

# The morality of phil in groundhog day

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



Aristotle, Kant, Mill, and Plato: All influential philosophers with differing opinions on what it means to be marked by morality. One situation in which the opinions of these philosophers could be used to evaluate the morality of a person is in the movie *Groundhog Day*, specifically looking at the actions of the character Phil. At the beginning of *Groundhog Day*, Phil is sarcastic and selfish. However, throughout the film, we see his character develop to be more wholesome. In this paper, I argue that Aristotle and Plato view Phil's character as increasingly moral throughout the film, and Mill and Kant also see his actions to be gaining morality throughout the film.

Aristotle has ten virtues that he sees as morally good, and an excess or deficiency of any is a vice (Aristotle 1108b11). At the beginning of the film, Phil is at the vice for a few of these: generosity, friendliness, and appropriate anger. Phil shows that he is lacking generosity when he refuses to give money to the beggar on the street (Aristotle 1107b10). He shows a lack of friendliness when he is rude to his old classmate, Ned (Aristotle 1108a28). Lastly, Phil shows an excess of anger on numerous occasions, namely when he kidnaps the groundhog (Aristotle 1108a5). Aristotle claims in order for one to re-balance a virtue, one must aim to do the opposite corresponding vice (Aristotle 1108b25). Phil does just this by giving all of his money to the homeless man, embracing Ned in a long, uncomfortable hug, and giving a heartfelt report on the groundhog to Punxsutawney. By aiming for the opposite vice, Phil is able to re-balance his character to Aristotle's virtues of character.

Furthermore, the situation in which Phil is placed is similar to the Ring of Gyges that Glaucon challenges Socrates with (Plato 359d1). At the beginning

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of the movie, Phil uses his “ opportunity” exactly how Glaucon predicts he will: by using immoral methods to benefit himself due to lack of consequences (Plato 361d1). As the film progresses, Phil gets worse in this regard before he gets better. Towards the end of the film, he begins to act more justly, despite having no ulterior motive because of the repetitive day. This shows that he is resisting the temptation to act unjustly without consequences, and thus his character is more just in the end of the movie than at the beginning from Plato’s perspective (Plato 358a).

In regard to Phil’s actions, Mill sees his actions as increasingly morally valuable throughout the film. The most obvious characteristic of Phil’s actions throughout the movie that the utilitarian lens sees as increasingly moral is the quality of the pleasures in which Phil is engaging (Mill 8). For example, at the beginning of the film, Phil uses his “ opportunity” to engage in lower pleasures such as stuffing his face with pastries and persuading random women to sleep with him (Mill 9). Later in the film, we see Phil shift his focus to becoming a better, more wholesome man. This is when we see a shift in his actions to resulting in higher pleasures, such as helping old women fix their flat tire, learning to play piano, and getting to know the locals (Mill 10). These actions result in more happiness for a greater number of people, and the direct pleasure that Phil receives is more valuable (Mill 10). Because of the increase in the quality of pleasure that Phil is striving for towards the end of the film, Mill sees Phil’s actions as increasingly moral.

Similar to Mill, Kant sees Phil’s actions to be increasing in moral valuable throughout Groundhog Day. One specific aspect of Kant’s philosophy that

can be related to Phil's actions is his idea of universality (Kant 4: 402). At the beginning of the film when Phil is attempting to seduce random women by memorizing odd details about them and gaining intel on delivery men in order to steal money, it would be impossible to universalize these actions. If everyone did these things given the same opportunity, our world would be far from just (4: 402). Yet, at the end of the film, when Phil catches children as they fall out of trees and saves men from choking, his actions become more universal for the world. Because of this increase in universality, Kant sees Phil's actions as increasingly moral.

Kant, Mill, Aristotle, and Plato all see Phil's actions and character as increasing in moral standing throughout Groundhog Day. The most feasible real-world application would be to reflect on one's own life in regard to Aristotle's virtues, and see where they may need to re-calibrate their virtues. This is a way that humans can learn from Phil and apply these Aristotelian teachings.