philosophy and the ethical significance of spectatorship

an introduction to *ethics at the cinema*

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The contributors to *ethics at the Cinema* were invited to engage with ethical issues raised within, or within the process of viewing, a single film. All of the contributors have previously written in ethics and/or the philosophy of film, but they come from a wide range of traditions and backgrounds within both.

We asked contributors to concentrate on only one film in their essays. We have two reasons for this. First, as I hope to make clear in this introduction, we see merit in forcing both authors and readers to engage with a single narrative in detail; discovering the ethical import of narratives requires digging into the fine points of those narratives. Second, one of the constraints inherent to writing and reading about narratives is that the reader needs to be familiar with the narrative being discussed. Limiting the essays in *Ethics at the Cinema* to discussions of single films ensures that even if the reader is not already familiar with the narrative being discussed, she can without too much time commitment view the film with which an author is concerned.

The contributors to *Ethics at the Cinema* were given the freedom to write on a topic and film of their choice. The result is a group of films—including one television series—that vary not only in terms of when and where they were made, but also in terms of their artistic quality.[1] The earliest film discussed is Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*, from 1937, one of two classic French films in the collection; the most recent is Paul Haggis'' *Crash*, a film released in 2005 and one of several films

in the collection coming from Hollywood. Not surprisingly, *Ethics at the Cinema* includes papers on some masterpieces. In particular, *The Third Man*—which three of our authors have chosen to write on—has some claim to being the greatest motion picture yet made, and *The Sopranos* has had a number of writers call it the greatest television show yet aired. Less expected is at least one film at the other end of the spectrum: the best reason I can find to see *Fools Rush In* is that it will allow one to fully appreciate Paul C. Taylor's fine contribution to this collection. Taylor's paper raises the interesting question of whether a rich philosophical engagement with a mediocre narrative might justify higher aesthetic appraisal of the narrative. More important, it illustrates that the richness of a philosophical engagement with a film is not dependent upon the artistic worth of the film itself. Indeed, Taylor is explicit that it is precisely the populist nature of *Fools Rush In* that concerns him; his aim is to "excavate and illuminate the meanings that constitute the shared culture that mass entertainments presuppose and that help constitute us as individuals."[2]

We have divided *Ethics at the Cinema* into two parts: "Part 1: Critique, Character, and the Power of Film," and "Part 2: Philosophical Readings." The papers in Part 1 wear their philosophical and ethical credentials on their sleeves; these papers engage explicitly with meta-issues surrounding film, film narratives, and film viewing. The papers comprising Part 2 are engaged less with issues *about* film than with the details of their chosen film: its characters, its plot, and its particular uses of images. Authors of these latter papers are more involved in what would be traditionally understood as *interpreting* their films. I do not want to exaggerate this difference; authors of papers in Part 1 do make interpretative commitments, and papers in Part 2 often address meta-cinematic issues. Nor do I wish to exaggerate the similarities among papers within each part; the authors of papers in Part 2, especially, take very different approaches to their films. Nonetheless, the emphases of the papers in this collection naturally place them in these two fairly distinct categories.

The papers in Part 2, however, raise two questions: What is the significance of a reading of a film to the philosophical study of ethics, and why should we not think that in reading a film philosophers are doing something that other academics—like film critics and theorists—do less na vely? The answers to these questions are not, in my opinion, obvious. The papers of Part 2 require more explanation and, perhaps, justification than the obviously philosophical enterprise of the papers in Part 1. The main aim of this introduction is to defend the significance of the philosophical reading. I sketch a general framework for theorizing the kind of interaction that films and other narratives invite us to have with them. As will be seen, spelling out this framework requires that I touch on large issues in aesthetics and ethics, relevant to all of the papers in this collection. After laying out the basics of this framework in the next section, I use it to situate the papers that comprise Part 1 of this collection. In order to understand how engagement with the finer details of filmed narratives can have both philosophical interest and

ethical importance, however, I will need to defend more of its features; this will be done in the second section below.

i. narratives, spectators and their attitudes

Perhaps the simplest answer to the question of why films and other narratives have philosophical significance is offered by Stephen Mulhall, in the introduction to his discussion of the *Alien* quartet of films.

> I do not look on these films as handy or popular illustrations of views and arguments properly developed by philosophers; I see them rather as themselves reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them in just the ways that philosophers do. Such films are not philosophy's raw material, nor a source for its ornamentation; they are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action—film as philosophizing.[3]

If, as Mulhall suggests, some films *are themselves* "philosophizing," then this would both explain and justify philosophers" engagement with them. Since films are doing philosophy, then at least some of them are philosophically significant. Therefore, philosophers are *prima facie* justified in bringing films into the realm of philosophical discourse, and philosophers have *prima facie* reason to be interested in *other* philosophers' engagement with such narratives. While provocative, Mulhall's suggestion that (some) films are doing philosophy needs a great deal of filling out. In particular, he needs to provide us with a conception of philosophy under which a narrative can instantiate it; such a conception would need to tell us which property narratives—which are, at bottom, simply depictions of characters in a series of events—possess such that they could count as "philosophy in action."[4]

I will take a different approach. I think it unlikely that the philosophical significance of film lies in the fact that films "philosophize," that is, that philosophy and film are *in the same business*. As we will see in a moment, there is, indeed, an important similarity between the two—both manifest attitudes toward their subject matter, and both invite their audience to do the same. Nonetheless, we should not conclude that the philosophical significance of film has anything to do with its *sharing* that feature with philosophy, that is, with the fact that films have features that can make them appear "philosophical." Film, like (say) science, is a fit subject for philosophy not because it shares something with philosophy, but because of its potentially complex, pervasive, and deep role in our lives; in the case of film, it is largely because of the importance of narrative-spectatorship in our ethical lives.

As a spectator of a film (or any other narrative), I am fully aware that it was made for an audience; it was produced to be viewed. The narrative before me is a *creation*, it is *someone else's presentation* of a series of events. In this regard, the spectatorship of a film differs centrally from my direct perception of the world; I am aware that my view of a film's world is controlled by another person's (or

persons') choices. As such, the film constitutes, we might say, a certain "take" on the world within the film. A film presents its audience with a point of view of its characters and events, and it invites us to adopt that point of view as we follow the film and its sequence of events to the film's conclusion. This thought provides the core of the position that I wish to develop here. A spectator's confrontation with a narrative is ethically significant because the narrative (1) manifests an evaluative *attitude* toward its own characters, events, and context, and (2) encourages the spectator, through the latter's enjoyment of and satisfaction with the narrative, to adopt a similar attitude. Conceiving of our interactions with film narratives in this way, I will suggest, allows us to readily grasp the significance of philosophical engagements with them, and the significance of the contributions to *Ethics at the Cinema*.

An attitude is best understood in terms of the dispositions of some person who possesses that attitude. A person with a certain attitude toward something S (a particular or kind of object, property, or event) will be, among other things, *attentive to certain features* of S, *inclined to describe or understand* S in certain ways, disposed to feel certain *emotions* toward S, disposed to certain *beliefs* about S, disposed to *praise* or *blame* S in certain conditions, and disposed to *act* in certain ways toward S.[5] Forgiveness, resentment, compassion, wariness, suspicion, trust, and admiration are among the many examples of attitudes that we take toward others, and that in turn manifest themselves on occasion in emotions, beliefs, and actions. Racism, sexism, and xenophobia are also plausibly understood as attitudes toward a certain kind of person; to have a racist attitude toward someone is to have tendencies to be attentive to certain things she does, to have certain beliefs about her, and to have certain emotions toward her.

As the examples above suggest, attitudes have an *evaluative* component; one's attitude toward something can be said to embody, in part, one's evaluation of it. Resenting someone involves adopting a negative, disapproving posture toward her for what she has done; admiring someone involves a disposition to praise her character or actions; taking a racist or sexist attitude toward someone involves a tendency to devalue her character or actions. The central component in the evaluative feature of attitudes is the tendency of the attitude holder to feel certain emotions toward the object of his attitude. Recent work on the emotions has made it clear that in feeling an emotion, one reveals one's evaluation of the emotion's object; my emotion toward something reveals my evaluation of that thing. That this is so is strongly suggested by examples. The surprising extent of someone's grief over the loss of a pet reveals how valuable the pet was to him. Someone's shame or indignation reveals his evaluation of his own or someone else's integrity or entitlements. The philosopher Robert Gordon has divided a long list of emotions into the "positive" (e.g., "is proud," "is grateful") and the "negative" (e.g., "is embarrassed," "regrets").[6] The appropriateness—in principle, at least—of Gordon's division is a manifestation of the fact that many emotions either themselves express a positive or negative evaluation of something (e.g. "loves," "is disgusted") or are a

kind of response to the positive or negative status of something of value (e.g., "is delighted," "is disappointed"). In expressing an emotion toward some state of affairs, these examples suggest, we express an evaluation of that state of affairs. Accordingly, in attributing to someone a disposition to feel certain emotions toward something, we are able to say something about his attitude toward that thing.

In general, then, attributing attitudes to someone allows us to identify and explain patterns in the mental states and actions that she possesses and takes toward another person or thing. Attributing to someone an attitude toward S allows us to explain, for example, his selective attention to certain features of S, his tendencies to pass judgment on S in certain ways, or his tendency to act in certain ways rather than others with regard to S. In attributing an attitude to an agent, we move to a higher level of description than we would were we to speak only of his emotions, beliefs, or patterns of attention or judgment; attitudes are higher in that they are "bundles" of, and thus allow us to organize, these lower-level phenomena. As such, the ethical importance of attitudes should be clear. To adopt an attitude toward another person is to take on characteristics in relation to her—for example, the kinds of emotions and actions that one will undertake toward her—that may have deep moral significance.

It is important to bear in mind three features of attitudes, as we turn to examine how they are manifested in narratives. First, while some attitudes may have common names and familiar features, this is not going to be true of most of them. A huge range of patterns in our attitudes toward others is possible, and it may be that most of them are too rare to be named or too subtle and complex to be spoken about in everyday discourse. This is not to say that attitudes cannot be described. On the contrary, while the content of many attitudes will not be *easily* describable, it will always be possible to describe some of the lower-level states and actions that the attitude includes. Second, as with any other mental state, we can identify, describe, or create an attitude that does not belong to any actual person. Although an attitude is necessarily something that *could* be attributed to a person, an attitude can be described, discussed, debated, or even named without ever actually belonging or being attributed to someone. Third, attitudes can be held not only toward real persons, but toward fictional, nonexistent characters; one can admire or be suspicious of a fictional character just as one can a real person. All three of these features are likely to characterize the attitudes manifested in fictional narratives. Indeed, they are all three pivotal to the suggestion that I am developing —the ethical importance of philosophical readings of narratives derives from the fact that they are involved in elucidating the often complex attitudes that narratives invite us to take toward their characters, their context, and their actions.

If the attitudes manifested in a narrative are not necessarily attributable to any single person, then how are such attitudes manifested in narratives? In many cases, this is a complex and often subtle affair. It is uncommon in films to find direct statements that reveal an evaluative attitude toward the personalities or actions of their protagonists, or of things that happen to them. Even on the rare occasions in

which there are such direct statements, it is often clear that the narrator making such statements is *himself* a character in the narrative; in such cases, while the narrator is directly expressing an attitude toward the other characters and events he is relating, the narrative itself will express in other ways an attitude toward the *narrator* and *his* attitudes. Because narratives can distance themselves from their narrators, a narrator's attitude need not, and in many cases will not, be identical with that of the narrative. As a consequence, in film, as in much written literature, a narrator's direct statement can be—ironically—the *least* direct way for a narrative to express its attitude toward its characters.

More commonly, and more effectively, it is in the choices of the narrative creator (e.g., filmmaker, author) regarding focus and description that a narrative's attitude is revealed. In his book *Engaging Characters*, Murray Smith usefully classifies two elements here, *recognition* and *alignment*, both of which encourage the spectator to take a certain attitude toward a character in a film.[7] "Recognition," he writes, "describes the spectator's construction of character: the perception of a set of textual elements, in film typically cohering around the image of a body, as an individuated and continuous human agent."[8] Creating a narrative involves choosing certain (kinds of) characters, choices that in themselves manifest an attitude toward those characters; indeed, at a minimum it reveals that certain (kinds of) characters are deserving of narrative attention. In addition, narratives invite spectators to become *aligned* with certain characters, as "spectators are placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their actions, to what they know and feel."[9] Any telling of a series of events must involve a choice as to which information to give its spectators about its characters, their properties, their actions, and their contexts; such choice will manifest an attitude toward the characters, as it reveals which characters deserve how much and what kind of attention from the spectators. Some characters get more attention than others; all characters have certain features described and others ignored. The consequence is that a narrative necessarily manifests evaluations of its characters in the various ways that it invites spectators to adopt various allegiances with—that is, attitudes toward—the narrative's characters.

In what is perhaps the most significant element in the process by which narratives manifest attitudes, a narrative leads its spectators to respond with certain emotions—and the desires and evaluations that go along with them—toward its characters and events.[10] In encouraging a spectator to feel a certain emotion toward a character or event, the narrative reveals *its own* attitude toward that person or event. So, for example, in so far as a narrative displays a character in such a way that the spectator is encouraged to pity or fear him, it encourages the spectator to form an evaluation of the character as, in part, the kind of thing *to be pitied* or *to be feared*. This invitation to emotion both reveals the narrative's attitude toward the characters and calls upon spectators to share that attitude, along with the evaluative desires and thoughts that are a part of it. In the paradigmatic case, then, the spectator "sees" a series of events in film, emotionally responds to

those events, and, as a consequence, forms an attitude toward the characters involved.

The thought that we should see narratives as inviting and endorsing emotional and broader attitudes toward their characters and events is familiar from literary theory. Indeed, the expression of attitudes in a narrative seems to be one of the main concerns of interpretation and criticism, and many theories of interpretation can be understood as claiming that attention should be paid to certain aspects of the creation, the nature, or the context of the narrative's attitude toward its characters and events. What we might call "author-centered" theories of interpretation (which, e.g., psychoanalyze authors, or seek out an author's intentions) advocate an interpretative focus on the psychological features—however that is to be understood—of the creator or the presented narrative attitude. "Reader-response" theories of interpretation advocate an interpretative focus on the narrative's spectator, what the narrative asks of her, and how she responds to the narrative attitude. Here is the reader-response theorist Wayne C. Booth, describing the scene from *King Lear* in which Cornwall gouges out Gloucester's eyes: "We have in this scene . . . . a revolting act that in its very portrayal *insists on our revulsion* . . . "[11] What we might think of as "agenda-driven" theories of interpretation (e.g., Marxist, feminist, post-colonial) advocate an interpretative focus on context, history, and bias factors in the creation and nature of a narrative attitude. We also see literary-minded philosophers working with a conception of narratives as inviting spectators to share an attitude; writing generally of irony in the novels of Jane Austen and Henry James, the philosopher Cora Diamond writes, "The reader of them is invited to share a way of viewing human nature and its failings, in which amusement, sympathy, critical intelligence, and delicacy of moral discrimination all play a role. . . . "[12] In all of these interpretative traditions, there is a core focus upon the attitude the narrative expresses toward its characters, and/or the attitude that the spectator is invited or encouraged to adopt.

If, as I have suggested, films manifest and invite us to take attitudes toward their characters and the events in which they occur, it naturally follows that they can invite improper attitudes, or invite attitudes in improper ways. The first two papers in Part 1 of *Ethics at the Cinema* address this issue. Andrew Gleeson follows a number of writers in exploring the thought that there is something fundamentally powerful and direct about the "moving image."[13] Gleeson argues that the power of film means that it can readily be used in the service of mendacity rather than truth. The immediacy and power of the moving image raises problems of manipulation, stereotyping, and downright lies. In the second paper in the collection, Stephen Williams continues with the theme of cinematic lying, focusing on the propagandist film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. Williams, however, is concerned not just with the film's attempt to manipulate its audience, but also with the tension between its manipulative nature and its status as a great film. This connects with recent philosophical discussion regarding the relationship between the aesthetic and moral qualities of an artwork.[14] Williams thinks that there is an

intimate relationship between a film's ethical status and its aesthetic status, and he endorses the view that ethical flaws in a film detract from its aesthetic status. He argues, however, that *Colonel Blimp* overcomes these flaws (or at least has the potential to do so), and it has the potential to gain or retain greatness in spite of its propagandist aims.

The third and fourth papers in Part 1 address a different issue arising from the attitudes that films and other narratives encourage us to adopt. The power of a narrative to influence a spectator's attitude derives, at least in part, from the spectator's satisfaction, pleasure, and approval of the narrative as a whole, including a satisfaction, pleasure, and approval of the kind of emotional responses that the narrative asks of her. What we might call a "standard" film narrative invites us to take certain straightforward attitudes toward its characters—partly, as we have seen, in the form of emotions we feel toward them and desires we develop on their behalf—and then the narrative plays out in accordance with those created emotions and desires. The result is—if things go as planned—the spectator's overall pleasure and approval of her experience. She is satisfied both by how the narrative events play themselves out and in the way it encourages her to feel about those events. As Noël Carroll writes, "Most movies elicit a gamut of garden-variety emotions over the duration of the narrative. . . . The pleasure that attends the conclusion of the film is a function of the desires that subtend these different emotions being finally satisfied."[15] If we are shown, for example, a character committing a horrifyingly immoral act, we may form an attitude toward that character that involves, in part, the desire for this action to be avenged as the narrative unfolds. A standard narrative will unquestioningly fulfill this desire—without, say, leading us to wonder whether we *should* have formed this desire at all—and we will feel the potency of such a desire being satisfied. As the standard narrative proceeds, events favor the characters we like and admire, and disfavor those we dislike and condemn; as a result we feel a certain pleasure at this fulfillment.

Not all narratives follow a simple procedure of inducing attitudes and straightforwardly satisfying the desires those attitudes bring with them. Some narratives lead us to feel more complex emotions and unclear desires toward their characters, and others invite us to take attitudes toward characters and then invite us to question or examine those attitudes. The issue of a film's inviting challenging and ambivalent attitudes is the main concern of the papers by Murray Smith and myself. *The Sopranos*, an episode of which Smith discusses in his paper, is remarkable for the sympathy that we feel for its protagonist, but this sympathy is by no means unequivocal, and most of us have no clear desires regarding what we wish to happen to Tony Soprano. Smith focuses on the first feature, seeking to explain the appeal of the violent, lying, womanizing Soprano. In my contribution, I address a related issue, aiming to account for our laughter with the deceitful, conniving Walter Burns and the lengths to which he goes in *His Girl Friday* in order to be reunited with his ex-wife. As with the first two papers in the collection, these papers are primarily concerned with a meta-issue in the philosophy of film: Why

and how do we enjoy—an enjoyment that is manifested in laughter with, concern for, and bias toward—those characters (like Tony Soprano and Walter Burns) who morally transgress? Although Smith and I ask very similar questions in our papers, our answers are very different; side by side, these two papers reveal how complex the issues in this area are.

These and related themes are also briefly raised throughout Part 2 of this collection. As previously mentioned, however, meta-cinematic and meta-narrative themes lie more in the background of the papers in Part 2. These papers are "philosophical readings," largely dedicated to interpreting and elucidating the narrative and characterization of individual films. I need to delve further into the framework I have so far introduced—that of seeing narratives as inviting us to take attitudes toward their characters—in order to reveal the ethical significance of the philosophical reading.

ii. the philosophical reading

The kind of philosophical work found in Part 2 of *Ethics at the Cinema* belongs to a tradition with more pedigree outside English-language philosophy than within it. At some point in their careers, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Derrida each directly engaged with specific narratives. Works in this genre of philosophy are not necessarily written in service of the artwork itself; the philosophical reading should not be seen, primarily, as a kind of literary criticism. On the contrary, these writers were doing, or took themselves to be doing, *philosophical* work. Nor are their works appropriating an artwork as a mere thought experiment, trotted out in the service of a philosophical argument; on the contrary, it is *in* the engagement with the artwork that these writers see themselves as doing philosophy. This kind of work was not prominent in the English-language tradition in philosophy until the work of Stanley Cavell in the 1960s. Cavell wrote essays on the work of Samuel Beckett and Shakespeare, as well as essays on film, publishing them alongside essays on J.L. Austin, Wittgenstein, and meaning and knowledge. In the 1980s, Martha Nussbaum began to do the same, engaging at length with Greek tragedies and the novels of Charles Dickens, Henry James, and others. There is a growing body of philosophical work in this vein, on film in particular, in books by Peter A. French, Joseph Kupfer, Andrew Light, Stephen Mulhall, Thomas Wartenberg, and others, and to which the papers in Part 2 of this collection contribute.

The philosophers of literature Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen express a reason to be skeptical about the value of such work:

> Literature offers its own alternative realm of application. It offers an imaginative rather than a discursive interpretation of the concepts. And this possibility of applying thematic concepts in literary application makes no direct contribution to philosophical. . . . insight, nor is it tied to any such aim. It

constitutes its own form of insight, its own kind of interpretation of thematic concepts.[16]

To some extent, the division that Lamarque and Olsen describe between the literary and real world is undeniable. In narrative fictions, we are requested to accept things that we know are not true and, even, that we know are not possible. We are asked to stretch our use of the concept *pig* or *spider* or *playing card*, for example, to apply to a thing with the property of *being able to talk*, and this is an application that we would not be willing to accept outside of a fictional world. So, Lamarque and Olsen are no doubt right that, to some degree, "literature offers its own alternative realm of application."

This is not true for all concepts, however. As I suggested in the previous section, narrative films invite us to adopt the attitudes that they manifest toward their characters. In accepting these invitations, we apply certain evaluative concepts to these characters—we come to see one character as someone *to be pitied* because his life has not gone well, another as one *to be praised* because he has done something good, or another as one *to be resented* or *punished* because he has done something blameworthy. These attitudes involve an application not of some stipulated or stretched concepts, but of *our* evaluative concepts. When a film invites its spectators to take an attitude toward its characters, it is addressing them as moral beings; we are being asked not to use concepts invented or stretched by the filmmaker, but to use the evaluative concepts that we use every day. We are being asked to use our ethical concepts as we would use them toward our fellow human beings.

At this point, however, it will now be objected that a film spectator's attitude is toward *fictional beings* and *events*.[17] Why should we think that it is important to discuss stipulated fictional characters, their events, and their contexts, much less the attitudes that the narratives and we as spectators adopt toward these fictional worlds? With limited exceptions, it may be claimed, philosophers are—and should only be—concerned with the *real* world and our attitudes toward what exists in the real world. The attitudes manifested by a fictional narrative, however, are toward its own characters, and those characters and their actions do not exist in the real world, the world in which we exist, the world of what matters. As a consequence, our adopting evaluative attitudes toward fictional beings is not of ethical significance, and *a fortiori* philosophers' discussions of films and the attitudes that they invite us to take are not of ethical significance, either.

I see two ways to respond to this worry. One would be to point to the ways that adopting attitudes toward fictional characters would *affect* the attitudes we adopt toward real creatures. Those who tend to adopt certain kinds of attitudes in the cinema, it might be claimed, will tend to adopt similar kinds of attitudes in the real world. In virtue of this effect, philosophical examinations of the attitudes invited by films can be ethically worthwhile. I do not doubt that there is some such effect, but its nature is intricate and complex, and it is one that can only be determined by

observation and testing.[18] Fortunately, an alternative response to skepticism regarding the ethical significance of a spectator's attitudes toward fictional characters is available, and it is this response that I will defend here. This response involves a straightforward denial of the objection expressed in the previous paragraph: the attitudes we adopt as spectators of fictional characters and events are of ethical significance. As spectators, it can *matter* to us whether or not we adopt attitudes that films invite us to take, and so philosophical discussions of the particular attitudes that films invite us to take can matter as well.

The fact that the attitudes that we as spectators adopt towards fictional narratives are important to us is manifested most strikingly in the occasions that we resist or refuse to accept, on moral grounds, the attitudes that a narrative invites us to take. From time to time, a spectator may find it difficult or impossible to join a narrative in taking a certain attitude towards its events. This is one of the cluster of phenomena discussed under the rubric of "imaginative resistance."[19] David Hume was perhaps the first to describe this phenomenon:

> Where vicious manners are described [e.g., in a poem] without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation, this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity. . . . A very violent effort is requisite to change our judgment of manners, and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind from long custom has been familiarized.[20]

Imagine a film or novel inviting you to celebrate or enjoy a horribly immoral action. As a spectator, you are not likely to have any difficulty in simply imagining the immoral action; difficulty arises, if it does, when you are invited to take a certain attitude toward that action—to celebrate or enjoy it. In such a situation, as Hume puts it, "vicious manners" are being "described without being marked" with disapproval; you are being presented with vicious manners without being asked to appropriately disapprove of them. The same difficulty arises when we are invited to like a character whom we find repulsive, or praise a character who has acted in an evil way; these attitudes may be difficult or impossible to adopt, precisely because such invitations are inappropriate given what we take to be the conditions for devotion or blame.

There is a difference, then, between *imagining that* a fictional character does something and *taking an attitude* toward the character for what she has done. The latter will be resisted by spectators even when the former is not. This distinction is nicely captured by Richard Moran in a recent discussion on imaginative resistance:

> If the story tells us that Duncan was *not* in fact murdered on Macbeth's orders, then *that* is what we accept and imagine as fictionally true . . . However, suppose the facts of the murder remain as they are in fact presented in the play, but it is *prescribed* in this alternative fiction that this was unfortunate

> only for having interfered with Macbeth's sleep that night . . . The [latter] seem to be imaginative tasks of an entirely different order. . . .[21]

A spectator's opposition arises not when she is asked to imagine something that is not true, but when she is asked to take what she sees as an inappropriate attitude toward it. Moran writes that "[w]hatever the ultimate explanation of such conflict, it seems to argue against thinking of the fictional world of the work as a separate domain, existing purely by stipulation."[22] A more accurate way of putting Moran's point would be this: while it may be that a fictional world exists by stipulation, our responses to it do not. While we can be invited to take certain evaluative attitudes toward characters, our accepting such invitations is not a matter of simple stipulation; our evaluative responses to fictional characters are not a matter of pure pretense. It follows that there is *something at stake* for the spectator of fictional narratives, in the attitudes that she is being asked to take.

One expression of there being something at stake here is that my refusing to adopt the attitudes invited by a narrative may result in my condemnation of the narrator, or even the narrative itself. If I find an invitation to be inappropriate, that may—as Hume puts it—"disfigure" the narrative in my eyes. In a recent discussion, Kendall Walton imagines a story that includes the following sentence: "In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl." We agree to imagine that Giselda killed her baby, but we *do not* agree to imagine that what she did was right, and as Walton adds, "A reader's likely response . . . is to be appalled by the moral depravity of the *narrator*."[23] This simple example nicely illustrates our inability to stipulate our evaluative responses to events in a narrative. Rather than accepting that Giselda did the right thing—which involves adopting a positive attitude toward Giselda—our response is to imagine that *someone else*—for example, the narrator—has this attitude. If there is no narrator, as is true in most films, then we may find ourselves—as Hume points out—condemning the work itself (or its creators) for inviting an offensive attitude. Rather than accept the invitation to take an approving attitude toward a fictional character like Giselda, we refuse the invitation and condemn the narrator or the work itself.

So, what is it that is at stake in the attitudes spectators adopt toward fictional characters? One candidate is suggested by Moran:

> Imagination with respect to the cruel, the embarrassing, or the arousing involves something. . . . like a point of view, a total perspective on the situation, rather than just the truth of a specifiable proposition. . . . It is something that I may not be able to do if my heart is not in it.[24]

One way of understanding Moran's reference to "my heart" is to my *character*, to my emotional and evaluative dispositions with respect to others. When a spectator is invited to relish in or laugh at a character's being physically attacked, for

example, and she resists doing so, her resistance may be a matter of her refusing to be the kind of person who relishes or laughs at physical abuse, whether fictional or not. The question of whether "my heart is in it" does not arise with respect to the factual stipulations that a fictional narrative invites me to have; I can easily imagine a playing card that talks or a spider that saves a pig. = With respect to the emotional and attitudinal response that the narrative asks of me, however, my character is at stake. It can matter deeply to me that I am the kind of person who does not relish physical abuse, whether imagined or not, and when I am asked to do so, I may find myself refusing.

The thought that it is a spectator's character that is at stake in the attitudes we take to fictional characters fits well with the fact that there is a good deal of variance in the attitudes that we, as spectators, are willing to adopt. Some spectators are happy to be invited to laugh at, or approve of, characters that other spectators would not. This is why, for example, some people enjoy dark comedy while others do not. On the view that it is my character that dictates what attitudes I can adopt as a spectator, this variance is not surprising; as we all know, our moral characters vary. Nonetheless, almost all of us have our limits. Even the most lenient of us will not be able to enjoy or laugh at just *anything* in a fictional narrative, be happy with just *anyone's* success or downfall. And this fits well with the fact that, for all of us, our moral characters matter to us.

The suggestion that it is the value of a spectator's character that leads her to refuse certain narrative invitations is only a suggestion. Precisely *what* is at stake deserves, in my opinion, more exploration in the philosophical literature. What does seem clear, however, is that we risk or expose something as spectators of fictional narratives, and that in coming to understand what we risk or expose as spectators—such that we can at certain points resist the invitation that the narrative extends to us—we will better understand why our daily engagement with narratives is important, and why it should be of interest for philosophers in particular to join in on the discussion regarding the attitudes invited by particular films. More pertinent to my purposes here, the existence of imaginative resistance shows us why philosophers should be interested in exploring the attitudes that particular narratives manifest and invite, even though those attitudes are toward fictional beings: as spectators, we are asked not just to join in a stipulated imagining of an alternative world, but to expose ourselves evaluatively to that world, and our evaluative exposure to fictional worlds—and not only the real world—matters to us. Once this is recognized, then one can readily see that the spectatorship of narratives belongs in the broad area of moral psychology. And with this recognition, one has a framework with which to understand why the contributions to Part 2 of *Ethics at the Cinema* are philosophically and ethically relevant.

I can summarize the position I have been outlining here by comparing the spectators of narratives to the receiver of another's *moral endorsement*. Imagine someone describing a politician to you in order to get you to see her as honest, or someone describing your new boyfriend in order to get you to see him as

conniving, or a lawyer describing a defendant in order to get a jury to see him as unlikely to have committed the crime of which he is accused. Film makers do not (usually) set out to deliberately change or entrench our attitudes. Nonetheless, in all of these situations, we are presented with a depiction constructed in such a way that we are encouraged to take a certain evaluative attitude to what is being described. Both the moral endorsement and the narrative are, in short, created appeals to our evaluative attitudes toward their objects. As such, the narrative (like the moral endorsement) has a range of features that deserve attention: the nature of its descriptions, the information that we are given and which is withheld from us, the points of view offered to us, the way descriptions of narrative and events unfold, the characters upon which we are invited to focus our attention, and many other features of the techniques that are being used to elicit our emotions and encourage us to adopt certain attitudes. It seems clear that certain experts will have something to tell us about these features of narratives. This includes philosophers.

Many of the writers in Part 2 of *Ethics at the Cinema* have something to say about the general relationships among philosophy, ethics, film, and spectatorship, and some of them may disagree with the framework that I have defended here. Some of them, for example, find the notion of *illustration* useful. Peter Goldie suggests that the world of his film has an illustrative relationship to the world; Samantha Vice and Thomas Wartenberg both suggest that their films illustrate philosophical or theoretical claims about the world. I do not wish to discourage the exploration of the morally salient relationship between the film world and (claims about) the real world. On the contrary, there is much to say about the similarities and differences between our attitudes toward the real and the fictional, as well as about the similarities and differences among ways in which our characters are formed, entrenched, and challenged by our engagements with the real and the fictional. I am convinced, however, that any relationship between the two is neither the only nor the most basic one at stake in the spectatorship of film. On the contrary, the phenomenon of the spectator's imaginative resistance, described above, suggests that there is something morally important entirely within the relationship between spectator and narrative.

My suggestion, then, is that the framework defended here best explains the philosophical and ethical importance of what these writers are doing when they "read" their films, that is, when they delve into the details of plot, dialogue, characterization, imagery, technique, and thematic development. Let me illustrate this by looking at one familiar feature of narratives and how philosophers discuss them. Films often have spectators follow the moral development of a character; as they do so, spectators are invited to have a range of complex, challenging, and perhaps ambivalent attitudes toward him. In doing so, the film can, if a spectator is so inclined, lead her to reflect upon these attitudes and the changing features of the characters that led to them, and to come to certain intellectual conclusions. One contribution in Part 2, for example, Thomas Wartenberg's discussion of *The*

Third Man, intricately charts the moral development of Holly Martins and attempts to make explicit the kinds of intellectual conclusions spectators may be led to draw. A spectator's early attitude of disapproval toward Martins' loyalty toward Harry Lime may lead her to conclude that (and see how) Martins' initial moral position is flawed, and her later attitude of approval may lead her to conclude that (and see how) Martins' moral position has improved; all the while, her attitude of sympathy toward the likeable Martins may lead her to appreciate his journey as genuine and sincere. Wartenberg does not himself make explicit reference to the spectator's engagement with the features of *The Third Man* that he discusses, but when we do so, a fundamental ethical dimension of the film and of his discussion comes into clear view.

Several of the writers in Part 2 ask whether philosophical readings can be generalized to tell us something about our interactions in the real world. This is an appropriate (and interesting) question, but the importance of the philosophical reading—just like the importance of the narratives they discuss—does not rely on its being answered. In these narratives, we observe, come to know, and are invited to have, emotional attitudes toward persons. What we gain from discussions of those narratives is not just a matter of whether they can give us lessons that we will transfer to real-life situations, or even descriptions of what we might encounter or how we might behave in real-life situations. On the contrary, their discussions tell us about our complex and ethically significant encounters *with these films*, and how it is that aspects of our characters were enlivened or ignored, accommodated or challenged in those encounters.

In sum, the intellectual insights that a philosophical reading offers up to us are wholly dependent upon the fact that films, like all narratives, invite us to take certain evaluative attitudes toward the goings-on in its world. Most fundamentally, it would not make sense to speak about a narrative offering intellectual moral insight unless it invited evaluative attitudes. Stated roughly, a narrative is simply a depiction of a series of events, of a character or characters doing things and having things happen to them. That description, in itself, does not include the conceptual resources for understanding how a narrative can carry or convey moral insights about those characters, actions, or events. It is only when we add to our description of a narrative—as I did in the previous section—the possibility of a spectator, and with it the possibility of that spectator's being encouraged to *evaluate* those characters, actions, or events, do we see how a narrative might contain moral insights to be excavated by a philosopher. It is in the potential *presentation* of a series of events that we get the possibility of evaluation of that series of events, and with that, of the possibility of there being a moral conclusion to be explicitly drawn.

A second way in which the intellectual insights of a philosophical reading are dependent upon the attitudes that films invite us to take is that this very feature of films is ethically significant. My claim in this section has been that philosophical readings can be seen as making explicit the many ways in which we, as spectators,

morally expose ourselves to films and other narratives. All films invite us to interact with them, and those invitations and interactions can be reflected upon. Stanley Cavell once wrote, "If philosophy can be thought of as the world of a particular culture brought to consciousness of itself, then one mode of criticism (call it philosophical criticism) can be thought of as the world of a particular work brought to consciousness of itself."[25] The interest of the papers in Part 2, I think, lies here. A philosophical reading is an instance of a philosopher bringing the world of a film "to consciousness of itself"; philosophical readings can be seen as describing, examining, and in some cases evaluating the kind of moral interactions that spectators (can) have with these films, and in doing so, they make explicit the kinds of insights to which these films can lead their spectators.

The kinds of topics in Part 2 of *Ethics at the Cinema* will be, to readers familiar with the history of film, unsurprising. Ever since their inception, film and television have been sensitive to the prevailing social and cultural mood, either democratically reflecting it or exploring it more self-consciously or critically. It was therefore to be expected that many of the papers in this collection would concentrate on topics relating to our social identities—race and class division, national and cultural identity. The first five papers in Part 2 address one or more of these issues. In addition, films have long been concerned with more universal, interpersonal themes of love, friendship, parenting and sexuality; the final six papers in the collection all address issues in these areas. Our division of the papers in Part 2 into these two thematic groups, however, does not do justice to the complexities of these papers. All of the authors here are philosophers, and so in bringing aspects of their respective films to "consciousness of themselves," they are concerned, not surprisingly, with particularly philosophical aspects of the themes in their respective films. Tom Martin writes on the meaning of life, Samantha Vice on ethical ideals, Lawrence Blum on stereotyping and prejudice, Torbjörn Tännsjö on ethical dilemmas, Thomas Wartenberg on moral intelligence and perspective, Julia Driver on justice and mercy, Deborah Knight on irony; other philosophical issues arise throughout.

Most of the authors of papers in Part 2 bring a tradition of philosophical work to bear on the world of their film. In the beginning of his paper on *The Believer*, Tom Martin looks at philosophical theories of racism, and he finds them lacking in their ability to account for Danny Balint's anti-Semitism; Martin thinks that the real source of Danny's hatred lies in another area of crisis about which philosophers have had a great deal to say—namely, the specter of life's meaninglessness and absurdity. Other papers are similarly explicit. Paul C. Taylor, for example, uses American Pragmatism in his reading of the intercultural romantic comedy *Fools Rush In*. Samantha Vice brings philosophical work on moral ideals to bear on *Meet John Doe*. Lawrence Blum uses his own extensive work on prejudice and stereotyping to explore the ways in which *Crash* affects its viewers. The thought driving Torbjörn Tännsjö's discussion of *Sophie's Choice* is that recent philosophical work on moral dilemmas will help us understand the kind of dilemma that Sophie

Zawistowska faces when she arrives at the concentration camp. The re-emergence within philosophy of forms of virtue ethics is well represented in *Ethics at the Cinema*. Joseph Kupfer brings a virtue framework to his reading of *Dangerous Liaisons*, interpreting it as a portrayal of the goodness of sexual integrity and virtue. Aristotle's account of friendship and moral intelligence provides the background to papers by Julia Driver and Thomas Wartenberg, two of the three authors who independently chose to write on *The Third Man*. The third paper in this trio, by Deborah Knight, approaches *The Third Man* as a philosopher, but without any kind of philosophical theory in hand; Knight portrays the film as an ironic study in "moral weakness." In a similar manner, Peter Goldie attempts to derive some quite fundamental insights about human bonding from *La Grande Illusion*. Karen Hanson brings *Jules et Jim* to bear on philosophy, concluding that the film provides "welcome corrections" to the Aristotelian picture of male/female relationships and reveals Plato's view of communities to be "boringly unattractive."

There is a growing awareness, from a number of areas within philosophy, of the role of narratives in our lives, in such disparate areas as theories of action and emotion, practical reasoning, personal identity, and ethics. Related to this is a growing sense that a serious engagement with sophisticated narratives can enrich not only ethical debate within philosophy, but also our ethical lives. This commitment has guided the majority of the contributors to *Ethics at the Cinema*. If *narratives in general* can contribute to ethical debate, then filmed narratives should be studied equally with written narratives. Film is a serious and popular conveyance of ethically laden narratives, and the narratives of many important films have been written especially for the screen and are not widely available in any other format. Indeed, only three of the filmed narratives discussed in this collection (*Dangerous Liaisons*, *Sophie's Choice* and *Jules et Jim*) are widely available in written form.[26] Were we to ignore film, we would ignore a rich source of serious and influential narratives. Those involved in the debates surrounding the role and nature of narratives in ethical discourse, persuasion, and commitment simply cannot close their eyes to the cinema.

My suggestion has been that the most crucial feature of spectatorship of filmed and other narratives is that the spectator is being made privy to a particular attitude toward a constructed world, an attitude that she is encouraged to embrace in her emotional and other responses to the events in the narrative. Furthermore, whether or not the spectator takes this attitude is not just a matter of her joining in the stipulation of the imaginary world, but rather flows from, and is a reflection upon, her character. Various features of our engagement with not only complex and challenging film narratives, but also those that are more straightforward and pedestrian, deserve philosophical attention. At bottom, I think, are questions about the nature of the attitude a narrative is inviting the spectator to take, and the details of how the film presents its world and encourages the spectator to see and respond to it in a particular way. This feature of the spectatorship of narratives (fictional and otherwise) brings it into the realm of the concerns of mainstream

moral philosophy, and it is to this realm, I think, that all the papers in *Ethics at the Cinema* make sophisticated and enjoyable contributions.[27]

NOTES

1. In what follows, I refer to "film" to avoid clumsy repetition, but have in mind both film and television narratives.

2. "Melting Whites and Liberated Latinas: Identity, Fate, and Character in *Fools Rush In*," *.

3. *On Film*, 2.

4. For a concise summary of some of the issues here, see Murray Smith's review article, "Film and Philosophy," in Donald and Renov (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Film Studies*, Chapter 10.

5. My thoughts on attitudes have been influenced by Lucy Allais' excellent work on the attitude of forgiveness. See, e.g., her "Wiping the Slate Clean: The Heart of Forgiveness," Section III, and "Dissolving Reactive Attitudes: Forgiving and Understanding." In recent work, Bas van Fraassen has described a similar state, which he calls a "stance" and which he defines as "a cluster of attitudes, including propositional attitudes as well as others, and especially certain intentions, commitments, and values." ("Précis of *The Empirical Stance*," 128. See also *The Empirical Stance*, Lecture 2.)

6. Gordon, *The Structure of Emotions*, 28.

7. Smith, *Engaging Characters*, Chapter 3. I have also been influenced by the work of Berys Gaut in this area; see, e.g., his "The Ethical Criticism of Art."

8. Smith, *Engaging Characters*, 82.

9. Ibid., 83.

10. I am ignoring the debate over whether the spectator's emotions are make-believe or real.

11. "Of the Standard of Moral Taste," 257, emphasis added.

12. Diamond, "Anything but Argument?," 300.

13. See, e.g., Noël Carroll's "The Power of Movies."

14. See, e.g., the papers collected in Jerrold Levinson (ed.) *Aesthetics and Ethics*.

15. Carroll, "Film, Emotion, and Genre," 23.

16. Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, 409.

17. This, of course, is not always true; there are nonfictional films. Nonetheless, it is often true, and it is true of all of the films discussed in this collection.

18. For a discussion of some of the empirical work and the issues surrounding it, see Hakemulder, *The Moral Laboratory*.

19. For a useful taxonomy of the various phenomena in this area, see Weatherson, "Morality, Fiction, and Possibility."

20. Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Selected Essays*, 152.

21. Moran, "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination," 95.

22. Ibid., 99.

23. Walton, "Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality," 37–38.

24. Moran, "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination," 105.

25. *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 313.

26. The script for *Dangerous Liaisons* is adapted from the novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, by Choderlos de Laclos; *Sophie's Choice* is based on the novel of the same name by William Styron; *Jules et Jim* is based on the novel of the same name by Henri-Pierre Roche. Graham Greene's screenplay for *The Third Man* is also widely available in written form, although it was written to be filmed.

27. Thanks to Elisa Galgut, Lindsay Kelland, Hafiz Sadeddin, Murray Smith, Ken Walton, Tom Wartenberg, and, especially, to Samantha Vice.