

Morality

And Dialectical Materialism

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Morality, and the decision as to whether or not another is moral, is a very subjective topic. No two people that have ever lived have shared the same exact ideology when it comes to what is moral and what is immoral. The concept of morality is created in each person through a series of instances in which information from the outside world is taken in and processed by the brain. For this reason the morality of an individual is unique and can never be governed upon by the rules, doctrines, philosophies, and ideals created by other human beings. The only person that can rightfully determine the morality of an action is the individual who committed the act. And if that person were to wholeheartedly believe they were moral, than they would be moral. This assertion stems from the philosophies of Georg Hegel, Karl Marx, and Fredrick Engels. Georg Hegel imagined and gave birth to dialectical materialism, from which all of Socialism, and Marxism in particular is based. Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels made their own revisions to Hegel's dialectical materialism and together created historical realism. Dialectical materialism, and its sibling philosophy, historical materialism, state that "in regard to morality, historical materialism recognizes no eternal code," (The Philosophy of Karl Marx). Eternal in this quote most nearly means unchanging. Leon Trotsky elaborates further in one of his writings, "There is place within this system for neither God nor Devil, nor immortal soul, nor eternal norms of laws and morals," (The ABC of Materialist Dialectics). Armed with the aforementioned philosophies that support self imposed morality, it is easy to understand and explain why Tom Joad and Willy Loman are moral characters.

Tom Joad as well as many other members of the working class endured harsh times during the dustbowl. Farmers, hard labor workers, and others were reduced to animalistic instincts in a situation where only the fittest would survive. "At this stage, the laborers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition," (Manifesto of the Communist Party). This is very apparent throughout *The Grapes of Wrath*. As the migrant workers are moving west with their families and limited belongings, they strive only to feed themselves and their family. Everyone else becomes competition. In a situation like this, wherein everyone is acting on the primal instinct, rules that once governed man are forgotten and vices become an occasional necessity for survival. At a time like this, when everyone is doing what they deem best for themselves and for their closest friends and family, everyone would be moral. Everyone would be moral because they would be acting in order to preserve what matters to them most; the lives of their family and themselves, and Tom Joad is no exception.

As time goes on, the migrant workers slowly begin to realize that competing against each other was pointless. They began to realize that their fellow migrant workers were not their enemies. They came to understand that competing against each other would prevent them from obtaining a better life. "The impoverished masses..." had risen, "up to rescue their right to a decent life from the hands of the ruling oligarchies," (Message to the Tricontinental). The workers began to form unions, they banded together against the minority that governed their current and future lives. By doing this they had taken the first step in putting power back in their hands. In place of the survivalist and instinctual reaction the migrant workers first experienced, emerges a humane and

peaceable alternative. This new method of working together may seem more morally inclined than the previous approach, however, it is not. The reason for the migrant workers uniting has not changed. The main goal each individual is trying to achieve is still to live comfortably, to succeed, to survive. They are not cooperating with other migrant workers in order to help anyone else, instead, every migrant worker is using the others to boost their income and well being. All of these migrant workers, including Tom Joad, are doing what they consider to be right in their own eyes, and therefore are moral.

By far the two most popular events cited when arguing against Tom Joad's morality are the two murders he committed. The first, brutally murdering Herb Turnbull after being stabbed by Herb with a knife, and the second, murdering a police officer after the officer had killed Tom's good friend. Although both of these murders seem at least somewhat sensible to most people, it would be difficult to find any set of laws or religious doctrines that would tolerate such behavior without exercising extreme punishment let alone pass it off as moral. Dialectical and historical materialism however, would place the spotlight on Tom Joad when questioning his morality. Tom Joad shows no remorse for his actions throughout the novel, even after serving time in prison after his first murder. Tom does not seem very phased by his time spent in jail due to his lack of hesitance when it came time to beat another wrongdoer in the head with a blunt object. Tom Joad's behavior reveals what he feels about his actions. It is clear that Tom Joad believed what he was doing was just and moral, and therefore is moral.

Dialectic and historical materialism run into conflict when applied under certain circumstances. It becomes hard to determine whether or not someone is still moral when they are either mentally unstable or ignorant, even if they believe what they are doing is

right. Willy Loman is the perfect example of this type of character. Willy is a chronic liar with severe mental instability that attempts to plant false ideas in his family and everybody he comes in contact with. Willy's problems also cause him to ignore any bit of nagging consciousness that might tell him he is immoral in his actions, which in turn prevent him from realizing he may be acting outrageous or inappropriate at times.

However despite these complications Willy loves his family and only does what he thinks is best for them. How can a man who is ignorant of his detrimental behavior be held fully responsible, and therefore immoral for committing them? Characters like Willy show that there is no exception to whom dialectic and historical materialism may apply to. Even the presence of ignorant and disabled characters cannot overcome the fact that one of the key points of these philosophies is the rejection of all religious, law, or moral standard for governing how people act. In effect, Willy Loman is a moral character as well.

Dialectical and historical materialism and the values it carries can be hard to grasp at times, or seem asinine to anyone who can not think creatively. It seems to carry little relevance in the world we live in today, since it has long since fallen out of common practice. However dialectical and historical materialism still allow for easy application to many common issues, such as morality, religion, and law. In this case dialectical and historical materialism have proven two fictional characters moral.

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