

Ethical Dilemmas and Modern Philosophical Concepts in British and American Film and Drama

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Abstract: With the progress and development of the thought of the times, a large number of excellent works have emerged in British and American film and television dramas. Based on the interaction between ethical dilemma narratives and modern philosophical concepts in British and American TV dramas, this paper analyzes the classic works and reveals how TV dramas present ethical issues with the help of philosophical discourse through audiovisual language, narrative structure and ethical representation mechanism. The study finds that film and television dramas use a variety of techniques to visualize abstract ethical issues, forming a unique field of moral dialogue, and triggering public reflection on issues such as race, gender, and science and technology through artistic narratives, as well as adjusting the direction of creation under the influence of social and ethical changes. In addition, film and television dramas can be used as a way to educate philosophy and assume the cultural functions of ethical enlightenment and value reconstruction in modern society.

Keywords: British and American Film and Television Dramas; Ethical Dilemma; Modern Philosophy; Narrative Structure; Ethical Representation Mechanism

1. INTRODUCTION

Under the condition of scientific and technological progress, film and television dramas conform to the development of the times and people's spiritual needs, not only demand box office and entertainment, but also focus on the return of the spirit and the sincerity of the art, the passion for life and social life contemplation (Sun, 2022; Sun et al., 2022). With the improvement of people's living standards and education level of social demand is also increasing, and at the same time stimulate the film and television drama creators to improve the level of works. Film and television culture has a subtle and profound influence on the public's worldview, values, especially morality (Killen & Dahl, 2021; Rodowick, 2022). On the other hand, modern communication technology gives the public a new aesthetic experience, which makes them tired of the authoritative narrative of official ideology and away from ideological writing. At present, Britain and the United States are in a mature period of social development, with diversified and complex values, and frequent moral events, which constantly triggers the public's reflection on ethical slippage (Tunåker et al.,

2025). Therefore, it is very worthwhile to pay attention to what kind of representations can be adopted by film and television works to achieve the effective dissemination of modern philosophical concepts and to trigger the public's concern and reflection on ethical issues. This paper focuses on the narrative structure of film and television texts, and explores the mechanism of moral representation in film and television works through a small view of narrative ethics. It focuses on the narrative “modes” such as camera movement, scene scheduling, music, etc., and finds out how the audiovisual expression of film and television texts carries out ethical narratives. We will explore the characterization, plot structure, narrative dynamics and other elements of the narrative in this paper, and how the structure of these narrative elements expresses the specific ethical values of the narrator, in an attempt to find out whose stance is embodied and what kind of ethical demands are expressed behind the narrative point of view. Through the analysis of the ethical expression of the narrative act, the ethical dialogues behind the interaction between the narrator, the text and the audience and their ethical implications are analyzed, and such interaction is precisely the goal of narrative ethics that the article aims to explore. By integrating interdisciplinary resources such as Levinas's theory of the Other, philosophy of technology and feminist criticism, this article takes typical British and American film and television dramas such as *The Masquerade*, *Oppenheimer*, and *Escape from Extinction* as the object of analysis in order to study the collision between ethical dilemmas in film and television dramas and modern philosophy, and to provide a new path for interpreting the philosophical dimensions of film and television dramas.

2. RELEVANT WORKS

Film and television dramas bring different meanings to each person. Arisoy, E based on Kant's ethical service (Arisoy, 2023), goodwill and responsibility discusses the ethical and moral concepts conveyed in... The images of the movie and television drama “The Sector” show that the existence of a rift between goodwill and responsibility can break the structure of peace that moves forward calmly in its own harmony. The definition of good and bad people can be defined ambiguously depending on one's experiences and life conditions, in conjunction with the Kantian theory that one can determine ethics by leading free will through reason. Cuklanz, L and Erol, A clarify that since the late 2000s, male hegemony-dominated American film and television have incorporated traditional

female elements to create a more stark contrast in characterization (Cuklanz & Erol, 2021). Incorporating female gender representations into traditional male roles has challenged the tyrannical father figure in classic westerns to positively adapt to the current socio-cultural context. McPake, A takes the period dramas *Downton Abbey*, *The Crown*, and *Bridgerton Abbey* as objects of study, pointing out that historical accuracy should not be the hallmark of period dramas, but rather the responsibility of them (McPake, 2021). For example, the original authors of *Bridgerton* deliberately avoided the issue of racism in their creation, but the movie and television dramas have once again taken this divisive issue to a new level. Laugier, S examines the educational value of film and television dramas as ethical public events (Laugier, 2021); for mainstream Hollywood film and television dramas, the cultural value is in the new experiences and the self-transformation required to gain an education. Jecker, N. S et al. in their article mentioned many British and American movies and TV shows such as *Metropolis* (Jecker & Nakazawa, 2022), *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Westworld*, *Terminator*, etc., in which robots are shown to be a threat to human beings, leading to chaos and even destruction of the world. Hauer, T. in his article takes Stanley Kubrick's movie and television series *2001 - A Space Odyssey*, which was introduced to the world in 1968, as an example of a movie and television clip in which an artificial intelligence causes the death of a human being in order to fulfill its own will. It then leads to the real-life case of a smart-driving car hitting and killing a pedestrian crossing the street in 2018 and discusses whether humans who can solve technological problems can solve ethical problems (Hauer, 2022). Karim, M. A. takes the film “*Why Home*” directed by Nadine Labaki as the object of study, which presents a number of distressing social realities, such as child marriage, child labor, child poverty, and children without identity (Karim, 2023). These dilemmas are different from the ethical dilemmas triggered by technological development in British and American films and TV dramas, which are caused by socio-economic factors and social structural problems, but all of them profoundly reflect the difficult choices faced by human beings in the process of survival and development.

Summarizing the above studies, Figure 1 shows the ethical dilemmas of film and television dramas, which involve ethical topics such as morality, power, responsibility, war and technology in the real society.

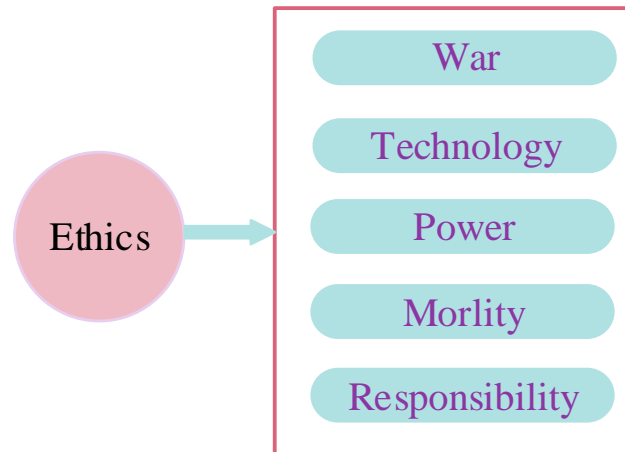


Figure 1: Ethical Issues in Film and Television Dramas

3. PHILOSOPHY AND THE ETHICS OF FILM AND DRAMA

3.1 Film as Philosophy

In artistic practice, the combination between film and television dramas and philosophy has never weakened. There are film and television dramas that use rich and vivid film and television language to carry out philosophical visual thinking, such as the famous aesthetic documentary “The Way of Seeing”. Or, they focus on individual philosophers and use images to introduce and explain their intellectual activities, such as Wittgenstein and Derrida. There are also avant-garde films and TV dramas that actively engage in a reflective exploration of the ontology of film and TV drama, such as the famous *Blue*. Others are more common, employing entertaining audiovisual language to encapsulate philosophically fascinating stories, such as the much-discussed *Matrix* trilogy (Karami, 2022; Morgan-Jones, 2022). In this context, FAP was born, arguing that film and television drama can be considered as philosophy. That is to say, film and television drama activities are philosophical activities, watching a movie is the same as reading a philosophical book, the audience can get the same ideological results from it, and both film and television drama and philosophy are able to put forward the same important ideological conclusions. The FAP theory originated in the philosophical turn of the film and television drama research at the end of the twentieth century, with the philosophical research on film and television drama by two people, Stanley Cavell and Deleuze, as the theoretical precursor, and finally formalization of the proposition by Stephen Mulhall (Gineprini, 2023; Öztürk, 2022).

3.2 Film and Television Dramas As Expressions Of Philosophy

3.2.1 Recording Functions of Film and TV Plays

The mere recording of philosophers and philosophical theories in a movie or television drama cannot be regarded as FAP, because such a movie or television drama is only “about philosophy”, not a movie or television drama doing philosophy, not philosophy itself. The difference lies in the fact that if a movie or TV drama merely records philosophical theories, it is merely an external educational tool, a means of dissemination, and we can gain the same information by reading philosophical textbooks and original texts. In some films and TV dramas, philosophical dialogues and discussions appear very prominently, but they are merely recording philosophical texts with sound tracks and images. Godard's film and television drama *Weekend*, for example, which contains a considerable length of Marxist philosophical footage, is merely a negative record of actors reading Marx's work; the film and television drama themselves do not make any more than an intellectual contribution to it. Similarly, while *Life in a Half-Dream* records a lecture by a philosophy professor discussing existentialism and Nietzsche, the movie and television show are only related to philosophy and do not engage in creative philosophical activity.

3.2.2 The Object of Philosophical Investigation

In the broad sense, all fields that explore the connection between philosophy and film and television drama belong to the philosophy of film and television drama, and FAP is included in it. However, in the narrow sense, the philosophy of film and television drama emphasizes examining film and television drama from a philosophical viewpoint, i.e., taking film and television drama as the object of analysis, and discussing the relevant issues in philosophy and aesthetic theory with the help of examining its ontology and phenomena. In this way, FAP breaks through the framework of the philosophy of film and television drama and asserts that film and television drama is a philosophical activity. Philosophy of Film and Television Drama is the meta-thinking of philosophy in relation to film and television drama; the subject of the action is philosophy, not film and television drama; film and television drama are only analyzed objects on the philosophical dissecting table here. Instead, FAP elevates itself as the subject, not the object, of philosophical action. What philosophers see in movies and TV dramas is not an intoxicating dream, but a thought-provoking case study, a philosophical story, that is, a “thought experiment” that often appears in philosophical writings, or a historian of philosophy's interpretation of classical theories. For example, when philosophers see

The Matrix, philosophers are very naturally reminded of Plato's Allegory of the Cave and Putnam's Brain in a Mantle (Niessen, 2022). Putnam could use thought experiments to articulate his philosophical theories of mind. Likewise, film and television drama can play a similar, if not better, role in expressing philosophical propositions in this way. It is in this light that many of FAP's moderate supporters recognize the relationship between philosophy and film and television drama, whose fictional narrativity serves this purpose, and whose particular advantage is that it is more vivid, rich, and revelatory.

3.2.3 An Expression of Philosophy

FAP hardliners argue that it is entirely possible to use film and television drama as philosophy. FAP hardliners argue that the most essential link between film and television drama and philosophy lies in the fact that it is philosophy itself, i.e., a way in which philosophy expresses itself. FAP is not a graphic illustration and record of other philosophical ideas, or the dissemination of philosophical ideas, but philosophy as a way of being philosophical. As Alexander Aschuk put it, if Descartes lived today, he would no longer use a pen, but a camera in hand to create his philosophical works. Today, perhaps film and theater are the best means of expressing the Philosophical Meditations. In the eyes of many, the FAP hardliners are too "bold" in their claim that movies and TV shows can make an original theoretical contribution to philosophy.

4. MECHANISMS OF REPRESENTATION OF MORALITY IN FILM AND TELEVISION DRAMA

4.1 Color Presentation

Film and television dramas are able to construct a unique mechanism of moral representation in a range of ways. Nolan, who is considered to be the top film and television drama producer of the 21st century, used his specialty of cross-narrative as the main narrative method of the film and television drama when he made *Oppenheimer*. In the film, director Nolan constantly makes the screen clips representing Robert Oppenheimer's subjective viewpoint in color and the black-and-white screen clips representing Strauss's viewpoint cross-presented, severing the complete reality of space and time and allowing the audience's perspective to constantly produce changes, bringing a sense of bystander's levitation. The black-and-white film-textured footage represents the irrefutable objective

perspective, while the color represents Robert Oppenheimer's present moment. This technique of using black-and-white and color to make some kind of distinction is often seen in the films of director Nolan (Davies, 2022; DiGangi & Bethard, 2021). In *Fragments of Memory*, black-and-white and color are used to differentiate between forward narrative and flashback story segments. The protagonist Leonardo is suffering from short-term memory loss while searching for his wife's murderer. The complex character relationships and the confusing reversed narrative sequence create a more confusing atmosphere for the protagonist's revenge road to its conclusion. In *Oppenheimer*, this black-and-white and color images are used to differentiate the perspectives of the two protagonists, so that the audience, while experiencing the big events of Robert Oppenheimer's life, can also use the perspective of a bystander to get to know the character more comprehensively, and also to set the tone for the complex temporal and spatial structure of the film and television drama and to present a richer visual effect. Director Nolan also specializes in the use of audiovisual elements that contain metaphorical meanings to convey ideological connotations to the audience. *Oppenheimer* isn't a fast-paced movie per se, but when close-ups of characters' faces appear, the movie slows down again. When these close-ups appear, Robert Oppenheimer tends to be less intense in his lines and less exaggerated in his expressions, and more out of his head in thought. Prior to his involvement with the atomic bomb, close-ups often represented the protagonist's thoughts and innovations in physics. Robert Oppenheimer expected physics to go far, and everything in life inspired his research. The close-ups show the protagonist's apprehension and entanglement after he suddenly begins to realize the fact that the atomic bomb may bring disaster to the world and that he cannot stop his research for a while. From then on, Robert Oppenheimer begins to think about whether his research will bring about the end of mankind. Each close-up shot of the face is the protagonist's in-depth thinking about this issue (Fabian & Heryono, 2024).

4.2 Sound Elements

In *Oppenheimer*, director Nolan also fully demonstrates the charm of auditory elements in film and television dramas, with sound becoming a narrative thread and an important part of shaping a character's psyche. After Robert Oppenheimer and a group of researchers successfully develop the atomic bomb, Robert Oppenheimer walks up to the lectern and the surrounding audience cheers for him. In this passage, the sound of cheering is treated as a blur, as if it were coming from a distance, and the

close-ups of the protagonist's face that appear from time to time show the panic at this moment. In Robert Oppenheim's mind, standing on the lectern, it is not the cheering of the crowd that is heard, but the gradually approaching sound of leather shoes tapping on the floor. This sound gradually came toward Robert Oppenheimer, as if it had become the sound that everyone, including the audience, was waiting for on the day of the atomic bomb test. At that time, all kinds of people who were busy with preparations were waiting for the moment of the atomic bomb explosion with different moods, including the audience who was mobilized by the gradually accelerated narrative rhythm, all imagining how shocking this sound was. But director Nolan just let the audience see the moment in pure white, removing all the sound elements and letting the audience fall into the imagination of the sound of the atomic bomb. So, in the auditorium, Robert Oppenheimer heard what sounded like an atomic bomb going off. After a flash of white light, the girl who had been injured by the explosion was seen. At this point, Robert Oppenheimer's fear of the damage caused by the atomic bomb reached its peak. The screams of the crowd could be the cries of pain from the injured people, and the sound of drunken vomiting could be the aftermath of the explosion. The movie and TV drama directed by Nolan not only attracted a large number of viewers with its complex and subtle narrative structure and innovative audio-visual expression, but also exposed various problems faced by human society. This profound reflection has melted into the theme of the movie and TV drama, forming a cultural core with philosophical connotations. In *Oppenheimer*, the main character Robert Oppenheimer is a quantum physicist. Graduated from a prestigious school, he holds the position of professor in a major university, but the common man side of his character puts him in a tangled dilemma. The atomic bomb brought peace to mankind, but its powerful destructive force and complex international situation made it a great threat to mankind. From then on, Robert Oppenheimer is not only a gifted physicist, but also a man whose personal abilities have brought about great changes in society. Nolan's film and television dramas explore the meaning and realization of individual self-worth from different dimensions, and establish a path of exploration from individual subjectivity to the meaning of the value of life ontology. As a director of film and television dramas living in the present, Nolan has a profound understanding of the development of technology and the change of times. How to maintain social stability in this era and avoid the new powerful force to bring disaster to people. This setting was similarly discussed in the Batman trilogy. The superhero defends Gotham City, but

the powerful Batman is also above the rules. Therefore, the emergence of forces opposed to “justice” is, so to speak, inevitable. Robert Oppenheimer has a high degree of consistency with Prometheus throughout the story. The atomic bomb was brought into the world by Robert Oppenheimer as a spark. The fire creates a whole new order for human society and opens Pandora's Box for the whole world. Fire not only brings about the basic needs of life, but also provides the conditions for human beings to pursue spiritual development. Fire not only satisfies the basic needs of human beings, but also enables them to contemplate a higher level of spiritual development and is a symbol of unity and cohesion. The atomic bomb provided support for the world's destruction of fascist forces, but its overpowering destructive power also pushed the human world into a new situation. While Robert Oppenheimer brought fire to mankind, he also brought suffering to himself. Should the atomic bomb have been invented, should it have been used as a means of war and politics, and how many people would have suffered and died because of it. These questions constantly tormented Robert Oppenheimer like a hawk pecking at his liver daily. Robert Oppenheimer was eager to let the world see its own achievements, but at the moment of real success, it might become a tragedy for history and itself. To be a hero like Prometheus is to suffer, as in “Now I am death, the destroyer of worlds”. Prometheus, who brought fire to mankind, became a martyr, and Robert Oppenheimer went to the same fate.

4.3 Narrative Devices

Another example is the world classic film "Truman's World", which is full of black humor and uses a two-line narrative technique, one clue is narrating the real world represented by "Fiji" as Truman living in the virtual world, and the other is narrating the real world in which the director and audience live behind the reality show (Kegerreis, 2022; Nweke, 2023). The setting of the two clues creates suspense in the development of the story, allowing the audience to empathetically watch the movie with doubt and hope that Truman will discover the truth of the matter and escape from Truman. In addition, the movie utilizes close-ups, close-ups, and vistas to show the life of a reality show. The extensive use of point-of-view shots and the covert filming of Truman's life are the main content of the movie to be expressed, which makes the camera's point-of-view shots become the most important way of camera presentation in the movie (Zhang & Weber, 2023). The camera lens is an important means for the audience to peek into Truman's life, with the camera side being the “viewer” in a position of

control and Truman being the “viewed” object in a position of control (Pamungkas et al., 2024). Reality TV directors use the relationship between “watching” and “being watched” to manipulate Truman and the audience's preferences in order to achieve the effect of reality TV. Today, like Truman, the Earth may be living in a world full of unknowns. In this sense, “Truman's World” is more realistic, providing a mirror for people like “prisoners”. That is, how to recognize false information and move from the sensible world to the intelligible world, to the philosophical height of truth where the ultimate value of human beings lies.

5. THE INTERACTION BETWEEN FILM AND TELEVISION DRAMA AND REALISTIC ETHICAL ISSUES

The interaction between film and television dramas and real-life ethics has a two-way impact. On the one hand, film and television works visualize abstract ethical issues through metaphors, symbols and narrative strategies, for example, the “deer” element in *Escape from Extinction* symbolizes the racial gaze. On the other hand, real-life ethical changes feed back into the creative process. For example, the exploration of open relationships in *Fatal Woman* responds to both feminism and the affirmative action movement, but is also constrained by conservative values. This interaction can be a catalyst for social progress, but it can also lead to ethical dilemmas due to commercial compromises, requiring a balance between artistic expression and social responsibility.

5.1 Socio-Cultural

The interaction between film and television dramas and real-life ethical issues is an important mirror image of social and cultural dynamics, and there are few discussions about racism in British and American films and dramas (Donatelli, 2022). The highly rated North American thriller film *Escape from Extinction* was created by African American director Jordan Peele, who wrote and directed the film. The film won the ninetieth Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, and behind picking up the award was the accumulation of Jordan Peele's four consecutive seasons of brilliant presentations on the comedy show *Key and Peele*. The deep depiction of the racial memory of the black people and the construction of the cultural landscape of the “other” are solidified by his own precipitation, the coldness and warmth of the class situation, and the perception of art. In the film, a large number of metaphors and symbolic materialized

vehicles bring together the implicit values of “desire for power” and permeate from the screen illusion. Through the historical trauma of the symbols of “identity” and “cotton,” Peele politicizes the black body and reflects the deep-seated racial ethical dilemma in American society. The construction of Chris's “identity” in *Escape from Extinction* is carefully crafted by director Jordan Peele to analyze the internal mechanisms of power structures and class concepts through the racialized body politic. The multiplicity of meanings of “identity” extends from one narrative text to another (Virginia & Mubarak, 2022).

5.2 Feminism

There is also the discussion of feminism in film and television. Along with the rise of feminism, women's pursuit of economic independence, autonomy in marriage, and realization of self-worth have been widely mentioned. In the real world, more and more women are able to explore their own strengths while balancing their family and workplace identities, and live out their individuality and splendor. As a work of art originated from life and higher than life, the image of women in American dramas also presents a rich and diversified trend, such as the four female protagonists in “*Desperate Housewives*”, single mother Susan, the representative of the strong woman Lenette, the sexy female model Gabby, the perfect housewife Brie. The screen of American dramas is no longer dominated by urban white-collar and upper-class rich women as popularized in the last century, nor are good wives and mothers who repress their egos and follow feminine virtues prevalent (Lee, 2024). The portrayal of women on *Desperate Housewives* remains traditional and conservative, with the four housewives being the same heterosexual women that mainstream America identifies with, and with the exception of Gabby, who is Hispanic, the three female leads and their neighbors being exclusively white. And in the first season of *Deadly Women*, there is Beth, a white housewife in the 1960s, Simone, an Asian socialite in the 1980s, and Taylor, a black professional attorney in the 210s. The women of the world have jumped from being represented as the silent “other” to constituting the main characters of the show, which is the racial manifestation of women's equal voice. At the same time, the writers surprised the audience even more by constructing Taylor's character as a bisexual feminist. Taylor's practice of open relationships in her marriage is a courageous challenge to the traditional monogamous spousal system. In the process of exploring a new type of intimate relationship, the audience can feel the multiple possibilities of women in real life, and realize the

survival status and emotional world of different female groups (Yslas, 2024).

6. CONCLUSION

Philosophical study of film and television dramas is not an outdated or rigid model, but the nature of the comprehensive integration of film and television dramas with the broad field of humanities represented by philosophy embodies an exploration of the current life issues, development issues and social possibilities. Through an interdisciplinary perspective, this paper reveals the deep interaction between the ethical dilemmas of British and American film and television dramas and modern philosophical concepts, i.e., film and television dramas are able to realize the figurative transformation of philosophical propositions through audio-visual linguistic innovations and have ethical representations with a multi-layered structure. In addition, the study also finds that film and television dramas form a certain dynamic intertextual relationship with real-life ethics, for example, the reconstruction of gender relations in *Deadly Woman* not only reflects social ethical changes, but also reshapes the public's perceptions through artistic communication. In conclusion, this paper demonstrates the possibility of film and television dramas as a carrier of modern philosophical practice, provides a new theoretical path for understanding the ethical value of audiovisual culture, and provides methodological insights for cross-media ethical research.

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