Media at Chapman University, in her published work *Philosophy Through Film*. A formal film analysis delves deeper into the creation of a cinematic piece in order to reveal the true meaning and how it may influence the intended audience. In her novel, Litch analyzes established films such as *Inception*, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *The Matrix*, and more, recognizing that "some feature films may be interpreted as attempts to provide answers to classic questions within philosophy" (2). In the film world, the DC extended universe, a subsidiary of Warner Bros, has become one of the pre-eminently studied franchises, claiming some of the most relevant film icons such as Batman, Wonder Woman, Superman, and their evil opposers. The Joker has been both a DC comic book and film icon, having countless appearances and adaptations on the big screen as a famed villain. In the most recent 2019 adaptation, *Joker*, Todd Philips utilizes a thriller film¹ to shine new light on the familiar antagonist. After evaluating the preliminary research on *Joker*, it had been noticed that no philosophical interpretations of the film existed. After extensive examination of philosophical theories, it led to the inquiry: To what extent has the portrayal

¹ a work of fiction or drama designed to hold the interest by the use of a high degree of intrigue, adventure, or suspense ("Merriam-Webster")

of Moral Nihilism² in thriller movies revealed the philosophy as a threat to Law and Order³ in modern American society? (A film review of *Joker*).

Literature Review

The Philosophy of Nihilism

Alan R. Pratt, a Professor of Humanities at Embry–Riddle University known for his research on existential nihilism, affirms that Nihilism was first associated with German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and became popularized after it appeared in Ivan Turgenev’s novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862) as it was used to refer to scientism, the belief in scientific fact as the only explanation to societal values, in his characters. As quoted in *Father and Sons*, Turgenev divulges that “[A] nihilist is a man who ... looks at everything critically ... who does not take any principle for granted, however much that principle may be revered.” In a collection of his unpublished writings, Nietzsche references that Nihilism means “*That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is missing; ‘Why?’ finds no answer*” (*Nihilism in Film and Television* 7). This idea has been simplified to better understand the core nihilistic belief that no proof of a higher existence leads to the belief that a “true morality” does essentially not exist (“The Basics of Philosophy” 2), eventually leading to a selfish mindset and a rejection of societal order based on moral truths.

Nihilism can be seen as a complex philosophical ideology that is easily confused with other beliefs that share similar values including pessimism, cynicism, and apathy. Nolen Gertz, a writer and researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, distinguishes the difference between them. Pessimism is a “glass is empty” type of thinking, described as the dwelling of despair, while Nihilism is just the rejection of certain beliefs, not a depressing view of the world. Cynicism views the members of society as merely selfish; everyone who is helping others is doing it for their own benefit. Apathy displays the lack of individual emotion and empathy. This varies from Nihilism because apathy is an individual way of thinking, but a person who believes this recognizes that others are different and does not push their way of thinking onto others in society as a Nihilistic individual would (“What Nihilism Is Not”). Research on similar concepts to Nihilism confirms the choice to narrow this research specifically to *just* Nihilism by revealing that many of these complex ideologies can be represented through the wide variations of Nihilism, and many are not as extreme and therefore would be more difficult to analyze.

Morality in Nihilism

Nihilism has been divided into numerous branches to allow a more narrow understanding of the philosophy. Moral Nihilism is a specified branch of Nihilism defined as “the meta-ethical view that ethical claims are generally false. It holds that there are no objective moral facts or true propositions - that nothing is morally good, bad, wrong, right, etc - because there are no moral truths” (“The Basics of Philosophy”). For this research, Moral Nihilism is the most relevant branch of Nihilism and will correlate best with an analysis reflecting the views of a villain, as evil figures often lack morality. Focusing on just Moral Nihilism also generates a more specific lens for the researcher to examine the film.

Bulent Diken, a Danish-Turkish philosopher and sociologist who teaches at Lancaster University, puts forth, “In its origin, nihilism is an inability to accept pain, conflict, and antagonism. But since these are parts of life, the search for a pain-free life amounts to the denial of the world as it is” (2). This core nihilistic belief compromises

2 A Philosophy first associated with Friedrich Nietzsche that argues that human existence is without objective meaning, purpose, or value (“The Basics of Philosophy”)

3 A political theory describing the conditions of a society where individuals follow the orders of higher powers and live in maintained harmony (Flamm)

morality by creating the mindset that nothing really matters. Tartaglia, who studies philosophy at University College London, and Llanera, an assistant research professor of philosophy at the University of Connecticut, build upon Diken's argument as they advise, "The best way to use the word [Nihilism] is for the claim that human life is meaningless, in the cosmic sense of there being no overall plan for our existence" (2). Individuals with nihilistic tendencies are usually inclined to act on their own personal impulse and satisfaction, regardless of whether it is seen as ethically correct, compromising their ability to differentiate right from wrong. Thomas H. Brobjer, a Professor at the Department of History of Science and Ideas at Uppsala University, elaborates further on this as he notes, "Nietzsche denies that we can ever know the intentions of any other human being. In fact, Nietzsche emphasizes the relative unimportance of conscientious thinking, 'consciousness is a surface,' in favor of subconscious thinking and instincts" (64). Subconscious thoughts, usually selfish in nature, are the driving force of Nihilism, resulting in an absence of morality and concern for other individuals in a society.

The Association between Nihilism and Law and Order

As clarified by Michael Flamm, a history professor at Ohio Wesleyan University, Law and Order is described as the situation in which individuals are obedient to the set expectations and live in cooperation with authority; the disturbance of Law and Order can lead to both positive growth and legal chaos within a society as the outcome is completely situational. ("Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s"). Building on this, in "Law and Social Order," Russell Hardin, an American political scientist, argues that in successful societies, legal systems have a clear moral principle behind most of their law, concluding that morality is a direct factor of legal prosperity. Nihilistic beliefs contradict the basis of the political theory of Law and Order due to the emphasis that life, in a sense, is meaningless. This prompts the individual to act on what will satisfy their own needs, without recognition of moral conscience. In the academic journal, *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference on Philosophy of Education, Law, and Science in the Era of Globalization*, economic professors declare that Legal Nihilism is considered a negative subjective attitude towards law and therefore, behavior associated with a Nihilistic set of beliefs becomes more radical during periods of crisis and radical reforms when Law and Order does not fulfill social functions and processes (326). This selfish attitude directly affects law and order, as a society can be disrupted by a figure acting in such a way that morals are disregarded, ultimately affecting the environment around them as well and showcasing a direct cause and effect relationship between Moral Nihilism and a disturbance of Law and Order.

Philosophy in Cinema

In cinema, philosophy can be a perspective used to examine to a character's thinking or the filmmaker's intent. Philosophical ideas, such as Nihilism, can even be incorporated without the intent of the filmmaker and revealed through a philosophical analysis of a specific aspect of a movie. Mary Litch, a previous Director of Learning Spaces at Chapman University who studied Philosophy, expands on this as she argues that even though the purpose of Hollywood Blockbusters is to entertain and make money when watching even mainstream commercial films, it is possible that dialogue, visual elements, and characters can refer to and even reason through philosophical topics (6). Nihilism can be used as a facet in a film to explain the evil traits and actions of a villain, as it leads to a lack of knowledge of what is morally wrong, strictly focusing on the individual's inner motives, feelings, and desires.

The Joker Film and its Relevance

The Joker has been a prominent film icon across the nation for many years since his first appearance in comics as Batman's arch-nemesis. In the most recent Joker movie, the director, Todd Phillips, explores another side to the

character, giving him a movie of his own to showcase the character's complex background. When looking at preliminary research there is an abundance of papers on Arthur Fleck's (Joker) manic behavior in the 2019 film. Alexis Dema, a member of the Department of Neurology at Le Havre Hospital, and David Tillot, part of the Department of Anesthesiology at the University Hospital Charles Nicolle, establish a convincing case on Arthur Fleck's medical portfolio, diagnosing him with traumatic brain injury resulting in both Pathological Laughing and Psychotic Disorder. Yustina Fitriani, a researcher in the Technology Institute at the Nahdlatul Ulama University, explores a different viewpoint through the Sigmund Freud theory, a psychoanalytic theory of personality development, justifying the lack of the Joker's moral consciousness. Although there has been research done by medical professionals diagnosing the Joker from a psychological and neurological approach, there has yet to be a philosophical analysis of the 2019 *Joker* movie to explain the character's reasoning, the effects of his actions, and the fictional society he lives in known as Gotham City. Looking at Satrio Jagad's paper "MORAL NIHILISM AS REFLECTED BY JOKER IN THE DARK KNIGHT MOVIE," it can be concluded that Nihilism can be applied to the character; however, this theory had not been applied to Todd Phillip's interpretation of the Joker, which is the gap this research seeks to fill.

Methodology

Methods Description and Defense

In order to thoroughly answer whether the portrayal of Moral Nihilism in *Joker* has revealed the philosophy as a threat to Law and Order in modern American society, a formal film analysis was conducted, specifically incorporating a thematic content analysis. Film analysis can be extremely broad, involving a multitude of cinematic techniques including camera angles, dialogue, settings, characters, etc. For the purpose of this study, the film analysis was narrowed to focus on dialogue, actions, and interactions within Arthur Fleck (the Joker) and the setting and sub-characters around him.

Thematic content analysis is a form of qualitative analysis, focusing on intangible and abstract concepts rather than exact statistics and data. As declared by Lorelli Nowell, a writer in the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Thematic content analysis is used in qualitative research for "identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (24). Similar studies analyzing abstract concepts and prominent characters such as "The Representation of Fascism on Lord Voldemort Character in Harry Potter and Deathly Hallows by J.K. Rowling" (Aisyuh) and "MORAL NIHILISM AS REFLECTED BY JOKER IN THE DARK KNIGHT MOVIE" (Jagad) use different variations of qualitative content analysis, justifying the use of one for this research.

Coding Categories

This process analyzed the presence of Moral Nihilistic behavior in Todd Phillip's *Joker*, specifically applied to the main character Arthur Fleck and how the presence or lack of presence of this philosophy depicted chaos in Gotham. Philosophical thinking is not a quantitative aspect of a film that can be measured explicitly; therefore, in order to analyze the presence of Nihilistic tendencies, it was necessary to thoroughly comprehend the philosophy and create relevant guidelines for which scenes can be examined. After conducting preliminary research on the philosophy of Nihilism, a "checklist" was created, noting strong indicators that Nihilistic behavior or thought is present. These coding categories were: lack of empathy, lack of attachment to consequences, moral subjectivism, amorality, and intense egoism (see Table 1).

Lack of Empathy

Lack of empathy is used to show instances where Arthur fleck disregards the harm he has mentally or physically instilled in others. It is the condition in which an individual cannot understand or vicariously feel the emotions of another (*Merriam-Webster*).

Lack of Attachment to Consequences

Lack of attachment to consequences is demonstrated by a character who seems indifferent regarding the effects of their actions. This is shown through rash decisions and disregard for law and order.

Moral Subjectivism

Donald Crosby, a theologian, and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Colorado State University, clarifies in *The Specter of the Absurd: Sources and Criticisms of Modern Nihilism* that Moral Subjectivism is the theory that morality is decided by the individual. There are no exact moral codes as it varies by person (12).

Amoralism

Amoralism is arguably the most significant of the coding categories for Moral Nihilism, as Crosby defines it as a denial of *all* moral values, precluding to the belief that life is meaningless and moral codes are useless. This could be portrayed through extreme illegal acts and a disregard for any ethical solutions (11).

Intense Egoism

Crosby introduces Egoism as the belief that one's own needs will always be superior. Intense Egoism is demonstrated by an extremely selfish outlook that fails to acknowledge varying perspectives (14).

The Process

With this table, notes were taken throughout viewing the movie, acknowledging time stamps where the coding categories for Nihilism were present. In order to be fully accurate with this process, a cocoder, who had been given background information found through the same preliminary sources as the researcher, viewed the movie on a separate checklist without communication to avoid any undue influence. In addition, another table was incorporated to take notes on instances where Law and Order of Gotham is disturbed, marking the scenes and their significance with the coding categories: violence/destruction, riots, and lack of political control. This entire process was replicated twice by the researcher and cocoder to avoid any biases and guarantee validity. At the end of the study, all eight data tables were analyzed for their interrater reliability, examining to what extent both observers were consistent with their results.

Findings and Analysis

As defined in *Nihilism in Film and Television* by Kevin L. Stoehr, professor of Theoretical and Applied Ethics and Film Studies, "Nihilism, then, is the overturning of our trust in the conventional and traditional order, a human-created order that is usually taken to be bedrock and guideline in our quest to be a good person and to live a good life. At its deepest level, nihilism is a loss of faith in the natural order as well" (14). Stoehr reinforces that Nihilism is a result of overturning one's trust in the order of society, which is the main theme throughout studies done on Nihilism and Law and Order; however, after evaluating Todd Philip's Joker, it has been found that Moral Nihilism and a disturbance of law and order mutually reinforce one another over time, evolving simultaneously as both Gotham and the Joker fall into a state of insanity.

Egoism

At its core, by believing nothing matters, Nihilism derives from people not caring about others. This lends itself to Egoism, which is portrayed early on by Arthur. As the film begins, the audience soon becomes aware of the

abnormal dynamic between Arthur and his mentally ill mother, Penny Fleck, where Arthur, a grown man, still resides with her as her caretaker. Early on in the movie when Penny questions Arthur on the mail, he lies and takes the medication. This selfish and seemingly mundane act demonstrates egoistic tendencies early on in Arthur's behavior as Joel Fienburg proposes that "psychological egoism is the doctrine that the only thing anyone is capable of desiring or pursuing ultimately (as an end in itself) is his own self-interest" (Ethical Theory: An Anthology 167). Arthur shows an intense drive to fulfill his own self-interest by a yearning to be seen as powerful and important. After being an outcast for so long, Arthur murders the three men on the subway and unknowingly begins a "kill the rich" movement. When this murder gets recognition and becomes the headline of Gotham, Arthur ominously tells his social worker "And until a little while ago, it was like nobody ever saw me. Even I didn't know if I really existed. But I do. And people are starting to notice." Even though his identity is still concealed and the residents of Gotham are unaware that it was Arthur who committed the crime, his actions are still gaining attention resulting in Arthur feeling seen, fulfilling his egoistic desires.

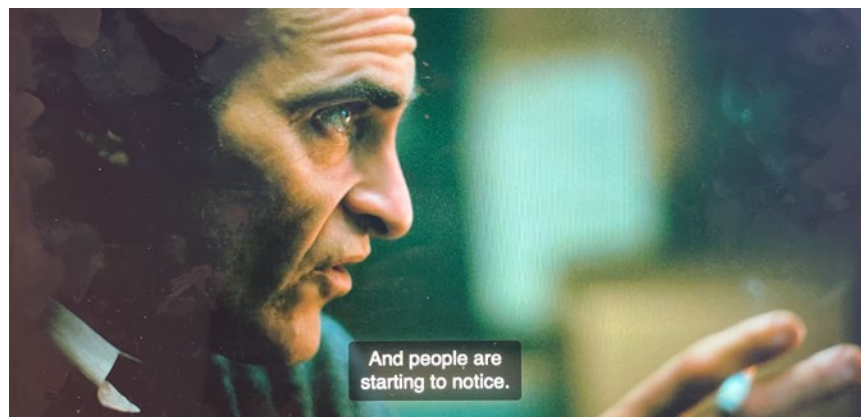


Fig 1. "Arthur talking to his Social Worker" *Joker* 2019, Author's Screenshot.

This representation of Egoism already being present in Arthur from the start but being heightened as he wreaks havoc in Gotham illustrates that Arthur was Egoistic before committing the crime, and that committing the crime only intensified this thought process. One does not merely cause the other, but instead they reinforce one another cause a cycle of radical thought and chaos.

Lack of empathy and attachment to consequences

Arthur as an individual seems to lack empathy or any attachment to consequences from the beginning of the movie; however, as the society around him begins to descend to madness, he becomes even more distant from these qualities. This is shown through small acts of carelessness.



Fig 2. “Arthur shoots a man on the subway” *Joker* 2019, Author’s Screenshot.

At first, for example stealing his mother’s letters and breaking into Thomas Wayne’s gate to interrogate him about any relations he once had with Penny Fleck, but as the movie progresses these actions drastically worsen. After murdering three men on the subway, Arthur begins to eerily dance around in elongated and abnormal movements. This becomes increasingly significant as later the dance is paralleled after he murders his coworker and Arthur disassociates from the detrimental actions he had just committed. When Arthur first inflicts violence on others he almost seems shocked by his lack of empathy as he admits to the psychiatric hospital worker, “Last time I took it (anger) out on people I thought it was going to bother me, but it really hasn’t.” This lack of empathy is reflected again when he announces to his coworkers that “My mom died, I’m celebrating.” This absence of empathetic emotions is heightened as Arthur makes rash and atypical decisions after executing crimes. After shooting Murray on live television during his interview, the camera shows Arthur laughing, smiling,



Fig 3. “Arthur shoots Murray” *Joker* 2019, Author’s Screenshot.

and dancing, clearly having no association or even fear of the consequences that may endure but rather deriving entertainment from his brutal actions.

Moral Subjectivism

Throughout the duration of the film, Arthur Fleck is able to justify a majority of his unjust actions through his own rationalization. As confirmed Crosby, Moral subjectivism argues that morality is relative, and each individual

acts upon their own moral code that is neither correct nor incorrect. Throughout the film, Arthur acts upon his own moral code disregarding what is traditionally seen as ethically correct. This is first revealed when Arthur's coworker gives him a gun in order to defend himself. When Arthur meets his neighbor Sophie and becomes intensely infatuated by her presence he admittedly states "I have a gun I could stop by tomorrow" in response to Sophie signaling a gun to her head in a sarcastic manner. This absurd behavior progresses as Arthur brings his gun to a children's hospital while putting on his clown act and loses his job as a consequence. When inquired about the subway murder Arthur expresses his subjectivism almost directly by responding with "I killed those guys because they were awful. Everybody is awful these days. It is enough to make anyone crazy." As coined by Crosby, moral subjectivism is all determined by the individual. While onlookers may view Arthur's actions as insane and deceitful, he defends his actions with his own logic, emphasizing subjectivist behavior that aids a nihilistic view.

Amoralism

While Moral Subjectivism was present throughout the film, Arthur also portrayed acts of amoralism, which is the denial of *all* morality (Crosby). Amoralism is arguably one of the more prominent and direct coding categories lending itself to moral nihilism because of the mentality that nothing even matters, not even morality, that comes along with it. There is a multitude of obvious acts of Amoralism starting with Arthur murdering three men on the subway while unintentionally disguised as a clown. After the fame he receives for this perceived act of rebellion, Arthur spirals deeper into a state where he believes nothing matters and loses a complete moral obligation. In a fit of rage after his traumatic past is revealed through psychiatric papers regarding his mother's delusional mental state, Arthur suffocates his own mother in her hospital bed.



Fig 4. "Arthur strangles his mother" *Joker* 2019, Author's Screenshot

When his two ex-coworkers show up to share their condolences Arthur brutally murders one of them with his face painted white as an allusion to his clown persona that gained him popularity in the first place. He continues with this costume and even asks to be referred to as the Joker when interviewed for his failed stand-up comedian performances with talk show host Murray Franklin, rejecting his past self "Arthur" and fully giving into his fully Nihilistic clown persona.



Fig 5. “Arthur after killing his ex-coworker” *Joker* 2019, Author’s Screenshot.

When Murray questions who would ever believe the murder of innocent people to be a comedic joke, the Joker replies with “I do. And I’m tired of pretending it’s not. Comedy is subjective, Murray” and also directly states “I don’t believe in anything.”

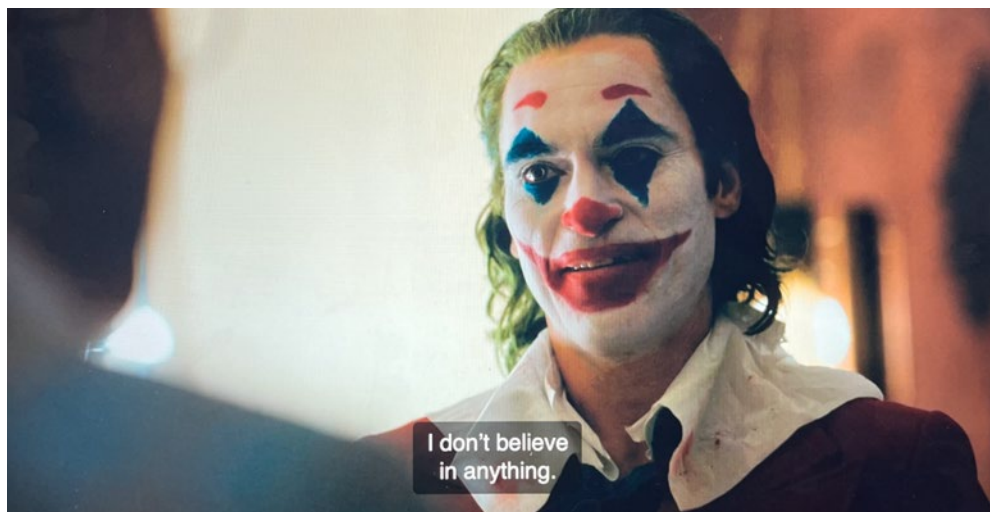


Fig 6. “Arthur on the Murray Show” *Joker* 2019, Author’s Screenshot.

While Arthur had demonstrated unethical acts throughout the entirety of the film, the complete rejection of a moral code is completely clear in this interview. This interview is the last significant scene before Gotham falls into complete madness and the movie concludes.

Violence inflicted on Arthur Fleck

When evaluating the disorder of Gotham through the lens of violence and destruction and its relevance to Arthur Fleck’s character, there are both occasions of violence inflicted on Arthur, and Arthur inflicting the violence upon others. As the film progresses, Arthur’s tragic past is unraveled to the audience after he steals and reads the letter his mother wrote to Thomas Wayne, a mayoral candidate of Gotham, claiming that Wayne is Arthur’s father. Perplexed

by this statement, Arthur steals his mother's records, finding that Penny Fleck "suffers from delusional psychosis and narcissistic personality disorder. Was found guilty of endangering the welfare of her own child."

After running off with the files, Arthur uncovers psychiatric papers charging his mother with neglect and extreme physical abuse to her adopted son.



Fig 7. "Penny Fleck's Medical Portfolio" *Joker* 2019, Author's Screenshot.

According to preliminary research, the physical and emotional abuse Arthur endured at a young age caused his Pathological Laughing Disorder, which leads to even more abuse in Arthur's life. Arthur becomes an outcast of society and is isolated for his abnormal behavior; impulsively laughing at the wrong time leads others to mistake him for making fun of them or being insensitive to serious situations. A turning point in the film is when Arthur is beaten up by three men who were verbally assaulting a woman in the Subway after breaking out into a laughing fit. This beating seems to be Arthur's last straw, as the audience is aware physical violence is common in Arthur's life. The opening scene of the film showcases Arthur as a functional member of society simply working his job of advertising a business dressed as a clown when a gang of young men steal his sign and brutally beat Arthur in an alley. In Arthur's following therapy session, he questions his social worker, pondering, "Is it just me, or is it getting crazier out there?" Violence, which is used as a coding category for instances where there is a disturbance of Law and Order, has followed Arthur his entire life. The audience sees that a Nihilistic attitude shown through Moral Subjective actions end up behind a coping mechanism for the violence Arthur has suffered under; in turn, this Nihilistic mindset leads to an increasing amount of even more violent behavior onto others, shown through his Amoralistic actions as the movie continues.

Violence inflicted on others

It is evident in the film that Arthur has lived an isolated life surrounded by violence. While at the beginning of the movie, Arthur is depicted as a deranged individual suffering from extreme mental illnesses and the consequences of an abusive childhood. An easy target for violence, Arthur's mindset is depressed and leading to lack of any reason for his own existence. However, the turning point in the film occurs when Arthur first inflicts violence on others, murdering three men who were tormenting him in a subway.

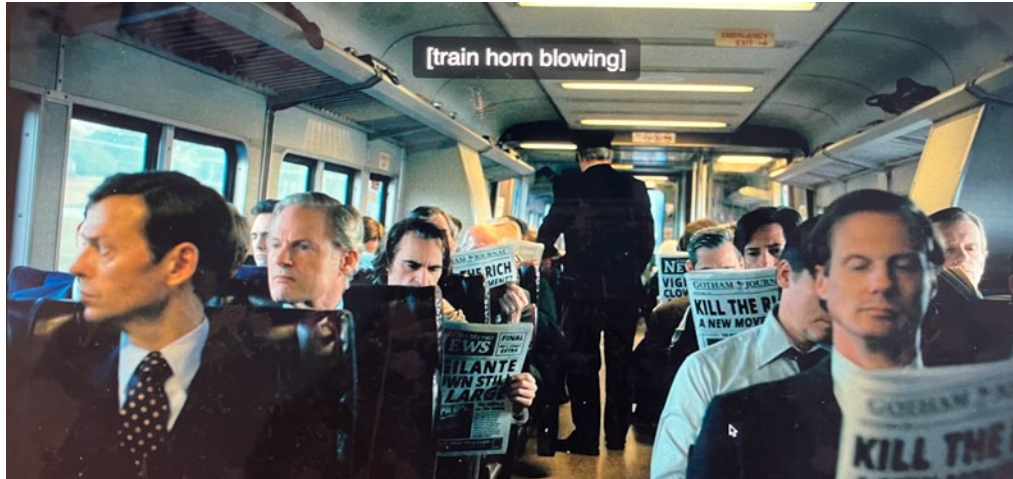


Fig 8. "Gotham citizens reading the paper" *Joker* 2019, Author's Screenshot.

This not only demonstrates extreme Amoralism but is also the shift from where his nihilistic beliefs became a threat to society and were quickly heightened once the crime was publicized as it kickstarts the "kill the rich" movement and sparks riots throughout the city of Gotham. Candidates for Gotham Mayor speak out as "Mayor Stokes has pleaded for cooler heads to prevail." Television declares that "Gotham's lost its way" as the poor take the side of the killer and clown rioters destroy businesses down the streets of Gotham. Arthur, now aware of the power he holds and the attention he has gained, begins to embrace this evil persona and fall farther into his role as "the Joker." After enduring violence his entire life, he now takes control over his circumstances and stops caring about anyone or anything, transforming into the criminal mastermind and murderer of Gotham City.

Conclusion

As argued by Shatkovskaya, Nihilism is a result of an absence of Law and Order in society as she specifies "that nihilistic perception of right is objectively a social phenomenon, supported by the controversy of any national cultural dominating idea" (1). Other legal researchers argue the opposite, including Flamm, who declares that Law and Order are disturbed as a result of such radical thinking. However, after analyzing *Joker* for both Moral Nihilism and disorder in society, it can be concluded that Nihilism and Law and Order are not a direct cause and effect relationship that so many researchers argue but are mutually reinforcing to one another as time progresses. Violence and disorder have followed Arthur his whole life, resulting in his belief that nothing matters. As the violence against him heightens, so do his Nihilistic tendencies, causing him to commit violence against others and resulting in even more disorder in society. This circular cycle shows that chaos and nihilism are not direct results of one another but collaborate together causing both Arthur and the city of Gotham to fall into madness as nihilism and violence mutually reinforce one another throughout the film. In simplest terms, Nihilism does not cause disorder in society, and disorder in a society does not cause Nihilism. There is no direct cause-and-effect relationship. Instead, *Joker* reveals that the two are mutually reinforcing, and both build on one another over time, eventually leading to the destruction of both the individual and society.

Implications and Future Directions

After coming to the conclusion that *Joker* does not portray Moral Nihilism as a direct threat to Law and Order in society, but rather the result of a negative and violent upbringing along as a leading factor in inflicting violence, it allows one to better comprehend the character of Arthur Fleck, which was ultimately Todd Phillips intention with the

film as he declared, "Our thing was let's make an origin story about a villain who's actually the hero in the beginning, and you love him until you can't love him anymore" (*GameSpot*). Delving into the cinematic world, extensive research could be done using a similar approach to track social disorder and Moral Nihilism in other movies or evil characters in order to conclude whether the mutually reinforcing relationship applies and is validated through further research. Beyond just understanding the complexities of an evil icon in cinema, this nuanced understanding may interest individuals studying philosophy to care about this complex character as a tool to see fictional adaptations of certain philosophical concepts.

Looking past film studies, this research allows for a better understanding of the relations between philosophy and society. This new understanding of the complex relationship between Law and Order and Moral Nihilism is also relevant to legal studies which may be concerned with how radical thought and morality in legislation may impact social order. In addition, this study revealed that violence created an environment where Arthur was unable to care about others resulting in Moral Nihilism, which fueled even more violence as he began to lash out on others. Building upon this concept, continued research could be done to apply cycles of abuse and domestic violence to the *Joker* film, opening up a topic on how it is represented in film and how it relates to radical thoughts such as Nihilism and the circular cycles such thought has the potential to caus

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