Stories on screens—via film, television, and streaming—are central to our lives. They allow us to experience complex moral situations from multiple perspectives. Cognitive science, philosophy, and film studies are coming together to better understand how character engagement, reflection, the powerful experience of a film, and moral understanding are connected.

Characters are key to the meaningful experience of stories. We enter stories through characters, and this imaginary interaction with characters can lead to moral understanding.

Film functions as an attentional engine that can move and fascinate audiences. We unconsciously mimic the emotions we see on screen, leading us to experience stories with our whole bodies, not just our minds.

The study is multidisciplinary, incorporating the fields of media psychology, film and media studies, literary studies, cognitive neuroscience, and philosophical aesthetics. The study is led by four academics, two scientists and two from the humanities.

Morally simple films are straightforward, and the narratives tend to resolve neatly. Morally complex films are ones where the stories—and the moral quandaries they pose—are left open for interpretation.

Reflection on morally complex situations can occur while we watch a film, but a great deal of meaningful reflection can happen later while thinking or talking about it. This is called the "reflective afterlife" of a film.

Over time, conclusions about morally simple films become more confident, while morally complex films lead to more complicated reflection.

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The study is interdisciplinary, investigating the role of moral complexity. The study is published in *The Social Network*, and *The Truman Show*.

WHEREAS TWO WEEKS AFTER VIEWING...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morally Simple</th>
<th>Morally Complex</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Truman escaping was the most important scene</td>
<td>Facebook founders confrontation was the most important scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77%</td>
<td>450%</td>
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