

# Teaching deontological ethics with the help of films

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## Introduction: Films, philosophy, and moral education

A growing number of publications illustrate the surge of interest in the relationship between film and philosophy (Carroll and Choi, 2006, Choi, 2006, Frampton, 2006, Gilmore, 2005, Leitner and Engell, 2007, Nagl, Waniek and Mayr, 2004). One group of issues revolves around the aesthetic nature of films, while another focus is the question if films can serve as vehicles of or forums for philosophy (Smith and Wartenberg, 2006, p. 1). Stanley Cavell has not only gained the status of a pioneer of philosophical film studies; he has also asserted that films have the potential to 'do philosophy' in the fullest sense (Cavell, 1981, 1996, 2004; Nagl, 2007). In an interview, he claimed: 'Film is made for philosophy; it shift or puts different light on whatever philosophy has said about appearance and reality, about actors and characters, about scepticism and dogmatism, about presence and absence' (quoted in Nagl, 2007, p. 194).

Together with Stephen Mulhall, Christopher Falzon, Thomas Wartenberg and others, Cavell stands for the more daring approach, the movies-as-doing-philosophy model (Mulhall, 2002, 2006, Falzon, 2002, Wartenberg, 2006; see also Read and Goodenough, 2005). For these writers, films do not simply illustrate philosophical theses, they actually contribute to them, they 'do philosophy', they 'develop philosophical views of their own' (Wartenberg, 2006, p. 21). For instance, Wartenberg tries to show that Charles Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) is not simply an illustration of Karl Marx' theory of alienation in capitalist societies, but also a reflection on the effects of assembly-line work on the human mind and body that is innovative and a 'philosophically significant contribution' (Wartenberg, 2006, p. 30).

The second group of writers endorse the modest films-as-illustrations model (a more elaborate label would be: film-as-*ancilla-philosophiae* model). According to this approach, movies cannot make a distinct contribution to philosophy. Paisley Livingston, for instance, claims that any interpreter must import a well-defined problem and an interpretative context into the film if a philosophical 'output' is supposed to be the result. Films have important pedagogical functions,

complement philosophical texts, and may have a heuristic role; but the bold thesis is mistaken (Livingston, 2006, pp. 15 and 16).

Philosophers who use films in their courses often seem to ignore these debates. They offer down-to-earth film didactics and point at obvious advantages of using films in classrooms: they increase student participation and engage students more profoundly with philosophical issues. Good films present us complex and concrete issues of moral life (Marshall, 2003, pp. 93-4). These teachers try to make the best of the teaching potential of a movie, some offering guidelines how to use certain scenes, how to analyse them, how to stimulate discussions (Peters, Peters and Rolf, 2006, Peters and Rolf, 2003, Schöffel, 2002).

In this paper, I want to show how films could help when teaching deontological ethics in general or Kantian ethics in particular. Though I analyse just two films, my hunch is that deontological themes are more widespread in movies than one might expect. First, I will briefly outline key concepts of Kant's ethics. In the following section, I present Kant's ethical didactics, his theory of moral education. In particular, I focus on what he says about moral instruction, which is divided into *Katechetik*, *Kasuistik* and *Exemplarik*. As old-fashioned as these terms may sound, I think that these three types of moral instruction offer a systematic framework and didactical reflections that can be employed when showing films in a classroom (casuistical questions and films will be the topic of another essay). I conclude that using films make Kant's ethics, or deontological ethics in general, more accessible, and I suppose that my paper supports the film-as-illustrations model described above. I have imported an interpretative context and I needed an ethical framework to analyse the films.

First, however, I want to explain briefly why I focus on Kantian and not some other deontological ethics, and why I explore, or rather attempt to begin to explore, the relationship between Kant's moral educational theory and films. There are, indeed, a number of deontological ethics that rival Kant's. If we look at the twentieth century, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and the discursive ethics of Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel come to mind. However, Kant offers a systematic and profound analysis that is probably unmatched by other thinkers, and his moral educational theory has obviously been widely ignored until now.

Many are familiar with the *Groundwork of The metaphysics of morals* and its exposition of the categorical imperative. Most seem to disregard the 'Doctrine of the methods of ethics' in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and other relevant passages pertaining to moral education.

Why Kant and films? First of all, I want to point at previous attempts to relate the two. Most notoriously, Cavell juxtaposed *The Critique of Pure Reason* with Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934; Cavell, 1981, pp. 71-110; see also Wheatley, 2007). It is probably common for teachers to refer to Kantian themes when they show films in classrooms which raise moral issues. So my first argument is simply pointing at existing practice. Secondly, Kant subscribes to the rather daring thesis that 'common human reason' functions the way he describes it in his writings. For instance, he asserts that we all know the difference between prudence or cunning and morality, and that we should universalise our maxims (Kant, 1996, p. 57; see also p. 165, p. 224, p. 269). 'The most common understanding can distinguish without instruction what form in a maxim makes it fit for a giving of universal law and what does not' (Kant, 1996, p. 161). If Kant is right, then ordinary people in their conversations know basic moral distinctions, know how to assess or judge human conduct, and so on (and films would reflect this common sense morality). Kant does not hesitate to draw this conclusion. He writes about his observation that during conversations, non-philosophers usually abhor 'subtle reasoning', but like to argue 'about the *moral worth* of this or that action by which the character of some person is to be made out' (Kant, 1996, p. 262). This reasoning often tells us a lot about the character of the person who makes the judgement. Many, Kant claims, are very strict in their attempts to find, or isolate, 'genuine moral import in accordance with an uncompromising law' (p. 263). Kant is surprised why teachers and educators do not make use of 'this propensity of reason to enter with pleasure upon even the most subtle examination of the practical questions put to them' (ibid.). He suggests that they use biographies to present characters, situations, and moral dilemma, helping students to develop their faculty of judgement. Kant is probably thinking of Plutarch's *Lives*, among others, just like Montaigne and Rousseau (Koch, 2003, pp. 263f.). More recently, Martha Nussbaum has argued that some works of literature, such as the novels of Henry James, deserve the status of philosophy, as they may help us to understand ethical issues better or even lead to new philosophical

insight, for instance about the relationship between the particular and the general (Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 3-53 and 125-67). If we subscribe to this thesis, then it takes just another step to accept that films at least have the potential to help us with moral education (I set aside the claim that they do more than just help with illustrating theories). It seems to me that Kant's method, especially *Kasuistik* and *Exemplarik*, can be applied to films as well.

## **Kantian moral education**

The key concepts of Kant's ethics are autonomy, practical reason, maxims, duty, and the various types of imperatives (Höffe, 1983, Koch, 2003, pp. 37-105, Johnston, 2007). Autonomy is 'freedom in the *positive* sense' or self-legislation, '*lawgiving of its own* on the part of pure and, as such, practical reason' (Kant, 1996, p. 166; cf. p. 89). One's self-legislative activity results in the categorical imperative: our maxims should not contradict themselves; they can be universalised; they imply that we do not use others or ourselves as mere means, but as ends in themselves; they could be the basis of a 'universal law of nature' (Kant, 1996, pp. 72-85). Maxims are subjective principles of actions and subsume several practical rules (Kant, 1996, p. 153; cf. p. 57). Rules are more context-bound, whereas maxims are abstract, so they require practical judgement to apply them in concrete situations. A typical maxim would be that of happiness or selfishness (Kant, 1996, p. 288). In the film *It could happen to you* (Andrew Bergman, 1995), Charlie Lang follows the maxim that promises should be kept. His wife Muriel Lang endorses the maxim of personal happiness and therefore tries to convince her husband that he should not keep his promise, and should not give half of his lottery win to the poor waitress Yvonne Piazzzi. Kant's point is that moral maxims are self-legislated and can be universalised at the same time. Previous philosophers, Kant claims, realized that 'the human being is bound to laws by his duty, but it never occurred to them that he is subject *only to laws given by himself but still universal* and he is bound only to act in conformity with his own will, which [...] is a will giving universal law' (Kant, 1996, p. 82). Our *Willkür* or freedom of choice is always at the crossroads, we can choose the law of practical reason or ignore it, following, for instance, our inclinations like our desire for happiness. Following our inclinations is not *per se* immoral, only if there is a conflict with 'grounds of reason' (p. 66). If we opt for the law of

practical reason and our incentive (*Triebfeder*) of action is this very law, we do our duty: 'duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law' (p. 55).

One formula of the categorical imperative states that humans are ends in themselves (Kant, 1996, p. 80 and 83). In the film *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), adapted from the novel by Anthony Burgess, Stanley Kubrick tells the story of teenage criminal, gang leader and rapist Alex (Malcolm McDowell). When he kills a woman and is sent to prison, his ruthless and immoral behaviour is reconditioned by the - equally immoral - government. Alex has used people, for instance when he raped them; now he is used as a guinea-pig by the Minister of the Interior (or 'Inferior', as Alex claims). The leaders of the opposition stick to the same maxim: once they get hold of Alex, they use him to topple the government. The atmosphere of dehumanization that the film conveys is rooted in the implicit assumption that humans, even criminals, are ends in themselves (cf. Kant, 1996, p. 473). 'You lot should be exterminated. Like so many noisome pests', one of the characters says to Alex (Burgess, 1972, pp. 113f.). Only at the end of the book (not in the movie), Alex is able to leave behind the maxim of selfishness. He longs for a stable relationship, wants to get married, have children: a possible relationship based on love and respect replaces raping girls and women. Given the importance of maxims in Kant's ethics, it comes as no surprise that he wants moral education to be based on the cultivation of maxims, not on discipline, 'examples, threats, punishments, and so forth' (Kant, 2007, p. 464).

In prison, Alex is conditioned into a moral robot who becomes nauseated by thoughts of violence and sex. He is no longer a human being with the freedom of choice, he has become a 'clockwork orange', a machine. 'What does God want?' asks the prison priest, couching the issue in theological terms. 'Does God want goodness or the choice of goodness? Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps in some way better than a man who has the good imposed upon him?' (Burgess, 1972, p. 76). This freedom of choice is the basis of, but not identical with, internal freedom as self-legislation. The goodness of Alex after his reconditioning is what Kant calls legality, not genuine morality. Morality of dispositions means that the determining ground (*Bestimmungsgrund*) of the will is 'the immediate representation of the law [the categorical imperative] and the [...] observance of it as duty'. By contrast, legality of actions means

that they correspond with the moral law, but the ‘incentives to action’ lie outside one’s practical reason (Kant, 1996, p. 261). Alex has become a good citizen (he does not murder, steal or rape), but he is not a morally good person (he has ceased to be a person in the strict sense, and his actions are conditioned, not the result of his free choice).

*A Clockwork Orange* illustrates another Kantian distinction. Hypothetical imperatives have the form ‘If you want x, then you should do y’. The action is good ‘merely as a means *to something else*’ (Kant, 1996, p. 67). In prison, Alex learns to behave well, to pretend to be good at heart (in order to get rewards and bonuses). He cultivates what Kant calls imperatives of skilfulness (*Geschicklichkeit*) and prudence (*Klugheit*), learning how to use other people for his own ends (Kant, 2007, pp. 448f., Koch, 2003, p. 17). The result is again legality, not morality of disposition. Of course, Kant stresses the importance of moral education based on the categorical imperative, ‘by which the human being is to be formed so that he can live as a freely acting being’ (Kant, 2007, p. 448).

According to the standard interpretation, the categorical imperative is a testing device making sure that subjective maxims meet the requirements of universalising them, of autonomy, and so on (Johnston, 2007, p. 241). Johnston, by contrast, claims that we apply the moral law this way only occasionally, that the context in which it is operative ‘is always already the existing stock of norms, rules, laws, and duties built up in interpersonal, social, and public discourse’, and that the categorical imperative is not something given, but developed ‘in the process of maxim formation’ (ibid., p. 243). I am inclined to side with Johnston’s qualification. Kant’s thesis about ‘common human reason’ mentioned above suggests that ordinary humans have an implicit moral knowledge, and philosophers like Kant, ‘as did Socrates’, make them attentive to their own reason’s principle (Kant, 1996, p. 58). This is the basic assumption of the semi-Socratic method in Kant’s didactics (see below).

The key issue of Kantian moral education is motivation (see especially Koch, 2003, to whom I am much indebted; Cavallar, 2005, Kauder and Fischer, 1999; more secondary literature in Koch, 2003, p. 11 and pp. 401-16). How can we educate pupils to become autonomous agents, to realise their self-legislating potential, to cultivate their maxims

in a way that they become compatible with the maxims of others? In Kant's words, moral education looks for the 'way in which one can provide laws of pure practical reason with *access* to the human mind and *influence* on its maxims, that is, the way in which one can make objectively practical reason *subjectively* practical as well' (Kant, 1996, p. 261). The goal of moral education – the doctrine of the methods of ethics – is to prepare moral autonomy (cf. Kant, 1996, p. 591, Koch, 2003, pp. 118 and 192).

Kant has claimed that he was the first philosopher to have found the one and only method of moral education (a strong claim, indeed). He criticizes teachers in the past who 'have not brought their concepts to purity, but, since they want to do too well by hinting everywhere for motives to moral goodness, in trying to make their medicine really strong the spoil it' (Kant, 1996, p. 65). For example, the priest in *A Clockwork Orange* preaches in his sermon that evil-doers will wind up in hell, whereas good people will be rewarded in heaven. The result can only be heteronomy of the will, not autonomy. Kant calls this mixing of morals with theology and 'empirical inducements' (ibid., p. 64). Kant's own methodology is completely opposed to this approach. The moral law, he asserts, should be taught 'by way of reason alone' (ibid.). This is the 'autocracy of reason': reason is not only self-legislating, it can also serve as an incentive and become practical (Koch, 2003, p. 193). Kant adds the psychological hypothesis that this rational and pure method is much more efficient than the mixing of rational and empirical/pragmatic elements, as its 'influence on the human heart' is more powerful (ibid.) and 'elevates the soul' (ibid., p. 65; Koch, 2003, pp. 11f. and 19f.; pp. 192-211 with more passages).

I have just sketched the outlines of Kant's ideas on moral motivation. This is just one part of moral education, the other two being moral instruction and moral training (or 'ethical ascetics'). Moral instruction in turn is divided into *Katechetik*, *Kasuistik* and *Exemplarik*. Thus we get the following distinctions (see chart below; cf. Koch, 2003, pp. 110, 118, 189, 383f.):

## Moral education

1.) moral instruction

2.) moral motivation

3.) moral training

1. 1. Katechetik

1. 2. Exemplarik

2. 3. Kasuistik

Knowledge

wanting

capacity/*Vermögen*

Next, I will present one film in each of the following sections, and try to show how they might fit into Kant's ethical didactics.

### ***Judgment at Nuremberg and Katechetik***

*Katechetik* describes the method how to teach the metaphysics of morals, the canon of virtue (Koch, 2003, pp. 163-73, 384-6). This is no pure catechism where the teacher lectures and the pupils memorise, but a semi-Socratic dialogue which involves the pupils' reason: they have to learn to think for themselves (Kant, 1996, pp. 591f.; see also Kant, 2007, p. 466). The teacher is the 'midwife' who helps the pupils to become aware of their own implicit moral assumptions. 'The teacher, by his questions, guides his young pupil's course of thought merely by presenting him with cases in which his predisposition for certain concepts will develop (the teacher is the midwife of the pupil's thoughts; Kant, 1996, p. 592). The dialogue is semi-Socratic because it combines catechism and maeutics. The teacher instructs the pupils about basic moral concepts and the system of virtue, but does so with the help of the 'common human reason' of her pupils. As usual, this form of moral instruction has to remain pure, that is, it must not be mixed with theology, for instance. The teacher hints at the pupils' consciousness of their own moral freedom, with Kant hoping that the instruction eventually produces 'an exaltation' in the learner's soul about moral goodness and our own moral capacities (Kant, 1996, p. 596).

I think that discussing a film in class might approach this semi-Socratic dialogue. I will try to show this with the help of the courtroom drama *Judgment at Nuremberg*. The film premiered in December 1961,

shortly after the building of the Berlin Wall (the symbol of the Cold War) and one day before war criminal Adolf Eichmann was sentenced to death in Israel. German reporters attacked director Stanley Kramer for digging in the German past and stirring up old hatreds. Kramer had assembled a principled cast, among them Marlene Dietrich, who had spoken up during the war, criticizing Hitler, the Third Reich and the German people. Chief Allied judge Don Haywood (Spencer Tracy) alludes to the climate of the McCarthy years when he says that 'there are those in our country too who today speak of the protection of country, of survival' (ch. 15, 2: 44), suggesting that the problems dealt with in the film are not those of a distant past (Muñoz Conde and Muñoz Auni6n, 2006, Mann, 2002).

The following basic moral concepts can be developed in a debate or discussion:

1. the idea of justice and legal positivism, an issue which is related to
2. human rights and dignity
3. the problems of criminal law and moral/legal responsibility
4. the means-end problem
5. duty versus inclination.

I will focus on just a few aspects. The film develops a clear-cut contrast between Haywood - and partly the repentant German chief judge Ernst Janning (Burt Lancaster) -, who stands for 'justice, truth, and the value of a single human being' (2: 46) on the one hand and the other German judges and Hans Rolfe, the attorney of the defense (played by a brilliant Maximilian Schell) on the other, who endorse legal positivism and claim that they did not know and had nothing to do with the extermination of six million people. This contrast could be the starting point of a discussion of the rule of law, of the content of the idea of justice, of the just state, and so on. While these are generic philosophical issues, the discussions could be pepped up with Kant's exposition of the principle of right (Kant, 1996, pp. 387f.), his claim that legal positivism 'is a head that may be beautiful but unfortunately it has no brain' (ibid., p. 387) and his familiar *Reinheitsgebot* that justice has to remain 'pure and strict', thus 'extraneous considerations' have to be left out (Kant, 1996, p. 473, see also Mulholland, 1990 and Rosen, 1996).

One aspect of the problem of criminal law is the search for responsibility. Who is to blame for the Holocaust and other 'crimes against humanity', a few 'sadistic monsters and maniacs' (2: 44), the Germans in general, or only those who consciously participated in 'a nationwide, government-organised system of cruelty and injustice' (ch. 15, 2: 40)? Haywood tries to understand what went wrong in Germany in his off-the-bench hours, and frequently hears from Germans that they were also victims. 'It was the Eskimos' is the sarcastic summary of the prosecuting attorney Col. Tad Lawson (Richard Widmark). The very Kantian element of the story is the fact that Janning winds up accepting full responsibility for his crimes, and calls Haywood's verdict of life imprisonment a just one. A discussion could also profit from Kant's provocative – and highly dubious - endorsement of the law of retribution (*ius talionis*), which leads him to accept the death penalty for murder (Kant, 1996, pp. 473-7).

The means-end problem is dealt with at some length in the film. Janning, Rolfe and the U. S. generals and politicians who try to influence Haywood develop maxims whose form make them unfit 'for a giving of universal law' (Kant, 1996, p. 161) as they entail some material end, namely the well-being of their respective countries. Janning explains that as a Nazi judge, he did not care if some lost their rights or were used as 'sacrificial lambs' because 'we loved our country' (ch. 12, 2: 17). For him, this supreme end even justified mock trials and 'sacrificial rituals' (2: 20) like the passing of the death sentence for defendants he did not think were guilty. Later on, Rolfe does a similar thing: he plays down the crimes of the accused and of the Third Reich in order to save a tiny piece of German dignity. A self-critical Janning comments: 'Once more, it is being done for love of country' (ch. 12, 2: 19). Finally, there are U. S. Americans who want Haywood to pass lenient sentences. The Cold War has just started, and the West needs the help of the German people. Harsh judgements would contradict the imperative of prudence (*Klugheit*). Judge Haywood, by contrast, is the representative of deontological ethics. He stands for the 'value of a single human being' who must never be used as a mere means; and he has realised that in times of 'national crises', whole countries are tempted to sacrifice their moral and legal principles for the sake of national survival. 'At the very moment when the grasp of the enemy is at [a country's] throat, then it seems that the only way to survive is to use the means of the enemy, to

rest survival upon what is expedient, to look the other way' (ch. 15, 2: 45; this is another allusion to the McCarthy era).

The conflict between duty and inclination is one of Kant's favourites, at least according to standard interpretation. He repeatedly claims that obeying the moral law and thus acting from duty (and not only in conformity with the commands of duty, which would amount to legality) is always linked with 'sacrifice (*Aufopferung*)' and 'self-constraint (*Selbstzwang*)' (Kant, 1996, pp. 61, 207). Haywood embodies this moral attitude: in spite of all the political pressure, he keeps 'extraneous considerations' away from the courtroom and his verdict and sticks to his principles 'when standing for something is the most difficult' (2: 45). This is where Janning failed, and he eventually comes to realise this. 'I know the pressures that had been brought upon you' (2: 53), he tells Haywood in the end, and because Haywood resisted these pressures, the judge has won his, Janning's, respect.

The film leaves little room for casuistic problems (one of its weaknesses), and its moral message is so straightforward that the 'impartial rational spectator' (Kant, 1996, p. 49) will most likely side with Haywood (or director Kramer) and his principled approach.

### ***Sophie Scholl, Exemplarik, and the moral interest***

At the Berlin premiere of his film in December 1961, Stanley Kramer encouraged German filmmakers to make movies about the Third Reich. Marc Rothmund is one of the numerous more recent directors who heeded this advice. His film *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage* (2005) describes the main character's last days from her arrest at the University of Munich till her execution in February 1943. The script is based on interrogation protocols, testimony of contemporary witnesses, and leaflets of the resistance group *White Rose*, Sophie and Hans Scholl as well as Christoph Probst being its best-known members. The key scene is a philosophical talk with Gestapo officer Robert Mohr (ch. 16).

Like the previous movie, *Sophie Scholl* lends itself to discussions of several moral concepts or issues, such as

1. the idea of justice and legal positivism: 22-year-old Sophie Scholl describes her moral compasses as conscience, morals (*Sitte*) and God, Mohr is the representative of legal positivism
2. human rights and dignity
3. means and ends: Scholl rejects the use of violence to fight against the Third Reich
4. autonomy versus heteronomy: Scholl has developed her own reason and cultivated her conscience (Kant, 1996, p. 530), though socialized in a totalitarian regime. By contrast, Mohr simply reproduces Nazi ideology.
5. virtue: Sophie displays what Kant calls virtue, 'the moral strength of a human being's will in fulfilling his duty' (Kant, 1996, p. 533, cf. p. 208, Koch, 2003, pp. 14f. and 109, Bühler, 2005, pp. 6, 7, 20).

I want to focus now on a different set of issues: first, can Sophie serve as a moral example? Secondly, what is the possible effect on the viewers and what could be its moral significance?

Examples play an important role in Kant's ethics. An example is usually an illustration, it serves as an intermediary between the categorical imperative and moral life (Løvlie, 1997, p. 416). In the example of the shopkeeper who does 'not overcharge an inexperienced customer', not even a child (Kant, 1996, 53), Kant wants to illustrate the difference between legality (the customers are served honestly because the shopkeeper's self-interest demands it, as dishonesty would ruin his business) and morality or acting from duty (Kant's examples are discussed in Johnston, 2007, pp. 239-41). Here, examples are subordinated to the level of rational and principled moral analysis. A different picture emerges if we look at the *Critique of Judgement*. In aesthetics, examples are used in a creative way, they 'work like images or metaphors, and as such they demand to be filled out through the creative effort of the reader' (Løvlie, 1997, p. 418). The reader's imagination, interpretation and judgement are required to match principle and example. Løvlie calls it 'a poetics of ethics' (ibid., p. 417).

Can persons serve as moral examples? Kant tries to answer this question in the part of moral instruction that is called *Exemplarik* (Koch, 2003, pp. 181-8). He starts off with the truism that the teacher is

inevitably a good or bad example for pupils (Kant, 2007, p. 473, Kant, 1996, p. 593). This is a fact; but Kant claims that in a normative sense, others cannot serve as moral examples, because what matters is the standard of evaluation, namely, the categorical imperative, not the actions of others: 'a maxim of virtue consists precisely in the subjective autonomy of each human being's practical reason and so implies that the law itself, not the conduct of other human beings, must serve as our incentive' (ibid., p. 593). What Kant rejects here is learning by imitation (Koch, 2003, pp. 182f., 387). Even the shining example has to be evaluated first, and the yardstick is again the moral law, or, as Kant puts it in another passage, 'our ideal of moral perfection' (Kant, 1996, p. 63).

This looks like a rather meagre outcome. However, Kant has more uplifting things to say. Imitation has no place in moral education, but examples can serve for encouragement, as 'proof' that we can 'act in conformity with duty' (Kant, 1996, p. 593; cf. p. 63). The example should not stimulate imitation (*Nachahmung*), but it can encourage us to follow a similar path (*Nachfolge*; Kant, 1973, § 32, Kant, 1996, p. 209, Koch, 2003, pp. 186-8). And this is where a film like *Sophie Scholl* comes in. I recall a student who, after having watched the movie, remarked: 'All the time, I kept thinking: what would I have done in her place? Would I have been able to show the same strength of character?' I suppose that this is the kind of reaction Kant expected from presenting biographies and other stories of virtuous conduct (cf. Kant, 1996, 163f.). The readers, listeners or viewers become participants or *Teilnehmer*, signifying that they take part; they may identify with a character, they may be moved. In these situations we learn something about ourselves, and this self-knowledge is an 'inward experience' (Kant, 1996, p. 289). Here Kant returns to his thesis that moral education is most effective if it focuses on the 'pure moral disposition' and not on external incentives. We realize that we *can* do our duty and overcome our inclinations (another familiar theme) because we realize that we *ought to* do. We touch upon the mystery of our moral freedom and, in Kant's rather emotional phrase, 'feel [...] a holy awe' at our true 'vocation' (ibid. It is significant that Kant sees this inner experience as something *felt* rather than thought of).

In the last paragraph, we have moved from moral instruction to moral motivation: The goal of the exemplary method is to cultivate the faculty of moral judgement of the learner, to incite moral interest, and to

encourage the learner to reflect upon herself. It should become clear to the student what is 'always already' in her mind or heart (see the thesis on 'common human reason'), and should prepare autonomy (cf. Koch, 2003, pp. 269 and 376).

## Concluding remarks

What are the problems of this methodology? For a start, a critic might point out that it is pedagogically helpless. It shies away from trying to exert any direct influence on the pupils, as it tries to appeal to rational insight. I suppose that Kant would not see this as a disadvantage. Moral education should not turn into manipulation and indoctrination, as this would contradict the very concept of moral education (here we have the principle of rational consistency again). In other words, possible uselessness is the price we have to pay for the ideal of autonomy. Another critic might argue that in the end, we do get mere indoctrination, as the moral catechism leaves little room for disagreement. I assume that a lot depends on the teacher, her character and her skilfulness in guiding the debates and discussions. They *could* degenerate into indoctrination and dogmatism, but a talented teacher would keep a balance between the two extremes of moral relativism on the one hand and dogmatic indoctrination on the other (a very Aristotelian thought, for a change). We do need an ethical framework to analyse a film, but we also need ethical reflection and discussion. This way we can cultivate our faculty of judgement and, possibly, our moral disposition (Kant, 1996, p. 591, Marshall, 2003, p. 97, and Koch, 2003, p. 116).

Along these lines, I think, we can counter the argument that films by definition manipulate and commit the 'sin of simplification' by resolving complexity (Marshall, 2003, p. 95f.). Part of a critical and reasonable discussion would be analysing the structure, moral rhetoric, and subtle manipulations included in the films. We may be seduced while watching, but by teaching detachment and cultivating judgement, we also help to become aware of this seduction.

It has become fashionable to attack the concept of 'universal reason' and Kant as a typical representative of rationalist Enlightenment, but I think that an element of rationality – in the sense of prudence *and* as practical reason – is indispensable for any contemporary moral

educational theory. In a recent essay, for example, Stijn Sieckelinck and Doret de Ruyter argue that a useful goal of moral education is teaching children to become 'reasonably passionate' about ideals, and they see this as a vital contribution in the fight against extremism and political radicalization (Sieckelinck and Ruyter, 2009). The idea is that we do not eliminate the passions of children or adolescents, but that we help them to channel and limit them in a way that they become compatible with the passions and lifestyles of others. In Kantian terms (and described by Dorothy Emmet), an ideal should be seen as a regulative idea and not as a blueprint (Emmet, 1994; Sieckelinck and Ruyter, 2009, p. 182). This implies, for instance, that adolescents find out that the means and methods employed to realise an ideal should correspond with this very ideal. 'Pursuing an ideal should not infringe upon others' rights to pursue their ideals, unless these are immoral or the pursuit thereof clearly has immoral characteristics' (ibid., p. 191). This in turn requires the cultivation of critical reflection, and thus of our 'cognitive faculty' (Kant, 2007, 464).

Two final remarks: the Kant I have presented here is not the transcendental metaphysician who has his head in the clouds, but the advocate of 'common human reason'. The widespread interpretation of Kant's ethics as 'misrepresentative of actual human conduct' (Johnston, 2007, p. 237) is probably in need of revision: at least some elements of his moral didactics point at closeness to human life. Secondly, I suppose that my paper supports the film-as-illustrations model described in the introduction. I have imported an interpretative context and I needed an ethical framework to analyse the films. This does not mean, however, that the films-as-doing-philosophy model is wrong or illegitimate. One might even argue that the two films support Cavell's theory, as they could be understood as supporting the theory of 'moral perfectionism' he has detected in the Hollywood remarriage comedies of the 1930ies and 1940ies. Stanley Cavell has defined moral perfectionism as an ethical theory revolving around the question of how persons 'shall live their lives and what kind of persons they aspire to be'. This question is usually triggered by a crisis which 'forces an examination of one's life that calls for a transformation or reorienting of it' (Cavell, 2004, p. 11; cf. pp. 24-6). Ernst Janning and Sophie Scholl are cases in point. They try to be true to themselves. At the heart of the theory of moral perfectionism, Cavell claims, lies Kant's assumption that humans can regard themselves from two standpoints: belonging to 'the world of sense (*Sinnenwelt*)', they are

determined by laws of nature, whereas as free and rational beings, they are autonomous (Kant, 1996, pp. 99f., Cavell, 2004, p. 1).

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