CAN FILM *SHOW* WHAT (ANALYTIC) PHILOSOPHY WON'T *SAY*? THE "FILM AS PHILOSOPHY" DEBATE, AND A READING OF *RASHOMON*

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Abstract: Following in the footsteps of Stanley Cavell and Stephen Mulhall, I will argue in this paper that film can offer genuine contributions to philosophy. I will do so by trying to show that the main obstacles to consider film as capable of doing philosophy stem from rather restrictive views of rationality, cognition, meaning – and ultimately of philosophy and film themselves. I will present some of those obstacles and suggest ways of removing them by adopting a broader construal of those notions. The resulting understanding will then be further worked out by means of a reading of a specific film – Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* – which I take as exemplary of a fictional work of cinema capable of reflecting philosophically about the nature of reality and of our own existence. That reading will be enriched by means of a "Heideggerian interlude" dealing with the importance of moods in attuning us to the world. Finally, and with those considerations at hand, I will conclude my analysis of *Rashomon* and try to bring the main lessons of the paper home.
Keywords: Cinema; Philosophy; Rationality; Cognition; Meaning.

Resumo: Seguindo os passos de Stanley Cavell e de Stephen Mulhall, argumentarei neste artigo que o cinema pode oferecer contribuições genuínas para a filosofia. Para tanto procurarei mostrar que os principais obstáculos para considerar o cinema como capaz de fazer filosofia derivam de pontos de vista bastante restritivos sobre a natureza da racionalidade, da cognição, do significado - e, finalmente, da filosofia e do cinema eles mesmos. Apresentarei alguns desses obstáculos e indicarei formas de removê-los, adotando uma interpretação mais ampla dessas noções. A compreensão resultante será então elaborada em mais detalhes por meio da leitura de um filme específico - *Rashomon*, de Akira Kurosawa - que considero uma obra exemplar de ficção cinematográfica capaz de refletir filosoficamente sobre a natureza da realidade e de nossa própria existência. Essa leitura será enriquecida por meio de um "interlúdio heideggeriano" que trata da importância dos estados de ânimo para nos sintonizar com o mundo. Finalmente, e com essas considerações em mãos, concluirei minha análise de *Rashomon* e farei um balanço dos resultados.
Palavras-chave: Cinema, Filosofia, Racionalidade, Cognição, Significado.

Introduction

"Expressivism" is a word with different, if related uses in philosophy. The most common context in which the term is employed is in metaethical discussions, in which it names a family of views that construe the meaning of ethical statements as being *expressive* of our attitudes, feelings, etc., hence essentially different from the meaning of factual statements that *describe* states

of affairs. Another debate in which the term is used concerns the interpretation of utterances of the form "I am in pain", that an expressivist would construe as ways of *externalizing* or *avowing* our feelings (again as opposed to *describing* them). In both contexts, "expressivism" contrasts with "cognitivism": in the case of metaethics, cognitivism would hold that ethical statements are descriptions of (ethical) facts, hence are just as capable of generating *bona fide* knowledge claims as any other factual statement; ditto for the cognitivist analysis of statements of the form "I am in pain"[1].

Laying my cards on the table, I must say at the outset that my approach to these disputes is Wittgensteinian, in the following sense: I suspect they originate from false dichotomies, which in turn depend on simplified pictures of the way our practices work – most immediately, in the cases distinguished above, our practices of blaming and praising, on the one hand, and those of expressing sensations and feelings, on the other. Accordingly, I think the beginning of wisdom in each case would be to seek for an alternative, more accurate understanding of those practices, which in turn could be achieved by means of a careful recollection of our criteria, generating a series of what Wittgenstein would call "grammatical reminders". Ultimately, what that investigation should be able to show is that the very distinction between "description" and "expression", as it is presented in those debates, is a contentious one, precisely because it passes over the complexity of a series of interrelated concepts such as "reason", "thinking", "mind", "inner", "outer", "self", "language", "meaning", "embodiment", "cognition" and so on[2].

My aim on this occasion is to apply that Wittgensteinian strategy to another debate that seems to be based on those same false dichotomies and simplified pictures, this time concerning the candidacy of narrative, fictional films to the role of providing *bona fide* philosophical insights about the nature of reality. To that end my paper will be structured as follows: section 2 introduces some initial reasons for thinking that film can offer genuine contributions to philosophy; section 3 takes that argumentative line forward, focusing on a debate initiated with the publication of Stephen Mulhall's seminal *On Film* (2002). Following the Wittgensteinian strategy delineated

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[1] A similar debate is held in the field of aesthetics, concerning the question whether artworks can offer cognitive contributions or should rather be understood as expressive of feelings.

[2] I have attempted to offer some of those reminders in two previously published papers: (Techio 2012) and (Techio 2016). The first deals with our practices for expressing pain and other sensations using the first personal pronoun, and the second deals with our ethical practices. Both were inspired by the work of (late) Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell. I'll have more to say about both authors in what follows.

above, I will try to show in those sections that the main obstacles to consider film as capable of doing philosophy stem from rather restrictive views of rationality, cognition, meaning – and ultimately of philosophy and film themselves. I will present some of those obstacles and suggest ways of removing them by adopting a broader understanding of those notions. The resulting understanding will then be further worked out by means of a reading of a specific film – Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* – which I take as exemplary of a fictional work of cinema capable of reflecting philosophically about the nature of reality and our own existence in it (section 4). That reading will be enriched by means of a "Heideggerian interlude" dealing with the importance of moods in attuning us to the world (section 5). Finally, and with those considerations at hand, I will conclude my analysis of *Rashomon* and try to bring the main lessons of the paper home (section 6).

1. Film as philosophy: a first pass

The debate about the philosophical potential of film can be helpfully framed by a more general reflection concerning the limits of conventional philosophical prose which was initiated by philosophers like Martha Nussbaum, Iris Murdoch and Cora Diamond[3]. One thing that unites those authors is their diagnosis of contemporary academic philosophy – especially in the analytic tradition – as being too prone to disregard or to distort aspects of our everyday lives that they see as fundamental to the treatment of certain philosophical questions, particularly ethical ones. As a form of preventing that distortion they argue that literature would be best suited to provide a more realistic depiction of our condition and to attune the readers more fully to the moral saliences and complexities of a given situation. This point is clearly stated in the following passage from Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge*:

> [...] there may be some views of the world and how one should live in it – views, especially, that emphasize the world's surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty – that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose, a style remarkably flat and lacking in wonder – but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars[4].

Cora Diamond argues for a similar point, reminding us that certain texts generally accepted as "philosophy" – such Plato's dialogue *Crito* – are *philosophical* not so much because of the presence of something like deductive

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[3] This section draws in part on material previously published (in Portuguese) in (Techio 2013).
[4] NUSSBAUM 1990, p.3.

arguments, but rather because they offer exercises of "moral creativity" and "moral imagination" that allow us "to see the situation differently"[5]. For Diamond, as well as for Nussbaum, philosophy has been characterized since its inception by an interest in transforming the way people see the world, and to that end it has employed a great variety of techniques and literary styles. Now, granted that precision and the use of clear argumentation can have an important role in achieving that purpose, what those authors see as problematic is that these formal features should become ends in themselves, all but ubiquitous, at the expense of other forms that could eventually lead to a better, more realistic understanding of our existence[6].

The point I want to make in this connection is that films can provide even more possibilities to generate the kind of philosophical involvement advocated by those authors. Techniques such as montage, deep focus, slow motion, close-up, traveling and the use of soundtrack (just to name a few), all can make effective contributions in calling the viewer's attention to the particularity and complexity of our everyday lives. This point was nicely articulated by William Pamerleau in the introduction to his book *Existentialist Cinema*:

> there is something about that concrete depiction of the film that cannot be easily reproduced in the abstraction of an essay. As a result, films can be used to assess the accuracy of philosophical descriptions. [...] [M]ovies sometimes show us that life is more complicated than we might think from reading a philosopher's description of it, or they might show us that the philosophical view begins to seem less plausible when connected to real situations and real people (or, at least, realistically *portrayed* situations and people)[7].

It is true that novels and other literary narratives, by virtue of their very length and the time they require of the reader, can sometimes provide greater familiarity with the complexities of a fictional world, which can in turn be crucial for a good understanding of the relevant elements for a philosophical reflection. But it is not my intention here to establish a comparative evaluation of the potential of each of those artistic media; rather, I would like to argue that, at least from the point of view of the intensification of our experience with the complexities of human life, *both* cinema and literature (not to mention other arts) can be in an advantageous position compared to conventional philosophical prose.

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[5] DIAMOND 1991, p.311.

[6] Similar considerations are presented by Iris Murdoch in *The Sovereignty of Good* (MURDOCH 1970).

[7] PAMERLEAU 2009, p.2.

Importantly, I want to extend this line of argument beyond the domain of practical philosophy (which was the main concern of the authors mentioned above), contemplating a larger set of issues from other traditional fields of the discipline – such as metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, philosophy of mind and language, *and so on*. In so doing I am aligning myself to the work of the American philosopher Stanley Cavell. In dealing with the relationship between philosophy and film in the preface to his third book dedicated to the subject[8] Cavell says that to his way of thinking:

> the creation of film was as if meant for philosophy — meant to reorient everything philosophy has said about reality and its representation, about art and imitation, about greatness and conventionality, about judgment and pleasure, about scepticism and transcendence, about language and expression[9].

Now this is undoubtedly a bold claim – but it is also meticulous; Cavell does not state that film is intended to redirect everything that philosophy has said about any philosophical subject. Consistently with his Wittgensteinian heritage, which is very averse to hasty generalizations and more congenial to a case-by-case analysis, he is talking from his own experience with movies, expressing his own discoveries in this field[10]. But he offers no reasons, neither in that passage nor in any other context I can think of, to restrict *a priori* the scope of the reorientation he is referring to.

Despite that, it is not difficult to find authors willing to accuse Cavell of being pretentious simply for his willingness to find connections between cinema and philosophy[11]. Underlying that accusation is the assumption, most often tacit, that philosophy and film (especially hollywoodian film, which is the main focus of Cavell's attention) have nothing to say to each other. That assumption, in turn, is based on more specific views about the nature of movies and about the nature of philosophy – e.g., that the former are mere "specialized commodities manufactured by an industry designed to satisfy the

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8 The two preceding books are (Cavell 1971) and (Cavell 1981).

9 1996, p.xii.

10 As he puts in another context: "Nothing can show this value [i.e., the value of movies to investigate philosophical issues like the ones listed above] to you unless it is discovered in your own experience, in the persistent exercise of your own taste, and hence the willingness to challenge your taste as it stands, to form your own artistic conscience, hence nowhere but in the details of your encounter with specific works" (CAVELL, 2005, p.94). The key message here is that to seriously reflect on films is a way to show an interest in one's own experience. Cavell in this context reminds us of Henry James's advice in his essay "The Art of Fiction": "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost" (*apud.* CAVELL, 2005, p.91).

11 About that accusation, see (Cavell 2005: 91).

tastes of a mass audience"[12], and that the latter is a technical discipline reserved for experts. In line with Nussbaum's, Diamond's and Murdoch's diagnosis, Cavell does not need to deny that such a view of philosophy pretty much sums up its current (academic) state; only he points out that this is what makes philosophy *professional*, but not what makes philosophy *philosophy*[13]. The alternative he offers is to think of philosophy as

> a willingness to think not about something other than what ordinary human beings think about, but rather to learn to think undistractedly about things that ordinary human beings cannot help thinking about, or anyway cannot help having occur to them [...][14].

By insisting on the relevance of including (some) movies in the set of texts that are worthy of the attention of philosophers Cavell does not want to give the impression that "philosophy left to itself requires compensation by revelations within the medium of film"[15]; on the contrary, he wants to indicate that movies can be thought of as

> differently configuring intellectual and emotional avenues that philosophy is already in exploration of, but which, perhaps, it has cause sometimes to turn from prematurely, particularly in its forms since its professionalization, or academization [...]. The implied claim is that film, the latest of the great arts, shows philosophy to be the often invisible accompaniment of the ordinary lives that film is so apt to capture [...][16].

These two ideas – namely, that we should fight the temptation to prematurely abandon the complexities of our ordinary lives, and that films are particularly suitable to capture some of those complexities – are the main methodological advices I think one should follow in approaching the idea of "film as philosophy". In order to achieve a clearer view of how that approach can be put into practice I suggest we turn to a more recent iteration of what I will argue is the same fundamental dispute about the nature of film and philosophy, one that was (re)initiated by the publication of Stephen Mulhall's *On Film* (2002).

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[12] CAVELL 2005, p.93.

[13] See CAVELL 2005, p.92.

[14] CAVELL 2005, p.92.

[15] CAVELL 2004, p.5-6.

[16] CAVELL 2004, p.6.

2. Film as philosophy: a second pass

The following, often quoted passage from Mulhall's book presents what can by now be considered the classical (if contested) formulation of the idea of "film as philosophy":

> [...] I do not look to these films as handy or popular illustrations of views and arguments properly developed by philosophers; I see them rather as themselves reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them in just the ways that philosophers do. Such films are not philosophy's raw material, nor a source for its ornamentation; they are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action – film as philosophizing[17].

As it happened with Cavell's "bold claim" discussed in the preceding section, this passage generated some controversy, and its main claims were criticized by many philosophers. Thomas Wartenberg, in his book *Thinking on Screen* (2007) presents a useful categorization of main objections that were offered in the ensuing debate (as well as his own replies to them). Let us have a summary of each of the objections he distinguishes:

> 1. Explicitness: the main thrust of this objection is to say that "film lacks the explicitness to formulate and defend the precise claims that are characteristic of philosophical writing"[18]. In its most extreme form, this objection would assume that *bona fide* philosophy requires the presentation of arguments in a textual medium (say a paper or a book), or at the very least in verbal form.
> 2. Generality: this objection would point out that philosophy has since its inception searched for general truths, or perhaps even universal and necessary ones. Now film (as any other narrative, fictional art) hardly seems fit for that task, given its emphasis on particular characters, situations, etc.[19].
> 3. Imposition: "Although films can be useful ways to introduce the discussion of philosophical issues and may even help us think about those issues in deeper and more adequate ways, the films themselves do not contribute to our store of philosophical knowledge, assuming that there is such a thing. The philosophizing is being done by a philosopher using a film, but not by the film itself"[20].

Of course in practice those three objections tend to be presented together, which is to be expected, given how naturally their respective assumptions about the nature of philosophy connect with each other in what we could call an "analytically orthodox" view of this discipline[21].

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[17] MULHALL 2002, p.2.

[18] 2007, p.16.

[19] See WARTENBERG 2007, p.20–25.

[20] 2007, p.25.

[21] One very influential objection that seems to make all of those assumptions was presented by Paisley Livingston in his book *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman: On Film as Philosophy* (2009) in the form of a

In the revised and expanded editions of the book[22], Mulhall took the opportunity to engage with some of his critics directly, and in so doing he made even clearer his affiliation with the Cavellian (and Wittgensteinian) approach to philosophy and film that I began to articulate in the preceding section. His main line of defense is actually to reject the terms of the challenge presented by his objectors – basically, that of showing *theoretically* and *in general terms* that films can philosophize. Following Cavell's (and Wittgenstein's) footsteps, he argues that to accept that challenge would be precisely to fall prey of an unduly restrictive view of philosophy's aims and methods that he wants to counter. Whence the strategy of diagnosing more clearly the main resistances that might have inclined his readers not to take that lesson to heart, assessing the achievements of his book *in the abstract*, instead of engaging with the specific and detailed readings of films that he painstakingly presented.

I won't go through the details of that response[23]. Instead, I want to focus our attention to one specific exchange involving Julian Baggini, Nathan Andersen and Mulhall himself[24]. Contrary to most critics, Baggini's assessment does not assume the most radical version of what I have been calling a restrictive view of philosophy – that is, one according to which philosophy proper could only be done through textual media, and, more specifically, through the presentation of (narrowly conceived) arguments leading to general

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dilemma for what he dubs the "bold thesis" about the relation between film and philosophy (of which Mulhall and, I suppose, Cavell, would be the main exponents): "To accept one prevalent conception of the cinema's specific representational devices, while arguing for an innovative and independent philosophical contribution, leads to an insoluble problem of paraphrase. If it is contended that the exclusively cinematic, innovative insight cannot be paraphrased, reasonable doubt arises with regard to its very existence. If it is granted, on the other hand, that the cinematic contribution can and must be paraphrased, this contention is incompatible with arguments for a significantly independent, innovative, and purely 'filmic' philosophical achievement, as linguistic mediation turns out to be constitutive of (our knowledge of) the epistemic contribution a film can make. [...] To accept, on the other hand, a broader conception of the cinema's exclusive capacities leads to a trivialization of the thesis that cinema can contribute to philosophy" (LIVINGSTON 2009, p.21). Livingston himself uses this dilemma to justify a more "moderate" approach to the relationship between film and philosophy. According to him philosophy *properly* requires sophisticated arguments and distinctions that can only be made in the traditional (verbal) medium; the only function of the films is to provide an impulse, motivation or material for the philosophical reflection (see LIVINGSTON 2009, p.21-38).

[22] MULHALL 2008 and MULHALL 2016.

[23] Interested readers should refer in particular to chapter 5 of the second or third editions (see previous footnote).

[24] This exchange took place originally in a single issue of the *Film-Philosophy Journal* (see BAGGINI 2003, ANDERSEN 2003 and MULHALL 2003). Mulhall's reply was later revised and incorporated in the two revised editions of *On Film*.

truths. Accordingly, he has no *a priori* reasons to assume that films could not philosophise.

I will touch briefly upon two moments of Baggini's criticism, before turning to Mulhall's response. First, Baggini articulates some conditions that (in his view) any film should satisfy in order to "genuinely philosophise"[25] (as opposed to merely "mimic or enact philosophical arguments"); second, he uses that result to criticize Mulhall's book *not in the abstract* (as many critics did), but rather for having failed to show that the *Alien* quadrilogy *in particular* would be a good candidate for that task of offering positive and genuine contributions to philosophy.

The articulation of the conditions for a movie to philosophise begins with an objection that employs a Wittgenstein-inspired distinction between *saying* and *showing*. It goes as follows:

> To show something within a film is not necessarily to show something which is true of the world and is indeed sometimes to necessarily not show something which is true of the world. This might seem antithetical to the project of philosophy, which is surely about, in some sense at least, revealing the nature of reality, the structure of logic, the essence of being, and so forth. If this is true, then how can fictional representations hope to show the nature of reality in a philosophically rigorous way[26]?

In his own reply to this objection Baggini employs a notion inherited from Bernard Williams, that of "truthfulness" understood as "a kind of intellectual virtue", a "readiness against being fooled, and eagerness to see through appearances to the real structure and motives that lie behind them"[27]. Now truthfulness, thus understood, is clearly an aim shared by philosophy and film (as well as literature and arguably other arts). Even if one was to argue that the *paradigmatic* way in which philosophy seeks truthfulness is by presenting precise and rigorous arguments (a contentious claim, as we saw in section 2), one does not need to restrict philosophy's resources to that method. Actually:

> Film, like philosophy, can represent reality to us truthfully in such a way as to make us understand it better or more accurately than before. Film can achieve this through fictions which can include non-literal modes of representation such as metaphor, whereas philosophy usually achieves the same goal through more

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[25] All quotes from Baggini and from Andersen in this section are taken from the online versions of their respective papers in *Film-Philosophy* (see BAGGINI 2003 and ANDERSEN 2003), so I will not be able to provide page numbers. For Mulhall's reply I will use the third edition of *On Film* (MULHALL 2016).

[26] BAGGINI 2003, online.

[27] See WILLIAMS 2002, p.1.

literal modes of description. Philosophy thus *says* while film *shows*, its form of showing being distinct from more literal forms such as demonstration[28].

As the passage above already indicates, it does not suffice for the purpose of achieving "truthfulness" simply to show something that is "consonant with our experience" (if that was the case, Baggini points out, then "video recordings from CCTV cameras would be as good as feature films"). Rather, film as well as philosophy "should be consonant with our experience [...] in such a way as to reveal something about it we had not noticed before, or to make sense of it in a different and helpful way"[29].

So far, Baggini's view seems to be perfectly in tune with the approach I have been supporting[30]. Yet there is one further condition that he thinks films should satisfy in order to be considered capable of doing philosophy, and this is where he thinks Mulhall's book falls short of the mark:

> I see it as central to the philosophical enterprise that we offer reasons as much as is possible and that reason-giving ends only when it has to, not before. In contrast, along with much film and literature, the *Alien* films offer us symbolic representations of the world, but don't provide us with reasons for thinking that these representations are accurate[31].

In his reply to Baggini, Mulhall makes clear that he does not want to dispute the idea that "philosophy is peculiarly, or distinctively, subject to the claims of reason"[32]; but the crucial question, of course, is how conceive those claims, as well as what should count as ways of answering them. And it is at this juncture that Mulhall offers some elucidations that I think can help us refine our understanding of what a film can offer to philosophy.

Mulhall starts answering those questions by exploring a suggestion made by Nathan Andersen in a paper published in the same volume that contains Baggini's. Andersen's sympathetical assessment of *On Film* is summarized in the following passage:

> None of this talk of film as philosophy will make sense from the perspective of those who insist upon the notion of philosophy as the construction of arguments with respect to canonical 'philosophical' questions. As I take it, there is a different sense of philosophy in which film – and for that matter much of the most interesting philosophy of the twentieth century – is or can be philosophical. In a general characterization of philosophy we might replace the idea that it consists in the production of philosophical 'arguments' with the

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[28] BAGGINI 2003, online.

[29] *Idem, Ibidem.*

[30] Compare this with Nussbaum's, Diamond's and Cavell's congenial claims presented in section 2.

[31] BAGGINI 2003, online.

[32] MULHALL 2016, p.150.

notion that it provides a pathway for thinking, an open space in which thinking takes place, enabling new modes of organizing and making sense of experience and knowledge[33].

Drawing on Andersen's suggestion, Mulhall reminds us that there are at least three different situations in which we could be challenged to provide reasons. The first, perhaps more common case is one in which a disagreement appears against the backdrop of "shared space of thought", that is to say, a shared sense of the "shape and significance" of the topic under discussion, of the methods that could be employed to solve that disagreement, and so on[34]. (Although these are not Mulhall's examples, I think helpful illustrations would be: (i) a local disagreement between two scientists that share what Thomas Kuhn called a scientific paradigm about how to interpret the result of an experiment; (ii) a disagreement about how to judge the accomplishment of this particular work of art, when there is a general consensus about what counts as a work of art; (iii) a disagreement about how to judge this particular person, or her actions, or the consequences of those actions, when there is a general consensus about what is right or wrong, blameworthy or praiseworthy, etc.) In such cases philosophy might be of help by allowing one (perhaps the disagreeing parties themselves, perhaps someone else) to take a step back, making clearer what is involved in assessing the conflicting reasons offered by the each side. And to that end, offering clear and precise definitions and arguments would certainly be a good – if not the only – effective way of making progress.

Sometimes, however, a deeper kind of disagreement may take place, and in those cases what we might need is precisely a way to go beyond our "shared space of thought", re-imagining, finding, in Mulhall's words, "a new way of thinking about the topic – one that reorients both participants to the dispute by altering their sense of what stances are available to them with respect to its topic"[35]. (Again, this sounds like an accurate, if simplified, way to describe the moment in which a recalcitrant scientific disagreement might lead to the need of finding a new paradigm; or, in the case of aesthetic or moral discussions, the moment in which we may need to change our conception of what counts as a work of art, as the right course of action, etc.).

Finally, we may find ourselves in an even more difficult predicament, lacking any shared space for thinking to begin with:

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[33] ANDERSEN, 2003, online.

[34] MULHALL, 2016, p.151.

[35] MULHALL, 2016, p.151.

> We [may] find ourselves utterly disoriented by our situation, unable to find our feet with others, and with ourselves, with respect to what we confront. Then we need to find our orientation by imagining how we might take a stand here, and hence by finding a way to recognize certain topics and opinions about them as defining a space of thinking that we might inhabit[36].

Importantly, Mulhall contends that such "reenvisionings of the space of reasons" need not be thought as "beyond the claim of reason"; rather, they should be thought as "answerable to it in different ways"[37]. In this connection he offers the following example[38]:

> [...] when Socrates faces judicial execution, and his friends urge him to flee from his captors, he tells them that it would be wrong to do so because disobeying the Athenian polis would be like disobeying his parents. He thereby reorients their thinking about Athens by comparing the polis to a family. But the degree of conviction this imaginative connection elicits is dependent upon the extent to which it can be followed out in detail, the way in which it makes sense of various aspects of political life, the further connections it allows us to draw in a range of related cases, and our willingness to rethink our own status and our own experience of life (in the family and in the polis, but not only there) in the terms it suggests. Socrates's imagination is thus not a faculty that is essentially other to that of rationality, or essentially unconstrained by it; it is accountable in a variety of ways, but none would straightforwardly fit the model of 'giving reasons for and against an opinion'[39].

What I want to emphasize here is the idea, presented at the end of the quote, that rationality and imagination need not be thought as *different faculties*, and that in some cases using one's imagination is precisely a way – perhaps the best way, perhaps even the only way – to (rationally) advance a conversation. (Again, compare this to Diamond's idea, presented in section 2, that some of the best philosophical texts in our tradition are precisely exercises in "moral creativity" and "moral imagination" that allow us "to see the situation differently"[40].

Now the use of imagination to provide new pathways for thought is also a central – if underestimated – feature of Wittgenstein's methodology in his "mature" writings (say after 1930). Its most palpable results are the myriad of language-games he creates in order to provide "objects of comparison"[41] capable of reminding us of aspects of our linguistic practices that might be

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[36] MULHALL, 2016, p.151.

[37] *Idem, Ibidem*.

[38] The example was originally presented by (DIAMOND, 1991, p.312).

[39] MULHALL, 2016, p.151-2.

[40] DIAMOND, 1991, p.311.

[41] See WITTGENSTEIN, 2009, §130.

otherwise difficult to pay attention to, for different reasons: be it because of their very ubiquitousness and familiarity[42], or because they are too entangled to other practices, enshrouded in a mist that prevents clear vision[43], or, finally, because we are mislead and "held captive" by a series of what Wittgenstein calls *pictures*[44]. In all those cases, imagining (that is to say, *inventing*) simple, clear-cut, particular uses of language would serve the therapeutic purpose of freeing ourselves from monolithic, "metaphysical" views about "the essence" of phenomena.

I am particularly interested in this connection to highlight what, according to Wittgenstein, "makes it difficult for us to take this line of investigation", namely what he calls "our craving for generality", or "the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case"[45]. He relates that attitude with "our preoccupation with the method of science", understood as a search for general, reductive explanations:

> Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy really is 'purely descriptive'[46].

Now one should not be mislead by this last claim – echoed many times, in different forms, across Wittgenstein's mature writings – to think that *all* a Wittgensteinian philosopher has to offer are descriptions of the way our

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[42] "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something a because it is always before one's eyes.)" (WITTGENSTEIN 2009, §129).

[43] In this connection, notice what he says when he introduces the technique of language-games in *The Blue Book*: I shall in the future again and again draw your attention to what I shall call language games. These are ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language. [...] If we want to study the problems of truth and falsehood, of the agreement and disagreement of propositions with reality, of the nature of assertion, assumption, and question, we shall with great advantage look at primitive forms of language in which these forms of thinking appear without the confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought. When we look at such simple forms of language the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent. On the other hand we recognize in these simple processes forms of language not separated by a break from our more complicated ones. We see that we can build up the complicated forms from the primitive ones by gradually adding new forms (WITTGENSTEIN 1958, p.17).

[44] "A *picture* held us captive. And we couldn't get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably" (WITTGENSTEIN 2009, §115).

[45] See WITTGENSTEIN 1958, p.17-18.

[46] WITTGENSTEIN 1958, p.18.

language *actually* works; that might well be the *end* of the enterprise, but, as I already suggested, is in no way the only *means* to that end. On the contrary, my sense in reading Wittgenstein's later writings is that in order to counter our "contemptuous attitude towards the particular case" what he is doing for the most part is precisely *imagining,* and asking us to imagine, *new possibilities*, which are not only *unreal* but even *surreal*[47].

The reason to call attention to those moments in Wittgenstein's writings is that having them in mind can help one better understand the kind of philosophical contributions that Mulhall wanted to show the films of the *Alien* quartet could offer. Take, for example, the following pair of claims already made in the introduction to first edition of *On Film*, and think about the way they seem to perfectly fit the bill of language-games, understood as imaginative, fictional exercises allowing us to see more clearly some aspects of our own, real world:

> [...] the uncanny otherness of the aliens, and of course the alien universe itself, stripped of the clutter of social particularity [is able] to reveal receding horizons of mythic significance[48].
> From beginning to end, the Alien films present us with small, isolated groups of human beings framed most immediately against the infinity of the cosmos. Each individual's inhabitation of the universe appears unmediated by the more complex interweavings of culture and society, those systems of signification which condition the meaning of any actions and events encompassed by them; [...]. This cosmic backdrop makes it all but impossible to avoid grasping the narrative and thematic structure of the films in metaphysical or existential terms – as if the alien universe could not but concern itself with the human condition as such (as opposed to some specific inflection of that condition, some particular way in which a given human society has adapted, and adapted to, its environment, some individual way of making sense of its circumstances)[49].

The main point I want to emphasize here is that the way Mulhall thinks these films are capable of doing philosophy is precisely *not,* or at the very least not *primarily*, by offering reasons that could be used to "win" an already ongoing philosophical debate or dispute (the first case of "answering to the claims of reason" distinguished in his reply to Baggini). As it is the case with the philosophers who are the main inspirations of Mulhall's own

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[47] As O. K. Bouwsma expressed, referring to the style and content of *The Blue Book*: "the author skips about in what strikes some as a kind of philosophical surrealism, juxtaposing the most distantly related ideas such as machines and tooth-aches, and questions and cramps, and mental processes and fidgeting with tea-cups" (BOUWSMA, 1961, p.146). The same could be said, with even more accuracy, of Wittgenstein's imaginative exercises in the *Philosophical Investigations.*

[48] MULHALL 2002, p.1.

[49] MULHALI 2002, p.8-9.

approach – Wittgenstein and Cavell, to be sure, but also Heidegger (more on this soon) – his point is rather that these films allow us to see things differently, reimagining our shared space of thought or providing new pathways for it.

To bring this point home I will close this section by quoting another Wittgensteinian philosopher interested in the power of film. I refer to Rupert Read, who also argues (in a "manifesto" published online[50]) that philosophy does not need to be, and in fact, *should* not be thought as restricted to the aim of providing theses or theories or arguments. As he summarizes, referring to a set of specific films he takes as exemplary for his purposes[51]:

> These films do not then make arguments in the ordinary philosophical sense of that word: they don't yield premises and conclusions, etc.. [...] [T]hey rather offer (what Wittgenstein sometimes calls) therapy. This is philosophy not as theory nor as quasi-factive impersonal claim, but as a process that one must work through for oneself. It is different from the idea of philosophy to which we are accustomed; it sits ill with the idolatry of science which lies at the heart of our civilisation. So much the worse for that idolatry. [...] These films are works, like Wittgenstein's writing, designed to heal. But: healing, healing of one's mind, one's body-self, and of one's world, is an art, not a science, and is through and through processual[52].

Now this is as bold a claim as one can get concerning the relation between film and philosophy. And yet, as I tried to suggest, it seems perfectly accurate, given one particular way of understanding the Wittgensteinian vision of philosophy. – If philosophy is an art[53] (an art of healing) then certainly can an art be philosophy. But can philosophy become art and still know itself?[54] – In a Wittgensteinian spirit, I submit this is not a question requiring a *general* answer; rather, I think we should judge the merits of this blurring of the boundaries between art and philosophy case by case. And this is my cue to finally present one such case – a philosophical reading of Kurosawa's *Rashomon*.

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[50] Cf. READ 2013. Similar considerations were presented earlier in (READ and GOODENOUGH 2005).

[51] Among them Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto*, Peter Jackson's the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Children of Men*, Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* and Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* and *The New World*.

[52] READ 2013, online.

[53] Again, this is precisely the word used by Bouwsma, in the paper I already quoted, to describe the achievement of Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology in *The Blue Book* (BOUWSMA 1961, p.147 ss.). I, for one, am more than happy to adhere to that description in my own understanding of Wittgenstein's later philosophy as a whole.

[54] I am here echoing the words of Stanley Cavell at the end of *The Claim of Reason* (CAVELL, 1979, p.496).

3. Film as philosophy: *Rashomon* as a test-case

Rashomon is among the most debated movies among philosophers. Since its release in 1950, there were innumerable attempts to decipher its philosophical message. At least among Western viewers (including professional philosophers, but in no way restricted to them) the most common interpretations tend to focus on epistemological questions – such as the nature and possibility of truth, the reliability of testimony, the threat of relativism or skepticism, and so on. Actually, the very title of the movie became associated with those issues in our popular culture. As Stephen Prince points out:

> [...] *Rashomon* is that rare film that has transcended its own status as film, influencing not just the moving image but the culture at large. Its very name has entered the common parlance to symbolize general notions about the relativity of truth and the unreliability, the inevitable subjectivity, of memory. In the legal realm, for example, lawyers and judges commonly speak of "the *Rashomon* effect" when firsthand witnesses confront them with contradictory testimony[55].

I will argue that, notwithstanding its popularity and *prima facie* plausibility, that epistemological reading is superficial, leaving untouched what I take as the most fundamental lesson of the movie – what I will call, in the final section, Kurosawa's existential challenge. But the more immediate reason to talk about *Rashomon* is that it was used as a kind of touchstone in the debate between Mulhall and Baggini. So I will take this opportunity to take that debate a little further, using *Rashomon* as a test-case for the approach to "film as philosophy" developed in the preceding sections.

Let us start by recalling Baggini's main contention against Mulhall's *On Film,* which is encapsulated in the claim that films should go beyond merely offering "symbolic representations of the world", and should rather provide us with *reasons* for assessing the truthfulness of those representations, *showing* aspects of reality that would ultimately allow us to understand it "better or more accurately than before"[56]. Baggini himself presents *Rashomon* as a good candidate to fulfill this role, and offers the following assessment of its main achievement:

> What we are really being shown then [in *Rashomon*] is how one event, which in certain respects objectively occurred, since its key details are not even contested by the inconsistent accounts, is nonetheless recalled differently because the participants did not merely experience the events as detached, objective observers, but as participants who saw, in their actions and the actions of

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[55] Cf. PRINCE 2012, online. The text originally appeared in the *Criterion Collection's* 2002 DVD edition of *Rashomon*.
[56] 2003, online.

others, motives, feelings, and moral commitments that were not simple, publicly observable facts. Hence we are shown how to make compatible a kind of non-relativistic view that there are objective facts with the truth that events are ineluctably perceived differently by each individual[57].

As we shall see, my own reading agrees only partially with Baggini's: I too think one of the philosophical achievements of *Rashomon* is to remind us of the complexity of our experience, thus offering a remedy to a common philosophical view of it as "detached". But I disagree that the final lesson to be taken from that reminder has to do with the epistemological problem he presents at the end of the passage. Following Mulhall's suggestion, instead of trying to extract from the movie a response to an already known philosophical problem – say the problem of the relativity of truth, or skepticism about the external world – I will argue that *Rashomon* is genuinely capable of opening new pathways of thinking about these issues. To advance some results I will try to argue for in more detail in what follows, the reading I want to offer will frame the particular forms of skeptical doubts normally associated with the movie inside a more general view of our modern condition of "mere spectators" of the world. In my view the film does not try to "defend", "illustrate" or even "refute" that kind of skepticism (e.g., by offering a compatibilist way out along the lines proposed by Baggini); rather, what it really tries to accomplish is a change in perspective, from narrow epistemological difficulties to a broader existential reflection, one in which the depths of the human soul are investigated and exposed. Specifically, I will argue that the film embodies the view that we are always already existentially implicated in the events we experience, *against* our tacit assumption that truthfulness and objectivity can only be achieved by a "view from nowhere". Complementarily, the film also reminds us of what an engaged and active stance within the world looks like by presenting different forms of attunement to it, stemming from each individual's existential commitments. Finally, it proposes a therapeutic way out of existential angst, precisely by effecting a change in perspective or mood that reframes the whole epistemological problematic with which it begins.

I will try to substantiate this reading it in two ways: first by (briefly) calling attention to the context in which the narrative of the film is set, as well as to its relation to the historical context in which the film was made; second, by offering a close reading of a central narrative development, emphasizing some specifically filmic devices employed by Kurosawa in order to show us something about reality. Ultimately, what I will argue is that Kurosawa's artistic

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[57] BAGGINI 2003, online.

aspirations, however firmly rooted in the historical context in which the movie was created, also have the power to transcend those conditions, thus offering a philosophical and existential lesson which might not be exactly atemporal, but is certainly still relevant for us (post?)moderns.

Let us begin with a brief statement of the main plot of the movie. A natural, apparently uncontentious way to summarize it would be to say that the movie presents a rape and a murder through a series of flashbacks, which in turn convey different accounts of that crime as experienced or remembered by four main witnesses[58]: an unnamed woodcutter, a bandit named Tajomaru, an unnamed samurai and his unnamed wife. – I said that is a natural, apparently uncontentious summary; but a little reflection will show that there is almost nothing uncontentious about that description. First, depending on the account you follow, it is not clear whether what happened was really a *rape* or something less extreme (a consensual sexual act resulting from the woman being seduced by the bandit); second, in at least one of the accounts the samurai was not *murdered*, but committed suicide; third, the so-called "flashbacks" (if this is what they really are) are not used in their traditional role – roughly to present an objective point of view about a past event; finally, that description of the witnesses is not completely accurate, since it does not mention that the account of the samurai was conveyed posthumously, through a medium, and it also does not take note of the peculiar role of what we could call the film's two "meta-witnesses", the woodcutter and the priest as seen in the beginning of the movie, who are actually the narrators of almost all the main events we will follow, and who are themselves *recalling* the accounts as they were (supposedly) presented in a trial (so that the "flashbacks" we see could be understood as the way those two narrators are *imagining* the events from recalling the accounts told by the first-hand witnesses during the trial). And one should not forget the "commoner", whose role seems to be to instigate these two narrators to go further with their stories. Complicated? It gets worse, before it gets better. Bear with me.

Now, besides the level of indirection already noticed, having to do with the second hand character of the reports we hear from our two main narrators (the "meta-witnesses"), the trustworthiness of those reports is further compromised by the state of mind in which they find themselves at the outset of the movie – one of profound confusion, mixed with sheer

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[58] There are also two additional, secondary witnesses that were not directly involved with the crime itself: the priest, who finds the samurai and the woman at the road before the events of the crime, and a police agent, who finds the bandit after those events.

hopelessness. This state of mind is clearly conveyed by their first lines[59]:

> *Woodcutter*: I don't understand. I just don't understand. I don't understand it at all. I just don't understand.
> *Priest*: Oh, even Abbot Konin of the Kiyomizu Temple, though he's known for his learning, wouldn't be able to understand this. [...] War, earthquake, winds, fire, famine, the plague. Year after year, it's been nothing but disasters. And bandits descend upon us every night. I've seen so many men getting killed like insects, but even I have never heard a story as horrible as this. Yes. So horrible. This time, I may finally lose my faith in the human soul. It's worse than worse than bandits, the plague, famine, fire or wars.

Focusing on this initial sequence, one question that could be asked – but, I will submit, is rarely actually asked – is: what exactly causes the confusion of the narrators? I suppose most viewers do not ask that question because they are initially led to assume, apparently with good reason, that the main cause of this confusion is the very crime committed – something about its horrendous details and consequences, say, or perhaps something having to do with the selfishness and mendacity of everybody involved in it. After all, that is the event immediately (and then repeatedly, relentlessly) recalled by the two narrators in their effort to dissipate their avowed confusion. That, at any rate, certainly describes my own initial reaction to the movie (and it is also a common reaction among students when I show them the movie for the first time). However, as I will try to show, that initial reaction will be put in question as soon as we start paying more attention to the subsequent details of the narrative (a phenomenon that is only reinforced after repeated viewings). What then happens is a gradual reorientation of our initial impressions in favor of the view that something much more momentous is underway, something that is capable of shaking or undermining the very ground upon which the narrator's belief systems or worldviews previously stood.

I will now try to substantiate this last claim with the help of some external and some internal information. The first piece of external information I want to bring is a passage from Kurosawa's autobiography, in which he offers a telling anecdote about the perceived obscurity of the movie's script by the part of the filming crew, followed by his own description of the intended meaning of the movie. Here is the extended quote in which the anecdote is presented:

> [...] one day just before the shooting was to start, the three assistant directors Daiei had assigned me came to see me at the inn where I was staying. I wondered what the problem could be. It turned out that they found the script

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[59] All the lines will be quoted from the Continuity Script to *Rashomon* published in Richie (Ed.) 2000.

baffling and wanted me to explain it to them. "Please read it again more carefully," I told them. "If you read it diligently, you should be able to understand it because it was written with the intention of being comprehensible." But they wouldn't leave. "We believe we have read it carefully, and we still don't understand it at all; that's why we want you to explain it to us." For their persistence I gave them this simple explanation: Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing. This script portrays such human beings–the kind who cannot survive without lies to make them feel they are better people than they really are. It even shows this sinful need for flattering falsehood going beyond the grave—even the character who dies cannot give up his lies when he speaks to the living through a medium. Egoism is a sin the human being carries with him [*sic*] from birth; it is the most difficult to redeem. This film is like a strange picture scroll that is unrolled and displayed by the ego. You say that you can't understand this script at all, but that is because the human heart itself is impossible to understand. If you focus on the impossibility of truly understanding human psychology and read the script one more time, I think you will grasp the point of it[60].

Now, supposing we take Kurosawa's word as at least relatively authoritative about the meaning of the film, this passage offers one initial indication that whatever it ponders – something about the complexity of the "human heart" or "human psychology" – that is precisely *not* (or at the very least not *simply*) an epistemological issue.

Let us also recall that the movie is set in a particular period of Japan's history, known as the Heian Period. This point is clearly articulated by Stephen Prince in his study of Kurosawa:

The story [of *Rashomon*] is set in the twelfth century, at the close of the Heian period when the country's central government and court authority were being undermined by the growth of autonomous political and military powers in the provinces. [...] Pestilence, fires, earthquakes, rebellions by warrior monks, violent crime in the capital city of Kyoto, all seemed to be signs of the dissolution of order, of a world teetering on the brink of chaos. It seemed to be the period known in Buddhist prophecy as "the end of the law," when human life would fall to its point of greatest degeneracy[61].

The very word "Rashomon" refers the great gateway to the city of Kyoto, southern Japan during that period of political and social chaos; its decaying state also symbolizes the state of that world. It became a space for thieves, for the disposing of bodies, and it was believed to be haunted by spirits or daemons. As Prince argues in another context, the very choice of this period and setting allows Kurosawa "to reveal the extremities of human

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[60] KUROSAWA 1983, p.183.

[61] PRINCE 1992, p.128. That explains the Priest's allusion to "War, earthquake, winds, fire, famine, the plague. Year after year, it's been nothing but disasters. And bandits descend upon us every night."

behavior"[62].

Finally, we should also notice that in some respects the real world in which Kurosawa was working – occupied Japan in the aftermath of WWII – was very reminiscent of that historical period. Not only was the nation *materially* shattered and devastated, but it also lost an authority which was formerly believed to be sacred and eternal.

With those contextual considerations in mind, let us now focus on some elements within the narrative that reinforce a general sense of disorientation and hopelessness. I already pointed to the state of the gate where the narration occurs; but even before we devise the gate, the first thing we notice is the impossibly heavy, torrential rain[63] that persists almost to the very end of the movie (more on this change later). And I submit we should think of this rain as the physical, external manifestation of the darkness of the human soul that the movie is about to explore – a lack of moral and existential clarity which is echoed in the lines of the main characters in many occasions, as we shall see.

Then we have the peculiar (and conflicting) "flashbacks" of the main events of the narrative. It is not an easy task to summarize the content of those flashbacks, particularly because, if the reading I am about to propose is correct, our own understanding of that content should go through some Gestalt changes with the film's progress. In trying to convey the way those changes are supposed to happen I'll inevitably fall into some artificiality, hence checking your own experience of the movie against this reconstruction is vital. With that disclaimer in place, let us plunge in. (I will number the different versions of the accounts following the order in which they are shown in the movie to facilitate reference.)

(1) The first flashback recounts the woodcutter's encounter with the scene of the crime, supposedly *after* the samurai was killed and the wife and the bandit were gone. This sequence is a prime example of Kurosawa's use of camera movements and soundtrack to punctuate and amplify the changes in the character's state of mind. As the woodcutter enters the forest he seems to be well attuned to his surroundings, confidently and gently navigating through its paths and obstacles as if this was a normal part of his routine; but soon things start to change – the setting becomes darker and the forest denser, the

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[62] PRINCE 2002, online.

[63] The story about the technical challenges to produce the rain effect at the gate is by now well known – unsatisfied with the fact that the rain wouldn't show up clearly against the light gray backdrop, Kurosawa and his crew decided to tint the water by pouring black ink into the tank of the rain machine.

camera (literally and figuratively) stops in its tracks many times, and then wanders around, as if lost and disoriented, even surprised (an effect compounded by the soundtrack), echoing the woodcutter's reaction as he finds some clues to what (we soon will know) turns out to be the main event of the film. (This sequence is very important to set the tone for the remainder of the movie; the forest itself, as many critics have noticed, has a dream-like or mythic character about it, and entering it can also be thought as a symbol for the examination of the depths of the human soul that Kurosawa is orchestrating – we are leaving "normality" or "civilization" behind, and with it all the garments and masks we usually wear to suppress our deeper and perhaps repressed "nature"[64]).

(2) The second version of the events is told from the point of view of the bandit – or at least that is a natural way of describing this perspective; but that is not exactly right, since we are never actually hearing the bandit first hand (or, for that matter, any of the three characters directly involved in the crime). What we are actually experiencing is a visual representation of the way the woodcutter recalls (imagines?) the events that happened from the story that was told by the bandit at the trial. So a better way of describing the perspective from which this "flashback" (?) is presented, clumsy as it sounds, would be something like "the bandit's-as-recalled-by-the-woodcutter" point of view. What we see / are told from that point of view is that the bandit felt a sudden urge to lure this wealthy samurai and his wife into the forest, for the purpose of robbing the man and raping the woman. To that end he used as bait an offer to sell some high quality swords he supposedly hid in the forest. The bandit then convinces the samurai to follow him to a dark grove, where the samurai is subdued and tied up. The bandit goes back to where the wife was left, supposedly in order to rape her and rob their possessions, but once again, apparently without much reflection and following his impulses, he decides he has to get the wife to witness his feat of subduing the samurai[65]; he

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[64] In this connection, compare to what Kurosawa himself has to say about the choice of the setting in his autobiography: "To provide the symbolic background atmosphere [to *Rashomon*], I decided to use the Akutagawa "In a Grove" story, which goes into the depths of the human heart as if with a surgeon's scalpel, laying bare its dark complexities and bizarre twists. These strange impulses of the human heart would be expressed through the use of an elaborately fashioned play of light and shadow. In the film, people going astray in the thicket of their hearts would wander into a wider wilderness, so I moved the setting to a large forest. I selected the virgin forest of the mountains surrounding Nara, and the forest belonging to the Komyoji temple outside Kyoto" (KUROSAWA 1983, p.182).

[65] The following line ascribed to the bandit at the trial describes this sudden change of heart: "She [the wife] became very pale and stared at me as though her eyes were frozen. She looked like a child when it turns suddenly serious. The sight of her made me jealous of that man. I started to hate him. I wanted to

tells her the samurai has been bitten by a snake and takes the wife to see him. Arriving at the grove where the samurai is tied up, the bandit tries to attack the wife; she initially refuses his advances and tries to defend herself, but eventually gives in and is somehow seduced. This is followed by a transition to a moment immediately after the implied sexual act. The woman now is filled with shame, and begs the bandit to duel her husband to the death in order to save her from the guilt and shame of having being possessed by two men. The bandit agrees, sets the samurai free and the two begin dueling for what feels like a rather long time – the bandit even claims at the trial that no man had ever crossed blades with him so many times before. The fight is clearly dominated by the bandit, however fierce the opponent, and the samurai is eventually killed by him. The woman, we are later told, went missing (possibly ran away during the fight).

(3) The third story is told from the point of view of the wife (or, more precisely, "the wife-as-recalled-by-the-priest"), and her version is quite different from the bandit's. The main difference is that in her version the bandit leaves her for dead after he has raped her (no consent or seduction here), but eventually she is able to get up and untie the husband. She then begs the samurai to kill her, so she will be at peace and freed from her shame and dishonour; but the husband doesn't do what she pleads – instead, he just stares at her with a look of utter disgust. His expression disturbs her so much that she takes a dagger in her hand, slowly walks towards him, but then faints; upon waking up she discovers the samurai was killed with her dagger, so she concludes she was the killer.

(4) The fourth story is also told from the point of view of the someone at the gate – it is not clear, it seems to me, whether the meta-narrator at this point is still the priest or whether the woodcutter took his place, since there is a rather abrupt transition back to the courtyard after an exchange among the three characters at the gate. In any case, what is then reported is the version that the murdered (and indignant) samurai told from beyond the grave, with the help of a medium. He claims that after raping his wife the bandit asked her to run away with him – a proposal she accepted, but only upon the condition that the bandit would kill her husband, so she wouldn't feel shame for having belonged to two men. The bandit seems to be outraged by that proposal, so he turns on her and asks the samurai what he should do with her. After some struggle she is able to escape, and upon returning from his failed

show her what he looked like, all tied up like that. I hadn't even thought of a thing like that before, but now I did."

chase, the bandit unties the samurai and goes away. The samurai, left alone and filled with shame, decides to take his own life, which he does with his wife's dagger. (Importantly, as we shall soon see, he also says that after having stuck the dagger into his chest he felt someone drawing it out.)

(5) We are now back to the three characters at the rain-soaked Rashomon gate. The commoner is still eager to hear more, and seems to be somewhat suspicious of what he heard so far – in particular, he accuses the woodcutter of knowing more than he acknowledged. Then, in an unexpected turn of events, the woodcutter decides to share what he really saw (or so he claims), contradicting his initial story and confessing that he actually witnessed both the rape and the murder, although he did not have the courage to say so at the trial (perhaps fearing being implicated with the murder). He then starts telling a new, supposedly more accurate, version of the story – at this point we are all but ready to take this as the objective, definitive version of the facts. In this version the bandit, the wife and the samurai are all petty, jealous and corrupt. He also says the bandit is the one who killed the samurai, but not the way the bandit described it in his own version; instead it happens almost by accident, after a very clumsy sword fight in which both contestants are portrayed as weak and cowardly, constantly tripping and falling and flailing about as they attempt to kill one another.

Now, is this really the definitive version of the events? I think not, and I think the film gives us at least two clues that suggest that cannot be the case. First, the commoner challenges the woodcutter once more by pointing out that this version does not account for the destiny of the woman's dagger, implying that the woodcutter has stolen it, perhaps by pulling it out from the samurai's chest – which is all but acknowledged by the humbled woodcutter. And then there is the portrayal of the fight itself. At this point of the narrative we were already told many times that the bandit is considered very skilled in fighting and handling weapons, and so must be a samurai. Then why does the fight we see in this last "flashback" feel almost comically awkward? Isn't it because what we *see* is supposed to reflect the way the woodcutter – someone supposedly unskilled in swordsmanship and duels – *tells* the story? And if so, is the fight only being badly *described*, or is it completely *made up*? Or something in between? And why should that matter?

These questions will allow me to introduce what I think is an important key for understanding the movie's central (if almost subliminal, or perhaps precisely because subliminal) achievement – namely, the way it is capable of reminding us of phenomenological features of the human experience that much traditional philosophy (particularly analytic philosophy) tends to skip over. At least until very recently that tradition has hardly paid any

attention to the importance of moods. Actually, as I shall argue, it is precisely because analytic philosophers are so prone to "imitate the methods of science" (to echo the Wittgensteinian diagnosis presented in the former section) that it is normally assumed that this is just how things *should* be – after all, moods are "merely subjective", and philosophy (as well as science) should strive for objectivity, generality, impessoality. Although this is not the place to mount a criticism of that view, I think it will be useful to provide a brief look at what an alternative view would look like, so as to better ground my claim that this movie is *doing philosophy* by reminding us of some phenomenological aspects of our existence. The alternative I will focus on is a (broadly conceived) Heideggerian approach, as put forward in *Being and Time*. I will briefly delineate that approach in the next section, and then resume the reading of *Rashomon* at the concluding one.

4. Moods and being-in-the-world: a Heideggerian interlude

Heidegger's main goal in *Being and Time*[66] is to provide a fundamental ontology, that is, an investigation of the very nature of being (as opposed to the "ontic" investigations of *particular kinds of beings* provided by our normal scientific disciplines). To that end he takes as his starting point our own, peculiar way of being, that he calls "Dasein" (literally "being there"). Against much of the philosophical tradition preceding him, Heidegger argues that the essence of human existence is not to be found in any static definition that appeals to certain properties – e.g., "a human being is a rational animal", or "a creature of God", or again "a thinking subject" (in the modern sense of a being who has mental states and experiences that in themselves could well not be connected to the state of the surrounding world). Rather, what is characteristic of our mode of existence is precisely that our very being is always an issue for us, something we have to take a stance on, whether we do it consciously or not. Besides – and in a marked difference both from the being of inanimate *objects* as well as "Cartesian" *subjects* – our way of being is intimately and inseparably connected with the world in which we find ourselves, so it can be thought of as a kind of *opening to a world*.

Now, according to Heidegger, just in the same way the (Western) philosophical tradition has failed to take into account this fundamental fact about *our* existence, it also failed to understand the nature *the world*. From the point of view of the phenomenological ontology provided in *Being and Time*, a world is not to be conceived a mere collection of entities that are inherently

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[66] HEIDEGGER 2010.

meaningless (say physical entities with causal properties, as studied by the different natural sciences), but rather as the very horizon of meaningful activity which we inhabit, and which gives purpose to our everyday dealings. Hence the neologism "being-in-the-world", which intends to convey that fundamental, originary unity.

From this (broadly Heideggerian) understanding of our being-in-the-world, nothing could be furthest from our ordinary experience than a relation conceived as a detached, neutral reception of data from a world of objects that are separate and independently given[67]. Instead, our average everyday dealings are with beings which are first and foremost apprehended and understood as having specific functions and purposes for our projects (i.e., as tools, or instruments). So, for example, when I enter a classroom what I see (if I am a professor, say[68]) is not some chunks of matter, and not even some discrete entities – "the lectern", "the blackboard", "the desks", and so on – but rather a holistic, meaningful web of what we might call (following Hubert Dreyfus's usage[69]) *affordances*, opportunities to act inside the world of lecturing. (It might be of help here to try and convert those nouns – "lectern", "blackboard", "desks" – into verbs or adverbial phrases conveying the affordances provided by each encounter – say "to-read-while-standing-up", "to-write-on", "to-sit-on", etc.)

It must be clear from this brief analysis why, for someone inclined to think of our being-in-the-world along those lines – as an opening to different affordances – moods would be of paramount importance. After all, if an affordance will show up as such might well depend on the way I am attuned (or out of tune) with the situation surrounding me. In a good mood the lecture room might not only be experienced as a web of affordances (to-read-while-standing-up, to-write-on, etc.) but as the opportunity I was looking forward to,

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[67] Notice that this is first and foremost a phenomenological claim, concerning the best way of describing the nature of our experience, the way things appear to us. As such, it does not necessarily commits one to specific epistemological views about, e.g., whether objects exist independently of our perceiving them. As long as we keep in mind the nature of an ontological investigation and do not conflate it with the ontic claims of empirical sciences, those questions should remain separate – actually, to conflate them is precisely a mark of what Wittgenstein, as well as Heidegger, would describe as the problematic urge to imitate the methods of science in philosophy. But these are matters for another paper.
[68] That the room might be apprehended differently by different persons, with different existential stances – professors, students, staff, etc. – is precisely the point that must be emphasized here.
[69] DREYFUS 2013. Dreyfus himself acknowledges that his use of the term "affordance" comes from J. J. Gibson, who in turn introduced it "to describe objective features of the world in terms of their meaning to the creatures that use them. Thus a hole affords hiding to a rabbit but not an elephant. To us floors afford walking on, apples afford eating, etc." (*Idem*, p.37).

so I could finally present and test those thoughts I have been ruminating about; in a bad mood, on the other hand, the same holistic web might be felt as something to endure.

Now here are some interesting features of moods that we should take into account in order to get an accurate understanding of this point[70]. To begin with, although moods can to *some extent, at some occasions*, be modified intentionally (say I am starting to feel blue and counter that mood by listening to an uplifting playlist), moods are never *fully* under our control – we cannot simply "decide" how we will be affected by the situations we confront. Ultimately, what that suggests is precisely something about the fundamental structure our way of being-in-the-world, namely that we are *thrown* in a world that we did not choose nor can totally command. Secondly, although it is clear that a mood is not an "objective" property of some entities in the world (the lecture room, in our example), it is neither "merely subjective". Actually, that whole dichotomy starts falling apart when we think about this aspect of our involvement. Take, for example, a boring philosophy talk – it might well not the case merely that *you* are bored by the talk, but rather that the talk *itself* is really boring. Or again, if I go to a party I can sometimes feel *its* mood; I can even make an effort to become *attuned* to that mood – and I can fail miserably to do so, of course, what only goes on to show that there is nothing "merely subjective" about this experience. Moods, therefore, are not internal, private phenomena, but public and shared ones.

Being-in-the-world means always already finding ourselves attuned to a particular mood, which will in turn affect our whole way of experiencing that world. To repeat: this is not to be understood as something internal, but rather as a way of opening to the affordances of that world. Thus interpreted, this is precisely not some sort of theoretical and detached relation to things, but rather a kind of embodied way of navigating a (meaningful) world, showing us the available range of ways to be.

Taken to their logical conclusions, these observations would imply a reversal of the traditional epistemological model assumed at least since modernity in Western philosophy: rather than passive spectators ("Cartesian egos", or occupants of a quasi-divine "view from nowhere") looking at a world of entities devoid of intrinsic meaning, this Heidegger-inspired approach would interpret beings like us (*Dasein*) as essentially active, situated, embodied and absorbed in daily activities, in a fundamental unity with the world. As Stephen Mulhall summarizes in his commentary to Heidegger's magnum opus:

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[70] I am here following DREYFUS (1991).

Being and Time shifts the focus of the epistemological tradition away from this conception of the human being as an unmoving point of view upon the world. Heidegger's protagonists are actors rather than spectators, and his narratives suggest that exclusive reliance upon the image of the spectator has seriously distorted philosophers' characterizations of human existence in the world[71].

Now what I want to propose is that *Rashomon* is also in the business of refocusing our conception of human existence, and it does so precisely by reminding us of some embodied features of our being-in-the-world – but only *after* baiting us to assume that detached picture for the best part of the movie, only to reveal its shortcomings.

5. Back to *Rashomon*: Kurosawa's existential challenge

Let me resume the analysis of *Rashomon* by quoting another passage from Stephen Prince that offers us an initial suggestion of how this "Heideggerian approach" can be conveyed cinematically. The passage focuses on a sequence already touched upon in section 4, namely the woodcutter's entering the forest (which I anticipated was crucial for setting the tone of the whole movie):

> During the sequence in which the woodcutter walks through the forest, Kurosawa fashions the camera's patterns of movement so that they become the architectonics of narrative and generate metaphor. The woodcutter intuitively responds to the rhythms of the forest by leaping a river, ducking a branch, crossing a log bridge. He does not recognize these objects consciously but glides over them in a mystical state. The lyrically tracking camera simulates the rhythms of his walk and the topography of the forest and is, therefore, a formal indicator of this condition. But his reverie is broken when he discovers evidence of a crime. As he finds several hats, an amulet case, a rope, and finally a body, he scuttles about awkwardly, with fear. As he makes these discoveries, the tracking shots cease. The objects have made him alarmed and rational. His thinking mind is switched on, and his sensuous, intuitive response to the forest is lost. This change is reflected in the shift from a moving camera to the stationary shots that record the discoveries of the objects and the dead man. The sequence has shifted on a formal and a dramatic level from sensuous movement to a fixed, narrowed perspective of interest, from the intuitive responses of the Zen state to the divided and rigid perspectives of the rational mind[72].

There is much to agree with Prince's phenomenological description in this passage. In particular, it conveys very clearly what happens when the woodcutter's familiar way of being-in-the-world disintegrates, generating a corresponding change in his stance toward that world – from what we could

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[71] MULHALL 2005, p.39.

[72] PRINCE 1992, p.133.

call an engaged state of *flow* to a disengaged *view*. Prince further equates the first stance with our "sensuous movement" and the second with the "rigid perspectives of the rational mind". Now I think this last claim combines insight and confusion. The insight has to do with the idea that we go from a *dynamic* and *embodied* way of being-in-the-world to a *static*, in the limit *disembodied* one. But to articulate that contrast in terms of sensibility vs. rationality is again to fall prey of those false dichotomies I indicated at the beginning of this paper. A more accurate understanding of these issues, it seems to me, would require thinking of "rationality" more broadly, including, to be sure, cases of disengaged observation, but also encompassing some *essentially embodied ways of navigating the world* that characterize rational animals (as opposed to irrational ones), allowing some affordances to become salient that would not otherwise (say "to lecture", "to write a philosophy paper", "to interpret a movie", and so on).

I will come back to this point, but first I would like to argue that the movie itself takes a stand on this issue, all but forcing the attentive viewer to reflect upon it. To show that I will start by noticing once again a peculiar feature of our experience of seeing *Rashomon* that I think deserves further investigation. It has to do with how difficult it is to keep alive during our viewing the realization that all but one version of the main events of the movie are told second hand. (That is clearly the case of versions 2-4 distinguished in section 4, but it also applies to the first of the two contradictory versions told by the woodcutter, which would be more precisely described as a *retelling* of the version he told originally at the trial.) The reason why I am interested in exploring this difficulty is that I take this to be precisely part of the movie's central accomplishment. I will present two "cinematic reasons" why I think it is so difficult to keep this level of indirection alive as we see *Rashomon* and then I will suggest a more "philosophical" inclination contributing to that effect.

The first cinematic device I want to focus on is the use of the flashback technique itself: except when clearly indicated otherwise (say by a change in soundtrack or by visual clues), we normally associate flashbacks with the provision of objective, authoritative recountings of past events (if from a particular point of view). In detective or "procedural" movies and TV series, for example, where the use of that technique is very common, the flashback is normally presented as a *final revelation*, *at last* leading us to see *the truth of the matter directly* (after trying to piece together clues that were at best good indirect evidence). Now that expectation is only reinforced in this particular movie by a second cinematic device that we haven't discussed so far, namely the fact that during the retelling of all those version of the crime we, the spectators, are (literally and figuratively) put in the positions of judges and jury, all but

identified with the actual judge hearing the retellings at the trial (the characters speak looking directly at the camera, hence at us, responding to questions we do not hear, because if we heard them they would be proffered in some alien voice; by avoiding that, the identification is further facilitated). Given the use of those two filmic devices, we naturally feel in the position of a detective trying to piece together some clues that should eventually lead to what truly happened. It is not surprising, therefore, that most readings of the movie should assume this is the right perspective to understand it – after all, if we are taking up the position of judges and jury, it behooves us to arrive at an "objective conclusion", a *verdict*, and the key to that is detachment, cool analysing of data. From this point of view, it is precisely *because* we are not directly involved with the main events of the movie that our experience of the conflicting reports *must* provide a better way of finding the truth.

Yet, I will submit, that is precisely a philosophical *picture*[73] of our condition that the movie is trying to criticize, perhaps even to deconstruct. It does that in at least two levels. First, by constantly *showing* us – without at any point having to *say* that to us – that the human experience is always already "attuned" by our affective involvement with the world, which suggests that assuming a "view from nowhere", no matter how useful it can be as an *ideal* for some human endeavours, is a problematic move when applied to our everyday experience. Second, the film also *embodies* that understanding of our experience in its own way of presenting its fictional world, by framing it inside a particular mood or affective atmosphere that will only be dispersed at its very ending, with the ultimate aim of providing a therapeutic change in our way of relating to reality that mirrors the change happening with (what in my reading would be) its two protagonists. In both cases the movie would be providing what in section 3 we were calling, following Mulhall's suggestion, new pathways for thought. Let me now try to substantiate those two claims.

Looking back at each of the five versions of the events the movie presents, and having in mind the remarks I just presented, it should become clear how each of those versions is attuned (or even *doubly* or *triply* attuned) by the emotional state of their narrators. (Recall that in the cases 2-4, and perhaps also in the case 1, there are *at least* two layers of indirection, hence the expected result would be to present the mood of the first-hand witness as filtered through the mood of the second-hand witness; what further complicates this is that the second-hand narrators themselves could be mixing two distinct moods in their reports, namely the one felt at the time of hearing the original versions

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[73] In the Wittgensteinian sense of this word presented in section 3 (see esp. fn. 18).

at the trial *and* the one felt at the time of retelling those versions to us.) Actually, the entire way each of the flashback sequences is constructed contributes precisely to show us those differences in mood: we have different camera angles and movements, different lightning and soundtrack, and even slightly different acting styles in each case. Now moods are paradigmatic examples of aspects of our lived experiences that film (and, more generally, art) is better equipped at conveying than any philosophical analysis could; but for our purposes here I'll have to risk at least a rough approximation. So here is what I take to be the *dominant* moods of each of those flashback sequences (I urge the reader once again to see the movie trying to test these claims):

1) The woodcutter's initial report: fear, surprise and disorientation, as if by entering the forest he is feeling more and more out of his element. (Remember: this version is itself a retelling of the story the woodcutter told at the trial; now if we look back at this story after the movie's conclusion, we will have strong evidence to suspect that it is a *lie* told by someone that had something to hide from the court, and still has something to hide from his present company, so it should come as no surprise that this is the mood conveyed at this point.)

2) The bandit's report: a mix of sheer, almost animal *joie de vivre,* courage, dominance, high self-esteem and pride. (Again, remember that what we hear is a second hand report of someone – the woodcutter – still impressed by the tale as it was told at the moment of the trial, in which Tajomaru seemed to go out of his way to self-aggrandize.)

3) The wife's report: shame, humiliation, dishonour. (This time the report is filtered through the eyes of the priest, again after an impression the wife left at the trial.)

4) The samurai's report, through the medium: he shares with the wife the feelings of shame, humiliation and dishonour, but in his case those feelings are all further coloured by a strong sense of indignation. (Once again, this is the impression he, or rather the medium that "channeled" him, left at the trial, and is being conveyed to us through a not clearly identified narrator at the gate.)

5) The woodcutter's final report: besides the feelings colouring his first report, what stands out here, as I noted in section 4, is his own lack of skill or know-how to recount the fight, so that his own clumsiness in this regard seems to affect the way he retells the whole event. (And we should also recall that he is telling this version after being accused by the commoner of withholding information, perhaps even incriminating information. So his clumsiness can also be partially explained by the fact that he is presently

under pressure and has to produce an improvised new version that would placate his listener's curiosity and suspicion).

Finally, and besides those specific moods of each character, we should also remember *the mood of the film itself*, suggested from its very first frames with the use of the torrential rain, the dilapidated setting, the dark lightning, the sober soundtrack and the general feeling of confusion expressed by the main characters. Formerly, when I had to provide a verbal description of that mood, I opted for something along the lines of "angst", "disorientation", "disappointment" and "hopelessness". Now although I do not want to deny that this mood (or mix of moods) is *connected* with the crime and its aftermath, my sense is that this event should be thought as only the straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak. – In a world in which meaning, values and authority seems to be rapidly deteriorating and disappearing, and which is now merely haunted by the spirits that perhaps once animated that way of life (as is the Rashomon gate, now only a feeble reminder of an ordered past; as is Japan in the aftermath of WWII), one finds oneself facing the existential challenge of finding new grounds for meaning, or else recognizing defeat, falling into a nihilistic worldview.

Now, what I want to finally suggest is that this nihilistic threat applies not only to the *fictional world* of *Rashomon*, and not even only to the (past) *real worlds* of Japan's Heian period or the aftermath of WWII, but also to *our own present,* to this *modern world* in which we all have been discovering that what we thought were firm grounds for our existence have been gradually disappearing, leaving a vacuum that we do not yet quite know how to fill – except, perhaps, by covering that existential difficulty with epistemological guises, turning it into so many intellectual problems in search of theoretical solutions[74].

Yet this movie does not stop at that realization, but offers its own suggestion of how to overcome nihilism and regain some hope and meaning. That happens at the very end of the movie, which I'll now try to summarize.

After the last version of the crime is told by the woodcutter and then questioned by the commoner, the priest, clearly disappointed, vents: "But it's horrible – if men do not tell the truth, do not trust one another, then the earth becomes a kind of hell"; to which the commoner replies "You are right. The world we live in is a hell". Soon after this exchange the cry of a baby is heard; the three look around and try to locate the source of the crying. The commoner eventually finds the baby, kneels over it and stripps off its few

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[74] I am here once again echoing CAVELL 1979, p.493.

clothes. The priest and the woodcutter, both appalled, run to the the commoner, and the priest picks up the infant. The following exchange ensues:

> *Woodcutter*: That's horrible.
> *Commoner*: What's so horrible about it? Somebody else would have taken those baby clothes if I hadn't. Why shouldn't it be me?
> *Woodcutter*: You are evil.
> *Commoner*: Evil? Me? And if so, then what are the parents of that baby? They had a good time making it – then they throw it away like this. That's real evil for you.
> *Woodcutter*: No, you're wrong. Look! Look here at the amulet case it has on. It's something the parents left to guard over it. Think what they must have gone through to give this baby up.
> *Commoner*: Oh, well. If you're going to sympathize with other people...
> *Woodcutter*: Selfish...
> *Commoner*: And what's wrong with that? That's the way we are, the way we live. Look, half of us envy the lives that dogs lead. You just can't live unless you're what you call "selfish."
> *Woodcutter*: Brute! All men are selfish and dishonest. They all have excuses. The bandit, the husband... you!

Precisely at this point the commoner indicts the woodcutter more directly for refusing to mention the whereabouts of the dagger in his version of the story:

> *Commoner*: And so where is that dagger? That pearl-inlay handle that the bandit said was so valuable? Did the earth open up and swallow it? Or did someone steal it? Am I right? It would seem so. Now *there* is a really selfish action for you.

The woodcutter is speechless. Having made his point – *everybody* is selfish, *everybody* lies – the commoner leaves the gate, and the two remaining men stand still for what seems to be a long time, marked by a jump cut; after the cut the sound of the rain has stopped, and we see some last drips falling from the gate. The baby, still in the arms of the priest, starts crying again. The woodcutter approaches the priest to take the baby, but the priest violently resists, shouting: "What are you trying to do? Take away what little it has left?" – to which the woodcutter humbly, ashamedly replies "I have six children of my own. One more wouldn't make it any more difficult." This is how the dialogue ends:

> *Priest*: I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.
> *Woodcutter*: Oh, you can't afford not to be suspicious of people these days.
> I'm the one who ought to be ashamed. I don't know why I did a thing like that.
> *Priest*: No, I'm grateful to you. Because, thanks to you, I think I will be able to keep my faith in men.

The baby finally stops crying; the priest holds it out and the woodcutter takes it and leaves the gate, as the sky gets clearer and we finally see the sun shining. The end.

What to make of this ending? It has eluded many viewers, who tend to see it as an afterthought, a kind of "deus ex machina" that is not true to the characters as they were portrayed so far and neither to the whole tone of the movie. And it seems to me that reaction is precisely to be expected if one buys the traditional, epistemological interpretation of the film. From this point of view, after having shown that there is no solution to the problem of relativity of truth (or even after showing that there is a solution, as Baggini suggests), the movie simply changes gears in order to provide a happier, more hopeful ending.

Now, if instead of focusing on the diverging narratives and the skeptical questions they raise we pay attention to the "investigation of the human soul" that has been progressing from the very first frames of the movie, its whole "ark" will have to be reinterpreted, not as going from an epistemological problem to a response (be it a solution or a demonstration that no solution is possible), but as going from the first promptings of nihilism to its more radical consequences. Those consequences are most markedly expressed by the words and attitude of the commoner at the end of the movie, which then work as a call to action to the other two characters (and hopefully to ourselves) to reassess their priorities, forgetting their skeptical doubts and their search for *truth* in order to *act* in the world, even in the absence of a final (theoretical) ground for those actions.

In this connection, notice once again the reason why the priest says he is becoming (reluctantly) convinced that this world is "hell": "if men do not tell the truth, do not trust one another, then the earth becomes a kind of hell". Truth, therefore, is supposed to be the ultimate ground of meaning, and it is the difficulty of finding truth in this chaotic world inhabited by selfish and mendacious people that leads to disappointment and disillusion. But what finally contributes to recover the priest's (and hopefully ours) faith in humanity is not an epistemological revelation, driven by some "conclusive evidence", but rather an altruistic, *groundless* act of the woodcutter. – But can one simple, isolated act really effect that change? – This, it seems to me, is precisely the question this film is raising, the existential challenge it is forcing us to confront. And from this point of view we should see this very movie, and particularly this ending, as Kurosawa's own "groundless act", his own *act of faith* in the future of humanity.

Epilogue

A final word about my title. It was formulated as a question, and what I hope the preceding considerations allow me to say in answer to that question is that, ultimately, the very idea of distinguishing what can be *said* from what can be *shown* is misleading, and depends on a rather restrictive understanding of the nature of both philosophy and film. If that understanding is replaced with the one I have been trying to articulate, following the footsteps of Wittgenstein, Cavell, Mulhall, Read and Heidegger, among others, it should become uncontentious to claim that both philosophy and film can *show* us fundamental aspects of our reality that might otherwise go unnoticed, or that both can (in Mulhall's phrase) "present new pathways of thinking", or again (in Read's phrase) that both are capable of *healing*. And it should be even less contentious to claim that both can also *say* great many things that might be used in settling disputes of opinion concerning philosophical issues.

I also used the parenthetical adjective "(analytic)" to qualify my question, implying that perhaps other ways of doing philosophy (in particular, so-called "Continental" approaches) could be less affected by the perceived failure in calling our attention to the details of our ordinary ways of inhabiting the world. But what I ultimately want to propose is precisely that the dichotomy between "Analytic" and "Continental" philosophies should be challenged, and that attention to the potential of film can contribute to that end. – I hope this exercise offered at least some initial steps in that direction[75].

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