

A Clockwork Orange: Choice and Morality

Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* is considered to be a cult classic film, garnering a large following of fans since its initial release in 1971. It follows the tale of a young delinquent named Alex DeLarge, who fancies going out with his fellow gang members to commit acts of sexual assault and ultra-violence. Through a government endorsed experiment termed the “Ludovico Technique,” Alex becomes highly aversive to the same acts that he previously enjoyed. A major dystopian theme of the film is a focus on defining human nature and how it clashes with the authority of society. A comparable analog that explores this theme is the moral and social debate on animal rights.

The World of A Clockwork Orange



Figure 1: The signature outfit of Alex and his droogs
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Taking place in a distorted version of England, *A Clockwork Orange* is told from Alex's point of view, who acts as a leader for his band of teen delinquents, referred to as his “droogs.” Alex's character is quite particular, as while he displays the same "murderous, cold-blooded, and unhinged" behaviors as his fellow droogs, he appears to have a taste for the more refined aspects of life, namely love for Beethoven (Dominguez).

One unresolved issue regarding Alex's introduction is whether his ruthless demeanor is an innate part of his nature or rather a consequence of circumstance. At the beginning of the film, the most prominent form of oppression in regards to Young's faces of oppression is expressed as violence. In Alex's society, there is an apparent disparity in the regulation of morals and justice, as seen with the scourge of teenage gangs raping and assaulting others. Smaller details, such as the ruined and vandalized entrance of Alex's home, also point towards this conclusion. Also, Alex's parents appear to be uninvolved, as they do not inquire about or scold him for constantly skipping school. These dystopian factors give proof to the indifference this society has towards nurturing morality in the youth, which as a result has them acting out violent and domineering behaviors that emulate the state of nature depicted by Thomas Hobbes' Hobbesian Jungle. The significance of this can be reflected in the children of the real world regarding, for example, the consumption of animals. Studies from the University of Exeter have found that "children draw strongly upon moral principles and concerns" when considering the morality of eating meat. In comparison, adults use "social-based reasoning to justify the consumption of meat." As children grow more accustomed to society, they lose their natural moral dispositions in favor of what appears normal to that society. Note that the result varies depending on the society. In Alex's case, it is possible that the environment of his world allowed and nurtured his lack of morals. This attitude would later result in Alex's downfall, as his ruthless and iron-fisted rule over his droogs led to their betrayal and his arrest due to an unintended murder.

"The boy has no real choice, has he?"



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4woPg0-xyAA&ab_channel=INXISIV

Figure 2: The Ludovico Technique

During his time in prison, Alex finds a chance to lower his sentence and become free by volunteering in a treatment program called the "Ludovico Technique." This is perhaps the most well-known scene in the film and has been referenced several times in pop culture. However,

compared to the renown of the scene, the implications of the technique as a dystopian element are not as thoroughly explored. Through the use of nausea-inducing drugs, Alex was forced to watch nazi war crimes and other forms of violence, which created an association of extreme sickness to sex and violence. Coincidentally, Alex's love for Beethoven was also bastardized, as he was also forced to listen to his favorite song throughout the procedure. Paired with the earlier quote made by a prison chaplain about the ability to choose moral choices, it has become clear that Alex has lost something that defined his humanity, no matter how twisted it was. Through unnatural means, Alex finds himself having to conform to a set of principles that goes against his supposed nature as if he were an organic orange filled with the robotic mechanisms of a clock.



Figure 3: An abnormal fusion of the natural with the artificial
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"You felt ill this afternoon because you're getting better."

This is what Dr. Branom, one of the researchers overseeing the therapy regimen, told Alex after he shared his qualms about the treatment. A significant highlight of Alex's time in prison and the treatment institution is that it provides insight into how authority and government function in *A Clockwork Orange*. Hypocritically, not much is done to help the issues occurring outside in society in comparison to behind the walls. While the Ludovico Technique is touted to be the cure to create a healthy and safe populace, the ethical issues it brings regarding human autonomy are largely ignored.

If society is what dictates what is correct and overall beneficial, how much can it infringe upon an individual's choices and rights before it is considered too much? This is a common question explored in societal and dystopian discussions which can apply to our analog. Livestock farming

is agreed upon by the majority to be permissible, yet there are disputes on how morally acceptable it is. Common arguments for it are that it aligns with the superiority of humanity in the natural order. This however seems more in tune with the values of the Hobbesian Jungle, which is described as the natural state of humans in the absence of a society. A dystopia can be described as extremes on two ends of a spectrum, which are an absence of society and a society that is overly involved. This brings us back to the problem of how much regulation of the animal industry can be considered acceptable. If the notion of livestock farming was to be considered wrong and laws were implemented to reduce it, would that outweigh the effect of taking away people's autonomy to make the wrong choice, similar to how Alex wishes to error? One way to determine this is to measure the overall consequence of the current situation.

Oppression Breeds More Oppression

After Alex is released and essentially physically reprogrammed to avoid violence and conflict, he goes through a series of trials involving his previous victims of assault. Acting out of revenge for his violence, these victims put Alex through physical and even mental torture. Although enacting justice on a wrongdoer appears to be fine, as the film is told from Alex's point of view, revenge is portrayed negatively. This commentary on the cycle of violence and oppression is perhaps another dystopian element to consider. The current sentiment of adding status to certain animals (such as comparing pets to livestock) has sparked debate on how animals overall should be treated. For example, the fur trade, which is notorious for cruel acts such as the "electrocution, beating, and live skinning" of animals, has used the argument of livestock to justify its existence ("Keep Pets and Eat Livestock"). This type of thinking is dangerous, as it promotes the idea that oppression overall is justifiable based on the existence of currently oppressed groups, essentially propagating a growing cycle of oppression that will surely lead to a dystopian future.

To summarize, the current status quo of what should and should not be right should be scrutinized. Pausing to think of the issues ongoing in the treatment of others from a perspective untouched by the environment/society one has grown accustomed to, one may realize a better, more objective point of view.



Figure 4: The conditions of captive raccoons and foxes raised for their pelts
 "Raccoon and Fox Fur | Into the Chinese Fur Trade | HuangKo Fox and Raccoon Farm" by [Animal Equality International](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

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