

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 General Background

Death Note is a Japanese dark psychological anime series in which the main character, Light Yagami, acquires a notebook which can kill anyone whose name is written in it. Light uses it to kill criminals in order to achieve his ideal vision of justice.

Psycho-Pass is set in a world where the mental state and emotions of every citizen is continuously scanned by sensors to determine the probability and capacity of one to commit a crime.

1.2 Rationale

Without justice, society would not be able to function properly. There would be no restrictions on people which would result in chaos. However, how do we judge what is just? Going beyond the dictionary meaning, there are many theories that try to define justice, which leaves contentious perspectives on its meaning. These two anime were chosen as the theme of justice is prevalent in these two animes. Both are set in a dystopian world that is due to their jurisdictional systems. They portray two different systems of justice and offer different perspectives to analyse. This paper aims to compare the two justice systems in the anime and show the implications of the systems.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the differences and similarities between *Death Note* and *Psycho-pass* in portraying justice and the judicial system?
2. What are the implications and significance of the judicial system on its people in each anime?

1.4 Thesis statement

Both animes interrogate the moral permissibility of sacrificing certain individual's rights in order to improve the well being of the rest of the society. However, both systems fall short of their utopian vision because of the repercussions which they bring to their societies.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism, where actions are judged solely on their consequences. Consequentialism “is the view that normative properties depend only on consequences”. (Driver, 2018) The better the consequences of an action, the better the action is. In *Utilitarianism* (Mill, 1863), utilitarianism is defined as a theory that “holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.” (Mill, 1863). Utilitarianism thus holds that actions which result in pleasure or removes pain are considered good, while actions that cause pain or a lack of happiness are bad. However, the quality of the happiness also has to be considered according to its desirability, according to Mill.

This general ethics theory has also been used to analyse another similar literature work, the film *Minority Report* (2002), in *Beyond Minority Report: Pre-Crime, Prepunishment and Pre-desert*, (John N. Williams, 2012, SMU). The paper uses a Utilitarian standpoint to analyse *Minority Report* (2002) which has a similar plot to *Psycho - Pass*. There is thus an existing precedence for using such ethical theories to analyse justice systems in films.

2.2 Kantian Theory

Kantian ethics is a form of deontological ethics. Deontological theories “judge the morality of choices by criteria different from the states of affairs those choices bring about.” (Alexander & Moore, 2016) They essentially judge actions based on the act itself instead of looking at the consequences. Certain choices and actions are morally forbidden because of their nature, no matter how much good it brings to the world (Alexander & Moore, 2016). Kantian ethics was founded by Immanuel Kant and he argued that “the supreme principle of morality is a standard of rationality that he dubbed the ‘Categorical Imperative’” (Johnson & Cureton, 2018) Kant characterised it as an unconditional principle that must always be followed despite our desires to do otherwise. (Johnson & Cureton, 2018) As long as an action followed his Categorical Imperative, it is considered right. This categorical imperative must be followed without exceptions. (“Categorical Imperative”, 2017)

Chapter 3: Methodology

We will only be using the two anime series, *Death Note*(2006), which consists of 37 episodes and *Psycho-Pass*(2012), which consists of 22 episodes. We will only focus on the anime series. The film adaptations, spin-offs, manga and novels will not be used for analysis. Additionally, sequels will not be used.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis

Chapter 4.1.0: Utilitarianism and Kantian

4.1.1 *Death Note*

After realising the power of the notebook, Light decides to use it on criminals, claiming “the world needs to be cleaned up” and he is using it to change the world for the better. Light wishes to use the notebook to rid the world of all criminals, so that the innocent would be able to live peacefully, with him as the “god” of the new world, raining down punishment on the guilty.



Fig 1: Light, scheming as his alter ego, with the red filter on

As the series progresses, Light starts to kill innocents in order to protect himself and fulfil his vision, thus moving away from his own vision of justice. His corruption is represented by the red filter that is put on him whenever he is scheming. His features also get more prominent as compared to his rounded face earlier in the series. The red also connotes the blood of the innocents and his intense emotions, showing that Light has become corrupted by his emotions already and thus his vision will never be realised.

L's vision of justice is more Kantian in nature, as he believes that certain actions are always wrong. He condemns Light's actions, calling him just a “serial killer” and that his actions have only resulted in the “most atrocious act of murder in history” L does not consider Light's killings, even on the guilty, to have any meaning. He just sees the actions for what it is: a murder. The fact that he refers to Light as a “serial killer” shows that he believes Light is just a psychotic murderer. Thus, he does not consider the consequences of Light's actions and just judge Light based on his action of murder. Hence, we can see that his approach is more Kantian in nature, as he believes that certain actions, such as murder, is always wrong.

4.1.2 *Psycho-pass*

The Sibyl judicial system is based around the theory of Utilitarianism, flagging and arresting citizens with the capacity to commit a crime to protect the rest of the city. In episode 1 of the anime, it judged a sexual assault victim as being a target for enforcement action due to her incredibly volatile emotional state, and her capacity to endanger those around her was immensely high due to her unstable mental state. Regardless of killing an innocent victim, the Sibyl system punishes and enforces action against anyone that would cause harm to others.

However, hints of Kantian can also be found in the system. One way it represents the Kantian view is how the Sibyl system judges everyone the same way. No matter the social status of the person, if he displays the capacity and intention to commit a crime, the system would flag him down as a criminal and there will not be any prejudices.

Chapter 4.2.0: Implications and Significance

Chapter 4.2.1 *Psycho-pass*

Citizens forced into manifesting happiness and cannot have the slightest feeling of hatred and anger, which will result in ingenuine emotions that are not truly representative of oneself. Akane's apparent healthy psycho-pass level is not representative of her true feelings and emotions. Even though her psycho-pass level is healthy and positive, Akane is feeling extremely distressed worried and anxious about having to face Kogami again in work after shooting him.



Fig 2: Akane having dark eye bags due to not being able to sleep the previous night

As we can see from this scene in, even though her mental health is scanned as being healthy, Akane herself isn't, as she is still extremely conflicted as to whether she made the right decision, and was unable to sleep throughout the entire night, portraying how the Sibyl system uses people's psycho-pass level to force them into having the need to feel positive and healthy. All this to achieve a greater purpose of portraying itself as a positive and happy society that when

viewed from the outside, that faces no problem with regard to crime and citizen happiness.

Chapter 4.2.2 Death Note

The world is split into two, those supporting him and those who still consider him a murderer. However, within those who oppose him, many have actually begrudgingly accepted his new system as they are unable to stop him, and those who actively work against him are a few. He has almost completely subdued the opposition. The quantity of the happiness has actually increased as well, with many of the public supporting him. However, his supporters either deify him and revere him, or use his reputation to commit justices such as the destruction of property. This calls into question the quality of the happiness.



Fig 3: “Fake” supporters attacking the base of the task force opposing him, destroying property in the process

The mob shown here are “fake” supporters only using his name to wreak havoc and gain attention. However, there are also those who are fully devoted to his cause and have developed a cult-like personality around him, treating him as the “saviour” and “god”. They would willingly die and kill for him. The “fake” supporters are not truly happy as their support is artificial, showing they may not be happy with the new system. The real supporters are also not truly happy as they are completely devoted to helping Light and not caring about themselves.

Light has truly made himself “god” of the new world. Society revolves around him, and inevitably, everyone, including the opposition, has an unhealthy obsession with him.

4.3.1 Differences

Light is a human who has feelings and emotions, which means he can be emotionally affected.

His initial goal was to kill only guilty criminals, but when the FBI starts to oppose him, he kills them, depicting how his sense of justice can be manipulated by his fear of capture. However, the Sibyl system has an algorithm to judge the capacity and intent of one to commit a crime based on his/her emotions and thus is impartial and cannot be corrupted as it judges everyone the same way. Thus, Light's system can be manipulated while the Sibyl system cannot.

The implications are also portrayed differently. The implications of the Sybil system are more insidious than Light's. The implications of Light's systems are more visible; the public has an unhealthy obsession with him, and they are aware that Light will kill anyone who opposes him. However, the Sibyl system has been already integrated into the lives of the people, and thus the public is unaware of the implications of the system. Perhaps, given enough time, Light's justice may also become an integral part of people's lives.

4.3.2 Similarities

Both animes hint at a Utilitarian system of justice, where actions are perceived as morally permissible when its consequence promotes happiness.

Both have characters that go against the utilitarian system of justice that is widely accepted. (L in *Death Note*, Akane Tsunemori in *Psycho-Pass*).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chapter 5.1.0: Viability in the future

This constant oppression of one's emotions by the Sibyl system will undoubtedly result in chaos one day, depriving the citizens of their free will, even though it results in a crime-free society. However, as it judges everyone the same way, it will result in an unbiased judicial system. No matter your social status, you will still be punished accordingly.

Light's vision of justice will cause society to revolve around a single person, leading to an unhealthy obsession. His supporters would do anything for him while those opposing him would do anything to stop him. He would also hold all the power in the world as he is able to kill anyone against him. This absolute power that he has results in his corruption and eventual downfall.

Chapter 5.2.0: Relevance to society

In America, a 2007 article in *Criminology and Public Policy*, found out that there could be as many as 800 occupations nationwide that automatically disqualify people (for life) with felony convictions. This is a blatant utilitarian system, showing bias towards ex-convicts, as it would be overall better for the society to not have a bank accountant who recently got out of jail on a bank robbery conviction.

Justice systems have always used severe punishments as a way of deterring people from committing crimes, much like Light does. According to a 2011 article by the Lawyers Collective, an NGO in India, Singapore is one of "32 countries(that) impose capital punishment for offences involving narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances." This harsh punishment in Singapore is successful in deterring numerous drug related crimes from taking place, a problem faced by many countries like Estonia, with 190.8 out of every million people dying due to drug related reasons like overdose or suicide in 2012

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