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“We are *not* the same,” the new caretaker scornfully says to her desperate predecessor. The predecessor is on her knees, pleading for help from a fellow “neighbor in need.” Instead of help, she receives a fatal blow to the brain.

In the 2019 film “Parasite,” the lower-class Kims infiltrate the luxuriously rich household of the Parks. With well-placed rumors hidden under guises of sympathy and good intentions, they replace the current employees. Eventually, the unsuspecting Parks are surrounded by cunning wolves in lowly sheeps’ clothing; for a brief time, the Kims gleefully leech off of their host, the Parks. However, when the former caretaker returns for something she “left behind,” they discover not *something*, but *someone*: her husband, who has been secretly living in the Parks’ basement for four years. The film quickly descends into brutal bloodshed, ending with a bleak view of the Kims’ future. As audience members leave the theater, two questions linger: why does the Kim family immediately resort to violence? Also, could the film have ended differently?

Firstly, why do the Kims immediately respond with violence? If one looks at “Parasite” from a Freudian point of view, the film’s gory conclusion appears inevitable. According to the pleasure principle, human action revolves around maximizing pleasure and “abolish[ing] or avoid[ing] pain” (Freud 12). In the film, the Kims’ “pleasure” comes from the naive Parks. Like a parasite sucking the blood out of its host, the Kims slowly drain the Parks of their money and resources. Accordingly, the Kims’ “pain” is the loss of their newfound pleasures. In a world controlled by pleasure, human beings cannot be innately altruistic; in the world of “Parasite,” the Gooks pose a threat to the Kims and their recently acquired “blood.” Therefore, why would the

Kims help them when there is no incentive? Since selfless acts cannot co-exist with the pleasure principle, the Kims never think of helping their fellow “neighbor in need.” The only path they see is one paved by blood in the name of self-preservation. The sharp descent into violence is understandable, and even predicted, by Freud’s pleasure principle.

In addition, the conflict in “Parasite” can be predicted by Marxist ideologies from “The Communist Manifesto.” If one designates the Kim and Gook families as the proletariat, then one can understand why they scramble to fight for the scraps from the Parks’ table: as the proletariat, they are “an incoherent mess” (Marx 16). Rather than uniting and fighting their true enemy, the Kims choose to fight the “enemy of their enemies”: the Gooks, who steal from the Parks, and effectively, from the Kims as well (Marx 17). Since they are unorganized, they cannot comprehend a future where they unite and overthrow their oppressor; blinded by self-preservation, they only see one solution: getting rid of the competition. If the most prominent law governing human nature is Freud’s pleasure principle, then the proletariat will never be able to overthrow the bourgeoisie. Instead, the proletariats will be locked in a battle amongst themselves, with no one left to challenge the bourgeoisie. Though the Park family does not escape unscathed in “Parasite,” it is undeniable that, had they united, the Kims and Gooks could’ve avoided the murderous bloodbath. The proletariat’s internal battle causes its downfall.

Still, could “Parasite” have ended differently? Could an ideal communist state be possible? If the pleasure principle controls human interaction, as the film suggests, the answer is a resounding, “No.” However, if Dr. King’s ideals in “Letter from Birmingham Jail” govern human interaction, then the film might have taken a different turn. The lower-class families might have united; in doing so, both might have been able to leech off of the Parks indefinitely.

With Dr. King's ideals, the ideal communist state would be possible. The proletariat would be able to rise up and overthrow the bourgeoisie. How?

It's important to note that Dr. King's ideals revolve around nonviolence--the exact opposite of the Kims' first instinct and Marx's method for establishing communism. If one sees an issue, then they must confirm that it exists, negotiate with the perpetrators, and "self-purify" to confirm that they can withstand the consequences of their actions; they must do all three steps before acting (King 126). Respect of the other party, acceptance of the result, and the ability to keep oneself in check must be present. Therefore, if the Kims channeled their violent, self-preserving impulses (as predicted by Freud's pleasure principle) into nonviolent behaviors corresponding with Dr. King's ideals, then "Parasite" might have ended peacefully. Through this act of sublimation, the Kims might have agreed to unite with the Gooks; though the resources would now be split, everyone would still be alive. While Marx is skeptical of nonviolence's effectiveness, "Parasite" demonstrates how the innate violence in the pleasure principle will inevitably cause division among the proletariat and the process towards communism to stall.

"Parasite" ends with two murderers: the heads of the Kim and Gook families. While Mr. Gook dies, his home in the basement of the Parks' mansion does not stay vacant. Mr. Kim, on the run after murdering Mr. Park, takes Mr. Gook's place and morphs into the new, underground parasite. Even though the Parks hurriedly move out, a new family promptly moves in. With them comes new employees, and the movie ends just as it began: one rich family above the surface. Another, residing in a half-basement apartment, daring to stretch their eyes to the sky and dream. Lastly, one isolated resident underneath the rich family, buried in the earth. There are three

households, stacked to the heavens, but only one can see paradise; each household can only covet the one above, and never empathize with the one below.

Should this situation happen again, how will it end? If the new members of this familiar system follow Dr. King's ideals, then the violent cycle might be broken; however, if they continue to follow their instincts, as predicted by Freud's pleasure principle, then the cycle will continue. Humanity will become locked in a never-ending pattern, hindering potential progress towards a nonviolent, cooperative world. The fractured proletariat will continue attacking itself, never realizing that there is another option; as their violence and attention is directed to the wrong party, an ideal communist state will never be realized. Instead, all of humanity's focus will be self-preservation at any cost, in the present, much like the brute beasts of nature. Though progress may occur in other areas (such as technology and life expectancy), human interaction will continue to loop through this violent cycle.

Works Cited

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