

ANESTHESIA: A DYING CIVILIZATION OR WHAT NOW?

ANESTHESİA: CAN ÇEKİŞEN BİR MEDENİYET VEYA ŞİMDİ NE OLACAK?

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ABSTRACT

Anesthesia takes a critical look at human condition in the early twenty-first century and tells the story of characters who anesthetize themselves to escape pain and suffering in a world that has lost its soul. Such issues as alienation, obsession with material prosperity and success, attitudes towards sex, life, death, and human quest to find meaning and purpose in life are addressed in the personal lives of characters from all walks of life living in the microcosm of the city of New York. The Enlightenment project that promised a better future for human societies by decentering God and replacing the religious outlook with reason and scientific method has resulted in a crisis of faith. The political and scientific bodies of knowledge or secular systems that replaced the traditional and religious worldview failed to fulfill the infinitely complex web of Man's spiritual needs. The film implies a return to religious and traditional worldview as the solution to humanity's current crisis.

Key Words: Human Condition, Alienation, the Enlightenment, Meaning and Purpose, Religious Worldview

ÖZ

Anesthesia filmi, yirmibirinci yüzyılın başlarında insanlık durumuna eleştirel bir bakışla yaklaşmakta ve ruhunu kaybetmiş bir dünyada acı çekmemek için alkol, uyuşturucu ve amacından sapmış bir cinsellikle kendini uyuşturan karakterlerin öyküsünü anlatmaktadır. Yabancılaşma, maddi refah ve başarıya verilen aşırı önem, cinsellik, yaşam, ölüm ve hayatın anlamı ve amacı gibi meseleler New York mikrokozmosunda yaşayan toplumun her kesiminden karakterlerin kişisel hayatları temelinde ele alınmaktadır. Tanrı'yı merkezden indirip, dini bakış açısı yerine akıl ve bilimsel metodu koyarak insan toplumlara daha iyi bir gelecek vaad eden Aydınlanma projesi bir inanç krizini netice vermiştir. Geleneksel ve dini dünya görüşünün yerini alan politik ve bilimsel bilgi kaynakları insana ait sonsuz derecede karmaşık ruhi ihtiyaçları tatmin etmekte başarısız olmuştur. Film, insanlığın hali hazırdaki krizine çözüm olarak dini ve geleneksel dünya görüşüne dönüşü ima etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnsanlık Durumu, Yabancılaşma, Aydınlanma Hareketi, Anlam ve Amaç, Dini Dünya Görüşü

1. THE CHANGING UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN BEINGS

Who are we? Why are we here? What is our relationship to the universe? These are some of the questions that, traditionally, religions claimed to have the answers to. Human beings, throughout history, have sufficed with the answers their religions and mythologies have provided. This was true for the Western world up until the end of the Middle Ages. People of the Middle Ages led a life of abject poverty, diseases, and subjection. Most toiled from dawn till dusk in the lands that belonged to the local lord and had barely enough to feed his family. The filth and squalor was part of their life and caused frequent outbreaks of cholera which decimated the population significantly. However, the Church was at the center of their lives and provided them with the spiritual need to adhere to something greater than themselves and hope that they might secure a place in the kingdom of heaven if they did good deeds and refrained from evil. Their belief imparted meaning to everything. The medieval belief in Man as God's favorite creation and the planet he dwells on as the center of the solar system was shattered when Nicolaus Copernicus proved that the geocentric model was wrong in 1543. Isaac Newton's discovery of the laws of gravity and motion further weakened people's belief in the Church which had explained the natural phenomena in terms of God's will. People no longer were satisfied with the answer that the Bible offered them. Revelation was replaced by reason and scientific method as the tools to understand

the workings of the universe. In the eighteenth century, Enlightenment thinkers further widened the gap between mankind and the belief in God. “The basic feature of the Enlightenment was a belief in the superiority of reason over superstition. This incorporated the idea that humankind was in the process of progressing socially, so that the future would be an improvement on the past; and one of those improvements was a challenge to orthodox religion with its overtones of superstition.” (Gribbin, 2003: 241).

The drift away from God continued in the nineteenth century, too. August Comte’s (1798-1857) law of three stages put forward that human societies went through three stages; theological, metaphysical and positive, and God was a creation of primitive human mind to explain natural phenomena. Since science now performed this function, human beings no longer needed a creator. Everything in the universe can be explained in concrete facts. The publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 was a stunning blow to the creationist front and its implications were to the effect that human beings were only a product of an evolutionary process that took millions of years. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was another influential figure whose insights into human psyche offered a bleak picture. Humans were a bundle of dark desires. However, the radical revolution in the understanding of the Man and the cosmos had its critics, too.

“God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?”(Nietzsche, 2008: 120).

Nietzsche complained that “without a belief in God, there was no authority for the moral values that had underpinned European society across two thousand years. ... The loss of belief would bring with it nothing less than a vacuum of meaning in human existence.” (Hughes, 2016).

When the twentieth century dawned, all of these developments had already changed the prevalent understanding of what the human nature was and his place in the universe. Once freed from God, Man went on to enjoy the fruits of a newly acquired freedom.

Traditional taboos began to fall, especially after two world wars, the age of “permissiveness” and “self-fulfillment was at hand. With moral, social and legal restraints loosened, men and women gave freer rein to their instincts for self-gratification. (Greer and Lewis, 2002: 732).

The insatiable greed for material progress brought two cataclysmic wars that cost millions of human lives in the twentieth century. Human suffering at such an enormous scale shattered the Enlightenment conviction that science and reason would bring an end to all social problems and lead to continual progress. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, mankind is struggling with the trauma caused by severing its link to God. Like a lover who broke up with his or her lover, and, after an initial sense of freedom, man realized how wrong the decision was, tried to fill the vacuum with other systems and saw that none of them is working.

2. ANESTHESIA

Anesthesia, directed by Tim Blake Nelson, is the story of desperate characters who are addicted to drugs, alcohol, material success and pain to quell the pain of living just like the patients who are given anesthetics so that they will not feel pain on the operating table. Each of the characters is employing some sort of anesthetic to cope with the world. Joe is taking drugs to escape the world that has treated him badly. Sophie (Kristen Stewart), quite paradoxically, uses physical pain to escape from an inhuman world and selfish insensitive people. Sarah (Gretchen Mole) uses alcohol and her husband, Sam (Corey Stoll) is engaged in an illicit affair to cope with an unhappy marriage. It tells the story of the last four days in the life of Walter Zarrow (Sam Waterston), Sophie, Joe (K. Todd Freeman), Sam and Nicole (Mickey Sumner), Adam (Tim Blake Nelson) and Jill (Jessica Hecht), Hall (Ben Konigsberg) and Ella (Henna Marks), whose lives intersect at certain points and the ripples caused by the impact have lasting effects on them. Walter Zarrow is a professor of Philosophy and teaches at Columbia University. He is married to his wife, Marcia (Glenn Close), whom he loves dearly, for the last forty-six years, which is in itself a telling sign of the kind of man he is in an age when it is a rare feat to keep a marriage for more than a decade. He is a very modest and helpful man. The people whose lives he touches directly or indirectly and impacts a positive influence include Sophie, Joe and Sam. He is loved and admired by everyone around him. His son Adam and his wife Jill have two children Hal and Ella. The family is going through difficult times when it was revealed at the beginning of the film that Jill might have ovarian cancer. Ella is the one who is most shocked and traumatized by her mother’s condition. Hal goes to Amy’s

place to lose his virginity the night his mother goes through surgery. Hall and Ella are struggling with usual teenage problems like drugs and sex. Sophie is a graduate student in philosophy. Her problem is that she cannot seem to interact with people. She finds it difficult to communicate with people, who she thinks are foolishly content with insignificant concerns in their small worlds. She desperately needs human contact and goes so far as to hurt herself just because she wants to forget the pain of loneliness. She seeks Walter's counsel and gets his help. Another interesting character is Joe. He is a university-educated man and had some talent in creative writing. However, he lost control over his life when he got addicted to drugs. His childhood friend, Jeffrey (Michael Kenneth Williams), who introduced him to alcohol when they were teenagers and then went on to become a successful corporate lawyer with an annual income of two million dollars, is trying to help him give up drugs. He hires a man to forcefully take Joe to hospital for a detox programme. After he was discharged from the hospital, he resumes where he had left off. He steals a woman's purse on the bus to buy drugs.

Sarah and Sam's marriage is not working. Sam has an affair with a British woman, Nicole. He told his wife he is on a business trip to China while, in fact, he is spending his time with her in New York. Nicole is a nonconformist character who rejects traditional gender roles. In their conversation with Sam, she explicitly informs Sam that she is not going to turn out like her mother, who went "from her parents to college, and then in with Dad". While on the other hand, Sarah sacrificed her career to be with Sam. Sarah seeks solace in alcohol and anti-depressant pills.

3. HUMAN CONDITION

In linear terms, the story of the film begins with Walter Zarrow lecturing his students on Schopenhauer's outlook on human condition.

Walter Zarrow: A thinker who predates Darwin and dares suggest that an objective analysis of what it is to live as a human. A thinking sentient being whose sole trajectory is toward the grave. Particularly once children have been reared would have us perhaps choose not to be born at all. Imagine that. Better not to live than to live and suffer. But Eros seduces us not only into striving for the falsely ethereal, but worse, propagating and thereby subjecting another generation to the same suffering we endure.

"There is no such thing as happiness, for an unfulfilled wish causes pain and attainment only brings satiety. Instinct urges men to procreation, which brings into existence a new occasion for suffering and death" (Cited in Russell, 1989: 724). But, the problem is that humanbeings, endowed with the inalienable urge to procreate, are in a sense, trapped in a world in which they tend to avoid suffering but cannot help bringing other humans into the same world of pain and suffering. This is emphasized when Sam and Nicole visit a botanical garden and discuss about a certain plant. The plant's physical features are designed in a way that makes pollination very easy.

Nicole: This shape is incredible. The lower and upper sepals are for protection. This petal is the labellum and it's always the largest. It lies flat like that to make it comfortable for pollinators. All that beauty is just about making more of them.

However, the problem with humans is that they want to indulge freely in sex and not reproduce. This is stressed when Ella catches Hal masturbating, and they later talk about their sexual adventures. Hal says that Amy gave him a handjob. Ella responds by saying that she gave Lucas, a boy in her class, a blowjob. Later, Hal goes to Amy's place to lose his virginity on the night his mother goes through a major operation. Hal is an extremely clever boy and represents human reason. Although his father urged him to stay at home with his sister on the night of his mother's surgery, He goes to Amy's anyway. In his sister's words, "he said he did a risk assessment and the benefits outweighed potential negatives." Jeffrey and Rachel are lawyers defending rival parties in a court case. They meet at a bar, have drinks and they cannot even wait until they go to a private place with a bed in it. They start kissing in the elevator. Sam sees his daughter with her teacher and classmates visiting the same botanical garden. He gets nervous and quickly leaves there ostensibly not to be seen by his daughter but, on a symbolic level his escape reflects his subconscious regret at having reproduced. Later, in Nicole's apartment, Sam talks to Nicole about his marriage.

Sam: We were just out of school... living uptown. We both had really lucrative job offers. She was gonna maybe go to London. Chose the Far East instead to be with me. The next logical step was marriage and kids... and we just did that, kind of without even discussing it. Two hyper-educated young adults making the most significant decision in life without a single real conversation. We talked about

movies we saw more than the meaning of a future together. I remember being, um... what would the word be... frozen when she was pregnant the first time.

Children are nuisance and they always get in the way and prevent people from living their own self-centered lives. Nicole knows Sam is married and has children. She does not intend to have a serious relationship with Sam or anyone for that matter. She is not thinking of getting married and having children.

Nicole: I am thirty-three

Sam: Friends of mine are having their kids in their forties.

Nicole: And they will be in their sixties when kids graduate college. Not for me.

Quite the contrary, she is there to have some fun with Sam and then everyone will be on their separate ways. In fact, it is her that urges Sam to go back to his family. The barrenness of the western civilization is brought to attention once again when we learn at the beginning of the film that Jill might have cancer not, say, in her lungs but in her ovaries. Ovaries being the organs that produce eggs in female humans, we get the the feeling that western civilization in the twenty-first is not a fruitful one any longer. And those healthy individuals that are capable of reproducing are only interested in the fun part of the sexual activity. Its citizens have turned into selfish individuals and have a distorted understanding of sex, the chief function of which is the continuation of the human species. By neglecting the reproductive aspect of sex and concentrating only on the pleasure principle, they, in fact, become alienated to their nature, and this alienation lies at the root of human misery.



By losing their belief in God and without the benefit of moral standards, humanbeings have only two roads ahead. The first time Hal and Ella smoke pot on the rooftop, they have a clear view of New York's skyline that is dotted with skyscrapers reaching out to skies.

Hal: *Imagine if all the people who built these brownstones could see the city now.*

Ella: *Mm...*

Hal: *It's our ruin or our nirvana.*

Ella: *What's that supposed to mean?*

Hal: *Either we'll extinguish ourselves... or become God*

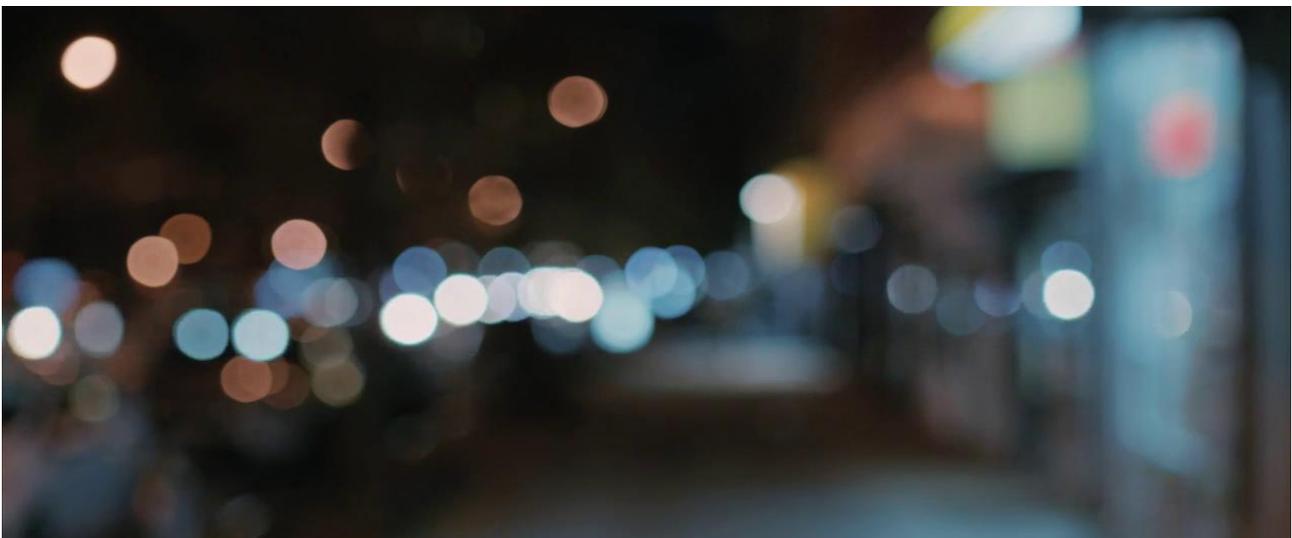
Skyscrapers become the symbol of material success and the ensuing hubris of a people whose migration from Europe to the new world began in the sixteenth century. In the span of four centuries, the scientific and technological improvements brought them to a position to “destroy cities, alter the planet irreversibly speak instantaneously face-to-face from across the globe, create life where there was to be none even while intoxicating ourselves with it all.” The irony is that the founding fathers were mostly devout Christians who fled persecution for their religious beliefs. They settled the land and built modest buildings out of brownstones. Their grandchildren, on the other hand, outdid their ancestors by building the tallest buildings of steel and glass. Tall buildings have negative connotations in the western collective consciousness and has come to be

associated with arrogance and reaching out for the impossible. The Bible tells the story of Noah's children. During the time of King Nimrod, they wanted to erect a tall building.

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. (Genesis, 11:4 Authorized King James Version).

The successive verses of Genesis tells how God wanted to prevent them from realizing their ambitious goal by making their language unintelligible to each other. Their desire to assert themselves and acquire fame by building a city and a tower ultimately brings about their end. The story of Icaros is another reminder of the downfall that follows excessive trust in one's achievements. King Minos orders Daedalus to build a maze to keep Minotaur in and then imprisons him and his son Icaros in a tower so that the secret to the maze would not be revealed to others. Daedalus makes wings out of feathers and wax for himself and his son and they escape from the tower. Exhilerated by the feeling of soaring into the sky, Icaros neglects his father's warnings that he should not fly too close to the sun. The wax attaching the wings to his body begins to melt and Icaros falls to his death. With the moral lesson that arrogance leads to a certain downfall in mind, the film implies that a similar fate awaits the western civilization.

4. MEANING IS ELUSIVE



The first sequence of the film begins on the night Professor Walter Zarrow was stabbed by a junkie who earlier asked him for fifty cents and the professor refused. The first frame of the sequence shows a blurred vision of a New York street at night. The street lights and the lights from the cars on the street are presented as they would be seen through the eyes of a drunk or someone who has just taken drugs.



Onto this blurred vision pops the lucidly serene face of the professor. This gives us the first clue that what we are going to see has got something to do with the binary opposition clarity/blurriness. While driving to the botanical garden, Sam and Nicole have a little argument about their relationship. Sam comforts Nicole by saying, "I'll do right by us." Nicole says she does not know what that means. Sam replies, "Can't that be good? Not knowing." Then, the camera shifts up and shows the naked branches of trees against a gray autumn sky and the vision gradually gets blurrier.

Walter has a structure in his life. He teaches at a university, buys his wife flowers every Friday. He is content with his life and the little pleasures it offers such as enjoying a glass of milk. He spent all his life to figure out "what it all means".

Professor Zarrow stands for a bygone age in a world that has lost its moral compass and humans can no longer talk about certain truths and meaning because they did away with the structures that make meaning possible. In their conversation with Sophie, Walter stresses the need for a structure whose rules must be accepted by all the members of a group before meaning can emerge and communication can be achieved. Anyone who opposes the rules of the structure, in fact, pose a threat to other people's sense of security in that group. This is an allusion to the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of how a language works in producing meaning. He defines language as "a system of signs that express ideas" (1959: 16), or "a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound-images"(ibid, 15). A sign has two components; the signifier, which corresponds to the sound or written image of the sign and the signified, which is the conceptual aspect. For example, the written word "car" on a piece of paper or the sound image that we hear is the sign and the mental image we have of a car is the signified.

Although Saussure thought the link between the signifier and the signified to be an arbitrary one, he said there had to be an agreement on the value of signs among the members of a group or a society in order for the meaning to emerge. Meaning can be achieved "only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community" (ibid, 14). In other words, everyone should have an agreement on what, for example, the word "car" refers to.

However, the link between the signifier and the signified was severed in the twentieth century when Derrida's concept of deconstruction gained circulation. Deconstruction implied that texts contain within themselves elements that go against the meaning the text seemingly has. We can no longer claim that a certain text has an essential meaning, rather, it is open to countless interpretations because meaning is always deferred through a chain of free-floating signifiers.

Deconstructionists believe in multiple meanings. They take Saussure's structuralist formula defining the sign as the signified bonded together with the signifier, and they widen the gap between the signified and the signifier, focusing on what they call free-floating signifiers, or the free play of signifiers. That is to say, in deconstruction, seemingly singular or stable meanings give way to a ceaseless play of language that multiplies meanings. (Parker, 2015: 86).

Sophie refers to deconstructive reading of texts when she complained that there is something wrong with twelve people reading the same text and each interpreting it differently. The human need for a reliable framework of reference to interact with the outside world and the psychological disorders that would arise in the absence of such a framework is echoed in Walter's words.

Walter: At the heart of human interaction is the agreement that we're all going to fabricate. Which is to say, agree on certain precepts we call truths but would be utter nonsense to anyone not in on the game. Consider language. We call an elephant an elephant with a certainty that will go so far as to marginalize even ostracize those who refuse. Society depends zealously on this, so we can structure it. In this case, communicate with one another even as each of us has his or her own disposition toward elephants.

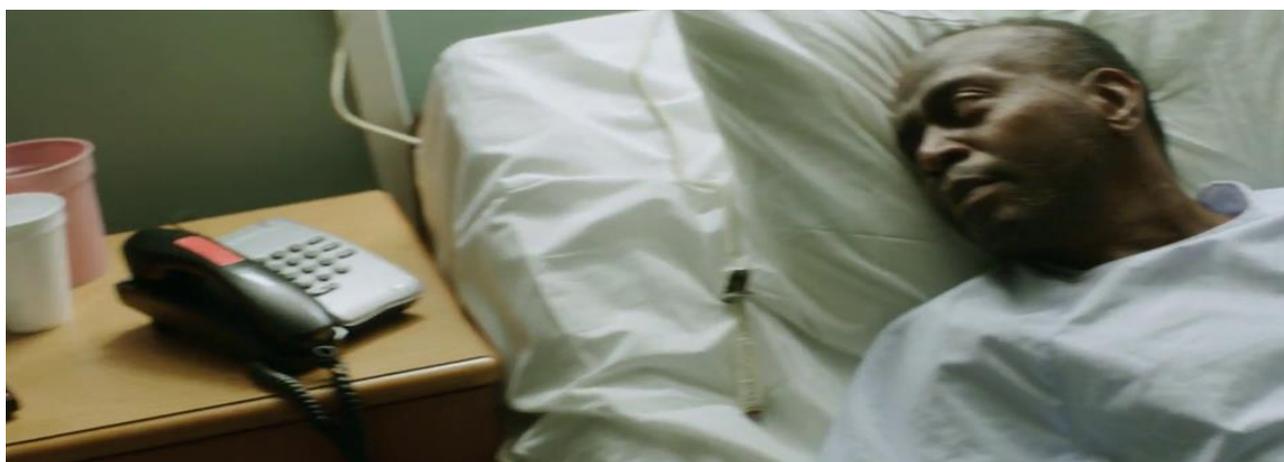
5. ALIENATION



6. SOPHIE

Sophie is introduced in the next sequence. She is a graduate student. The first time we see her is when she is sitting alone at a table seemingly studying but surrounded by other students at other tables in the university cafeteria. The camera pans to right and left showing students chatting, laughing and most conspicuously concentrating their attention on their smart-phones and lap tops. She is the odd man out among the crowd. She cannot seem to blend in. While she is studying, a young man, apparently another university student, approaches her table and grabs a chair from her table without asking her permission. Stunned by the sheer rudeness of the action, she protests that she might be needing it and he should have asked for her permission. In the ensuing confrontation, the boy treats Sophie extremely insensitively, calls her “a selfish, lonely bitch” and pushes the chair angrily towards her. Sophie is devastated and takes refuge in a toilet cabin. She puts her bag in her lap and holds it firmly, which makes us think that she has something in it that gives her comfort. The mystery of the bag is revealed when, towards the end of the film, Walter persuades Sophie to hand over the curling iron, with which she burns her arms and legs. Sophie reluctantly takes it out of her bag and gives it to him. In their first meeting, she asked Walter to go with her to the session with her psychiatrist, she explains why she burns herself,

Sophie: It... It concentrated me... to the exclusion of everything else. It was like a drug. The world has just become... so... inhuman. Everyone's plugged in. Blindingly inarticulate obsessed with money, their careers stupidly, arrogantly content. I can't talk to them. I fight them. I wanna destroy them even. I crave interaction. I crave it. But you just can't anymore. They pull their devices out for every little thing to reinforce their petty, convenient notions. To decide where they are going to shop what they're gonna eat, what movies they are gonna watch, everything they ingest. It's like this is all a game and I haven't been told what the rules are. Or even worse, if I had, I am ill-equipped to follow them. All I can do is provoke. I become spiteful. I'm just as bad as they are. They? I'm... I'm worse. I fucking hate myself for it. I'm... I am so fucking lonely. Why is the world so base? Why is it so insensitive? Why is it so selfish? Why am I? I am not for this world.



Another character who suffers from loneliness and “craves interaction” is Joe. After Joe is forcefully taken to the hospital, Jeffrey has to leave him there and go away to represent his client in a court case. He calls Joe in his hospital room to ask how he is doing. The conversation does not last very long because Jeffrey says he has to hang up. Joe, alarmed, asks “Why are you hanging up so fast?”. When Jeffrey replies that he will call him back, Joe, rather disappointed, says

Don't forget. You are all I got.

As the night progresses and it is past ten-thirty, we see Joe looking at the bedside telephone expectantly and repeating in increasing intensity,

F...king call me! F...king call me!

He literally howls like a wounded animal. Maybe, it was a lack of human interaction that prompted him to start using drugs.

7. SARAH



Sam calls home but does not talk much with Sarah. She is embarrassed in front of Meredith and feels humiliated that Sam does not care for her. Meredith offers to pour another drink for her and she accepts. After Meredith leaves and children go to bed, Sarah continues drinking in the kitchen. She does not notice Allie's coming to the kitchen to have some water, and Allie does not want her mother to know she is there and leaves the kitchen hurriedly. The next morning, while Sarah drives her daughters to school, Allie expresses her unhappiness about her mother's depressed state and ever-increasing alcohol consumption. Sarah says she has used all kinds of antidepressant pills to cope with the loneliness and lack of interaction with the man for whom she sacrificed her career.

8. IS THERE HOPE?

Walter is stabbed and taken to hospital. Marcia is by his bedside. Hal goes in the room to visit his grandfather. Walter is comatose and intubated. The film ends abruptly when Marcia tells Hal,

-At least, he is not in pain.

The question of whether Walter is going to die or not is not resolved, which suggests that the world he represents is in death throes, but might as well live on. The film does not take a completely pessimistic approach to what is waiting humanity in the twenty-first century. It provides us with signs that imply we have every reason to hope for a better future if we rouse ourselves from the stupor of whatever anesthetic we are using and start interacting with one another. Sarah does exactly this when Allie urges her to stop drinking. She comes home and tells her housemaid to empty all the alcohol bottles into the sink. Sophie takes her first step to stop hurting herself on Walter's encouragement. Walter feels the need to introduce himself to the florist from whom he has been buying flowers for his wife and asks him to call him by his first name. Joe approaches Walter in the grocery store to ask for five dollars to buy drugs and to eat. Walter helps him out with the eating and promises to do the same everytime he sees him, but refuses to give him money for drugs. Outside the grocery store, a junkie asks Walter for fifty cents. Walter refuses to give him money but offers to buy him a cup

of coffee. Walter leaves the grocery store to go home and Joe comes out of the grocery with food in his hand. On his way home, Walter is stopped by the junkie with a knife in his hand. Walter tries to save his life by taking shelter in the nearest apartment building. As chance would have it, the flat whose doorbell he rings to be let in turns out to be Nicole's, with whom Sam is spending the night. Meanwhile, Walter is stabbed several times. Joe happens to be passing by. He rushes to Walter's help and is stabbed to death himself. Sam goes down to find a seriously wounded Walter. Walter whispers with difficulty into Sam's ears and asks him to give the flowers to his wife. This is an eye opener for Sam. He, too, takes the first step to reforming himself. He calls Sarah the next morning and tells her he wants to come home. Sarah refuses and tells him that she is not going to be what she has turned into anymore. His reply is "neither am I", which implies that he has seen the wrongness of his ways and is ready to change.

However, we can also talk about a subtext in which a return to God is implied as a solution to saving western civilization from decay. In the farewell lecture that received a standing ovation from his students, Walter sees the current crisis as a direct result of daring "to trade the organizing bliss of good and evil, right and wrong as determined by a creator for other opiates. Communism, socialism, capitalism, psychology, technology, any learnable system to replace what had begun to evaporate." Mankind abandoned a worldview that provided him with a moral system in which God-given criteria that classify the existence and assign everything to its rightful place enabled them to live oriented and purposeful lives. The political systems and bodies of knowledge that replaced the traditional outlook led to an unprecedented progress. However, they failed to give them a set of principles that would enable them to find their way in the dark, contributed to their alienation to each other, made them self-centered creatures, and added to their loneliness in a universe that has lost its soul.

Walter: And so we wander... eyes closed to the dark... while technology, science, medicine and godlessness blaze illusions around us. With less to guide us now than ever. Seemingly omnipotent... but more human... and just as afraid.

Joe's allusion to St. Augustine in the conversation with Walter is another textual clue that advocates a return to the traditional worldview in which God is at the center and gives meaning and purpose to human existence. St. Augustine lived in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. He spent a life in pursuit of secular knowledge and worldly pleasures until he was 36 when he converted to Christianity and went on to become one of the most influential figures in the Church and intellectual history of the western civilization. The film seems to suggest that, like St. Augustine, the western civilization will return to a traditional understanding of Man's place in the universe. Human experience from the Enlightenment to this day has shown that a civilization cannot prosper without understanding the limitations of reason and human needs and weaknesses. Science and reason can be instrumental in bettering human lives, making intergalactic journeys and settling other planets possible. However, the human need to interact with other members of the species, or adhering to a power greater than himself at times when science and reason fail to provide him with the feeling of security is still there.

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