



# Existential Nihilistic ‘Condition’ Joker, 2019: A Movie Review

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## Introduction

The movie “Joker” released on October 2019 has been a box office hit. The movie proves to be a cinematic phenomenal experience. We find the film shows the theme of nihilism. The world today is a Nietzschean world where the moral discourse is hijacked and the idea is set for a heroic villain. Todd Phillips presents Nietzsche’s point in *The Will to Power* (1968) that nihilism requires an altogether rejection of the imposed values,

*“But as soon as man finds out how that world is fabricated solely from psychological needs, and how he has absolutely no right to it, the last form of nihilism comes into being: it includes disbelief in any metaphysical world and forbids itself any belief in a true world.”*

We observe that nihilism is a way of thinking which does not accept the culturally fabricated structured social setup. Nihilism has various types but we find existential nihilism as the most common kind among people as well as in literary creations. This specific type deals with the problems as human life do not have any objectives. It does not contain any purpose, values or meanings. Moral nihilists in particular asseverate that morality does not have any existence at all. When we try to find out the origin or history of nihilism we observe that it originates from nihil which is actually a Latin word. When one tries to search history and makes an effort to understand the concept one comes to know that nihilism is a term that has multiple definitions and contains the capability of reflecting diverse and multifarious shades which are independent philosophies in their respective disciplines. We come across different types of nihilism as, Epistemological nihilism which is a type of skepticism where we find all learning untrue. Medical nihilism does not believe in the effectiveness of medical inventions. Mereological nihilism more compositional nihilism explains that objects of the world as proper parts actually do not have existence. Existential nihilism believes that life does not have intrinsic meaning especially in reference to the

universe, it poses that neither any single human nor the whole human species have any significance. Metaphysical nihilism is a philosophical theory that submits that material articles may not live. Moral nihilism or ethical nihilism is a view there is no possible morality whatsoever. Ontological nihilism claims that there is nothing that is actually real and reality is something that actually is non-existent, merely a fabricated illusion. Political nihilism is a form that rejects non-rationalized assertions, the very fundamental political and social structures.

When we try to find out the earthly history we discover the clues of this theory's origin. We find the earliest histories of philosophical positions which can be related to the nihilistic outlook are the skeptics. Demosthenes (1852) relates that we actually want to believe which is believed by everyone. Similarly, (2004) we find Buddha discussing the very concept of nihilism. He refers to this world as well as worldly life as the place which has nothingness and which is actually a non-possession and one should not try to develop any kind of attachment to it. One finds as a result of these words of Buddha that his life as well as the whole web of construction of social life is nothing more than just waiting purposelessly for the end which is passing away or perishing.

Nihilism as a term is used for the first time by Jacobi. Nihilism gets popular by Turgenev's hero, Bazarov (2008) who is a nihilist and hires many assistants to his ideas. He gets familiar with the nihilistic trends as opposed to being in love. In chronological order, we find Kierkegaard (1962) in the present age as an early nihilist calling it levelling. He explains his feeling of levelling as motionless or quietness of death. It is the condition of soundlessness and tranquility to the extent that one hears his own heartbeat clearly. He relates it to motionlessness like dying and one feels like penetrating where everything drops down, disappears and ultimately becomes ineffective and without power. The widespread recognition happens in the Russian revolutionary movement of 1860.

We find Stirner's attacking the set beliefs. In history, his rejection of perfect and notional theory places him among the earliest nihilists. We find him having the liberty of the individual remains the sole code, if the country disturbs the liberty, needs get destructed. Thus Stirner (1907) asserts that it is an existence that is an infinite continuous war of one person against everyone around. When we think of nihilism we find the philosopher Nietzsche as one closely linked with it. Nietzsche (1968) writes that every faith, every possible consideration of anything trustworthy turns out to be necessarily wrong. In simple words, one needs to know that there is no true world. He further says that Nihilism is not just the credence that every possible thing in the existing world is worthy of getting perished rather one literally in an actual sense participates in the effort of destruction.

We observe that Heidegger (1953) mentions that there have been multifarious concealed forms existent already which are always taken as normal conditions of a man. Sartre (1948) refers to the movement of being coming before the soul. Camus (1955) has pointed toward Sisyphus and symbolized his eternal failure with the man's life. Then we find Bolanos (2014) explaining Deleuze interprets Nietzsche's nihilism as an exercise of rejecting life and belittling existence. We find Nietzschean renaissance in process. Thus we find Philosophers in the sequel of the movement, in France as Deleuze, Foucault and Derrida. Jean-François and Richard Rorty are the ones impressed by Nietzsche's explanation by Heidegger.

We find the movements like poststructuralists and postmodernists finding good space for them being skeptical of truth and religion. Derrida's deconstruction gets commonly labelled as nihilistic which he himself never accepted. Baudrillard (1994)

postmodernist relates that nihilistic passion has become a fascination now. Brassier embraces nihilism as it is a way of thinking which tends towards non-being rather than being as is described by the main character, “Arthur Fleck: At work, until a little while ago, it was like nobody ever saw me. Even I didn’t know if I really existed.”

## Finding and Discussion

When we try to find out the history of nihilism we come to know that it is more than a century when Nietzsche has explored and discovered it. I have been a little surprising to read this as for me nihilism starts in the Garden of Eden when God creates the man and asks for accepting his superiority over angels. The Lucifer, the leader of the angels, the most supreme of all the rest refuses the Divine orders and negates the moral laws. Thus starts nihilism by feeling ignorance of his existence and resulting into rejection of the religion and morality. The second example of Nihilism again is found in the very Garden of Eden by man when he finds his existence meaningless by getting confined and restricted to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. In the same way we observe Nietzsche saying that God has died and it is because of all of us as we have killed Him, means religion’s and moral values’ death by disobedience and we killed Him in the sense of Adam and Eve. He showed nihilism in the same way of disobeying the Divine orders and is explained by Sartre (1956) in Being and nothingness as thrown into the world.

This movie gets released in 2019 and the whole story revolves around a stand-up comedian. He remains a failure in life particularly his failure in career along with economic instability takes him towards pessimism as well as nihilism. He starts developing detest and loath towards wealthy people and tries to bring countercultural insurrection against aristocrats and community in rotten city of Gotham. Joker’s life reflects the true shades of existential nihilism. We find him making countless efforts to gain space and place in society. He is shown the one as disowned and trying to survive in this structured world being a victim. We find Hoyt Vaughn, Murray Franklin, Randall, Gene Ufland, Dr. Stoner, Thomas Wayne and Social worker exploit him in one way or the other. We do come across people who are nice to Arthur as Carl, Detective Garrity, Detective Burke, Gary, Carl and Sophie. His fate as disowned child and mentally sick mother pushes him into thorough pessimism leading to nihilism as Reginster (2006) relates that sadness or doom gloom is closely associated with nihilism. When one tries to have final analysis of situation one concludes that nihilism is nothing else than a type of altogether or absolute pessimism.

Joker’s character seems depicting nihilism as Chekhov (2009) has portrayed in *Three sisters*. They often feel about life and its incidents that nothing matters. This kind of expression has been given by many characters and refers the subscription to nihilism. This nihilism redirects as Nietzsche relates that very moment when someone comes to know the fabrication of the world around is out of psychological necessities and he utterly and definitely does not have any right to it. He confronts the last stage of nihilism. He discards any belief in metaphysical world and entirely as well as categorically any trust in the true world. Arthur is mentally sick that does not have any one to talk to and cannot have medicines anymore and ultimately gets insane.

## Critical Analysis

Nihilism believes that all moral values have never been timeless or abstract. These values are always meant to serve the interests of those ones who are powerful. Nietzsche (1966) relates that moral values or laws are found to be relative to the past, the culture as well as the social class for the benefit of the influential class. These very moral values are the way to restrain people. When people keep exercising those values over centuries they become natural, normal, or formal conscious according to Nietzsche (1966) this situation is similar to Freud's super ego which is a force of criticism in internal self. This agency of self-control is a kind of psyche which requires submissiveness or obedience. Thus we find that man imprisons himself and all credit goes to the very formal conscious. There is no other practice found which is done in a longer or a better in history than continuous practice and cultivation of obedience. Nietzsche (1966) says that we find now fair to think that it is formal conscious, an authority which orders that one should obey unconditionally and stay forbidden from certain practices unconditionally. One feels the need to act on it accordingly for the satisfaction inwardly. One develops this practice of obedience in such a way that one always remains impatient and with the maximum degree of its whole strength to accept and practice them. One does it as if some law, parent, teacher, group or some public opinion has told him in his ear.

Joker, directed by Toad Phillip and written along with Scot Silver is the biggest hit of 2019. The movie takes its main theme from DC comics of Gotham city. The theme is of existential nihilism, a true from catching lines of the Joker, "All I have are negative thoughts. But you don't listen." The movie moves around Arthur Fleck and scenes are arranged with a mixture of present and past. We find Arthur going along with stream of consciousness. He seems coping with total despair as, "Anyway, I said, for my whole life, I didn't know if I even really existed" and feeling as, "I just hope my death makes more cents than my life." He is shown as a man with misery as having mentally sick mother and no fortune. He still is shown to be willing for normal life because he keeps taking medicines for remaining normal since his childhood *condition* of laughter outbreak and gets sad by knowing, "**Social Worker:** They don't give a sh\*t about people like you, Arthur. And they really don't give a sh\*t about people like me either **Arthur Fleck:** What am I supposed to do about my medication now? Who do I talk to?" Here we find that even we as public or people do not bother that such kind of mentally weak people are actually humans. This movie reflects the social behavior in general towards such people. They are not dealt with sympathy and given a chance to become normal.

Next in movie when we observe Arthur trying to please a child, gets scolded by his mother, "[to Arthur, who's playing peekaboo with a young boy on the bus]" she does not get ready to see the card for his mental condition and Arthur says, "The worst part of having a mental illness is people expect you to behave as if you don't." Ultimately he feels that, "I think I felt better when I was locked up in the hospital", Nietzsche explains it as a state of stress and nervousness where one comes across the imbalance between one's expectation of the world and its reality.

Fleck gets disappointed and is not willing to accept facts as, "**Arthur Fleck:** Why are you saying this? I don't need you to tell me lies! **Thomas Wayne:** She's crazy. **Arthur Fleck:** She's [Arthur starts laughing uncontrollably]" The conception of such a life which should have determination of power is put forwarded as Nietzsche says that life as it is a procedure and action of which necessarily and essentially appropriate, hurt, damage and control over the weak ones. It presents, becomes hostile and despotic, thrusts as well as forces itself on people which ultimately results in the exploitation. Further when Thomas refuses him being his father he laughs and, "**Arthur Fleck:** [laughing] Dad, it's me! Come on! [Thomas suddenly

punches Arthur in the face]”, here we find Arthur as who, “cannot reach the sphere in which we have placed our values.” Registers (2006) links it by writing that hence, nihilism is a creed that it is not possible in this world that our sublime values can be acknowledged and we do not have any option of any other possible world where these values can be realized. He is rejected, humiliated and hated as, “**Thomas Wayne:** Touch my son again, I’ll f\*\*king k\*ll you”, and thus the absence and unavailability of meaning in life gives rise to his afflictions. He further correlates it as the nihilist starts mourning and loss of objective or meaning in life makes him actually detest the life.

Nietzsche (1913) believes and writes that he appreciates that he is not rebuking the approach or advent of nihilism. He believes it as one of the gravest concerns and cries which human beings have ever come across rather he declares it a moment of intense mirroring of the whole community. He is having suspicion whether man will never be capable of mastering over it and considers that it basically is the question of man’s will power’s strength. We find Arthur getting defeated because of unavailability of medication by Government and his unaccepted existence by the society and as a result he kills his mother “**Arthur:** Remember you used to tell me that my laugh was a condition, that there was something wrong with me? It isn’t. That’s the real me **Arthur Fleck:** [to Penny] you know what’s funny? You know what really makes me laugh? I used to think that my life was a tragedy. But now I realize, it’s an f\*\*king comedy. [He takes Penny’s pillow and uses it to smother her to death].” Nietzsche (1995) explains situation as the moment any specific reality or fact of a man is somehow devalued as a result it will not be characteristic of which have any authenticity anymore over him as a person. Thus the judgment of morality which previously depends upon previous truth or actuality becomes free, on the loose.

Similarly he shows his existence worthless as, “**Arthur Fleck:** Oh, why is everybody so upset about these guys? If it was me dying on the sidewalk, you’d walk right over me. I pass you every day and you don’t notice me! **Arthur Fleck:** Yeah, I hear you, brother. Sometimes, I don’t know what to do. The last time, I ended up taking it out on some people. I thought it was going to bother me, but it really hasn’t”, so Reginster (2006) relates it that despair is actually a situation when one confronts with belief that whatever has been the most important to us is literally unattainable. Further explained by Nietzsche when someone starts going on the way for looking like an angel (doesn’t want to use stronger word) man disturbs his stomach and to make his speech soft he does not only find out that the element of innocence as well as joy in animals is disgusting rather life as itself becomes distasteful.

He wants to live normal life, have friends like Sophie but in the end, “we then see their previous encounters were all in Arthur’s head and never happened].”Life and luck both play negative with Arthur. He has been a good fan of Murray and always dreamed to be on his show. We find in the movie that Arthur likes Murray show, “[as Arthur is imagining himself being on Murray’s show and getting his attention] **Murray Franklin:** That was great, Arthur. Thank you. I mean, I loved hearing what you had to say, it made my day”. Reality is quite opposite as he makes fun of him. “[Arthur looks hurt as he watches Murray]”, again we find him as nihilist as, “Comedy is subjective, Murray. Isn’t that what they say? All of you, the system that knows so much, you decide what’s right or wrong. The same way that you decide what’s funny or not.”Here we find Arthur having same views as Nietzsche as the elements which are making hectic efforts to set standards in forms of structures Nietzsche (1968) says that the most dangerous is the fact that there is no way available either to prove or deny the existence of specified actuality. Thus one finds that whatever priest says needs a strong defense. In other sense if someone has the consciousness or awareness that he is safeguarding something (really) which is in jeopardy or endangered and has

made his mind to protect it then he will take every possible measure to keep it safe and will always be ready to go to every possible limit which can be even drastic as murdering someone.

Nietzsche (1913) explains the origin of good and bad. He discovers that whatever superior or powerful feel good or beneficial for themselves they declare it as good. Thus they make the rest of the public to believe what they want them to believe by declaring themselves above common men and being high-positioned, noble and superior in rank than all low-minded or common people.

The condition of Alex is like that of master-slave condition explained by Nietzsche. He relates that noble man who is powerful one always remains self-sufficient and confident while on the other hand low-ranked person like slave behaves as a mirror to the outer world where his being or existence is not acknowledged and as a result he does not have true inside. He always remains in confusion and continuous struggle to get himself accepted along with the consecutive resentment with the master or noble man. The slave cannot dare or afford to take risk and has no other option but to accept already existing and acknowledged values and beliefs. This common man, poor man or slave character of Nietzsche finds the outer world as threatening while the noble and the rich finds himself confident in doing in whatever he feels like and knows how to defend his acts with the help of his power.

He accepts himself as worthless and rejects the idea of being liked and followed as, “**Arthur Fleck:** Come on, Murray. Do I look like the kind of clown that could start a movement? I killed those guys because they were awful. Everybody is awful these days. It’s enough to make anyone crazy.” Here we find Nietzsche (1968) correct as nihilism is most typically a condition of the greatest degree of being ineffective as well as incapacitated, the filthy richest life appears to a certain extent destructive and somewhat ironic. Nietzsche says as it is the very moment when one gets attracted towards destruction and falls a prey to nihilism and “[suddenly Arthur shoots Murray in the head and the audience start running off in terror].”

Nietzsche (1913) observes that man in the present age is like sick animal. He has become superficial self-conscious and unhappy. The previous value hierarchy has altogether turned around. Today man is more intelligent, crafty and shrewd. In the history we observe that slaves become victorious. Nietzsche relates it that in Rome of the present age we observe that highest values epitome. It is not only in Rome rather approximately half of the planet Earth has become either tame or they wish to be tamed. It is known that three Jews along with one Jewess, the weaver and their mother, Rome is defeated beyond any doubt. Here the slave appears as undisputed master, thorough subjectivity and obedience is replaced with crazy ego. Here slave does not want any confirmation from the world around.

When he is caught, “**Cop #2:** Yeah, the whole city is on fire because of what you did. **Arthur Fleck:** I know. Isn’t it beautiful?” This situation is explained by Nietzsche as mayhem, a nihilistic moan, a situation of losing every possible thing one has, an aptitude of weariness. This is vague and un-understandable but still the state of disarray as well as loss of all possessions indicates and worth nihilism which becomes really threatening and terrifying somewhere else.

In the “[last lines; we see Arthur locked up in Arkham laughing to himself], **Arkham Psychiatrist:** What’s so funny? **Arthur Fleck:** I was just thinking of a joke. [Arthur sees in his head young Bruce standing by his dead parents; he laughs again] **Arkham Psychiatrist:** Do you want to tell it to me [pause] **Arthur Fleck:** You wouldn’t get it.” He keeps dancing on invisible tunes, flexes the limbs like deformed artist after committing all crimes. Nietzsche (1968) explains that every possible thing and person deserve to be destroyed and one should actually and personally contribute to do it. Nietzsche (1913) further explains that one expresses in his context of detestation and empathy, the thing which needs to be scared of is

the point that there has not been any kind of destruction or doom worse than that of the worst abhorrence at man, in the same manner is the best benevolence for man. One needs to assume that both these emotions mate some day and as a result right away there will be something of nearly uncanny kind and that will be last will of the man. This will is non-being or non-existence which is nihilism. Hovering of Lawrence Sher's camera, Hildur Guðnadóttir's music with her other solo journeys of mental loners like *Sicario*, *Arrival* and *The Revenant* are there in her credit movie becomes a terrific hit. We have seen that movie is declared as nihilistic by Wikipedia and successful as it remains one of the most money making films as R-rated. This film is declared as sixth movie which collected highest grossing of 2019. It is announced as R-rated movie of all time. It gets the distinction of the first film which is R-rated and earns billion dollar mark. The character of the joker remains confusing and ambiguous. He offers multiple traits and shades as capricious and proves him to be an untrustworthy narrator for his multifarious nature of past glimpses. His character seems full of delusions which get worse because of his mental sickness. All these factors combined together make his character unclear.

## Conclusion

Joker has been declared as a nihilist and is stated that Arthur Fleck is a failure as a stand-up comedian gets inclined towards mental instability and nihilism. Todd Phillips seems to be the creator of maniac masculine comedies such as, *Joker, 2019*. He proves his excellence as the maker of comedies that are maniacally masculine. He has adopted the very story of some broken man, the one concluding that in the world nothing is funnier than tragedy. For many parts of this film, it seems impossible to separate his tears from his laughter. The main protagonist is praised as the hero who plays his character with such amazing expertise that it is declared that taking Joaquin's phoenix is basically not an effort to bring him into comic book series rather it is an attempt to introduce the movie of a comic book into Joaquin phoenix. Warner Bros presents an inspection of a person's character that is ignored by society. The movie is not only a courageous comprehensive study of the character but also an admonitory story.

Schopenhauer (2018) explains Arthur's condition as it is subjugated with awful emptiness and weariness. One finds its essence as well as its existence in itself is an unbearable burden. His life becomes like a pendulum that keeps swinging between agony and boredom, actually, these are the very components of which he is made. After the death of his mother he gets in a position as meaningful is something that is connected to values and objectives. Reginster (2006) relates it that the life of a person remains meaningful only when he is directed by some motivating objective or objectives.

Reginster (2006) further explains that in nihilism we find an aim or objective is something that makes man's life valuable only in a way that persuades the person to keep living. The capability of inspiration of any goal depends either on the person's approximation of evaluation of the merit or worth of the goal or it relies upon acknowledgment of that goal. If for any reason anyone or perhaps both these conditions may not be able to meet the very goal loses its capability of inspiring the person. In such a situation nihilism gets two ways, first is the depreciation of the aim which contains the meaning of our life or the belief that all these goals or objectives are unachievable.

Thielicke (1961) confirms it by saying that nihilism in the true sense possesses just one truth to proclaim that in the end it is just nothingness which all prevails and this existent world is altogether meaningless. Arthur is crazier as the world seems

crazy; he is violent as life is noisy. Joker is both demonized as well as adored for his character. Nietzsche elaborates him as what is the meaning of nihilism. When the most important values dash to the ground the objective is lost and if the question is asked as to why one finds no answer at all. Joker seems to be the follower of Bakunin (1883) who relates it seems that the creator of the whole life is mysterious. Thus the creator eradicates so faith in that immortal requires following him by assuming that destruction is creative.

Hero and director do not only go on to maintain the previous standard but take their professional image to the sky high. Arthur is depicted by Nietzschean nihilism as heartbroken and unfortunate consciousness and in such a situation a man is moulded into a true monster by urban isolation as well as societal neglect. We find Nietzsche (1968) true as he predicts that he is going to relate the future of the coming two centuries. He explains what is going to come and what cannot be different at all from just the approaching nihilism. He feels that the whole of European culture is constantly moving towards a catastrophe that contains agonizing tension which is increasing every year uneasily, destructively, on one's head the same way as a river that wishes to come to its end.

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