

Spring 2021

Dinner Service: Echoing the Value of Philosophy Through Character and Story

India Li Harrison
Bard College, ih6002@bard.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2021

 Part of the [Other Philosophy Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Harrison, India Li, "Dinner Service: Echoing the Value of Philosophy Through Character and Story" (2021).
Senior Projects Spring 2021. 201.

https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2021/201

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2021 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Dinner Service: Echoing the Value of Philosophy Through Character and Story

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
India Li Harrison

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2021

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I want to thank my advisor, Garry Hagberg, for giving the absolute best advice and support throughout my entire writing process. I am very grateful for all of your help, suggestions, and positive feedback that gave me the confidence to finish this project and make it my own. I would also like to thank the members of my board, David Shein and Norton Batkin. You both took the time to read my work, adopt my perspective, and give insightful comments. Thank you, thank you.

To the University of Cincinnati and Bard College, thank you for splitting my college career into two vastly different experiences that combined as one of the most rewarding times of my life. To the communities I took part in, the friends that I have made, and the cities that I spent years of my life in, I am forever indebted to this unique, beautiful journey.

And to my family, thank you for always being there for me.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: The Characters	8
Rita - Kantian Ethics	
Paige - Utilitarianism	
Table 12 - Contractualism	
Table 5 - Hedonism	
Table 13 - Virtue Ethics	
Gino - The “Practical”	
<i>Dinner Service</i>	18
Chapter 2: Breaking Down the Script	41
Chapter 3: Critical Response: Why Ethics?	59
Relationship Between Ethics, Screenwriting, and Story	
Relatives	
Palatability	
Malleability: Challenging Theories and Cultivating a Voice	
Conclusion	67
Bibliography	72

Terms for *Dinner Service*:

INT. (Interior) - An abbreviation in the slugline that implies the scene takes place indoors.

EXT. (Exterior) - An abbreviation in the slugline that implies the scene takes place outdoors.

O.S. (Off-Screen) - An abbreviation next to a character's name that notes the line they're speaking cannot be seen on-screen.

CONT'D - Continued dialogue for a character in between action on-screen.

CUT TO - A simple transition that changes the camera angle or shot.

BACK TO - A transition that returns focus to the original scene or action.

CLOSE ON - A close-up shot on some object, action, or character.

Shot - A image that can last for a various amount of time.

Slugline - The text in all caps that marks the beginning of a scene, the setting, and time of day
(INT. DINING ROOM ENTRANCE - NIGHT).

Introduction

“I have to believe in a world outside my own mind. I have to believe that my actions still have meaning, even if I can’t remember them.”

- From *Memento*

My sophomore year of college arrived in 2018, and I was entering another year as a philosophy major at the University of Cincinnati. I saw a flyer on the basement wall of McMicken Hall one day in August. It promoted a new course titled, “Philosophy through Movies”, where theories and segments of writing could be revealed through hand-picked narrative films. Taking that class was one of the most important decisions I made in college. We followed Dana Nelkin’s “The Sense of Freedom” with *Run Lola Run*, and compared Locke’s work on epistemology with *Memento*. Something clicked for me in that class as I began to understand a few things. Finding philosophy in films helped me work myself out of mental mud. In times where I would read a text that I struggled to decipher on my own, I would turn to any film that addressed the same question. Seeing those concepts animated through dialogue and action helped, allowing my confusion to break through fog. In this discovery, it struck me that some of the greats had their own ways of interpreting as well. Plato had dialogue with the Socratic methods, Descartes had skepticism and melting wax while Camus leaned on Sisyphus and his sentence. These thinkers proved that it is not foreign to flesh out thoughts through real examples and as they found their mirror of understanding, I too found mine.

Coming to terms with the fact that films helped me comprehend philosophy, this class presented a future career option I never considered: screenwriting. Educalingo defines the profession as, “...the art and craft of writing scripts for media such as feature films, television

productions, or video games...Screenwriters are responsible for researching the story, developing the narrative, writing the screenplay, and delivering it. Screenwriters therefore have great influence over the creative direction and emotional impact of the screenplay and, arguably of the finished film” (“Screenwriting”). I had seen the platform of the film industry in such a different manner after that course, and the ways in which these screenwriters utilized their stories as tools to educate and provoke their audience left me mesmerized. Some of the greatest screenwriters of all time understood this notion, like David Mamet. Mamet started out as a playwright and transitioned into screenwriting. He wrote critically acclaimed films like *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *The Verdict*, and *The Untouchables*.¹ In his article, “Ethics and Capitalism in the Screenplays of David Mamet”, Professor of Literature and filmmaker Kevin Boon makes a case towards how Mamet intentionally worked ethics into some of his best screenplays.² He writes, “...like the ethics in most of Mamet’s screenplays, is not in the characters of the drama; rather, it falls to the audience to render moral judgments. In Mamet, when two characters are engaged in dialogue, three characters are nearly always present: the two characters and the audience” (176). This brings us Boon’s idea of “triangulating” dialogue, where choices are made on-screen, but the audience will always think of an alternative that they find right or favorable.³ In a way, he alludes that the absence of what is said, that grows in the minds of the audience, is far more profound than what is said on-screen. Though I had already loved watching films, understanding all these notions made me want to play a part in them, specifically through screenwriting. From then on I planned to pave my career down the same route, where I would write films that touched on theories of philosophy, not in mechanical ways but, in ways that breathed human experience.

¹ <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000519/>

² https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4720830/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm

³ Kevin Alexander Boon, “Ethics and Capitalism in the Screenplays of David Mamet”, *Literature/Film Quarterly* (Salisbury University 2011), pp. 179

In this project, I have written a short screenplay titled *Dinner Service*. Within its story, I have positioned five different ethical theories together in a social setting for active discussion. These theories are Kantian Ethics, Utilitarianism, Contractualism, and Virtue Ethics. The ways in which the characters interact and speak for themselves are born from my interpretation of their respected theory. Yet, I have sought assistance from original works and secondary sources. With the intricate structures of these theories we wonder, what might it look like to let them play out naturally? Outside of philosophers' thought experiments suited to prove their argument, taking the guidelines of these theories and placing them in a social context with common issues arising, *Dinner Service* answers, what can we make of philosophy through story? Then, comes this essay, the analysis. The purpose of this essay is to reflect on what happens in the script, and further explain what it means philosophically. Chapter One precedes *Dinner Service*, as it gives a brief introduction to all of the characters and theories explored in the story. In Chapter Two, I will recall every incident of dialogue and action in the script, and give a further explanation of the philosophical aspect behind what occurs. Then, finally, in Chapter Three, I will reveal my inclination towards ethics and the specific theories I explored, and hint towards how they benefit my process of framing philosophy through story. However, this paper holds the weight of so much more than just expressing my interest in philosophy and film. Not only does it give me space to read philosophy and interpret it academically one last time, but it also gives me the space to sculpt this subject into a creative and communicative piece. Through my eyes, philosophy has the capability to influence within and without our minds. It can arise chilling or puzzling thoughts as much as it can transform into a tool, useful for peer communication and education of how to be an estimable person. My attempt in this project, and my dream as a career that will be spoken of in my conclusion, is to actualize philosophy through the art of

screenwriting. We as an audience can consume lessons or intentional tones revealed through films and perhaps be encouraged to reconsider how we approach our lifestyle and treatment of others. This motivation of mine runs its course throughout this project as an underlying theme, and speaks towards why I chose the prompt I chose, and how I am attempting to prepare myself as I near the end of my undergraduate career.

Chapter 1: The Characters

RITA - Kantian ethics

Our main character, Rita, is a waitress who puts the rules of her job over her attempts to connect with people. She does not make much in tips, and at the beginning of the script, we learn she is on the brink of being evicted. Due to the rules of her job that she is so intensely dedicated to, and her ability to make decisions that would serve everyone in the restaurant, I wrote Rita to stand in place for Kantian ethics. The term is associated with the German philosopher Immanuel Kant who was a prevalent figure in the world of philosophy and wrote profusely on subjects like epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.⁴ In 1785, he wrote *The Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* which highlighted his proficiency in moral philosophy. In three sections, he lays a foundation of moral principles including the idea of the “good will”, while mentioning the responsibilities we have in accordance with it, and where our knowledge of this is sourced from. His most famous remark in this work takes place when he elaborates on the “categorical imperative”. He writes, “Hence there is only one categorical imperative and it is this: Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (30). I structured Rita’s dialogue, motivations, and role in the story in a fashion that would be an enactment of this exact principle. She is always cognizant of her duty, and others, only making decisions that she would will to become a “universal law”.

In a social place like a restaurant that depends on the flourishing of personality, her willingness to be happy and even more so, make her customers happy, tends to fall behind her main focus of service. She does not see this as a problem and in fact, she views the prioritization of making impressions as detrimental to what she is supposed to do. Kant writes, “To be beneficent where one can is a duty; and besides this, there are many persons who...find an inner pleasure in spreading joy around them and can rejoice in the satisfaction of others as their own

⁴ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant/#MorFre>

work. But I maintain that in such a case an action of this kind, however dutiful and amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth” (11). There was a time where she understood the rules of the restaurant to be in alliance with her moral code. Much of the expected behavior in the dining room as well as the ways in which diners are to be serviced, is set to consider universality. It is not until the afternoon, where our story begins, that Rita finds out the major flaws and underlying misactions her place of work takes in, to keep up with its false status of widespread assistance.

PAIGE - Utilitarianism

Rita’s supervisor, Paige, sees the restaurant as a different place. It is a place where happiness can be maximized, in many various ways. If the restaurant crew executes their jobs well, patrons will be satisfied and the cash flow will be consistent. This means not only will people return to this restaurant for pleasurable experiences but, the employees will keep their jobs, be able to pay rent, and find happiness in financial stability. Paige stands for utilitarianism, specifically that of John Stuart Mill. Mill was an English philosopher, known for his work in politics and empiricism.⁵ He wrote *Utilitarianism* in 1861, which turned out to be a piece he was most known for, in which spoke towards a moral philosophy that insisted our obligations settled in producing the greatest amount of happiness. He clarifies, “The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals ‘utility’ or the ‘greatest happiness principle’ holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (17). Among this, he also discusses what his conception of happiness is, why the concept of utility is favorable and “susceptible”, and how it relates to justice.⁶

⁵ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill/#Life>

⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism and the 1868 Speech on Capital Punishment*, trans. by George Sher, Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), pp. 7-13, 6, 35, 42

In light of this, we can understand that Paige's efforts to keep the crew in order while pleasing customers stand for a reason bigger than herself. She does this not because it makes her happy, but because, "...utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator...with the interest of the whole..." as Mill declares (17). She and Rita both intend to serve every diner because they understand they should. How they differ in that understanding, is their path to accomplishing that goal. Unlike Rita, in every circumstance she lands in, Paige weighs out who benefits depending on the sizes of both parties. This means that most of the time, if Rita stands against the action of a wider group of people, or an action of the restaurant, Paige will typically go against her wishes, due to an opposing greater outcome of happiness. Moral intentions or a sense of duty do not reside in Paige's line of sight particularly like they do in Rita's. As Mill argues, "...but no system of ethics requires that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty...utilitarian moralists have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent" (19). A sense of duty to Paige and the restaurant lie in the consequences. Does this permittance make our customers happy? Do these allowances help them enjoy their experience and even return for another one? Paige's enforcement of these guidelines clearly clash with Rita's opposing moral vision, and because of that, the three tables Rita serves take on the brunt of their back and forth.

TABLE 12 - Contractualism

Though these tables may be receiving, this is not to say that they never give their two cents upon issues that cultivate. Rita's first table, Table 12 is occupied by a man who is quite vulnerable from the beginning. What once was a dinner for two, is now for one, and Paige firstly

sees this as an opportunity for Rita to start off her night by making an effort to emotionally connect with someone. This man, or 12 Man as labeled in the script, finds solace in Rita's somewhat stiff kindness. From this, Paige encourages Rita, as she does with every table, to upsell. Paige sees it as an opportunity to not only give 12 Man an enjoyable dining experience, with better food and drink than what he probably would have ordered but to give the restaurant a higher profit. Rita on the other hand disagrees in that, she would not encourage taking advantage of people. 12 Man, as we get to know him later on in the script, represents T.M. Scanlon's theory of contractualism sourced from his work *What We Owe to Each Other*. Thomas Michael Scanlon is an American philosopher that is highly acknowledged for his work in moral philosophy and civil polity. In 1998, he published *What We Owe to Each Other*, and it proposes his idea of a moral philosophy contingent upon agreeability within a community. His perspective sits in the shadow of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who surfaced the idea of the social contract.⁷ This concept engages in societal development, yet includes the importance of personal sacrifice and mindfulness of one's peers.⁸ Scanlon explains, "According to my version of contractualism, deciding whether an action is right or wrong requires a substantive judgment on our part about whether certain objections to possible moral principles would be reasonable" (194). This statement upholds the foundation of his theory, and within the work, he takes time to establish his thoughts upon topics like reason, well-being, judgments, and responsibility which all play a huge part in his case.⁹

In this story, 12 Man acts with others in mind, out of hopes that he will receive similar treatment in return. He has been let down on this lifestyle from the beginning of the story, as his girlfriend dumps him right before their anniversary dinner. This of course is something that he

⁷ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 5

⁸ <https://iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/>

⁹ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 17, 108, 248, 18-22

would probably never wish on anyone else experiencing. Now, as Scanlon claims, “According to the version of contractualism that I am advancing here our thinking about right and wrong is structured by a different kind of motivation, namely the aim of finding principles that others, insofar as they too have this aim, could not reasonably reject” (191). We do not know if 12 Man’s girlfriend dumped him according to factors that he could not reasonably reject, and we will assume that dumping someone right before a milestone dinner is bad enough. However, in the restaurant, from the point that we meet him, we follow his actions as he applies this rule to the ways in which people in the restaurant treat him and the ways in which he responds.

TABLE 5 - Hedonism

Our next table, Table 5, brings upon an issue for Rita from the beginning of their encounter. Their personal requests compete with Rita’s obligation to enforce universality. As Rita tries to point out the concern she has in giving them what they want, they oppose by presenting their desire for an enjoyable dining experience. Table 5’s focus on a pleasurable time slowly begins to impede on the nearby tables as we reach the midpoint of the script. Not only are they being loud, but their persisting attempts to get what they want through Rita are also extending the time she spends away from her other tables. It becomes clear that Table 5 represents hedonism slightly in an Epicurean manner in reference to his *Letter to Menoecus*. Epicurus was a Greek philosopher who was well known for his ethical standards that depended on happiness, pleasure, and friendship.¹⁰ The term “hedonism” that he is associated with means that experiences of pleasure and happiness are of the highest importance.¹¹ Epicurus wrote three letters, one being his *Letter to Meno*, where he encourages the chase for pleasurable experiences

¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Epicurus>

¹¹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hedonism/>

while turning a blind eye to fear, pain, and thoughts of death.¹² I mention that Table 5 represents Epicurus' hedonistic attitude “slightly” because there is an important note to make in light of their actions. When reading of their “vibrancy” one looks back to *Letter to Meno*, and may think of this quote:

By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of merrymaking, not sexual love, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest disturbances take possession of the soul. (Epicurus)

In comparing their behavior to this quote, there are obvious contrasts at first. Yet, we must remember that the impression we get of Table 5, and of their perceived vibrancy and selfishness only is given to us from the other two tables. The few questions they had for Rita were considered selfish by Table 12, and their lively conversation is already blaring for the ears of Table 13. In their perspective, they are a group of friends who gathered to converse over food and water, which is something Epicurus encouraged. Where Table 5 does contradict with Epicurus, is within their mental state. Whereas Epicurus only advises towards chasing happiness, Table 5 in this story, represents people who *are* happy and are attempting to maintain the feeling. With that in mind, despite the fact that their impression on the audience may be affected by the strangers around them, some steps they take still lack the “sober reasoning” Epicurus noted. The actions of Table 5 in this script reveal these motivations and allude towards how one might govern themselves if one is blind with pleasure.

¹² <http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/menoec.html>

TABLE 13 - Virtue ethics

The Elderly couple marks our last set of customers as they sit at Table 13. As soon as they arrive, they bring Rita a concern for solving. Though, their issue is not with her, but with Table 5. Being the last table that Rita waits, they arrive at a time where conflict is present already. Table 5 doesn't quite see eye to eye with both Rita and Table 12. Along with that, Paige pops into the picture every now and then changing Rita's decision-making and further, the route of her interactions with her customers. When the Elderly couple complains that Table 5 is being too loud, they implore the importance of character. This table represents Aristotles' virtue theory in his famous work, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle was also a Greek philosopher and student of the famous Plato. His writings in which covered topics of politics, ethics, and metaphysics were considered as playing a huge part in the beginning structure of Western philosophy. He wrote *Nicomachean Ethics*, a tribute to his son, with the intention of expressing his moral conduct, one that focuses more on the agent than the action.¹³ Within this work, in the course of 10 books, he gives numerous guidelines on how to live a good life. The highlight of these guidelines resides in Book Two, where Aristotle speaks of virtues and vices. He claims that in order to live a good life, we must work to act according to the virtue that exists as a mean between an excessive vice, and a deficient one. This behavioral beam is known as "The Golden Mean".¹⁴ According to Aristotle, if one were to achieve this mean, then they will be happy.¹⁵

Knowing this, the Elderly couple will continue to remind the other characters of the importance of virtue and how it threads into one's treatment of their own emotions, and those around them. Yet, when Table 13 begins to go unheard, their virtuous grounding turns into moral weakness as they begin to engage in harmful gossiping and moralism. This transition might not

¹³ <https://www.biography.com/scholar/aristotle>

¹⁴ <http://faculty.bucks.edu/rogerst/jour275morals.htm>

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* trans. by Martin Oswald (Library of Liberal Arts, 1999), pp. 23

be a favorable one for them but contributes to heightening conflict in the story while giving us insight into the immense practice it takes to become a virtuous, well-disposed person.

GINO - The “Practical” man

Gino is the owner of the restaurant and appears fairly late in the script. His unexpected approach to our tables matches his behavior, and his exit is not anything different. In this story, Gino does not embody ethics or represent any philosophical theory at all. He is what Bertrand Russell calls in the last chapter of his work *The Problems of Philosophy*, the instinctual or “practical” man.¹⁶ He writes, “The ‘practical’ man, as this word is often used, is one who recognizes only material needs, who realizes that man must have food for the body, but is oblivious of the necessity of providing food for the mind” (Russell). Bertrand Russell was a British philosopher that practiced logic and mathematics.¹⁷ His dedication to analytical philosophy was highlighted by his work, *The Problems of Philosophy*. In this piece, he discusses his thoughts upon knowledge, expresses the limitations of philosophy, and concludes with the value of philosophy.¹⁸ Despite the lack of inquiry or perspective that Gino brings to the story, oddly enough, his presence breathes fresh air into the scene. The possibility of carelessness and spontaneity is introduced among our characters, and Gino wears this coat proudly in the face of our deep thinkers. In light of this, we are not sure where Gino’s concerns lie. The fate of the restaurant means a lot to him, as does the productivity of his employees being that he comes over to assist Rita. Yet, his unapologetic responses to the requests of our three tables draw a line at the extension of his service. Rather, in his selfish ways, Gino seems to consistently look for an out from events. He will contribute a surface-level piece of his mind, and avoid further issues at all

¹⁶ <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5827/5827-h/5827-h.htm#link2HCH0015> “The ‘practical’ man...”

¹⁷ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/russell/#RWAP>

¹⁸ <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5827/5827-h/5827-h.htm#link2HCH0015>

costs. However, this does not imply that issues do not exist. Gino's blind eye and wide assumptions may provide temporary relief, but in the end, become harmful to those around him.

Dinner Service

by India Li Harrison

INT. BACK HALLWAY OF A RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

We look through half of a door frame where the kitchen of a restaurant is prepping through a blurred shot. The focus is on a row of coat hooks that extend out of the frame. The sound of a heavy door opens and closes as two voices in conversation slowly approach.

FIRST VOICE (O.S.)

When are they kicking you out?

SECOND VOICE (O.S.)

Three days, so Monday.

FIRST VOICE (O.S.)

You want me to spot you?

SECOND VOICE (O.S.)

No. I can't have you do that.

FIRST VOICE (O.S.)

Damn,

Both women casually merge on screen as they pace together. They come into focus and take off their coats. The woman labeled as "FIRST VOICE", is PAIGE, (20s), supervisor, sociable. The "SECOND VOICE" is RITA, (20s), disciplined.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Well, you're lucky you have the weekend to try and make it up.

RITA

Doesn't matter, I never make tips.

They both hang their coats and walk out of frame. Their figures move out of frame to reveal...

TITLE: "Dinner Service"

BY THE KITCHEN WINDOW

PAIGE

Look, you just got to connect with people. You're so focused on doing your job right you forget to smile.

RITA

But I *do* have to do my job right. I give people their food on time, I'm always punctual with refills-

PAIGE
But you want to make tips tonight
right?

RITA
Yes.

PAIGE
Then smile. Make eye contact, give
everyone what they want so we all can
make rent.

Paige ties her apron and walks off leaving Rita unable to
respond.

SOUND OF A BELL.

We see a montage of shots that initiate the beginning of the
dinner service. Sounds of conversation rise as people are
being seated, tickets being placed in the kitchen, cooks
sliding dishes out onto the hot plate.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

PAIGE
Rita, table 12.

RITA
Got it.

PAIGE
Remember, smile.

RITA
Yeah, I know.

We follow Rita as she ties her apron around her waist, and
pulls out her notebook arriving at the table.

RITA
Hi, my name's Rita I'll be your server
for tonight. Are we still waiting for
someone?

A young man (30s), sits somberly alone at a table for two.

He's at table 12, so we'll call him 12 MAN.

12 MAN
(clearly upset)
No.

Rita gazes back at Paige who mouths "connect".

RITA
How's everything going today?

12 MAN
Honestly, not too good.

Rita looks again at Paige who motions with her hands.

RITA
Well, can I do anything for you sir?

12 MAN
Uh no, it's okay. I don't want to bother you.

Rita stiffens a smile, waiting.

12 MAN
I was supposed to meet my girlfriend here to celebrate our anniversary. But, she just broke up with me and I worked too hard to get these reservations, and I really don't want to go home right now so...

RITA
Oh, that must've been difficult to go through.

12 MAN
It was. I appreciate your kindness, though. Servers don't always ask how you're doing.

RITA
Sure.

Paige walks by with another group of people, winking at Rita on the way.

RITA (CONT'D)
Should we start off with something to drink?

12 MAN
Any recommendations?

Paige swoops in and interrupts.

PAIGE

I would get the merlot, it's my favorite.

12 MAN

Sure, sounds great.

RITA

Okay. I'll be right back.

Rita hurries back to Paige at the hostess podium.

RITA

Uh, Paige, I know we should always try to upsell but, I don't know I feel like we're taking advantage of this guy-

PAIGE

We're not, we're going to give him an enjoyable dinner just like everyone else in this restaurant.

RITA

Yeah but, we wouldn't do this to everyone that comes in-

PAIGE

Rita yes we would.

Rita stares, not understanding.

PAIGE

Look, if we upsell to our customers, that means that we make tips, keep our jobs, and this restaurant stays alive. I'd rather benefit our entire crew, than worry about convincing someone to purchase an expensive glass of wine.

RITA

But-

PAIGE

(through gritted teeth)
Just smile and go wait Table 5 please.

RITA

Fine.

PAIGE

Oh and really work this table. They paid extra to be seated early.

RITA

Wait what, that's not allowed.

PAIGE

Not everything's fair kid. *grabs her two shoulders and turns her around* Go make rent.

INT. DINING ROOM TABLE 5 - LATE AFTERNOON

Two men and a woman sit at this table already immersed in their own conversation. Names are unimportant for this story so, we'll call them GUY, OTHER GUY, and WOMAN AT TABLE 5.

They're in mid-conversation when Rita approaches.

GUY AT TABLE 5 (O.S.)

No, I'm not scared of dying. I don't think about it.

WOMAN AT TABLE 5 (O.S.)

Exactly.

RITA

How's everyone doing tonight?

Various "Good"s emerge from the vibrant table.

GUY AT TABLE 5

Look before we get started, we'd really appreciate it if we could move to that table with the garden view?

RITA

Well, we have a chart and everything. I can't move you once you've been placed.

GUY AT TABLE 5

Yeah, I understand, but it won't be much of an inconvenience right?

RITA

Actually, it would-

GUY AT TABLE 5

We'd just like the garden view, miss.

RITA

We can't switch. I mean a lot of people like that table, and if one family sees you switch then they might want to and we can't do that for everyone.

GUY AT TABLE 5

The table's empty.

RITA

Yes, but chances are the next party will be seated there.

The once vibrant group stares at her.

RITA

Drinks to start?

GUY AT TABLE 5

We'll all just have water.

RITA

(drops shoulders)

Alright, then I'll get that started-

GUY AT TABLE 5

I'm sorry I just don't understand, the table's still empty. I mean- restaurants do this all the time.

RITA

Sure, but it's not something we as a restaurant do sir. And if we did that-

12 MAN

Miss, I'm ready to order.

Rita whips around.

12 MAN

(to GUY AT TABLE 5)

She's got other tables that are waiting.

GUY AT TABLE 5

(to 12 MAN)

I was just asking her a question.

RITA

Hold on gentlemen. *to GUY AT TABLE 5*

Let me take his order and then I'll
come back with yours.

Rita looks back at the hostess table before taking 12 Man's
order. Paige waves her back. Rita grunts.

RITA
(to 12 MAN)
Just give me one minute I'll be right
back.

Rita approaches Paige.

RITA
(chuckling)
Both of my tables almost got into it.

PAIGE
Got another one, busy night. Table 13.

They glance over at an elderly couple being seated.

Rita hurries over passing 12 Man without taking his order.

RITA
Hello, my name's Rita. I'll be right
with you in a moment.

She stops back at table 12.

RITA
Okay, are we ready to order?

12 MAN
Yeah, I was looking at the chicken
marsala.

RITA
(hesitates)
The prime rib is also a great choice.

12 MAN
That sounds delicious too. Well okay,
we'll go with that then.

RITA
Good choice. I'll go put that in.

12 MAN
(in a lower voice)
Sorry that table is giving you a hard

time.

RITA

Oh, it's fine. Happens more than you think.

12 MAN

I mean they can't argue against your reasons, ya know?

RITA

Yeah. But also it's just the rules, I have to follow them so.

She swipes his menu and heads to table 13.

RITA

Hi again folks, thanks for being patient it's a busy night.

An elderly couple patiently awaits Rita's arrival at table 13.

In trend, we'll just call them ELDERLY MAN and ELDERLY WOMAN.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(chuckles)

And a loud one too.

RITA

What do you mean?

ELDERLY MAN

(quietly motions to table 5)

Well, it's just that, that table is being a little loud.

Rita turns to find laughter emerge from table 5.

RITA

Okay, I'll let them know. We have a strict policy here so I'll make sure they keep that in mind.

ELDERLY MAN

Never mind the policy, they should know better.

He and his wife laugh in agreement.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Across the room, Paige drops off several entrees for a table. In the background we see Rita speaking to table number 5.

PAIGE
(to her table)
I'll come back in a bit to make sure
everything tastes amazing!

Paige turns to our POV where she sees Rita, looking somewhat stern. We follow her as she makes her way over.

Now over at table 5 she slowly approaches and sets her hand on Rita's shoulder.

PAIGE
Everything okay over here?

WOMAN AT TABLE 5
We were too loud, and she just came
over to remind us to quiet down a bit.

PAIGE
Well, we're packed tonight so it's
pretty loud. I'm sure everyone's being
a little too loud.

ANOTHER MAN AT TABLE 5
We don't mean to cause any trouble,
we're just having a good conversation.

RITA
As everyone else is, so please just
remember-

PAIGE
-to have a good time. *to Rita* And
Rita's gonna make sure of that, right?
Anything else we can do for you?

MAN AT TABLE 5
We were telling her earlier we
would've loved to have that table over
there with the garden view. We gotta
get that next time.

PAIGE
Yeah, that's our most popular seating
area. Unfortunately, someone's sitting
there now. Did you ask to switch when

you were placed here?

The entire table turns to Rita.

RITA

They did but, I told them I couldn't change the seating chart because obviously, it wouldn't be fair to everyone else.

Paige is annoyed.

PAIGE

So sorry about that folks, we're usually open to changing tables if a customer asks. Please don't hesitate to ask her for anything else okay?

Paige leaves, but not before she glares at Rita.

RITA

Uh, everyone ready to order?

INT. DINING ROOM ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Rita walks up to the hostess stand from the kitchen. Paige is waiting for her.

RITA

Listen, I was just-

PAIGE

I don't understand, I thought you needed to make tips tonight. Why are you making this shift so difficult?

RITA

I'm not I thought I was doing what I was supposed to do.

PAIGE

No what you're supposed to do is give the diners what they ask for.

RITA

Okay but you understand why I couldn't let them switch-

PAIGE

Rita I don't want to hear it. Whatever this rule is that you're trying to

remind people of, let it go. Think about the consequences for once, otherwise, you won't make any money.

RITA

I have to go.

Rita heads to the kitchen. Paige rolls her eyes and goes the opposite way.

At Table 13, the elderly couple looks over at Table 5.

ELDERLY MAN

(to Elderly Woman)

It's a shame, she asks them to quiet down and they still didn't listen.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Well, they clearly don't want anyone to ruin their fun.

ELDERLY MAN

I just couldn't imagine making a display like that.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Do you want to say something?

12 MAN

(over his shoulder)

The waitress already tried that.

ELDERLY MAN

Great, now we've got an eavesdropper too.

12 MAN

I didn't mean to eavesdrop, I was just saying-

ELDERLY MAN

She wasn't speaking to you young man.

(to himself)

As if no one has any self-control.

12 MAN

And talking rudely about others falls in that category?

Rita walks up with 12 Man's order.

ELDERLY WOMAN

They're the ones acting out of character.

RITA

Is everything alright here?

12 Man turns back around. Rita sets down his plate.

12 MAN

Wow, that's a bigger portion than I thought it would be.

RITA

(proudly)

Yep, it's one of our finest specials.

12 MAN

Hey, I don't remember seeing a price before I ordered. Can you tell me how much this is gonna cost?

RITA

(recalls)

Um if I'm not mistaken this should be \$43.85.

12 MAN

(astonished)

I'm sorry, how much?

ELDERLY WOMAN

Waitress lady, we'd like to switch tables.

RITA

(to 12 Man)

I hope that's not an issue for you, the meal has already been prepared. Uh, just wait one second okay?

Rita steps over to table 13.

RITA

(sighs deeply)

I cannot switch your table.

ELDERLY MAN

This man was eavesdropping on our conversation, and we still can't get over the volume of that table.

Table 5 notices they're being talked about.

12 MAN
 (to Elderly Man)
 First of all, I was actually trying to help you.
 (to Rita)
 Miss, you recommended this special knowing it was this high a price?

RITA
 (to 12 Man)
 This is one of the most popular dishes we serve.

12 MAN
 (angry)
 It's a \$50 meal. Do you normally take advantage of your customers?

ELDERLY WOMAN
 You haven't taken our order, you haven't listened to our request...

Laughter emerges from table 5.

ELDERLY WOMAN (CONTD)
 (loudly)
 and that table is still loud.

RITA
 (to Elderly Woman)
 I asked them once and-

MAN AT TABLE 5
 Is there another problem here?

ELDERLY MAN
 You all are still talking way too loud.

ANOTHER MAN AT TABLE 5
 We're not bothering anyone, the only people that seem to be concerned are you four.

WOMAN AT TABLE 5
 If we were able to switch tables this wouldn't have been an issue.

ELDERLY MAN

You really can't just quiet down?

RITA

(stressed)

Okay, everyone, we're all causing some noise over here-

12 MAN

(to Rita)

I'd like to send this back.

SOME GUY (O.S.)

How're doin' here folks?

A hand lands on Rita's shoulder. It's the owner of the restaurant, GINO (40s, Italian).

RITA

(sheepishly)

Hi Gino, we're good. We're just dealing with some requests.

ELDERLY MAN

(to Gino)

Excuse me.

GINO

Yes sir?

ELDERLY MAN

We'd like to switch tables, anywhere else but here.

WOMAN AT TABLE 5

As do we.

GINO

(motioning around the room)

As you can see friends we're completely booked tonight so that's not possible.

Everyone looks around to see all the tables filled, also quite surprised that there are other people present.

Elderly Man still throws his hands up.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Well, we have other issues with the tables around us.

INT. DINING ROOM ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A couple walks in completely drenched from the pouring rain outside. The WOMAN holds an umbrella.

WOMAN
 (to the man with her)
 I'm gonna use the restroom.

He nods.

She walks briskly through the dining room and takes a detour through the back hallway.

BACK TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

GINO
 (to Elderly Woman)
 I don't know how to help you, ma'am,
 honestly. We're just here to serve you
 good food.

RITA
 (to Gino)
 I've asked the other table to just be
 more mindful of how loud they're
 being.

GINO
 (shrugs)
 I mean can we all agree that it's
 pretty loud tonight in general? You
 know, it's the weekend, people are
 cheerful.

ELDERLY WOMAN
 But that's not the point-

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM BACK HALLWAY

The WOMAN returns from the bathroom. As she walks she eyes a purse on the ground near a coat rack and swiftly hooks the straps of the purse with the handle of her umbrella.

BACK TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

GINO

I'm sorry what's the point, ma'am?

ELDERLY WOMAN

The point is that everyone needs to be considerate. Yes, it's loud, but I can barely hear my husband talk over that table's laughter. *points to Table 5*

GUY AT TABLE 5

We're at a restaurant. This is a place for social gatherings. *to Elderly Woman* I think you're actually ruining things for yourself because you're so worried about us.

ELDERLY MAN

Christ, all we're asking is that you quiet down.

ANOTHER WOMAN AT TABLE 5

Are you though? Cuz I don't think that's your problem.

GINO

C'mon people let's settle-

12 MAN

to Gino Excuse me, your waitress here convinced me to order a \$50 meal and I no longer want it.

12 Man curtly hands his plate to Gino.

GINO

chuckles To be frank, it's commonplace for restaurants to upsell. But, we'll take it back anyway.

12 MAN

You shouldn't admit that to your customers.

GINO

All due respect, that's the business.

Rita watches these interactions with interest in how nonchalantly Gino is handling them.

INT. DINING ROOM ENTRANCE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

With the purse slung over her shoulder, the WOMAN meets back up with the MAN she came in with.

MAN

(to a random hostess)

You know what, we don't want to wait for a table so, I think we're just gonna try someplace else.

They both in unison swiftly exit through the front doors wasting no time.

EXT. OUTSIDE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

They both dig into the purse and take out the wallet. The WOMAN opens it to reveal a wad of cash and various credit cards.

CLOSE ON: Rita's driver's license.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

12 MAN

That's the business? You do understand I'm paying you right?

RITA

(trying to help)

Well, I think he means that there are certain rules in place for profit.

GINO

Well, it's not like officially a rule-

12 MAN

I don't care, especially when your waitress recommends something very expensive. That's awful.

The Elderly Man and Woman are out of their seats, putting on their coats.

MAN AT TABLE 5

(to himself)

Oh my God seriously?

(to the Elderly couple)

We're being that loud that you have to make a scene and leave?

GINO
 (to the Elderly couple)
 Folks c'mon please take a seat I'm
 sure that we can-

ELDERLY WOMAN
 (ignoring Gino)
 pointing her finger at Table 5
 You're right. My issue wasn't your
 volume or the fact that you all can't
 seem to find your manners.

ELDERLY MAN
 Honey, it's okay, let's go.

ELDERLY WOMAN (CONTD)
 My problem is that someone politely
 asked you to do something, and you
 searched far and wide for a reason not
 to. All I wanted was to be able to
 tell my husband "Happy birthday", and
 have him hear me clearly. But now
 we're leaving his favorite restaurant
 because you people won't think about
 anyone but yourselves.

RITA
 (grasping)
 Have a good night folks.

ELDERLY MAN
 You too, and thank you for trying.

Rita nods in response. The Elderly Man ushers his wife out of
 the restaurant.

GUY AT TABLE 5
 (shrugs)
 How were we supposed to know it was
 his birthday.

12 MAN
 That's not the point.

GUY AT TABLE 5 (CONTD)
 There could be a dozen birthday
 celebrations tonight- what if it was
 my birthday? What, I can't eat and
 laugh?

GINO

Look folks why don't we just put our disagreements aside and resume our evening okay?

(to 12 Man)

Sir, Rita's gonna take your order again and this time she won't play any games okay Rita?

He laughs and pats Rita on the back.

RITA

(trailing off)

I wasn't trying to-

GINO

Okay, nice meeting you all. Gave me some food for thought right? *laughs* So, eat, drink, enjoy the rest of the night!

Gino carelessly walks away. They all watch him.

RITA

(pulling out her notebook)

Alright sir, do you know what you want to order?

She turns around to find 12 Man zipping up his coat.

12 MAN

Uh no, I don't want to order something else. I left cash on the table for the wine.

RITA

Oh, are you sure because I can-

12 MAN

I understand that you guys gotta get paid. But you knew I had enough money to pay for two, and you took advantage of that.

RITA

Sir, I hope you understand. I was just trying to do what I was told.

12 MAN

Have a good night.

He walks out. Rita looks at the cash left on the table. No tip. Her shoulders drop as she sighs.

RITA
(to Table 5)
You guys aren't leaving too, are you?

They all laugh and shake their heads.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Dinner service has ended. Bussers are clearing tables. Rita swipes her tip from Table 5 and walks to the back with Paige.

PAIGE
(yawns)
God, there were so many birthdays tonight.

RITA
Wait, really?

PAIGE
Yeah, we gave out like 10 or 11 slices of cake.

RITA
The only birthday I had left.

PAIGE
Oh really? Everyone else seemed to have a good time.

Rita thinks to herself.

PAIGE (CONT'D)
Oh hey, how'd it go tonight with tips?

Rita shakes her head.

RITA
Not enough.

PAIGE
You just gotta think big picture next time, ya know? Can't be worried about everyone's individual problems.

RITA
I'm not. Just wanna make sure I'm doing the right things that' all-

Paige snores of boredom. She wakes up and shakes Rita by the shoulders.

PAIGE
Happiness, that's it. And since you
won't let anyone help, you better find
a way to make rent. We can't lose you.

They pass Gino's office. Rita stops and knocks on the door.

GINO
Come in.

Rita opens the door and walks in.

RITA
Hey, I just wanted to apologize for
bringing you into that situation. I
had another table leave after that.

GINO
(writing something down)
Don't worry about it. Doesn't matter.
We had other customers waiting so, all
good.

RITA
I'm sure that old man liked this place
for the free cake.

GINO
(still looking down)
Well, he missed out. Right?

Rita looks ahead, thinking.

RITA
Yeah, right.

She begins to walk out.

RITA
Actually Gino, all my tables tonight
had concerns that I didn't really
handle well. Is there something
specific I should do when customers
wanna switch tables or when they're
fighting with each other?

GINO

(finally looks up)

If they want to switch tables Rita then let them. If they're bickering over a \$40 steak in a fine dining restaurant or, whether someone's breathing too damn loud then let them. Restaurants are transactional, social, temporary spaces. People come here to eat and get drunk. It's not that serious, nothing here is. They pay us, and we feed them. And if someone literally can't seem to understand that, or really wants to bring a moral issue to my spot at 8 PM on a Friday night, then they can take that somewhere else. Either way, stop thinking. Just do your job.

Nothing's gonna get through to Gino.

RITA

Okay, thanks.

Rita walks out. Gino begins writing a check.

GINO

(almost to himself)

Sure thing.

EXT. OUTSIDE RESTAURANT - LATE NIGHT

HOLD ON:

Through the restaurant windows, we see Rita at the waiters' coat rack. She puts on her coat, looks down, and freezes. As she scours the area she realizes her purse is gone. She panics, asking everyone around, and receives shrugs and head shakes. Paige helps her look for a while until, Rita throws her head in her hands, hopeless.

FADE OUT.

THE END

Chapter 2: Breaking Down the Script

“It is the thing from which your art, your painting, your dance, your composition, your philosophical treatise, your screenplay is born.”

- Charlie Kaufman

We open on a shot watching the kitchen prep for dinner service while Rita and Paige walk in for their shift. Rita explains to Paige that she is being evicted in three days if she does not come up with her rent money. When Paige offers to spot her and Rita declines, we meet two of the five ethical theories played out in this script. Paige, our utilitarian, offers to spot Rita not entirely because she is kind but because she wants Rita to stay afloat and keep her job. To Paige, if Rita gets evicted, she will go looking for another job that pays better. If this were to happen, there would be one less server, more work for the team, and a not-so-happy work situation for everyone. Offering to help Rita financially is not essential, but it is a solution that can keep everyone happy.¹⁹ Rita, our Kantian, responds declaring, “I can’t have you do that.” Rita cannot allow Paige to spot her rent because she would not universalize this act.²⁰ Looking at this issue on a surface level seems to solve problems rather than cultivate them. Fewer people lose their homes, and money is shared instead of being possessed. Yet Rita is speaking in terms of duties, responsibilities. She understands that by signing a lease, she agrees to satisfy the financial obligations required to live there. She must uphold this agreement, so she begins her shift with an adjusted work ethic. Rita needs to make tips, and though she does not see the value in embellishing for a customer, she does not want to universalize breaking promises either.

¹⁹ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism and the 1868 Speech on Capital Punishment*, trans. by George Sher (Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), pp. 32

²⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by James W. Ellington (Hackett Publishing, 1981), pp. 14-15

After committing to charming whomever she serves, Rita approaches her first table. A man sits there alone, with the apparent expression that someone should be seated with him. Instead of routinely taking his order first, Rita asks how he is doing and gives him time to explain his situation. When the man, known as 12 Man, explains that he was dumped, Rita sterilely acknowledges his disappointment, to which he is grateful. As a contractualist, he appreciates the acknowledgment Rita gives him, as he would give to anyone else in a similar situation. When 12 Man decides to order, Paige swiftly interrupts to convince him to purchase an expensive glass of wine on the menu. As he is appreciative of the extended advice, he accepts her offer. Rita, set in her ways, immediately approaches Paige about the wrongness in upselling, specifically with a person who confided in her and revealed his vulnerability. Kant writes, “Then I immediately become aware that I...can not at all will a universal law to lie. For by such a law there would really be no promises at all, since in vain would my willing future actions be professed to other people who would not believe what I professed...then they would pay me back in like coin” (15). To Rita, upselling treads outside the boundaries of service, her duty. It enters the realm of hidden motives which go untold to customers yet, are still framed to them as caring and personable. Though she needs the money, Rita does not wish to pin that sacrifice upon her customers and lie about her inclinations in what she recommends to them. Yet, Paige, set in her ways, reminds Rita of the benefit of the room as she often does not consider it. Paige’s eyes are set on looking around and seeing smiles while hearing glasses clink and laughs arise from tables. She knows that if she looks up to those kinds of reactions, everyone is happy, the staff gets paid, and the restaurant survives. That being said, when Table 5 pays cash to be seated early, Paige accepts.

Rita approaches the lively Table 5 as they are already deep in conversation discussing death. We hear Guy At Table 5 admit that he is not scared of death and barely thinks of it.²¹ As Rita begins to take their orders, the party requests to sit somewhere else, preferably near the window with the garden view.²² This is expected from our Epicurean hedonists. Knowing this, we can assume that this table's main motive is to enjoy themselves, any pleasures they can attain, their conversations, and their food. The happy life Epicurus speaks of seeking has already been achieved by Table 5, and the story unfolds as their commitment to maintaining it. The pleasure they feel will give insight into the intricacies of a hedonist, but it will also give insight into the flaws of one. Back to the script, Rita declines their offer. Again, permitting these requests are not included in the "rules" of the restaurant, and if it were her choice, she would not allow it either. Her reaction stuns the hedonist table because they see the request as no inconvenience at all. They even argue that the table is empty and topen for anyone to occupy. Rita still will not allow it, figuring that the table won't be empty for long. Despite her efforts to get past this and take drink orders, Guy At Table 5 is not over the exchange. He pushes again for the table with the view, even asserting that "restaurants do this all the time." This instance is the first diversion that this table takes from Epicurean guidelines. Epicurus says, "Again, we regard, independence of outward things as a great good, not so as in all cases to use little, but so as to be contented with little if we have not much..." (Epicurus). The hedonists are already seated at a perfectly intact table. Though their request to switch is not exactly what Epicurus would deem luxurious, the act itself reflects a need for better, *for more*. In their defense, the switch would not cause any inconvenience to those around them; the table waits empty. Achieving this would bring

²¹ <http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/menoec.html> "Accustom yourself to believe that death..."

²² <https://iep.utm.edu/garden/>

happiness so, they seek it out in contempt of the “rules” that Rita mentions.²³ This issue is briefly interrupted by 12 Man, as he notes to Guy At Table 5 that other tables are waiting for service. 12 Man makes this remark for a few reasons. Aside from his emotional state, 12 Man sees Table 5’s actions as selfish and further dislikes their cemented opposition to the rules that she mentions. He says later to her that, “They can’t argue against your reasons, ya know?” These two motives behind his interruption fall in line with his contractualist view. One cannot argue against the notion that it is wrong to keep a waitress who has other tables that equally deserve service. This rings true especially if the waitress mentions rules with which she is expected to behave in line with.²⁴ Considering what we will know of Gino, we can assume that the conduct she speaks of is not terribly binding. Yet still, Tables 5 and 12 are unaware of this. Lastly, underneath his other reasons, 12 Man disagrees with Table 5’s desire-sourced behavior. Scanlon writes, “Desires in this sense include such things as a sense of duty, loyalty, or pride, as well as an interest in pleasure or enjoyment...we should not take ‘desires’ to be a special source of motivation” (37-40). 12 Man firmly believes in reasons and rational standards over appetitive behavior. One might argue that his indulgence in a nice glass of wine or fancy dinner contradicts his own belief. Yet, it is important to distinguish that 12 Man is not using his meal for any source of motivation or leverage to fulfill something else. That being said, at this point, very early on in the script, not only are the hedonists beginning to clash with the Kantian, but they are too clashing with the contractualist. The weight behind this small exchange speaks to the intricacy of the theories that are represented, but also to the productivity dialogue can have when it comes to experimenting with philosophy.

²³ <http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/menoec.html> “So we must exercise...”

²⁴ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 256-267 “Value of Choice”

Moving forward, Paige assigns Rita the third and final table of the story, Table 13. After briefly greeting them, Rita stops to take 12 Man's order. He has one dish in mind, and with slight hesitation, Rita suggests a more expensive one. This shows her internal struggle between being loyal to her philosophy, but making an attempt to solve her financial situation. The more money that Rita can get her tables to spend, the higher the tip she might receive. In a way, one could argue that upselling is her duty, considering that she would never universalize individuals to fail at paying rent. Be all that as it may, Rita utters her suggestion and, to her surprise, 12 Man accepts it. Again, within their exchange here, 12 Man shares his sympathy for the pressure she received from Table 5. To his remark, much in line with her beliefs, Rita acknowledges that she is just doing her job. She returns to Table 13, where we meet the Elderly couple who already seem to have an issue. They point out to Rita that Table 5 is being too loud, to which Rita quickly assures them that in light of restaurant policy, she will address their concern. The Elderly couple, our virtue ethics experts immediately make their mark on the importance of character with the next line. The Elderly Man responds, "Never mind the policy, they should know better." Aristotle's emphasis on an "agent-centered" theory can be further elucidated in Chapter 3 of the textbook, *Ethics for A-Level*, where the term is specifically used. Authors Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher both received their Ph.D. in Philosophy and are currently educators in the field.²⁵ In their discussion of Aristotle, they note, "Aristotelian Virtue Ethics is an agent-centered theory in virtue of a primary focus on people and their characters rather than singular actions...morality has more to do with the question 'how should I be?' rather than 'what should I do?'" (52). Instead of enforcing restaurant policy, or making Table 5 aware of their current behavior, the Elderly Man seeks to clarify that this kind of response should not be necessary. Not far behind the teachings of *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Elderly Man knows that "a given kind of activity

²⁵ <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/639>

produces a corresponding character.” In this brief exchange, he asserts that they should be cultivating a mindset that would advise them against being boisterous and unaware. Since Table 5 shows signs proving otherwise, he begins to understand their ignorance of proper virtues.

Rita, however, still takes on the initiative to make Table 5 aware of their volume. Across the room, Paige clocks Rita seeming to discuss an important issue with Table 5 and approaches learning more. Paige is determined to enforce a good evening for everyone dining and therefore senses that Rita is interfering with her intentions. She checks in with them and learns that Rita has asked the table to quiet down. Paige’s initial response is to acknowledge that the entire dining room is packed and noisy. This line is important to note because Paige is not endorsing the behavior of Table 5. Rather, making a quick observation about the state of the majority, she notes that in fact, everyone is being loud. Even if Paige understands that Rita is simply making a non-burdensome request, she is consistently more aware of the consequences that may arrive from this interaction. This gives insight into how her utilitarian mindset poses both against Rita’s Kantian perspective and the expectations of the virtue ethics table. Dr. Jane Singleton, lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Hertfordshire, writes about this point in her essay, “Virtue Ethics, Kantian Ethics and Consequentialism”. At a certain point, she references that consequentialism often does not answer any questions but ones that inquire “justifying the right option” (qtd. in Singleton 2). Utilitarianism, as a form of consequentialism, falls in this category, focusing on right action. Though, Singleton points out that virtue ethics and Kantian ethics are concerned with the minds behind the action as well.²⁶ Paige anticipates that Rita’s request could embarrass Table 5 and prevent them from being wholly themselves. In her perspective, this could make or break their experience, which she finds more valuable than what Rita deems right or wrong decorum. She strictly says this to Rita when they later speak at the hostess stand. “Think about

²⁶ Jane Singleton, “Virtue Ethics, Kantian Ethics and Consequentialism.” (University of Hertfordshire, 1999), pp. 1

the consequences for once...” she insists, inferring Rita’s need to make rent, and her need to maintain the spirit of the dining room. Rita, slightly flustered moves on from this advice, leaving Paige flustered as well.

The only time we are exposed to interaction without Rita’s presence is in the next few lines of dialogue in the script. This choice was made to briefly leave Kantian ethics out of the picture, and make room for the other theories to communicate. Table 13 is rather bothered at Table 5’s continuous noise, despite being informed of their impact. The Elderly Man and Woman discuss the shame they would feel if they were in that position. Though this a personal conversation, the Elderly couple exposes what might emerge from mishandling their feelings. Instead of turning their feelings into proper disposition, they slip into gossipy moralism. This continues as 12 Man overhears their conversation and reminds them that saying something directly to Table 5 will not bring change. His interruption frustrates the Elderly Man who in response points out 12 Man’s lack of self-control. The Elderly couple from this point on slowly focuses less on their actions, and more on the actions of others. This is pointed out by 12 Man who questions whether the Elderly Man is aware that gossiping signifies a lack of self-control also. Again, as a contractualist, he understands that gossiping has no right to be reasonably acceptable and lacks the air of respect that contractualism requires its participants to have for each other. Understanding the importance of respect in contractualist theory is vital. Rahul Kumar, Professor of Philosophy at Queens University, illuminates this point in his chapter “Contractualism”.²⁷ He claims that Scanlon’s theory contains, “...the hypothetical agreement as the appeal of living in community with others on a basis of mutual respect for one another...” (490). Within 12 Man’s frame of mind, though he considers reasoning, judgments, and others’ intentions as Scanlon would, he always leans on a certain kind of reliability for others to return

²⁷ <http://www.rahulkumar.ca>

civil treatment. As Kumar delineates, contractualism at its core flourishes on that invisible agreement. That being said, 12 Man stands against what the Elderly couple is doing. Not long after, Rita arrives at this altercation with 12 Man's order. As she sets down his plate, he reacts with surprise at the portion of the meal. When Rita reveals the price of the dish to him, he is astonished.²⁸ Rita is unaware that that could have been an issue. She then is interrupted by the Elderly Woman who requests to switch tables. 12 Man feels slighted about his meal, considering that it was more expensive than what he had in mind and that the idea came from Rita herself.²⁹ Having already gone through the rules of switching tables, Rita informs the Elderly couple that she cannot give them what they want. Yet, in response, they claim that Table 5's noise is at an intolerable point. As one can see, the unfortunate adoption of moralism from Table 13 persists and grabs the attention of Table 5. As 12 Man interrogates Rita about taking advantage of her customers, Table 5 joins the conversation, fed up with hearing complaints.

Before our final character approaches, let's look deeper into the state of each theory at this very moment. Rita, honest to her duty, is disappointed by the failure of others to do theirs. Between the responsibilities she faces outside of work, and the responsibilities she is being fed into fulfilling by Paige, committing to her Kantian standards becomes harder to do. She has a moment of weakness, which as mentioned before could be argued otherwise as doing her job, where she recommends an expensive meal to her customer. She knows it is wrong to embellish, yet her late payments sit demanding on her shoulders. Though Kant does not elaborate on the weight of various duties, we can still acknowledge Rita's confusing obligations and understand that practicing philosophy can introduce new propositions. Paige, though not present in the conversation, looms over Rita's conscience and further, over the decisions she makes. Rita

²⁸ Though he ordered the dish, in this case, 12 Man did not know that prime rib is expensive.

²⁹ This initial conflict that 12 Man has will prove to be to him later on, as something in which he cannot reject, despite how crass he might find the act of upselling to be. We will approach this realization later on.

already is apprehensive of how she will respond to 12 Man's issue, even though she knows what Paige would want her to do. As for 12 Man, up until this point, he had no concern with Rita's actions. He even took it upon himself to inform her that he understood the rules she uses as reasoning and empathized with her in the process. His interactions with Table 13 are brief, but point out his dislike of the Elderly couple's display of moralism, thinking that not only is their gossiping wrong but that they lack an awareness of others' ability to possess their own reasoning. Of course, in a theory like contractualism, one should not only pay attention to how they treat others but understand that people have their ways of thinking about life. Kumar discusses this as well when he says, "Respect for the value of others, then, requires that individuals be sensitive, in their practical thinking, to others' reasons for wanting, caring about, and pursuing certain things" (492). As mentioned before, 12 Man's contract is violated from the beginning by his ex-girlfriend who never appears in the story. He reels from this throughout the entire script, and it gases his annoyance with the respect he does not receive from the people around him. As for Table 5, besides their loss on switching tables, they remain unbothered with anyone until this point. They paid to be seated early and enjoyed a lively conversation with food and drinks. And after hearing complaints about their behavior for some time, displeased, they finally take the bait and enter the conversation. Now, when all the thinkers collide, a person who could care the least about contemplating approaches.

Gino approaches, placing his hand on the shoulder of our overwhelmed Rita. Wasting no time, the Elderly Man requests to switch tables. He is cognizant that Rita expressed that cannot happen, and he is fully aware that he is going over her head. One would argue that his actions are unfair but, consider that the Elderly Man is experiencing what Aristotle would call "conflicting obligations" (248). As much as the Elderly Man knows that he must reflect appropriate behavior

to the strangers around him while acting virtuously, he also feels an obligation to make his wife happy. Before Gino's arrival, she too complained and showed disappointment in the back and forth that took place between everyone. Aware of this, the Elderly Man finds his obligation to his wife more important and makes a last-ditch effort to give her what she wants. Unfortunately, the weight behind his desperate request renders unimportant as Gino gazes around and responds, "As you can see friends we're completely booked tonight so that's not possible." This is the first example that shows Gino's opposition to think deeply about any problem he encounters. He gives a similar response when the Elderly Woman mentions that they have other matters to discuss. Yet, paying attention to the beginning of this exchange can be difficult because, at the same time, our attention is drawn to an unknown couple entering the restaurant. These two characters are known as Man and Woman, and when Woman tells Man that she is going to use the restroom, she leaves accordingly.

Returning to our tables, Gino steers clear of conflict confessing that he does not know how to help. He also responds to Rita's comment with a remark about the entire restaurant's volume. When Bertrand Russell speaks of the "practical" man, he mentions the "private life" that this kind of person lives, apart from the rest of the world.³⁰ With this in mind, it is easy to see this notion in Gino's behavior. He shows no motivation to solve the issues that have been brought up to him, almost like most owners of restaurants who only thrive on positive feedback. This nods to the materialistic wants of the "practical" man, over the intellectual needs that he fails to accumulate. The Elderly Woman dislikes his matter-of-fact response claiming that he is missing the point. To her, in tune with Aristotle's proper dispositions, the height in volume means that everyone should have been considerate from the beginning, not that everyone should brainlessly

³⁰ <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5827/5827-h/5827-h.htm#link2HCH0015>

talk louder.³¹ This is not to say that she has been entirely considerate and disposing of appropriate attitude, but her mindset will always rest in these principles. We meet up with Woman at the back of the restaurant as she exits the bathroom. Making her way to the front, she uses the hook from her umbrella to grab a purse from the ground near a coat rack. Then, Guy At Table 5 explains that restaurants are social places. He goes further, asserting that the Elderly couple would be having a better time if they were not so concerned with the actions of others. It is known that Epicurus stresses the importance of seeking the correct pleasures and avoiding “groundless” desires.³² In this case, Guy At Table 5 finds the Elderly couple’s persistence to control the actions of others as something “groundless” or imprudent. This baffles the Elderly Man who cannot believe that their simple request has become this complicated. Woman At Table 5 catches onto her cohort’s point and goes even further in picking at the root of the situation. Does the Elderly couple *just* want Table 5 to quiet down? Or, has it at this point become something more? We can sense that the latter is true, considering we have heard the Elderly couple make remarks on more than just Table 5’s volume. During this, Gino, realizing he is getting caught up in more than what he prefers, asks the diners to settle down. Yet, as we know, Table 5 and 13 are not the only patrons present. 12 Man gives his plate to Gino claiming he will not eat a dish that was more expensive than he wanted. Gino finds this funny, telling 12 Man that he could encounter upselling anywhere, in that it is commonplace for restaurants to do this. However, he agrees to take 12 Man’s plate back. Our focus changes to the mysterious couple again as Woman slings the purse over her shoulder and meets back up with Man at the front. As if on queue, Man tells the hostess that the restaurant is too crowded and that they will dine

³¹ Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher, *Ethics for A-Level* (Open Book Publications, 2017), pp. 52-53

³² <http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/menoec.html>

somewhere else. They leave the restaurant with the purse, which we find out seconds later, belongs to Rita.

Rita, unaware of this, remains involved in the conversation as she watches her boss handle their patrons with an air of indifference. She is surprised by this and his forgetfulness in mentioning any restaurant policies or rules throughout the night. She even tries to bring it up to assist him until he denies her comment. 12 Man is shocked by Gino's response to his complaint, offended that upselling happens often and that he would admit it so callously to customers that pay the price of business' shortcuts. Within this moment, the Elderly couple gets up from their table to leave. Table 5 is surprised at this, feeling that the Elderly couple is blowing the evening far out of proportion and further ruining their own sought for pleasure. However, the Elderly couple thinks differently. They have improperly invested their time into wrongly controlling these strangers and are decidedly removing themselves from the situation. Aristotle might identify their attitudes throughout the night as a display of "moral weakness".³³ Yet, he also speaks on how difficult it is to be a good person and the importance of responding to one's misactions. About achieving the Golden Mean, he writes, "...we must watch the errors which have the greatest attraction for us personally...We must then draw ourselves away in the opposite direction, for by pulling away from our error we shall reach the middle" (50). Then, he comments, "But this is no doubt difficult, especially when particular cases are concerned. For it is not easy to determine in what manner, with what person, on what occasion, and for how long a time one ought to be angry" (51). The Elderly couple judged the small actions of others knowing that character is not defined by peculiar moments. They got caught up and lost their way of right action. Watching their exit from the story, one might think that their representation of virtue ethics speaks little of the theory or even discloses it as something feeble in the face of

³³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Martin Oswald (Library of Liberal Arts, 1999), pp. 180-188

situationism. On the contrary, the Elderly couple's behavior put on a strong display if not of virtue ethics, then of love for virtue ethics. This can be seen especially in the Elderly Woman's last few words in which she addresses the real issue that was picked at earlier, responding that Woman At Table 5 was right. Their loudness became the least important problem once it was understood that they could care less about how other people felt. Whether Aristotle would approve of the Elderly Woman's finger-pointing or not, he could never deny that her and her husband's aims were always pointed towards the good.³⁴ They wanted the people around them to care about character and virtuosity as much as they did, and if that happened to come out in a passionate matter, then so be it. Though they have not achieved the mean, their sights are set on it. That being said, when they exit, they thank Rita for her generosity. Even if she acts from obligation, they appreciate that she tried to help.

Table 5's response though slightly insensitive, asks a good question. Must we sacrifice to maintain happiness or in Epicurus' perspective, pleasure? Should they have to feel responsible for the Elderly couple's early exit even though they disagreed with their groundless desires? Ryan J. Johnson, author and associate Professor of Philosophy at Elon University, dedicates a chapter of his book, *The Deleuze-Lucretius Encounter*, to Epicurus and his beloved garden. In this chapter, he reveals, "One must practice the thing that produces happiness'...The place for such practice is the Garden...For the Garden is a distinct affective community in which relations are selected that increase one's capacities for living a pleasant and happy life...The Garden is a plane of relations among friends, on which affects of pleasure are transmitted" (229). In this case, though a garden resides outside the restaurant windows, the "Garden" Johnson discusses begins and ends at the four corners of Table 5. It is understood that Table 5 consists of a group of people who agree on valuing pleasure, but the questions mentioned earlier, however, arise from

³⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Martin Oswald (Library of Liberal Arts, 1999), pp. 3

their realization of life outside the Garden. So, what *is* life like outside of the Garden? And, does the pleasure-chasing aspect of hedonists have any impact on the people who reside there? From the beginning, we knew that the hedonists were there to nourish themselves physically and mentally, and they did throughout the script, minding their business in the process. Our contractualist sees the issue with a more empathetic tone, as he claims Guy At Table 5 is being ignorant of what matters. To this, Gino laughs, half-heartedly blames Rita for getting him into this mess, and comedically swallows the “food for thought” on his way out. Leaving in the unproductive fashion in which he came, he wishes everyone a great night, as long as they eat, drink and pay his bills.

Rita turns around to find 12 Man leaving also. After paying for his wine, he leaves, making an important distinction and a final note for his theory. He admits he has overcome the “that’s business” excuse from Gino and cannot reasonably reject that at the end of the day, restaurants have to make money. Upselling may be a principle that he wished he did not know about, but it is one he can accept. What he cannot accept, however, is Rita’s usage of intention. Scanlon writes about the influence intention has on reasoning.³⁵ He explains that one can feel as if their reasoning to complete an activity is stronger than other alternatives because they have stronger intentions associated with that activity. 12 Man is no longer bothered by how expensive the dinner was. His problem was that Rita reasoned recommending the dish with a selfish intention. He never knew what her intention was specifically, yet he knew that she programmed he brought money for two dinners. Though he was alone, she still tried to convince him to pay that amount, for her benefit. Scanlon’s contractualism does not flourish based on well-being, including the emotional state 12 Man originally brought to the story. Instead, Scanlon emphasizes the importance of moral judgment, which stands as the only qualifier someone could

³⁵ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 45-47

use to reasonably reject a situation.³⁶ The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy assists in explaining this. It says, “However, the fact that a principle impacts negatively on me is not *sufficient*. To know whether I can reasonably reject the principle, I must ask how it impacts others. If a principle imposes a certain burden (*b1*) on me, but every alternative imposes a greater burden (*b2*) on someone else, then *b1* does not give me a reason to reject the principle” (Ashford, Mulgan). If 12 Man upholds his rejection and leaves, there are no alternatives that would not impose anyone greater than what he has encountered. To this, we could immediately think of Rita and her need for tips. Yet, we must remember we are in a restaurant where other diners are waiting to sit at his table and tip Rita themselves. What 12 Man rejects is more important to him and his desire to prevent this from happening to anyone else than tipping Rita. This point speaks to how contractualism differs from utilitarianism or hedonism. It considers the accommodations of others, which also nods to why 12 Man holds such an empathetic tone throughout the entire story. Even if Rita was trying to follow instructions in making more money, her aims do not have the consequentialist and social lens that 12 Man’s does. This is not to say that either of them was exactly right or wrong. Determining which theory has the best ethical prowess has never been the aim of this project. To put it simply, this goodbye between our Kantian and our contractualist again actualizes these theories in an entertaining, inquisitive, and informative manner.

We are reaching the end, as dinner service has wrapped, and we are focusing back on our main two characters. They discuss the night, as Paige expectedly ruminates over the wonderful time her patrons had. When she asks about tips, we learn that unfortunately, Rita has not made enough. Paige’s advice is to try harder next time, worrying less about specific instructions and more about delivering happiness. She nearly shakes Rita in an attempt to get this through her categorical imperative head and demands her to find a way to keep her apartment. Paige and

³⁶ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 213-214

Table 5's exits are swift ones, but happen that way similar reasons. These two theories out of all five go through the least amount of damage. This is not making any claim that they possess more strength but instead, this says something about theories unlike Scanlon's, that prosper on well-being. Can theories that search for pleasure or maximization of happiness come off more composed when experimented with within social settings? Were the emphases on healthy conversation from Epicurus or Mill's "prevention of unhappiness" setting them above the other theories to thrive in such a lively setting? Despite the individual drive hedonism has unlike Mill's encouragement to contribute to society's contented state, it is again the focus on *well-being* that does not conclude anything definite about these ethical theories but does speak to how they played out in this script.

Rita stops by Gino's office to first apologize for involving him in the situation. She viewed taking care of her tables as her duty, and if Gino felt the need to come over, then she concluded she was not doing her job to the best of her ability. Secondly, she asks one question. Rita wants to know if there are practices set in place to deal with argumentative customers. This is who she is, on beat with what guides her, and makes sense considering that what she encountered throughout the night brought her anything but rent money. In his response, Gino rarely shares a piece of his mind. Gino tells Rita that the only thing she needs to do is her job. She thinks too much in his opinion, which alludes to what he thought of her three tables as well. Gino sees no restaurant as a place that deems judgment of right and wrong action. People arrive for him to serve, and in exchange they pay him. There is nothing more to explain than these simple facts, and Gino is even amused at the fact that someone would care to spend their Friday night arguing about morality. He delivers a missable but intensely important line, "Either way, stop thinking." And to Rita, she concludes after he says this, that she will never see eye to eye

with him. Almost as if it were called upon by his ignorance, ethics entered Gino's restaurant and left with Rita's purse. And we watch from outside, as we can picture her realizing the worst and further, thinking of how she will deal with what she has lost.

Chapter 3: Critical Response: Why Ethics?

“Here, also in the center of the kingdom is the realm of Morals or Ethics; again a region arid with academic abstractions, but in some ways the richest of the mansions of philosophy...Of what good is goodness, and what right is there in power?...Is pleasure the aim of life?...Here if anywhere are vital questions, in which entire civilizations may find their fate involved; here are dilemmas that touch every state and every heart...”

- Will Durant, *The Pleasures of Philosophy*

In the process of writing *Dinner Service*, a lot of focus went into developing the story and intricately involving philosophy while trying to stay argumentatively strong. Attempting to strike a balance between translating the theories chosen in the clearest sense, while twisting them creatively was hard. So, I had to be methodical in the topic of philosophy that I would use to fuel the story. One may question why I chose the subject of ethics and these theories themselves. Again, this decision was not loosely made as quite a few reasons went into this crucial part of the project. I had to consider what theories would allow me to tell a good story, what theories I could condense into 22 pages, and what theories I was passionate about and understanding of. To summarize as of now, first, I chose ethics as the subject of my story because the art of storytelling and further screenwriting themselves, are inherently ethical. Second, I chose these specific five theories because they have been grouped and pitted against each other in scholarly work. This helped to find a throughline between them all and allowed a seamless transition to the script. Third, aside from their closeness to each other, they each have a kind of palatability. This means that they deal with subject matters with which anyone could empathize, and their written structure contains activeness that does not trap the words to the page. These theories were written with the intention of being useful, and *Dinner Service* accepts the challenge in applying them to

reality. Lastly, these five theories have malleable nature that granted me the ability to challenge their flaws and cultivate my voice in the story. This kind of flexibility will be explained later but arises from the structures and contents of the original texts.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHICS, SCREENWRITING, AND STORY

Ethics has always been my favorite branch of philosophy. Questions of right versus wrong, how to live, seeking happiness, building character, and moral obligation intrigue me and even speak towards why I have found a home in storytelling. Ethics is embedded in storytelling if one looks at the point of telling stories. They are intuitively meant to be told to an audience. Forms of literature, including screenwriting, utilize the power of story to teach lessons that give us a peek at how to live better lives. Daniel Taylor, a published American writer, passionately writes about this topic in his essay, “The Ethical Implications of Storytelling”. He reveals:

Part of literature’s ethical value is that it preserves human experience for contemplation and evaluation. It snares fleeting human reality in characters, actions...giving us the opportunity to sift, judge, reflect, evaluate, laugh about, cry over, and all the other things we are prone to do with our experience...Stories tell us who we are...And who we are unavoidably raises the host of ethical questions about how we should live. (Taylor)

Understanding that stories mirror our experiences, have the power to evoke emotions, and overall preach lessons about what we should do better in the real world, Taylor exceedingly proves the presence of ethics in storytelling. When it comes to certain forms of storytelling, screenwriting is a powerful one that acutely focuses on ethics in action: decision-making. What moves a screenplay forward is the dialogue and action meaning, what characters communicate, how they think, and what they choose to do. Though I did not use this writing tool in *Dinner*

Service, discussing “The Hero’s Journey”, a very important concept for screenwriters to use in their scripts, also helps emphasize the embedded importance of ethics through decisions in screenwriting. In her chapter “Writing for Film” from *The Handbook of Creative Writing* that discusses the various fields of writing in entertainment, Bonnie O’Neill takes time to clarify what “The Hero’s Journey” is. She lists the various phases that exist within the concept, writing, “Set-Up...Turning Point... Point of No Return...Lost Hope... The Heroic Effect...and Climax” (296-300). Each one of these steps contains a point in the story where the hero, the main character, must decide in light of a conflict or personal barrier that challenges their sense of ethics. Looking at *Dinner Service*, Rita is the closest depiction of our story’s hero, being that her issues are what ignites the story, and her consistent decisions keep it going. Again, this writing tool was not intentionally used in *Dinner Service*, yet it serves as an example to support the closeness between ethics and screenwriting. Due to their similarities, choosing ethics among other fields of philosophy became the obvious beneficial choice. Threading the subject into the story allowed it to continue feeling like a story, which was important because *Dinner Service* is a short screenplay. Within the small number of pages given to tell the story, there is no time for background or major exposition. With ethics feeling as intuitive as it did in the script, I confidently narrowed my focus into to choosing theories.

RELATIVES

Aside from needing to condense, these theories are a few of the most popular in the realm of ethics. Plenty of studies have been devoted to them individually and together in comparison.³⁷

Aside from Aristotle and Epicurus, Scanlon, Kant, Mill took time in their writings to mention

³⁷ Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher, *Ethics for A-Level* (Open Book Publications, 2017) pp. 11, 61, 184-192, 211-213, John D O’Connor, *New Blackfriars* (Wiley Publications, 2006) pp. 239-252, http://pitt.edu/~mthomps/readings/scanlon_contractualism.pdf

how their theory either relates or opposes another of the five. Scanlon even writes about three of the four other theories in *What We Owe to Each Other*.³⁸ This notion play a profound part in choosing these theories for two reasons. If contrasts and comparisons can be found in the original texts, then I could write the characters with confidence in knowing that the conflicts or connections that I position between them are real. For example, in *Utilitarianism*, Mill makes a distinction about the kind of happiness he finds possible to achieve. In his explanation, he alludes to hedonism when he says, "...the philosophers who have taught that happiness is the end of life were as fully aware as those who taunt them. The happiness which they meant was not a life of rapture, but moments of such, in an existence made up of few...many and various pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive" (13). This point was valued in writing Paige and her reactions to the behavior of Table 5. Not only are the two theories aware of the negativity they receive in their quest for happiness, but they are aware that the happiness they want is valuable, which makes their search worth it. Paige and Table 5 both like to keep a present mindset, which explains why they find dinner conversations or being instinctually serviceable important. In this case, Mill's writing gave me assurance in that they would connect, and allowed me to understand why others would disagree with them. Getting these brief glimpses in the original texts speaks to the assistance it gave my translations of these theories, only strengthening my reasoning in choosing them in the first place.

PALATABILITY

Yet, going back on the note of structure, these theories among the many that I have studied, appeared to have the most palatable foundations. Firstly, this means that the subject matter of all these theories focuses on how we should act and treat one another. This is a topic

³⁸ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 53, 152-154, 136-137

that anyone would invest. Especially in writing a script with characters that an audience *should* empathize with, I wanted to fill them with traits that make them appealing but flawed in a way that shows their humanity. Utilizing these theories assured me that they would not only make my characters come off as human but that the story itself would be seen as relatable. Secondly, this is also meant in the sense that despite however complex they might be, the structure in which they are written appeals to the decision-making framework of a screenplay. As mentioned before, these philosophers did not pose these theories to settle in the mind forever. When Aristotle says that we should turn away from our pleasures and impulses, one can put that into practice.³⁹ When Kant writes one of his most famous lines about acting only upon rules that we would find permissible for anyone to follow, one can put that into practice.⁴⁰ When Scanlon gives us an exercise by saying “consider”, or when Epicurus advises that death is meaningless, or when Mill insists that we should be benevolent spectators, one can put that into practice.⁴¹ There is an essence of activeness and guidance within these texts that feels as if we should not only think about them but follow their direction in our own lives. In consideration of this, my personal response was to exercise them in a screenplay.

MALLEABILITY: CHALLENGING THEORIES AND CULTIVATING A VOICE

The final reason that motivated my choice in selecting these theories was their malleability. I wanted to work with material that I could challenge and attempt to break down. In order to do that, I needed sources that were flawed. There is no denying that these theories stand alone as some of the greatest philosophical works to date, yet none of them are perfect either.

³⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Martin Oswald (Library of Liberal Arts, 1999), pp. 50

⁴⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by James W. Ellington (Hackett Publishing, 1981), pp. 30

⁴¹ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 235, Epicurus and, *Letter to Menoeceus*, trans. by Robert Drew Hicks (The Internet Classics Archive), J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism and the 1868 Speech on Capital Punishment*, trans. by George Sher (Hackett Publishing, 2001), pp. 17

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy points this out in their entries of each theory. For contractualism, they look at “problem cases” and ask whether the theory is circular or too tidy.⁴² On their page for hedonism, they list a couple of objections to the theory as well.⁴³ This point should not encourage us to dwell on their flaws but instead understand that they leave room for interpretation. As a writer, I can work my way through their structures posing my questions in the script. This benefits the audience as well, being that they can read the script and witness the unstableness of the theories and form their own opinion about what is right and wrong. Earlier in this essay, I pointed out Boon’s description of the role audiences play when encountering an ethical screenplay like David Mamet’s. The room for interpretation or, room to grow that these theories have allow the audience to be participatory in that triangular dialogue. As the story evolves they can evolve right with it, and as the story ends they can adopt newly formed thoughts and opinions. Unlike applied ethics that is driven to answer real-world questions, the imperfect or rhetorical aspect of normative ethics, if you will, aligns easier with fiction. It is subject to criticism and in that way feels approachable and entertaining. Again, not only does it give the audience a clear path to agree or disagree with what transpires on-screen, but because of its malleability, it gives the writer an ability to play with its structures and guidelines and tell the story that they want to tell.

When it comes to screenwriting, the involvement of ethics is one of the best ways to engage with your audience. The purpose of *Dinner Service*, in the simplest sense, is to encourage reflection and philosophical discourse, based on what unfolds from scene to scene. Wanting to write a story that could have this impact meant that I needed to be very passionate about the material I was handling. Memories of reading *Nicomachean Ethics* for the first time not only

⁴² <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractualism/#ConCirRed>

⁴³ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hedonism/#OthArgAgaEthHed>

made me nostalgic about how long I have been studying philosophy, but they reminded me of why I desired to study the subject in the first place. Moving past ethics and choosing these theories had its structural, practical, and argumentative benefits. Still, at the end of the day, I intensely admire these works. They are extremely high-shooting and optimistic about the potential we have as humans living among one another. In that way, perhaps they are flawed or feel distant to apply to our complicated realities yet, that only means they are imperfect as we are. From this, we must recognize the adamant faith these texts have in us. It is only right to pay our respects to them by writing stories or taking their guidelines to the streets and in an attempt to live better and hope for better.

Conclusion

“A moral philosophy should be inhabited.”

- Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*

I knew I wanted to major in philosophy when I would make time to read Plato's *Republic* between homework and volleyball practices. My high school had one copy, that had not been checked out for years before I got ahold of it. The book was riddled with dust, yet the spine was completely fresh, unworn. At that time, I did not know that philosophy was really anything, let alone a subject. Hearing the term in my British Literature class for the first time left me unphased as if it were any meaningless word. It was to me, as Wittgenstein says, a “something about which nothing could be said” that was as good as nothing.⁴⁴ Once I became familiar with the various branches of the subject and people associated with it, I felt confused as to why no one was talking about it. Why it was never offered as a class at my school, like sociology or U.S. history. Truth, justice, reason, beauty, virtue. These qualities that drive what we make of the world, are being discussed at length in this field yet, somehow fall to the deaf ears of most of us. I have always felt that my studies these past four years have weathered that same dust of bookshelves as if I were uncovering some lost artifact. Behind my frustration in the lack of attention this subject received, I always treasured that I turned and listened. In the little advancements, I have grown in my writing and communication. I have found comfort in playing the role of a skeptic. I have mentally made myself at home within the walls of the most troublesome issues ever presented to humanity. I have been acquired all of these skills with the assistance of deep discourse and

⁴⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein and G.E.M Anscombe, *Philosophical Investigations* (Basil Blackwell, 1958), sec. 304, pp.102

numerous texts. Yet, more than anything, as our world continues to reveal itself as a place far more strange, violent, and selfish than we might have ever expected it to be, I receive these realizations mentally prepared with wise references. I do not shy away from navigating a conversation about the intersectionality of minorities when it comes to instances of racism, hate crime, and police brutality. I welcome those who wish to learn how to unlearn a harmful bias or those who want to discuss distributive justice in light of these past two years. My exploration of this ancient subject feels valuable always, but especially in these events which are becoming increasingly frequent.

The ending of *Dinner Service* can come across with many messages. Perhaps one looks at how each theory ended and concludes that ethics is unstable. Maybe one person might feel sympathetic for the Elderly Man and his disappointing birthday, while another could claim the story as unimportant with issues that do not hold any substance. Stories can often come across this way, as the audience takes various pieces of information with them and denies others. No matter what one makes of *Dinner Service*, framed in their favor, the story will always have two intended purposes.

From the moment that the unnamed couple enters the restaurant, the philosophical aspect of the script takes a different form. We are not discussing matters of noise or mere seating preferences. This couple introduces a level of consequence that goes completely unnoticed by anyone in the dining room. When Gino informs Rita that restaurants are not ethical places, we understand that he is sorely mistaken. *Dinner Service* proves that there are no ethical boundaries where there is human interaction. While Gino is correct that a restaurant may be a temporary place of companionship and celebration, in the blink of an eye, we can see that questions of right and wrong can creep into any space, at any time. That being said, we must understand when we

encounter someone like Gino or even when we have become someone like Gino and realize what the “practical” man lacks. Russell writes, “The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a man the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects rouse no questions...” (Russell). We must fear people like Gino, the people who prefer their private worlds, the people to whom ethics is foreign, the people who write checks while their employee gets robbed. Knowing Gino, not only can we conclude that Rita was never able to pay her rent, but we can also conclude that Gino most likely took no part in helping her overcome this setback. *Dinner Service* shakes us, as Paige does Rita often, and tells us that philosophy matters. It prepares us as it has me to overcome life’s obstacles while contemplating we encounter them in the first place. It nourishes our knowledge and serves as the only worthy compass we have to be good human beings. Though reading original philosophical text awakened this realization in me, it may not do that for everyone. Opportunity comes to seek other platforms, like screenwriting and filmmaking, and through this, by chance, someone has their own realization.

This leads to the second intention of *Dinner Service*, which further prevails as the entire argument of the project. If anything obvious could be construed from these pages it is that screenwriting is an effective vehicle for actualizing philosophy. To welcome Wittgenstein back to the conversation, he pressed readers to understand the importance of the meaning behind our words. He viewed the best way to understand language was through practice, being that it would bring about ways of usage, intention, and clarification. If words can have different meanings, sentences, arguments, and in our case, philosophical texts can crumble into worthlessness. In his

view, to actualize philosophy in any way, is to learn the subject correctly. And as far as screenwriting, *Dinner Service* does not stand alone. Films like *The Matrix*, *My Dinner with Andre*, *Waking Life*, and others exist as tangible examples yet, have not made enough noise. Within writing dialogue, complicated speculations can be communicated through personable and informal language, while newfound questions can surface about those speculations. For example, Rita's conflicting duties made us inquire about what Kant would say about prioritization or values of different needs. Table 5 brought a few new questions, referencing the potential differences in behavior between chasing pleasure and experiencing it. Plus, their unapologetic response to the Elderly couple's exit, brings up the concept of sacrifice and consequence in the face of maintaining happiness. We also saw an example of how treacherous the path towards the Golden Mean is, even for two people who idolize the journey. Using screenwriting won't be as educational as the original texts, but it will serve as a vital device in grasping philosophy, in a way that is entertaining, empathetic, and highly accessible.

This past academic year has been unlike anything I imagined it would be. I spent half of it working in the basement of my childhood home and the other half at school distanced from my peers. Between the newly adopted pandemic reality, the tumultuous election, and the nationwide court cases that hold nightly riots in their hands, it has not been easy to fully grasp that I am on the brink of closing a chapter. One reason I think I often forget that immensely adds to why I study philosophy and why I chose this topic is that I have never had the luxury to think for fun. The woman that I am, the way that I look, the household I grew up in, the obstacles I face, I have always had to think to solve. Whether that is for personal issues, issues presented to my family, or issues that bombard my community every day, my mind has never solely belonged to me, for watching wax burn, nor should it. Russell as we know, already advised against private worlds.

As a first-generation college student, I think of my grandfather who did not make it past sixth grade or my grandmother who picked tobacco in hopeless fields. I feel as if I should study philosophy, something so intellectually profound, not to just enjoy it, but to do something with it. I may be passionate about the subject, but I care more about what it could do. The minds it could spark, the points of pain and divide it could attempt to treat. Film movements are growing as we speak that center on political and philosophical topics, and show stories of people who often go unheard. I look forward to being a part of this, even if I only write one film that fails to succeed, but impacts a theater room of a few individuals. I can at least give it to my relatives, my people, who are too not afforded mental luxuries, and say that I understand, I hear them, and I am trying to do this for them. I think of all this as I sit at my own booth in Gino's restaurant, trying to comprehend everything I have been taught, and hoping that when I receive my check and graduate, that I will be able to pass it on.

Bibliography

10 Screenwriting Secrets from Charlie Kaufman - ScreenCraft.

<https://screencraft.org/2017/07/13/10-screenwriting-secrets-charlie-kaufman/>. Accessed 30 April 2021.

A Glossary Of Screenwriting Terms & Filmmaking Definitions.

<http://www.movieoutline.com/articles/a-glossary-of-screenwriting-terms-and-filmmaking-definitions.html>. Accessed 7 December 2020.

“Aristotle.” *Biography*, <https://www.biography.com/scholar/aristotle>. Accessed 28 April 2021.

Aristotle - the Golden Mean. <http://faculty.bucks.edu/rogerst/jour275morals.htm>. Accessed 28 April 2021.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Martin Oswald, Prentice Hall, 1999.

Ashford, Elizabeth, and Tim Mulgan. “Contractualism.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/contractualism/>.

Boon, Kevin Alexander, and David Mamet. “Ethics and Capitalism in the Screenplays of David Mamet.” *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 3, Salisbury University, 2011, pp. 174–89.

“David Mamet.” *IMDb*, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000519/>. Accessed 29 April 2021.

Dimmock, Mark, and Andrew Fisher. “Aristotelian Virtue Ethics.” *Ethics for A-Level*, 1st ed., Open Book Publishers, 2017, pp. 49–63. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wc7r6j.7>.

“Stealing.” *Ethics for A-Level*, 1st ed., Open Book Publishers, 2017, pp. 183–97. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wc7r6j.15>.

“Telling Lies.” *Ethics for A-Level*, 1st ed., Open Book Publishers, 2017, pp. 209–17. *JSTOR*,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wc7r6j.17>.

“Utilitarianism.” *Ethics for A-Level*, 1st ed., Open Book Publishers, 2017, pp. 11–29.

JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wc7r6j.5>.

Driver, Julia. “The History of Utilitarianism.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2014, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford

University, 2014. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/utilitarianism-history/>.

Epicurus | Greek Philosopher | Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Epicurus>.

Accessed 28 April 2021.

Ethics for A-Level - Open Book Publishers.

<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/639>. Accessed 2 March 2021.

Garden of Epicurus, The | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://iep.utm.edu/garden/>.

Accessed 27 April 2021.

Irvine, Andrew David. “Bertrand Russell.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited

by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2021, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University,

2021. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/russell/>.

- Johnson, Ryan. "Ethics in the Garden of Epicurus." *The Deleuze-Lucretius Encounter*, Edinburgh University Press, 2017, pp. 210-255. *JSTOR*, https://www-jstor-org.ezprox.bard.edu/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g050ch.10#metadata_info_t ab_contents.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals with On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns*. Translated by James W. Ellington, 3rd ed., Hackett Publishing Company Inc.
- "Kevin Alexander Boon." *IMDb*, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm4720830/bio>. Accessed 29 April 2021.
- Kumar, Rahul. "Contractualism." *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 1st ed., Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013. <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/campuspress.yale.edu/dist/a/2423/files/2018/03/Kumar-Contractualism-2e7ywg2.pdf>. Accessed 30 April 2021.
- Macleod, Christopher. "John Stuart Mill." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2020, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/mill/>.
- Memento - Movie Quotes - Rotten Tomatoes*. <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/memento/quotes/>. Accessed 2 May 2021.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism and the 1868 Speech on Capital Punishment*. Translated by George Sher, 2nd ed., Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2001.
- Moore, Andrew. "Hedonism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2019, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019. *Stanford*

Encyclopedia of Philosophy,

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/hedonism/>.

Murdoch, Iris. *The Sovereignty of Good*. New York, Schocken Books, 1971. *Internet*

Archive, <http://archive.org/details/sovereigntyofgoo00murd>.

O'Connor, John D. "Are Virtue Ethics and Kantian Ethics Really so Very Different?" *New Blackfriars*, vol. 87, no. 1009, Wiley, 2006, pp. 238–52.

O'Neill, Bonnie. "Writing for Film." *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, edited by Steven Earnshaw, NED-New edition, 2, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, pp. 293–302.

JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09x8s.33>.

"Rahul Kumar." Rahul Kumar, <http://www.rahulkumar.ca>. Accessed 30 April 2021.

Rohlf, Michael. "Immanuel Kant." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2020, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/kant/>.

Scanlon, T. M. *What We Owe to Each Other*. Harvard University Press, 1998.

"Screenwriting." *Educalingo*,

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1H6OXMyAdDfrMjex_j-gPVswTubzKGE7Vgl](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1H6OXMyAdDfrMjex_j-gPVswTubzKGE7VglNbanhzWU/edit)

[NbanhzWU/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1H6OXMyAdDfrMjex_j-gPVswTubzKGE7VglNbanhzWU/edit). Accessed 2 May 2021

Singleton, Jane. *Virtue Ethics, Kantian Ethics, and Consequentialism*. University of Hertfordshire, Sept. 1999,

<https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/1152/103504.pdf?sequence=1>.

Social Contract Theory | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/>.

Accessed 30 April 2021.

The Ethical Implications Of Storytelling.

<http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr03/story1.html>. Accessed 15 April 2021.

The Internet Classics Archive | Letter to Menoeceus by Epicurus.

<http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/menoec.html>. Accessed 18 April 2021.

The Problems of Philosophy, by Bertrand Russell.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5827/5827-h/5827-h.htm#link2HCH0015>. Accessed 20

April 2021.

Will Durant. *The Pleasures Of Philosophy*. 1929. *Internet Archive*,

<http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.101166>.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Basil Blackwell, 1968.