Repent, Harlequin: Utilitarianism.

The story begins with a vivid description of a dystopian society, all controlled at the hands of the feared Ticktockman, a tyrannical leader who punishes citizens for not adhering to their daily schedule, as dictated by their individual time cards. Each interval of time that a member of society is late, an equal interval is deducted from their lifespan, and as the intervals buildup, their life can be taken immediately. Amongst this strict society presides a masked member known as the Harlequin, who makes it his mission to not only be late to every single event, but to throw other members of society off their schedule as well, with often comical and fantastical acts, such as making it rain jellybeans, or making public scenes at shopping centers; although harming those who adhere to the time, the Harlequin adopts utilitarian concepts of providing the most good to the greatest amount of people, essentially “freeing” them from the societal pressures. Even though they do not As expected the Ticktockman calls for his punishment, which he avoids until his girlfriend, Pretty Alice, rats him out after she gets fed up with his debacle of a lifestyle. The Harlequin is caught and brainwashed, made into another slave of society, but not without having a lasting effect on the Ticktockman himself, making the autocrat thrown off of the time-based society he had once created. The Harlequin saw himself not above anyone else, rather as an equal, and therefore he deemed himself worthy enough to sacrifice his mental state and his personality for the greater good, hoping to cause a spark in society to change.

Although their minds are enslaved by the society, the minor character’s hearts are free. When determining to do good, the Harlequin does not look at the rules society has placed upon them, rather he looks upon what truly makes them happy, as shown in the example where he makes it rain jellybeans; people, although their whole days have been thrown off, are still smiling to see a spectacular sight. The consequences of the happiness of the individuals are worth more than the consequences of the societal rules and pressure. These people, in fact make up the majority in the society, even though the few are making the rules, further proving that the Ticktockman’s dictatorship is not the greatest good for the most amount of people, in fact he is doing it for the exact opposite reason from the Harlequin’s point of view.

Despite what we may see as “good” in the story, the Harlequin’s girlfriend, Pretty Alice, acted on her version of utilitarianism as well. Her brainwashed mind perceived what was “good” as order and structure in society, knowing that despite the lack of personality and individualism, she thought most people found comfort in a schedule based world. Alice did not see any good coming out of the Harlequin’s actions, rather she saw chaos and a disruption to her ideal world. Therefore, even though she loved him (one can assume), she applied the utilitarian concepts of sacrificing him, exposing who he is, for what she thinks is the greater good of society. In utilitarianism, the ends justify the means, and for the most part, the general perception of things going back to normal after the Harlequin was normalized was a good enough result to sacrifice, and completely erase the face off her significant other. She could have easily let him be, and it wouldn’t have affected her that much, besides a minor annoyance, but it most certainly have kept on disturbing the public, and therefore she made the conscious decision to put the public’s needs over her own.

The ending really showed the purpose of the vast amount of effort that the Harlequin put in, all the investment of time, money, and commitment only to sacrifice himself for a minor, yet significant change to the Ticktockman. The actions of the Harlequin reinforce his behavior, always getting the last laugh for the betterment of others, giving up his possessions for the greatest amount of people to be happy, and using these utilitarian concepts as a map for his life. Earlier in the story, when deploying jellybeans, or when creating a public disturbance at the mall, his goal was not the change everyone overnight, rather it was to plant seeds in the roots of society to change how it fundamentally is run, throwing the time off, and slowly showing people what a better future looks like. Despite his rather bleak ending, he still does the same thing, changing the Ticktockman, the one who makes the rules, into someone who is flawed, making him realize, as well as others, that even the most feared man in the community is imperfect and that these strict guidelines are not the ways humans are supposed to live. From his money to his soul, Harlequin gave it all to sow the simple seeds of change, and though he will not, other will be sure to enjoy the fruits of his valiant effort.