

The Philosophical Message of Woody Allen's 'Crimes and Misdemeanors' 1989

In the last scene of the film, where in a side room at the wedding Judah semi-confesses his crime (having his mistress murdered) to Cliff:

Judah Rosenthal: And after the awful deed is done, he finds that he's plagued by deep-rooted guilt. Little sparks of his religious background which he'd rejected are suddenly stirred up. He hears his father's voice. He imagines that God is watching his every move. Suddenly, it's not an empty universe at all, but a just and moral one, and he's violated it. Now, he's panic-stricken. He's on the verge of a mental collapse-an inch away from confessing the whole thing to the police. And then one morning, he awakens. The sun is shining, his family is around him and mysteriously, the crisis has lifted. He takes his family on a vacation to Europe and as the months pass, he finds he's not punished. In fact, he prospers. The killing gets attributed to another person-a drifter who has a number of other murders to his credit, so I mean, what the hell? One more doesn't even matter. Now he's scot-free. His life is completely back to normal. Back to his protected world of wealth and privilege.

After **Cliff** counters that the story needs a happy ending, perhaps an heroic and tragic one.

Judah Rosenthal: If you want a happy ending, you should *go see a Hollywood movie*.

Professor Levy (the existentialist philosopher): We are all faced throughout our lives with agonizing decisions. Moral choices. Some are on a grand scale. Most of these choices are on lesser points. But! We define ourselves by the choices we have made. We are in fact the sum total of our choices. Events unfold so unpredictably, so unfairly, human happiness does not seem to have been included, in the design of creation. It is only we, with our capacity to love, that give meaning to the indifferent universe. And yet, most human beings seem to have the ability to keep trying, and even to find joy from simple things like their family, their work, and from the hope that future generations might understand more.

Message: So, there is no God up there; there is no moral order in the universe, which is empty; we therefore have to take responsibility for own lives and make choices that make the best case for a less-than-perfect situation. Keep trying: love your family; enjoy your work; help the less fortunate, etc.