

LAURIE CALHOUN (Oakland)

**Pragmatism, Love, and Morality:  
Triangular Reflections in Carol Reed's *The Third Man***

---

**Abstract**

*Carol Reed's 1949 film The Third Man offers a richly metaphorical expression of the view that pragmatism, love, and morality are incommensurable perspectives from which to interpret the world. Harry Lime is a black market trader whose actions are constrained only by practical considerations. Anna Schmidt, Lime's former lover, understands what is morally wrong with what Lime does, but refuses to assist the police. In contrast, Holly Martins, an old friend from childhood, ultimately agrees to help trap Lime. These three protagonists occupy distinct conceptual worlds that color their interpretation of the others with whom they interact. In addition to illustrating the paradoxes of love and morality, The Third Man self-referentially expresses the idea that reality is far more complex than language could ever convey.*

**Keywords:** Carol Reed, pragmatism, love, morality, duty, justice, aesthetics

---

In *The Third Man* (dir. Reed, 1949), Holly Martins travels to Austria intending to work on publicity for a medical charity with his friend Harry Lime. Upon arriving in Vienna, Martins is told that, while crossing the street in front of his apartment building, Lime was accidentally killed by an automobile. When informed by Major Calloway that Lime had been heavily involved in racketeering and that his death was the "best thing that ever happened to him," Martins becomes outraged and resolves to vindicate Lime by clearing his name of all such allegations.

Martins soon learns that the circumstances surrounding Lime's death are shrouded in mystery. According to the porter, Lime was killed instantly, but Baron Kurtz maintains that before dying Lime asked him to look after Anna Schmidt (Lime's girlfriend) and Martins. Although both Kurtz and Popescu say that they were the only two who carried the body away from the scene, the porter, who at the time was cleaning a window two stories above, claims that there was a third man. Martins finds curious that all those present at or immedi-

ately after the accident, including the driver of the truck that killed Lime (actually Lime's own driver), should have been personally acquainted with the victim. Martins' suspicion that Lime's death might not have been accidental is shared by Anna Schmidt, who confesses, "I wondered about it a hundred times, if it really was an accident." But, recognizing that nothing can be done to save Harry, she sighs, "What difference does it make? He's dead, isn't he?"

Major Calloway has no interest in the circumstances surrounding Lime's death, though for other reasons: "I'm not interested in whether a racketeer like Lime was killed by his friends or by an accident. The only important thing is that he's dead." In defiant anger, Martins decides to remain in Vienna rather than heeding Calloway's advice to return home, proclaiming: "As soon as I get to the bottom of this, I'll get the next plane." Calloway warns him: "Death's at the bottom of everything, Mr. Martins. Leave death to the professionals." Calloway regards Holly with derision, as both naïve and deluded: "This isn't Santa Fe. I'm not a sheriff, and you're not a cowboy."

Holly Martins *is* simple and straightforward, as is underscored by his agreement to speak on "The Contemporary Novel" at a meeting of the "Cultural Re-education Section" despite of his utter ignorance regarding the rarefied world of literary arts. When Mr. Crabbin appraises Martins that the topic of his presentation is to be "the crisis of faith," he responds, "What's that?" Martins, a writer of genre fiction (serialized westerns), is ensconced in a world view framed by conventional morality, where good and evil are simple dichotomies, and all bandits wear black. As such, Martins could have no comprehension of "the crisis of faith."

Shortly after having agreed to meet with Martins in order to reveal further details about what he witnessed, the porter is murdered. Major Calloway becomes concerned that Martins' curiosity will endanger him as well: "I don't want another murder in this case, and you were born to be murdered, so you're going to hear the facts." Calloway then proceeds to display the overwhelming evidence that Lime was involved in racketeering of the vilest type, trading in penicillin stolen from military hospitals and diluted before being sold for use by what became his victims, men with gangrened legs, women in childbirth, and children with meningitis. After Calloway produces evidence of Lime's own fingerprints on vials, Martins sadly concludes, "How could he have done it?" Calloway replies, "Seventy pounds a tube." Recognizing how disturbing this news must be to a man who has told him that Lime was "the best friend I ever had," Calloway expresses his regret, "I'm sorry, Martins," to which he humbly concurs, "I'm sorry too."

Martins prepares to depart from Vienna, preferring not to share Lime's sordid story with Anna, who has however already met with Calloway and so knows the ugly truth.

When she laments, "I knew he was mixed up, but not like this. He's better off dead," Anna seems to side with Martins, against Lime. But when Martins then proceeds to criticize Lime, Anna objects: "Oh please, for heaven's sake, stop making him in your image. Harry was real. He wasn't just your friend and my lover. He was *Harry*." Expressing what seems to be agreement with Anna's earlier claim that "He's better off dead," Martins observes, "Whoever killed him, it was a sort of justice." But Anna protests, "A person doesn't change because you find out more." When she later learns from Major Calloway that Lime is in fact alive, Anna again asserts that he would be better off dead, this time explaining why: "he would be safe from all of you, then."

When Martins sights Lime late at night and reports this to Calloway and his men, they initially suppose that he must have been imagining what he claims to have seen. However, they subsequently discover a feasible escape route through the sewer opening in the middle of the street, precisely where Martins claims to have witnessed Lime disappear. Calloway thus recognizes that Martins may very well have sighted the presumed dead man. They return to Lime's grave and discover buried there the body of Joseph Hobbin (a former medical orderly), who had disappeared shortly after having been persuaded by Calloway to give evidence against Lime and his group.

Having proven that Lime is indeed still alive and was himself apparently "the third man," Martins insists that Kurtz and Dr. Winkel (the doctor who testified as to the cause of death), arrange a meeting between the former friends. Lime appears shortly thereafter, unfazed by the fact that he has been discovered, since he still believes Martins to be his devoted friend. Lime does, however, inquire: "Exactly who did you tell about me, hmm?", to which Martins replies, "I told the police...and Anna." Lime murmurs, "Unwise, Holly, unwise." The ensuing conversation reveals Lime's essentially pragmatic approach to life and his disdain of what he takes to be the fictional concepts of morality.

First, when Martins decries Harry's insouciance toward Anna (who is about to be turned over to the Russians), he responds, "What do you expect me to do? Give myself up?... Holly, you and I aren't heroes. The world doesn't make any heroes." Lime thus excuses himself for not being heroic by denying that anyone ever is. He proceeds to oscillate between rhetorical strategies that aim, on the one hand, to persuade Martins to join his side and, on the other hand, to exonerate himself from any wrongdoing whatsoever. Lime intermittently lapses in ways that display his fundamentally egocentric aims, and these revelations render his rhetoric ineffectual. But Lime seems to believe throughout the exchange that Martins will eventually come over to his side: "You can have any part you want, as long as you don't interfere.... Old man, you never should have gone to the police, you know. You ought to leave this thing alone."

In anger, Martins demands: "Have you ever seen any of your victims?", to which Lime rather nonchalantly responds: "You know, I don't feel comfortable in these sort of things," referring ostensibly to the dizzying height that they have by now reached in the ascending amusement park ride where they converse. The journey "up" to the perspective that Lime eventually achieves causes him some discomfort, but at last he arrives:

"Victims? Don't be melodramatic. Look down there [pointing to the children on the merry-go-round]: Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving forever? If I offered you twenty thousand pounds for every dot that stopped, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money? Or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spend? Free of income tax, old man, free of income tax."

Lime's use of an example involving large sums of money is intended to persuade Martins of the rationality of eliminating people when "the price is right." Of course, Lime's own price is considerably less than twenty thousand pounds. If a tube of penicillin contains the dosage normally needed to kill the bacteria of a single person's illness, then Lime has been destroying human beings at the rather modest rate of seventy pounds per person. Yet he appears to see nothing wrong with the racket.

Lime's own comparison reveals that he in fact regards himself as committing the equivalent to murder by selling diluted penicillin while knowing that it will lead to the destruction of unsuspecting patients. Although it is not Lime's *intention* to kill his victims, they are nonetheless destroyed as a result of his mercenary scheme. Lime's example further illustrates that he takes himself to be operating along the lines of hit men, who may well view the victims whom they have been paid to eliminate as mere dots to be prevented from further motion. In any case, if a person views morality as having essentially to do with intention, then he can always choose to describe his own actions as involving moral or amoral ends that happen to necessitate means interpreted by society to be immoral. This pattern of reasoning is perhaps deployed by professional killers to justify their killings to themselves, consoling themselves with the fact that they don't really *intend* to kill anyone—it's just that their route to the acquisition of funds (tax-free!) coincidentally involves the destruction of human beings.

Through the derogatory and sarcastic tone of his reaction, "Victims? Don't be so melodramatic," Lime attempts to make Martins feel idiotic for employing the idiom of morality. But if there are or ever have been victims, then Lime's "dots" are victims. In other words, Lime effectively rejects the legitimacy of any possible moral interpretation when he denies that his "dots" are victims. He can identify his actions with those of a paid killer because no action, in Lime's view, has any moral significance whatsoever. Conventional morality, according to Lime, is a vain and delusive notion—a mere chimera.

When Lime recognizes that his friend Holly has changed his attitude in the light of his newfound knowledge of Lime's crimes, he points out: "There's no proof against me, besides you." And Martins is well aware that Lime's attitude toward him has reciprocally transformed: "I should be pretty easy to get rid of." Lime calmly agrees: "Pretty easy.... I carry a gun. Don't think they'd look for a bullet wound after you hit *that* ground [looking down]." However, Martins immediately disarms Lime by apprising him: "Dug up your coffin." Lime pauses in realization: "And found Hobbin?... Pity."

Calculating that it would be strategically unsound to add yet another name to the list of his former associates now murdered, Lime switches to an ingratiating stance: "Holly, what fools we are to talk to each other this way, as though I would do anything to you or you to me." Lime then proceeds once again to attempt to convert Martins:

"You're just a little mixed up about things in general. Nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Governments don't. Why should we? They talk about the people and the proletariat. I talk about the suckers and the mugs. It's the same thing. They have their five year plans, and so have I."

Here, again, Lime suggests that everyone is "guilty" of the same sorts of deeds as is he, that there is no significant distinction between what he and everyone else does. If everyone is guilty, then no one is innocent, and these moral concepts are devoid of any real meaning. Lime also poses here a vexing question: if the government itself, the alleged guarantor of justice, law and order, does not act "morally," then why should its citizens? Through this chain of reasoning, Lime tries to make Martins, who does believe in conventional morality, feel as though he is one of "the suckers," the poor slobs who cling to a myth as ludicrous to Lime and others like him as that of Santa Claus or the tooth fairy.

Martins concludes that Lime has devolved into some sort of nihilist and so reminds him: "You used to believe in God." Lime retorts:

"Oh, I still do believe in God, old man. I believe in God and mercy and all that. But the dead are happier dead. They don't miss much here, poor devils.... What do you believe in?"

Lime might seem to be an extreme case of the religious hypocrite so often derided by "free-thinkers," but there is another sense in which he simply highlights the chasm separating metaphysics and action, insisting that he *is* a believer but that religious beliefs have no direct implications for practice. At this juncture, Lime exculpates himself by offering a *moral* rationalization for his conduct, by interpreting his murders as acts of mercy: "The dead are happier dead." Viewed in this way, his comportment can be seen as fully consistent with his professed belief in God.

For Lime, the solution to any problem is a matter of adopting the proper perspective. He fails to persuade Martins, however, for without pausing for even a moment, Lime quick-

ly reverts once again to his pragmatic stance, exhorting Martins to take care of Anna because doing so will be to Martins' benefit: "Oh, if you ever get Anna out of this mess, be kind to her. You'll find she's worth it." Martins, who fashions himself as a moral agent, remains unmoved by Lime's appeals to practical rationality.

Apparently unable to see or unwilling to acknowledge that Martins is not in the least bit sympathetic to his *Weltanschauung*, Lime persists:

"Holly, I'd like to cut you in, old man. There's nobody left in Vienna I can really trust, and we've always done everything together. When you make up your mind, send me a message, and I'll meet you any place, any time."

Here, again, Lime taints his efforts at persuasion with frank confessions of his egocentrism. His efforts are doomed to fail since he never stops with the type of justification ordinarily expected within a moral community but always proceeds to display his ultimately selfish motives. Even Lime's "offer" to allow Holly to capitalize on his mercenary racket is finally motivated by Lime's own need to find associates whom he can trust.

Lime's actions require no justification to his own mind since, viewed from the distance from which he chooses to gaze, his victims are no more and no less than "dots." But, in one last attempt to mitigate what in Martins' eyes are abominable crimes, Lime concludes:

"Don't be so gloomy. After all, it's not that awful. Know what the fella says: in Italy, under the Borgias for thirty years they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed. But they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love. They had five hundred years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock. So long, old man."

Lime's final "justification" speciously suggests that his murderous deeds will lead to the production of great works of art. Lime defends his own actions by interpreting "warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed" as beneficial to humanity in the long term. Clearly, the seductive conceptual thesis that there can be no good without evil offers nothing toward a justification of specific instances of murder. Lime places his own life in the broader context of historical forces greater than himself, but the circumstances surrounding the production of the *chefs-d'oeuvre* of the past hardly serves as a justification for the destruction of innocent victims in the particular circumstances of the present. Needless to say, Lime once again fails to convince Martins.

### Shifting Stands

By "ascending" Lime irrevocably distances himself from his victims, who are, to him, anonymous objects with a certain monetary value. In viewing their victims as "dots,"

Lime and others like him simply ignore properties such as sentience and intelligence, willfully adopting an interpretation according to which their victims have no intrinsic worth whatsoever. This becomes much more difficult when one's victims are people with whom one is personally acquainted, but anonymous "dots" would seem to be simple to erase from the notepad of the world. Witness the existence and deployment of hit men by "ordinary" people who desire the elimination of their adversaries but cannot bring themselves to confront them face to face. (Some hit men are gainfully employed. Therefore, some "ordinary" people hire them.)

Lime's fundamental pragmatism also emerges through his remarks regarding Anna, whom he views as an object to take or leave as circumstance dictates. Lime helped Anna to evade repatriation to Russia by providing her with a counterfeit Austrian passport, but in the face of danger he seeks shelter among the Russians, who agree to help him only so long as he reciprocates. Lime agrees, surrendering Anna's name.

Holly Martins wishes to defend and uphold the ideals of honesty, justice, and truth, while Harry Lime represents the powers of ruthlessly calculating practical reason. Through these protagonists, conflicting conceptual perspectives are battling for supremacy, and the infinitely deep hiatus dividing them is *metaphysical*. Harry thinks that Holly should see the world through Harry's eyes, who believes himself to occupy not Holly's fantasy world of pretentious moral pablum but The Real World. Holly, for his part, believes himself to occupy The Real World, not Harry's childishly amoral world of insouciance and egocentrism.

The opposition between Martins and Lime, notably the only two Americans in *The Third Man*, also symbolizes the tension between the American ideals of success, on the one hand, and democratic equality and justice, on the other. Both are in some sense facets of "the American way," but they are in fundamental conflict, a fact which may escape many Americans. According to Harry, nothing is relevant to one's decisions to act one way rather than another beyond the number at the bottom of the balance sheet of one's own financial ledger. According to Holly's favorite story, what really matters is that the good guys win the duel against the bad guys, that justice prevail.

Lime repeatedly refers to Holly as "old man," and Anna perceptively observes about Harry that, "He never grew up. The world grew up around him, that's all." The point is highlighted by the two men's meeting place: an amusement park. Viewed from the outside, it would seem that Lime either never developed the moral conscience of a normal adult, or else he willfully rejected the perspective of commonsense morality. But, from Lime's own perspective, he grew up and never stopped ascending—his journey through life is thus modeled by the amusement park ride in which he spirals upward during his meeting with Martins. There is of course another sense in which Lime has traveled back, full circle, to a

pre-moral or amoral perspective. Martins and Lime view each other's perspective as childish, and each is in some sense right, for a child's perspective can be either selfish or naïve.

Martins' stay in Vienna was initially motivated by his belief that his friend had been wronged by the police, who sullied Lime's name through their false attribution of heinous crimes to an innocent dead man no longer around to defend his own honor. Once faced with the incontrovertible evidence that Lime indeed committed the crimes ascribed to him, Martins, fully disillusioned, decides to retreat, having discovered that his "moral duty" was illusory – founded upon lies.

In spite of his attachment to a moral perspective, when initially confronted by the police with their proposal, Martins is disinclined to help them apprehend Lime: "Calloway, you expect too much. Oh, I know he deserves to hang. You've proved your stuff, but twenty years is a long time. Don't ask me to tie the rope." In other words, Martins believes on some level in the idea of loyalty to old friends, even those who have gone astray. It is only after Calloway has juxtaposed the Lime file and Anna's passport on the table, and Martins learns that Anna is to be turned over to the Russians, that Martins suddenly changes his mind, saying, "What price would you pay?" Calloway replies: "Name it." Seeing the file and passport together, Martins perceives himself to be in an either/or situation. He can side either with Lime or with Anna, but not with both. The price named by Holly is that Anna's safety be guaranteed, that Calloway provide her with a passport and transport out of Austria.

Although Martins would like to be a moral hero, the cowboy clad in white, he wishes at the same time to be Anna's "knight in shining armor." But his "deal" with Calloway suggests that Martins may be motivated to act out of selfish interest no less than is Lime, for Martins' reasons for helping the police at this point are arguably egocentric. He seems to want to extinguish forever Anna's feelings for Lime, by having him captured and convicted as a criminal of the basest kind. By having saved Anna (with whom he is smitten), Martins would thus become the "hero" of the genre fiction that he creates of his very own life. However, Anna will not allow herself to be written into Martins' fiction, for her feelings for Harry are strong enough to withstand the facts about his crimes. She refuses to help Calloway capture Lime and later explains to Holly, "I don't want him any more. I don't want to see him, hear him. But he's still a part of me. That's a fact. I couldn't do a thing to hurt him." When she encounters Martins at the train station from which she is about to depart for France, Anna is incensed to learn that he has agreed to help trap Lime in exchange for her freedom. She rips her passport in two and haughtily proclaims, "If you want to sell your services, I'm not willing to be the price. I loved him."

Anna remains faithful to Harry, whom she regards as the same person, despite what she has learned about his crimes: "A person doesn't change because you find out more."



Anna Schmidt loved Harry Lime, not a list of properties. Anna did not love Harry because he acquired a passport for her, for Holly tries to aid Anna in an analogous way, by persuading the police to overlook her ersatz passport and relocate her safely in another place. By disdainfully rejecting Martins' offer of help, Anna Schmidt thus evinces the ineffable force of love, impervious to the sorts of reasons that either Lime or Martins might adduce. Anna is moved by that which defies reduction. Because it cannot be analyzed, it cannot be aptly described.

### Shifting Sands

*The Third Man* includes a number of fascinating reversals of interpretation, and only Anna's love for Harry survives these changes in the "true" story. Holly Martins remains in Vienna in order to vindicate Harry Lime's name. But his investigation into the possibility of the death's having been a murder leads him to discover that the alleged death was not a death at all. Through the process of attempting to clear his friend's name, Martins learns that Lime is a vicious criminal at large, the very antithesis of a dead man falsely accused. Martins is persuaded to help the police capture Lime out of his feelings for Anna, whom Lime has betrayed to the Russians. But Anna remains faithful to Harry, viewing Martins as a traitor. Anna's cold rejection of Martins initially leads him to renege on his offer to help Calloway. Dejected by Anna's rebuff, Martins decides once again to retreat, adopting the stance of an outsider who can excuse himself by saying, "It's none of my business."

Baron Kurtz and the porter both exemplify this role, of the generic "outsider". Kurtz advises Martins early on that rather than ferreting about Vienna investigating the Lime case: "You'd do better to think after yourself." Kurtz' advice is obviously intended to prevent the truth about Lime from being discovered, which would immediately implicate Kurtz and others associated with him. Lime's "death" was a clever scheme to prevent his being captured by the police through definitively ending their pursuit. The porter is similarly concerned with his own safety, and he is disturbed by Martins' threat to reveal to the police that there were three men at the site of the death. Terrified that Martins might tell the police that he has withheld evidence, the porter exclaims, "I have no evidence. I saw nothing. I said nothing. It's none of my business!"

The porter is doubtless aware that Lime and his friends are involved in racketeering, and his initial refusal to help Martins stems from his fear that doing so might jeopardize his own safety. His initial suspicion proves to be true, as he is murdered the moment after he calls out from his apartment building to Martins (standing below) that he will discuss the matter further with him that night. Throughout the film, Martins is exhorted by nearly eve-

ryone to be "sensible." Everyone seems to agree that Holly really has no business being in Vienna and least of all meddling in police affairs. Ironically, it is Martins' very refusal to heed Calloway's advice that leads him to accomplish what Calloway has been unable to do on his own, namely, to put a definitive end to Lime's racket. Martins' sincere attempt to vindicate his friend leads finally to his demise.

After having been spurned by Anna, Holly decides once and for all to leave Vienna, at last accepting Calloway's advice to "leave death to the professionals." But now recognizing Martins' potential value to the police, Calloway cleverly makes one last attempt to persuade "the cowboy" to help lasso Lime. *En route* to the airport, they stop off at a children's hospital to visit some of Lime's victims, children with meningitis who were given diluted penicillin and consequently lost their minds. Although Holly had been temporarily dissuaded by Anna's rebuff from helping Calloway, in the end, it is the sight of these victims that changes his mind: "All right, Calloway, you win... I'll be your dumb decoy duck." This is precisely Anna's perception of the role that Martins plays when she discovers that he is helping Calloway though she has refused to be "the price" for his services. She confronts Martins this time with utter disdain:

"Don't tell me you're doing all this for nothing. What's your price this time?... Honest, sensible, sober, harmless Holly Martins. 'Holly', what a silly name. You must feel very proud to be a police informer."

Holly's acceptance of commonsense morality helps him to make sense of the world, but attachment to a story, mere words, is not enough to motivate action. What finally impels "honest, sensible, sober, harmless" Holly Martins to help Major Calloway is the *sight* of Lime's victims, something neither Harry nor Anna has ever witnessed. Would Harry and Anna change their outlooks, take a moral stand, if they were brought face to face with a child whose mind had been irreparably damaged through having been treated with the products of Lime's racket?

In fact, Harry Lime is so trapped within his own pragmatism that he would literally have to become an entirely different person in order to see matters in a moral light. Agents who do not already affirm the legitimacy of a moral interpretation must somehow be persuaded that it would be a good thing to adopt a moral outlook. In other words, Harry Lime instantiates "the paradox of morality." A chasm separates morality from practical rationality and all other non-moral valuational stances. Arriving at morality from the outside cannot be achieved without a "leap of faith," since a moral justification of morality has no force unless one already accepts morality.

Analogous to the paradox of morality is what might be termed the "paradox of love," alluded to above. Love defies analysis and the object of love becomes somehow much more

than the sum of his or her enumerable properties, if only for a time, in the enamored person's eyes. Anna's love for Harry Lime blinds her to both the pragmatic rationality of accepting Calloway's help in exchange for Martins' "services" and the moral righteousness of capturing Lime in order to prevent him from further victimizing innocent people. But Anna's own reaction to Martins' "morality" reveals her skepticism about his ultimate motivations. And it is true that Martins' initial motivation was to help *Anna*, not the victims of Lime's racket. After Anna has rejected him, Martins rebounds in what she sees as an act of petty revenge. In Anna's view, Martins attempts to salve his wounds by becoming the moral "hero" of his own private serialized fiction. Anna takes herself to have seen through Martins' moral façade, and she is disgusted by his false pretensions to heroism and his *soi-disant* "morality." To Anna's mind, Martins is no more and no less than a self-deluded hypocrite.

Anna was genuinely happy to learn that Lime was still alive, and when he is at last dead, she refuses even to look at Holly Martins, who has killed the love of her life. In the worlds of , to be is to be seen, so Anna annihilates Martins by refusing to grant him even a gaze. In the last scene of *The Third Man*, Anna Schmidt walks past Holly Martins down the dirt road leading away from the cemetery where she has attended Harry Lime's second and definitive funeral. This time, unlike the first, she has poured a scoop of soil upon Lime's plot. This time, unlike the first, she knows the circumstances surrounding his demise, that his death was not an accident. In this final scene, the juxtaposition of Anna Schmidt and Holly Martins, who will never exchange words nor see one another again, symbolizes the vistas of love and morality, completely distinct and finally irreconcilable. Harry Lime, the symbol and exemplification of simple and transient pragmatic concern with one's own comfort and survival, was shot in the sewer and lies buried in the ground. It is the meta-perspective of aesthetics that illuminates the vertices of this triangle. Only through ascending can we see the serialized genre fiction that we have created of our own lives, modeled more or less loosely upon all of the other stories that we have read up to this point in time.

### **Perspectival Post Script**

While it is plausible to view Anna's love as amoral, her comportment could also be understood as the expression of a moral outlook along the lines of Kantian deontology. Anna certainly exhibits what appears to be righteous anger in her reaction to what she takes to be Holly Martins' crass pragmatism. She clearly values emotional honesty and decries hypocrisy, a quality that she deplores in Martins. In this reading, Anna represents pure deontology, which denies the moral relevance of consequences. In contrast, both Holly

Martins and Harry Lime base their actions upon their calculations of consequences, though for Lime only considerations of self-interest count. But, again, while Lime's unalloyed prudence may seem to be an amoral stance, there are those who maintain that "ethical egoism," the maximization by a subject of the subject's own interests, is itself a moral stance. In other words, while of these three protagonists, only Holly Martins embraces conventional morality, Anna Schmidt and Harry Lime need not necessarily be viewed as amoral agents, for they are equally interpretable as unconventional moral agents. The drawback of this reading is that it renders the idea of morality vacuous or trivial, by construing of people as "moral agents" by definition. Adopting this sort of moral relativism would, however, be one way to dissolve "the paradox of morality."

*Dr. Laurie Calhoun, The Independent Institute, Oakland, California, USA,  
laurielcalhoun[at]gmail.com*