

Shawshank redemption moral context essay

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



The movie I've selected to analyze, which I feel provides a rich moral context, is Shawshank Redemption. The movie focuses on main character, Andy Dufresne, a banker in 1947 who was wrongfully charged with the murder of his wife and her lover. Due to the lacking of his lawyer, Andy was convicted and sentenced to two life sentences at Shawshank State Penitentiary in Maine. In an attempt to be his best self while serving his time, Andy befriends fellow prisoner Eliss Redding, otherwise known as Red.

The story follows the two friends and their struggle to survive the brutal environment of the Shawshank prison, led by the the “ supposedly” moral figure, Warden Norton, who abuses his power in the most unethical ways. During his time at Shawshank, Andy makes the free and deliberate decision to deceive the warden, steal his laundered money, and escape through the walls of the penitentiary. Though this seems extremely unethical and worth punishing, he justifies his actions for all the pain he suffered as an innocent man.

Towards the middle of the movie, Andy began to be respected by the guards and Warden Norton for his financial advice and abilities. Prior to the guards and Warden Norton realizing that he had great financial abilities, he was often attacked and sexually assaulted by other prisoners. Though once he understood that his abilities can protect him from these group of men, he began using his power in order to document false records for Warden Norton. The plot thickens soon after when the audience discovers that Andy truly is an innocent man.

Fellow inmate Tommy told Red and Andy that when he did previous time at another prison, his cellmate bragged about shooting a couple at a country club and that they blamed the husband for the killing. When Andy finds out and approaches the Warden to let him know, the Warden dismisses him, basically saying that Tommy was just trying to make him feel better. Though, really Warden Norton was just concerned that Andy would be released and would tell authorities about his money laundering.

Andy told the Warden that he would never share the information because he would be in trouble too; so the Warden had Andy locked up in solitary confinement for two weeks. During this time, Warden Norton secretly has Tommy killed so that his statement could never be revealed and Andy would never be released. Yet, little did anyone know that Andy was actually putting Warden Norton's laundered money into an account that he was building for himself.

He eventually escapes the prison, takes the money the Warden laundered, and sends incriminating information about the Warden to a reporter at a newspaper. He then takes off to Mexico and lives the rest of his life a "free" man. During his time at Shawshank, Andy dealt with unnecessary abuse and mistreatment. After all, he truly was a good man and did whatever it took to prove that. He explains that used the wardens scheme in order to bring down the scandal of him escaping the prison.

At one point in the movie, Andy even states, " The funny thing is - on the outside, I was an honest man, straight as an arrow. I had to come to prison to be a crook. " Andy's decision to deceive the warden and escape through

the walls of Shawshank seems like truly unethical actions but he justifies it through the torment he dealt with in the walls at Shawshank. In the last scene of the movie, Red, Andy's only true friends from Shawshank, finally gets released after serving his sentence.

Red, who could have simply waited the time he was given probation, makes the the moral choice to skip parole and meet Andy in Mexico. Inside Shawshank, Red was the supplier of goods to the inmates, getting them whatever they needed to get by, such as alcohol to celebrate their kids graduation or reefer, if that was their thing. Though in the world outside the prison, Red had a difficult time finding his place in society. At first, Red didn't believe he could function outside the prison walls because he wasn't use to freedom; it was a truly frightening concept.

It seems as though he contemplated suicide like his old friend Brooks before coming to a realization. He finally explains that committing the small unethical act of skipping parole would fulfill the greater good of seeing his friend again and living life in freedom. Even though Andy and Red's moral decisions were on based on different levels of severity, both of their decisions were based on the absolutist theory, Ethical Egoism. Their choices both conform to this theory because they both made a decision to pursue their self interest.

Ethical Egoism states that one should do whatever serves his or her interests bests. In Andy's case, he had no choice but to put his self interest before anything else. He knew for a fact that he was an innocent man and if he didn't pursue his self interest and escape, he would have lived the rest of his

life in prison being tortured and raped. In Red's case, he had spent a majority of his life in prison, never knowing what true freedom was; therefore the decision that served his interest best was escaping parole in order to explore freedom.

Two other absolutist theories, The Divine Command Theory and Utilitarianism would judge Andy's decision differently. The Divine Command Theory says that one should always follow the word of God, and would therefore disagree with Andy's decision to deceive the Warden and escape prison. Even though Andy's only other alternative would have been to suffer for the rest of his life, Divine Command theorist would have argued that lying and stealing to gain happiness is immoral. On the other hand, I think that a Utilitarian would have agreed with Andy's decision to deceive the Warden and escape.

Utilitarianism says that one should always choose the action which consequences create the greatest amount of happiness for everyone. A Utilitarian would have agreed with Andy in this case because it not only resulted in his happiness, but the happiness of all prison inmates who were unnecessarily tortured by the warden and his guards. His scheme brought the scandal to police attention which causes an investigation of the entire prison. The warden ended up dead and the guards who mistreated others were arrested. Therefore, Andy's decision resulted in the highest net gain of happiness for everyone.

In Red's case, Utilitarianism and Kant's Theory, are two absolutist theories that would also judge his decisions differently. A Utilitarian would agree with

Red's decision to skip parole and escape to freedom with Andy because Red was never able to experience freedom his entire life. Freedom was the only thing Red had to look forward to, therefore creating the greatest amount of net happiness. Though on the other hand, Kant theorist would most likely disagree with Red's decision to escape because rational universality is embodied in Kant's Categorical Imperative.

The way Kant would judge Red is by asking if his decision could be made universal, and it cant. If it could, that would mean that it would be okay for all men and women on probation to skip parole and violate the law and society would quickly deteriorate. I personally feel that both Andy and Red made the best decisions they could have possibly made for the situations they were in. Although their acts, escaping a prison and skipping parol, are seen as unethical in our society, they were acts necessary in order to survive.

Pursuing their self interest was the only way that both of them had any chance of freedom. I could somehow relate to the feelings and decisions of both of these men, because unfortunately I've known several men who have spent a majority of their lives in prison. Some like Andy, were wrongfully charged, and some like Red, spent their half of their life in prison repenting and repaying their debt to society. I think that in these situations where there are no other options but to suffer, pursuing your self interest has to come first.