The Truman Show

An examination of the ethics

The Truman Show is a fascinating movie based on concepts I’m sure many people have wondered about - nature of reality, free will, and the ethics of making someone else’s life decisions. The movie tells the story of Truman Burbank, who lives on Seahaven Island, is happily married and has a satisfying job.

During the opening minutes, we’re told that this is all just a facade, and that Truman’s life is actually a reality show, contained within an artificial dome, with every aspect of his life being controlled by the creator of the Truman Show. Starting from the beginning of his life, to the present, everything about him has been televised and manipulated in a way to create interesting television, and he has unknowingly become one of the most famous reality TV stars in the world. However, the end of the facade comes one fateful night, when a projector falls near Truman’s house. From this point forward, the movie tells a harrowing tale of a man struggling to discern what’s real and what’s not.

The ethics of The Truman Show are highly questionable, if not deplorable. Christof, the creator of the show, argues that Truman wouldn’t want to leave the simulation because the world outside is much worse than Truman’s fantasy city. He uses this reasoning to stop Sylvia, who tried to tell Truman that he was in a simulation, from allowing Truman to understand the true nature of his life. This is an argument of choice versus happiness. It is likely that Truman would’ve lived his life happily inside the simulation, but the fact that he was denied the choice to experience the world outside, even if it is worse than the simulation, is ethically questionable.

Then we come to realize that Christof’s interest in Truman’s well-being is fully based on his own self interest and not any sort of caring for Truman. The Sylvia episode, as well as his willingness to use potentially lethal means to stop Truman from escaping near the end show that his only interest in Truman’s well-being was the continuation of the Truman Show. If he had to force Truman to stay inside the simulation, he would.

Lastly, the movie makes us think about the nature of reality. Without a reliable means of discerning reality from a simulation, there will always be doubts on whether everything around is real or just a construct of our minds. In Truman’s case, he got a concrete, if terrifying answer to this question, which some may say is a much better outcome than what real people have to deal with.

In conclusion, the Truman show lets us decide on several important ethical questions. In my opinion, because Christof’s care for Truman’s well-being was completely selfish, his decision to force Truman to live inside the simulation is a violation of his basic human rights. The movie also ponders the nature of reality, which is something many scientists have also thought about, and none have yet come up with a satisfying theory.