

Show the Opening Scene of *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* – breakdown

Now that we feel the weight of the law...we react in several different ways, from the very passive to the very active:

1. Deny It (Show the opening scene of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*) – Intro. “This is just a tune-up for us.” The problem with denial is that it’s never believable. We are clearly meant to realize that, no matter what this couple says, their satisfaction with their relationship is not an “8.” We like to imagine that we’re closed books; that no one can tell what’s really going on. “I’m ok you’re ok” never lasts very long.
2. Suffer
 - a. **INTRO: A man is in prison, having just killed his brother. He is visited by a priest.** *The Mission* (show the scene where Jeremy Irons visits Robert DeNiro in his seclusion, and continue until Liam Neeson cuts DeNiro free from his burden, only to watch him climb back down and reattach himself) – suffering as repayment...remember *Saving Private Ryan* (Tom Hanks’ “earn this” to Matt Damon and Damon’s tortured older self). “There is no penance hard enough for me.” Notice the glance at Liam Neeson (almost a self-righteousness), remember the readings for Ash Wednesday: don’t disfigure your face!
3. Fight back
 - a. Act out
 - i. **INTRO: The girl is a perfectionist, who has decided that perfection is being elected class president.** *Election*: (show the scene in which Reese Witherspoon tears down all of Paul Metzler’s posters) Failure to uphold the law leads to violence “you’re all going down with me.” Eventually, unassimilated legal pressure leads to explosion.
 - ii. Remember *Office Space*: continued prodding with the law leads only to reactivity. Also, *Finding Nemo*’s “Don’t touch the boat.”
 - b. Get out from under it
 - i. Casuistry: “Specious or excessively subtle reasoning intended to rationalize or mislead.” Dictionary.com OR: the human endeavor: to figure out ways in which our behavior is not against the law.
 1. *The Simpsons* (Show the scene in episode “Homer vs. Lisa and the 8th Commandment” in which Homer agrees to steal cable): Cable

companies are big faceless corporations with crappy programming, so stealing from them is ok.

2. *The Boondock Saints* (show the scene in which the Saints explain their mission and kill Yakavetta in court): Killing bad people is ok...they deserve it.
 - a. Varying degrees of evil. The better judge the worse.
 - b. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said (addressing human rights concerns about his policy of chemical castration for convicted rapists and molesters: "I don't think you can call such individuals – such creatures – human beings. I don't think you can talk about human rights in such a case."
3. **INTRO: A man discovers that Prefexol, the anti-anxiety medication he's been taking, isn't real.** *Matchstick Men*: (Show the scene in which Nicolas Cage's therapist confronts him about his career) "I'm not a criminal; I'm a con-artist." It's not stealing if people give me their money.
4. The ultimate example (Handout): "Machines will perform euthanasia on terminally ill patients in Israel under legislation devised not to offend Jewish law, which forbids people taking human life."

4. Admit it

- a. **Intro: A Congressional Hearing concerning putting warning labels on cigarettes.** **Nick Naylor (Aaron Eckhart) is a lobbyist for tobacco companies.** *Thank You for Smoking* (Show the scene in which Aaron Eckhard testifies before congress): The cigarette lobbyist admits that smoking is harmful. "Yes, the law is true. I have come up short." But if we're going to admit it, we have to go all the way, and put warning labels on everything that can kill: Boeing (plane crashes), Ford (car crashes), Cheddar Cheese (cholesterol).

So the only viable option is to admit the righteousness of the law that make us feel that we've come up short. Denial, suffering, anger, and casuistry (though these are the ways we all deal with our shortcomings, 100% of the time) are ultimately unsatisfying. The law continues to judge. So if these are the possible human reactions to the accusation of the law, what might it look like if we actually did, once in a while, admit our failures and acknowledge that the law that judges us is right on the money?

5. The Solution: Let Go

- a. *Fight Club*: (Show the scene in which Brad Pitt burns Ed Norton's hand) the first thing that happens is that we realize that the unbeatable nature of the law means that we will die. The primary law that we try to beat is the law of decay and death. This is why plastic surgery, gym memberships, and the Hair Club for Men are so popular. We tenaciously hold on to false youth in the hope that we can convince the cosmos not to kill us. As Brad Pitt says, though, we have to KNOW, not fear, KNOW, that some day, we're going to lose that fight. It's only when we've lost the idea of our immortality, which, to us, is losing everything, that we're free to do anything.
 - b. *Finding Nemo*: (Show the scene in the whale's mouth) If Marlin holds on to the taste bud, he'll die. There's no water in the whale's mouth. But Marlin THINKS that he has to hold on to live. The very thing he thinks is keeping him alive is killing him. He must let go, succumbing to "certain death" in order to be blown out of the whale's blow-whole, his life saved. We try to save ourselves by our own efforts. We try to "be all we can be." We can't. We keep trying, we hold on. This holding on, the thing that we think is saving us, is actually killing us. It is keeping us from our Savior. Letting go, giving up, and succumbing to certain death is the only way we can live.
 - c. *The Weatherman*: (Show two final scenes, one in which Nicolas Cage admits that he's not who he wished he would become, and the other, final scene, with Cage on the parade float) The opposite of the Confessions clip. It's still a bad moment, but if we can acknowledge who we are ("Who knows?" He's a weatherman who doesn't know if it will rain), rather than let it kill us, we have a chance. Though things don't work out the way we predicted, and easy doesn't enter into grown up life, we have a chance.
6. The Result: *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (Show the final scene) There will always be challenges, but you can handle it. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."