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Humanity in James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*

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Zásady pro vypracování

Ve své bakalářské práci se autorka zaměří na problematiku lidskosti v knižní sérii *The Maze Runner* (2009) Jamese Dashnera. V úvodní části využije vhodných sekundárních zdrojů k podrobné úvaze o hlavních attributech pojmu "lidskost". Tento metodologický základ v hlavní části práce využije pro detailní rozbor zvoleného tématu v Dashnerově díle *The Maze Runner*. Svou pozornost zaměří primárně na dopady, které na povahu lidství mají extrémní životní podmínky a odloučení od společnosti. Soustředit se může i na úlohu, kterou v otázce lidskosti hraje ztráta řádu, který je s životem ve společnosti obvykle spojován a který často mizí, je-li společnost vystavena kritické situaci. Práci uzavře kapitola, která z předchozích rozborů vyvodí obecnější závěry.

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ANNOTATION

The bachelor thesis focuses on humanity. It looks in detail at the main attributes of the concept of “humanity” and highlights the effects that extreme living conditions and separation from society have on the nature of humanity. It also reflects on the notion of “justifying the means to an end” and exemplifies morally wrong acts performed in the name of humanity. It analyses the presence of humane and inhumane aspects in James Dashner’s *The Maze Runner* series, supported by various excerpts from the novels.

KEY WORDS

humanity, community, morality, moral values, manipulation, isolation

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na lidskost. Podrobně se zabývá hlavními atributy pojmu “lidskost” a poukazuje na dopady, které mají na povahu lidství extrémní životní podmínky a odloučení od společnosti. Zamýšlí se také nad pojmem “účel svěťí prostředky” a uvádí příklady morálně špatných činů, které byly spáchány ve jménu lidskosti. Na základě vybraných výňatků analyzuje přítomnost humánních a nehumánních aspektů v sérii *Labyrint* Jamese Dashnera.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

lidskost, komunita, morálka, morální hodnoty, manipulace, izolace

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Introduction

The question of humanity has accompanied humankind for centuries. It is an incredibly complex but also abstract concept. It might be said that it is about people's beliefs and values and what they consider right or wrong in society. That can include empathy, compassion, dedication to human rights, and a commitment to helping and caring for one another. It might also encompass the instinct to show kindness and generosity. Humanity also recognises the need for justice and a desire to create a better world for all people. It also gives the ability to forgive and show understanding in difficult situations.

The concept of humanity is linked to the scientific and technological revolution, from the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century to the escalation during the two World Wars. At this time, the question of humanity, ethics and morality began to be addressed more regarding progress. World War II brought crimes against humanity and experimentation on innocent people, and more than one author began to explore utopian and dystopian topics. This literary theme has a tradition in Western literature. The question of a perfect civilisation and progress or, on the contrary, a civilisation heading for extinction, was dealt with by authors such as George Orwell, Aldous Huxley with his *Brave New World* or even the Czech author Karel Čapek, who directly warned against inventions. H. G. Wells discusses the conflict between the interests of society and the moral principles of humankind in his work. The theme of a community losing its humanity and descending into chaos is evident in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. More contemporary authors dealing with dystopia include Dave Eggers and *The Circle*.

One of the authors interested in dystopian themes is James Dashner, the author of the bestselling *Maze Runner* series. This pentalogy consists of *The Maze Runner* (2009), *The Scorch Trials* (2010), and *The Death Cure* (2011), as well as two prequel novels, *The Kill Order* (2012) and *The Fever Code* (2016). This paper examines these five books. He is also the author of the bestselling *Mortality Doctrine* series (*The Eye of Minds*, *The Rule of Thoughts*, and *The Game of Lives*). His books are considered speculative fiction, a broad literary genre encompassing any fiction with supernatural, fantastical, or futuristic elements.¹ In his books, he writes about a post-apocalyptic world and a dystopian future, presenting brave and intelligent children who have to fight for something.

¹ "Dictionary.com", Speculative fiction, accessed November 7, 2022, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/speculative-fiction>.

This paper aims at the issue of humanity in James Dashner's book series *The Maze Runner*. The introductory section considers the main attributes of the concept of 'humanity' according to appropriate secondary sources. It also deals with the concepts of 'community', 'moral values', 'manipulation' and 'isolation' and describes some other terms related to the importance of the topic for a better understanding of the issue.

The second chapter discusses humanity, community and moral values. It focuses on the behaviour of the children's community in Dashner's books and how the children try to preserve humanity despite the harsh conditions they are subjected to. Their behaviour contrasts with the decisions and motives of doctors in the series, who often lack humanity and moral values due to the adverse effects of extreme living conditions on humanity. The motif of order and chaos appears, and the chapter also mentions the usage of biological weapons and explains the motives behind the violent acts against humanity.

The third chapter focuses on the impact that manipulation has on the minds of the characters in Dashner's books. The concept of manipulation is discussed in relation to experiments on children and compared to actual experiments conducted in the past. The chapter also mentions torture-based mind control and its motives and illustrates cases where torture is carried out in the name of humanity. The final topic of the chapter is controlled solitary confinement, particularly of children, and its effects on the humanity of those subjected to isolation.

One of the main issues of the fourth chapter is the ethical aspects of sacrificing individuals for the sake of communal welfare. It concludes with close attention to the moral aspects regarding inhumane experimental methods in preserving the human race.

This paper aims to analyse the concept of 'humanity' in *The Maze Runner* series and focuses on the effects that extreme living conditions and separation from society have on the nature of humanity. It also aims to reflect on the justification of morally wrong acts done in the name of humanity and on the presence of humane and inhumane aspects supported by various excerpts from the novels. The thesis concludes with a chapter that draws more general conclusions from the preceding analyses.

1 Definition of Basic Terms

In the opening chapter of the thesis, it is necessary to characterise the basic concepts such as humanity, community, moral values, manipulation and isolation. The chapter also presents some other notions related to humanity. Each section introduces the term and discusses various interpretations.

The concept of humanity has various connotations, and it is necessary to define them in order to understand the issue. The first meaning is understanding and kindness towards other people.² The first known usage dates from the 14th century in the sense of compassionate, sympathetic, or generous behaviour or disposition, the quality or state of being humane marked by compassion, sympathy, or consideration for humans or animals. The second meaning is the quality or state of being human, if used in plural, human attributes or qualities. The last meaning to be mentioned is humanity in the sense of humankind, the human race, referring to all people.³ This work primarily deals with the first described meaning of humanity.

Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson explain the strengths of humanity. They, for example, describe kindness as a tendency to be friendlier towards other people, but also to be interested in the well-being of others, in their contented existence. They also describe it as a tendency to care for people and to do good deeds in general and that kindness is morally valued.⁴ On the other hand, they represent the opposites of kindness, which are selfishness, stinginess, and mean-spiritedness.⁵ Kindness is connected with humanity and with treating others in a good manner.

The question of humanity is an essential aspect of medicine and dealing with patients. In 1981, the American Board of Internal Medicine established a task force to evaluate the “humanistic qualities” of new interns. The task force report described these qualities as integrity, respect and compassion, implying that nothing less than high standards in the medical area should be respected.⁶ The question of humanity in medicine is further mentioned in the thesis.

² “Humanity,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed November 28, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humanity>.

³ “Humanity,” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, accessed November 28, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humanity#h1>.

⁴ Peterson et al., *Character strengths and virtues*, 296.

⁵ Peterson et al., *Character strengths and virtues*, 297.

⁶ Julius R. Krevans, and John A. Benson Jr., “Evaluation of humanistic qualities in the internist,” *Annals of internal medicine* 99, no. 5 (1983): 720–724.

Closely related to humanity as such is the community in which it can be applied. Merriam-Webster Dictionary states many possibilities to understand this term. The first definition to be mentioned is a unified body of individuals with common interests living in a particular area. Also, a community is a group of people living together within a larger society with a common characteristic or interest. The community can be a group linked by a common policy. Further, the dictionary mentions community as a social state, condition, or society as a whole.⁷ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states that people live most of their lives in communities. Those communities shape moral and political judgments, and people have a strong obligation to support the particular communities that provide meaning for their lives, without which they would be disoriented and lonely.⁸ Community is an essential part of people's lives, shaping the individuals within it.

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "moral" refers to principles of right and wrong in behaviour. It also expresses or teaches a conception of proper behaviour or conforming to a standard of correct behaviour. Another meaning is sanctioned by or operative on one's conscience or ethical judgment; the example is a moral obligation. It also means the capability of doing right or wrong actions. The last meaning is perceptual or psychological rather than tangible or practical in nature or effect; the example is moral support.⁹ P. F. Strawson suggests that morality is, at the very minimum, a set of norms and principles that govern our actions towards each other and carry special weight or authority.¹⁰ He also states that one generally accepted concept of morality is the idea of rules or principles governing human behaviour that apply universally within a particular community or class.¹¹ This is related to the above-mentioned concept of community. Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph identify five moral foundations they call Moral Foundations Theory (MFT). These are harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. They insist that the moral mind is partially structured in advance of experience so that five or more social concerns are likely to become moralised during development.¹² The Morality as Cooperation theory by

⁷ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, "Community."

⁸ "Communitarianism," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified May 15, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/>.

⁹ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, "Moral."

¹⁰ P. F. Strawson, "Social Morality and Individual Ideal," *Philosophy* 36, no. 136 (January 1961): 6.

¹¹ Strawson, "Social Morality," 4.

¹² Jonathan Haidt, and Craig Joseph, "The moral mind: How five sets of innate intuitions guide the development of many culture-specific virtues, and perhaps even modules," *The innate mind* 3, no. 1 (2007): 383.

Oliver Scott Curry, Matthew Jones Chesters, and Caspar J. Van Lissa offers a similar structure as MFT. They say that morality evolved as a biologically and culturally developed set of solutions to cooperation problems in social life. They identify seven general moral values: family values, group loyalty, reciprocity, bravery, respect, fairness and property rights.¹³ Moral values are an indicator of humanity in human behaviour and form an essential part of it. All those seven values also relate to the community in which they are most apparent.

There are terms associated with moral values which ought to be mentioned. Courage is, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.¹⁴ Self-sacrifice is a sacrifice of oneself or one's interest for others or a cause or ideal.¹⁵ Another term is persistence. If someone is persistent, he continues to do something even though it is difficult or others are against it.¹⁶ It is essential to explain those three terms for better comprehension of the issues further below.

In the fourth chapter of the thesis, the term “justifying the means to an end” occurs several times. In order to understand this concept, it is necessary to describe it. Historical documents prove that Ovid used this phrase in his *Heroides*. However, this concept is usually ascribed to Niccollo Machiavelli, an Italian Renaissance politician and philosopher.¹⁷ According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the “end justifies the means” is used to say when a desired result is so good or important that any method, even a morally bad one, may be used to achieve it.¹⁸ Traditionally, the “Machiavellian” views and manipulates others for his own purposes.¹⁹ “Machiavellian” also decides to act in: “a morally faulty, pragmatic and cynical way while attempting to achieve a goal widely perceived as beneficial.”²⁰ Quentin Skinner claims that the monarch's committing acts that society considers amoral is his last best option. According to Machiavelli's “The Prince”, he states that a head of state ought to do good if he can but has to

¹³ Oliver Scott Curry, Matthew Jones Chesters, and Caspar J. Van Lissa, “Mapping morality with a compass: Testing the theory of ‘morality-as-cooperation’ with a new questionnaire,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 78, no. 1 (2019): 107.

¹⁴ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, “Courage.”

¹⁵ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, “Self-sacrifice.”

¹⁶ “Persistence,” Collinsdictionary.com, accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/persistence>.

¹⁷ Tibor Mahrik, “The End Justifies the Means – Ethical Analysis,” in *Edukacja Etyczna*, ed. Anna Szklarska, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UP, 2017) 124.

¹⁸ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, “The end justifies the means.”

¹⁹ Richard Christie, Florence L. Geis, Leon Festinger, and Stanley Schachter, *Studies in Machiavellianism* (Massachusetts: Academic Press, 1970), 1.

²⁰ Mahrik, “The End Justifies the Means,” 126.

be prepared to commit evil if he must.²¹ This implies that in urgency, it is justifiable to use immoral means. Hannah Arendt talks about the means to an end. She states that: “since the end of human action can never be reliably predicted, the means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals.”²² Arendt suggests that one should always be concerned with the means and not just the ends when the end is not guaranteed. To sum up the topic, according to Machiavelli, the means to an end are justifiable as long as the end is morally good and serves the public.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states that manipulation is often characterised as a form of influence that is neither coercion nor rational persuasion. Also, the term typically refers to radical programming or reprogramming of all or most of an agent’s beliefs, desires, and other mental states. Manipulation is commonly imagined via supernatural intervention, direct neurological engineering, or radical programs of indoctrination and psychological conditioning. It is typically thought to deprive its victim of free will. A different type of manipulation is deception which is the deliberate attempt to trick someone into adopting a faulty belief. Other versions of the manipulation involve trickery which is an account that views manipulation as the deliberate attempt to trick someone into adopting any faulty mental state such as a belief, desire, emotion, etc. Another way to characterise manipulation is to treat it as pressure to do as the influencer wishes. Manipulation is commonly used aggressively to harm the manipulator’s target or at least benefit the manipulator at the target’s expense.²³ Although manipulation can sometimes be perceived positively, for example, in terms of advertising and its efforts to sell a product, it generally harms the target group and is considered wrong.

Isolation is defined simply as being alone or when an individual is set apart from others and is socially withdrawn or removed from society.²⁴ Solitary confinement is connected with isolation. Sharon Shalev defines “solitary confinement” as an individual’s physical and social isolation in a single cell for 22.5 to 24 hours daily. At most, isolated prisoners have very limited, if any, access to educational, vocational and recreational activities, all conducted in isolation from others. The number and type of personal belongings allowed in prisoners’ small,

²¹ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. 1: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 136.

²² Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 4.

²³ “The Ethics of Manipulation,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified April 21, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-manipulation/#ManiHarm>.

²⁴ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, “Isolate”.

sometimes windowless cells are highly restricted and closely regulated.²⁵ Andrew B. Clark states that solitary confinement is typically used for disciplinary, administrative, or personal protective reasons. It is thought by some facility administrators to be: “a necessary tool for managing disruptive behaviours and for maintaining discipline and safety within a detention facility.” Solitary confinement came into frequent use in adult and juvenile detention facilities beginning in the 1980s, accompanying the dramatic increase in the number of incarcerated persons in the United States.²⁶ In American prisons, it is still a common practice. Even children and young adults are put into solitary confinement. Jean Casella and James Ridgeway discuss a report released by Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union. They state that solitary confinement causes severe pain and psychological damage. The report says the practice has a “distinct and particularly profound impact” on children. Because of adolescents’ unique vulnerability and needs, it can be a cruel and harmful practice when applied to them.²⁷ The effects of isolation and solitary confinement are further discussed in one of the following chapters.

The term torture ought to be mentioned in relation to humanity and manipulation. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, torture is generally defined, in part, as the intentional infliction of extreme suffering and is, therefore, morally wrong. It also says that torture can be morally justified in extreme circumstances or if refraining from performing it constitutes a much greater evil.²⁸ Ellen P. Lacter defines torture-based mind control. It is a systematic use of acute torture, including cold, heat, rotation and brain stimulation. Then she describes torturing by conditioning, including coercive hypnosis, illusions (staged tricks, film, stories), and spiritual threats. She also discusses operant and fear conditioning to force victims into altered mental states.²⁹ Nevertheless, torture is generally considered immoral and should not be part of human behaviour towards any human being.

²⁵ Sharon Shalev, “Solitary Confinement as a Prison Health Issue,” in *Who Guide to Prisons and Health*, ed. S. Enggist, L. Moller, G. Galea, and C. Udesen (Copenhagen: World Health Organization, 2014), 27.

²⁶ Andrew B. Clark, “Juvenile Solitary Confinement as a Form of Child Abuse,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 45, no. 3 (2017): 350.

²⁷ Jean Casella, and James Ridgeway, “Kids in solitary confinement: America’s official child abuse,” *The Guardian*, October 10, 2012, 1.

²⁸ “Torture,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified May 5, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/torture/#DefiTort>.

²⁹ Orit Badouk-Epstein, Joseph Schwartz, and Rachel Wingfield Schwartz, *Ritual abuse and mind control: The manipulation of attachment needs*. (England: Routledge, 2018), 58.

In sum, this chapter examines humanity, regarding mostly kindness towards each other and the importance of humane methods in medicine. It also connects humanity to the community because it applies the principles of humanity. Next, it examines morality and moral values and defines general moral values according to several thinkers. Closely related to humanity and morality is also the Machiavellian principle that the end justifies the means and that it justifies it only when the end is morally good. The following term in this chapter deals with manipulation as a tool for reprogramming and deceiving the person. Isolation is also mentioned as an immoral way to control a person. In particular, the isolation of children in solitary confinement is considered horrible, as is the torture and mind control of other people. The following chapters depict these terms and principles in a broader context.

2 Humanity, Moral Values and Community

This chapter analyses humanity, moral values and the community in *The Maze Runner* series. This section focuses on the behaviour of the community of children in Dashner's books and preserving their humanity despite the harsh conditions. As in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, often cited as one of James Dashner's main points of inspiration, the motif of order and chaos recurs. Golding shows that people are capable of leaning toward good or evil motives, and Dashner shows similar dimensions to his characters. The children's behaviour contrasts with that of the adult doctors, often lacking humanity and moral values due to the effects of extreme living conditions on the nature of humanity. The chapter also mentions the ethical problem of using biological weapons and tries to explain the motives behind the violent acts against humanity.

Humanity and moral values can be seen in the behaviours of the individual characters in Dashner's books. The first book of the pentalogy, *The Maze Runner*, begins in a dark elevator called The Box, where a confused young boy named Thomas finds himself with no memory of anything but his name. He is surrounded by a group of around fifty boys and soon realises he must work with the community where he finds himself if he is to escape. He doesn't know where he is: "this place is called the Glade, all right? It's where we live, where we eat, where we sleep—we call ourselves the Gladers."³⁰ The Glade is an enormous courtyard surrounded by gigantic high walls, forming a square around them. Each wall has a split that closes at night and leads to the Maze. The boys do not know why they are in the Glade, they have no memory of their former lives and do not know the purpose of being in such a place, but they manage to form a functional community where everyone has a role. When Thomas arrives, things start to change, and finally, after two years in the Glade, they have a hope to escape. Thomas is pictured in the books as a role model of humanity. He is portrayed as compassionate, brave, and helpful. At the beginning of *The Maze Runner*, he has to decide whether to break the main rule of the Glade, which is not to go out into the Maze under any circumstances unless you are a Runner: "He barely knew Alby and Minho. But his chest ached at the thought of them out there, killed by the horrendous creature he's seen through the window his first morning in the Glade."³¹ He sees two boys who try to reach the Door of the Maze before it closes, and he cannot bear to think that he would stand there and do nothing. Even though he barely knows them, he cannot stand the thought of their deaths. Obviously, he cares about them, and he shows compassion

³⁰ James Dashner, *The Maze Runner* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2009), 9.

³¹ Dashner, *The Maze Runner*, 110.

and a desire to help others. He shows kindness because, as Seligman and Peterson suggest, kindness can be: “a fleeting act directed toward strangers.”³² Ali Sadikin Berutu and Muhammad Amrin Siregar mention that Thomas realises he cannot be selfish in such a horrible place. Thomas is fearless in entering the Maze a few seconds before the Glade is tightly closed. He does not care what will happen to himself later, even though he is prohibited from entering the Maze. His willingness to help is greater than the threat or prohibition.³³ He does indeed have moral values. Ultimately, Thomas rescues Alby and is the first to survive the night in the Maze. Through his courage, determination and self-sacrifice, even though he broke the rules, he manages to save his life and the lives of his friends.

Extreme living conditions require setting rules and order that must be followed. The boys are sent into an artificial environment, but because their memories are wiped out, they cannot know. The Creators, as the Gladers call the people, who put them there, send some supplies every week in The Box, but otherwise, they have to care about themselves alone. The boys develop a community in which everyone has a role to play. According to Anthony Valcke, rules are made to achieve civilised behaviour and social harmony in society and limit the application of the tools of law and punishment to those who fail to obey the code of the team.³⁴ There are three rules in the Glade to achieve order, civilised behaviour and social harmony. Number one, do not go to the Maze; only a Runner can enter. Number two, never hurt other Gladers. Rule number three, do your job for teamwork. Thomas breaks rule number one when he helps his friends and runs into the Maze, so he has to spend one night in prison. Without obeying the rules and punishing those who break them, there would be chaos instead of order. Chaos is associated with crime, injustice, escape from facing serious situations, hatred, and negative actions and feelings that could harm humanity in general as S. Y. Mustafa and H. H. Khalil mention.³⁵ The boys in the Glade always try to maintain order instead of chaos by following the rules they established in their community.

Communication is also an important part of a well-functioning community. It is essential to talk about the issues which may occur and solve them fairly. Clarisa Tasabela mentions that

³² Peterson et al., *Character strengths and virtues*, 296.

³³ Ali Sadikin Berutu, and Muhammad Amrin Siregar, “Physical Courage in James Dashner’s novel *The Maze Runner*.” *Journal of Language* 2, no. 1, (May 2020): 32.

³⁴ Anthony Valcke, “The Rule of Law: Its Origins and Meanings (A Short Guide for Practitioners),” *Encyclopedia of Global Social Science Issues* 1, no. 1 (March 2012): n.p.

³⁵ S. Y. Mustafa, and H. H. Khalil, “Order and Chaos in Young Adult Science Fiction: A Critical Stylistic Analysis.” *Arab World English Journal* 10, no. 3 (September 2019): 133–150. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no3.9>.

the gathering is convened when there is an issue to discuss to get the result on the Gladers' problem.³⁶ There are three stages. First, the Gladers listen to the point, then give their opinions and debate to find the right solution. If a punishment needs to be carried out, they will hear each other on the council and then decide. For example, Thomas broke rule number one, not to go out to the Maze. Newt leads the open discussion about his punishment, asks the Gladers for a recommendation, and they vote. This procedure and its observance lead to discipline and the maintenance of order. It also enables the group to discuss urgent issues. However, even though rules and communication are essential, moral values are also a part of the community life in the Glade. Although punished, Thomas is still elected a Runner, the one who searches the Maze, because the Gladers can appreciate when Thomas saves his friends. It is essential to obey the community's rules, but Thomas revealed his moral values by breaking one.

Moral values become distinctive in escaping the Maze. In *The Maze Runner*, a girl called Teresa is sent in The Box to the Glade as the last one ever. She and Thomas are the clues to escape from the Maze. Teresa finds out that the Maze is a code, and together they decipher the words that the Maze has been showing them all along. However, they do not understand what the words mean. Thomas again shows his moral values, courage and self-sacrifice when he voluntarily gets stung by a Griever – a horrendous creature from the Maze, part animal, part machine, which causes the Changing when people are stabbed. The Changing is a process of recovering lost memories. It is very painful, and the one who goes through it is never the same afterwards. Felicia Carolin Azali claims that Thomas's character reveals four moral values. The first one is being selfless, the second value is the courage to take risks, the third is always being persistent in achieving a goal, and the last is staying confident in the goals. Felicia states that those moral values can be seen in how Thomas solves conflicts. Even though the conflicts seem impossible to solve, he always tries to find a way and never gives up in any situation.³⁷ Thanks to his moral values like courage, persistence and self-sacrifice, mentioned in the first chapter of this work, he gets part of his memories back and knows how to escape the Maze. To escape the Maze, the boys and Teresa have to go through the Griever Hole, the lair of the Grievers. They finally manage it, with significant losses, but they only get out of the Maze to discover that the worst is coming. The children find out that everything is an experiment to study their brain

³⁶ Clarisa Tasabela, "Behavior Patterns of Teamwork in *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner (2009): A Behaviorist Approach." (BA thesis, Universitas Muhammadiyah in Surakarta, 2020), 6–7.

³⁷ Felicia Carolin Azali, "The Moral Values Revealed Through the Main Character's Way in Solving the Conflicts in James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*" (BA, Universitas Sanata Dharma in Yogyakarta, 2022), 66.

responses and that the Creators are a governmental organisation called WICKED. WICKED is an acronym for World In Catastrophe, Killzone Experiment Department. After the sun eruptions burnt half of the world, scientists and governments cooperated and managed to establish this organisation to fight the Flare virus. The Flare is a deadly virus that decomposes the brain and causes madness and murderous rage. To combat this disease, they create the Maze and study the subjects they put there. One doctor explains: “We want our name to remind people of why we exist, what we plan to accomplish, and how we intend to do it. [...] Our objective is to save humanity. Otherwise, what’s the point?”³⁸ They keep telling the children that all these experiments are for the greater good and that, eventually, there will be a cure. They repeat that it is about saving the world. Thomas’s mind after the Changing also reveals that the Creators manipulated him into creating the Maze with Teresa, and he feels guilty about it. Even though he was part of WICKED, he was only a child, manipulated by the adults, and sometimes tortured to cooperate. Now when he is older and less helpless, he can tell what kind of person he wants to be and what moral values he believes in:

“It’s just...there’s still a part of me that thinks a cure is possible. Don’t you feel that way? At least a little?”

“Yeah, of course I do. But there has to be another way. All I know is that if they have to achieve it by torturing my friends, then it’s not right.”³⁹

Thomas shows his humanity when he realises that the experiments performed on his friends are neither humane nor moral, even though they aim to save humankind. Even though the children are manipulated in any way possible, they still try to preserve their humanity, especially Thomas. Oliver S. Curry, M. J. Chesters, and Caspar J. Van Lissa classify morality as cooperation theory and identify seven general moral values already mentioned in the first chapter. Those are family values, group loyalty, reciprocity, bravery, respect, fairness and property rights.⁴⁰ Some of them can apply to the main characters’ moral values. For instance, family values and group loyalty are certainly visible among the Gladers. Bravery, respect and fairness are also apparent. They protect each other and the community, honour the rules and attempt to maintain order. They do every action for their community’s greater good; they are not selfish but show compassion and help each other.

On the other hand, the scientists and doctors in Dashner’s book show quite the opposite of humanity. They use inhumane means to achieve their goals. The world finds itself in extreme

³⁸ James Dashner, *The Fever Code*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 2016), 28.

³⁹ Dashner, *The Fever Code*, 333.

⁴⁰ Curry et al., “Mapping morality,” 107.

conditions, and saving of human race is put above all the other aims, including preserving humanity and moral values. *The Kill Order* explains how it all began. Before WICKED was formed and the Maze was built, the sun flares hit the Earth, killing most of the population. People are desperate, and even though so many died, there are not enough resources for all of them. The planet's resources are being depleted. The Post-Flares Coalition is established, consisting of the people who want to wipe out half of the population: "The problem is simple: the world has too many people and not enough resources."⁴¹ They use a virus that spreads and kills fast, but it does not work as they hoped. It starts mutating, and infected people do not die immediately but are changed into murderous, insane beings. The governments have agreed that one part of the world, the worthy one, survives, and the other half disappears. Ironically, compared with the community of Gladers and their capability to maintain order, the adult scientists are unable to stay sane. The Post-Flares Coalition got infected with the Flare. They plan to revolt against the governments that left them to die slowly: "They'll go to where the governments have gathered and make sure the world ends, even though that's not their intent."⁴² They do not realise that all they are going to cause is a massive transmission of the virus to healthy people. They succumb to chaos and disregard order.

The use of biological weapons has occurred in the past. Kate Charlet notes that since 1945, six countries admitted to developing biological weapons, and more than a dozen are suspected because of sufficient evidence.⁴³ She also mentions that during one campaign, the Japanese dropped plague-infected fleas from aircraft onto Chinese targets.⁴⁴ This situation is similar to the one in the book. The Post-Flares Coalition sends soldiers to shoot civilians with virus-filled darts before the innocent people even realise what is happening: "The virus will be released in the locations recommended by the PCC and agreed upon by the Coalition."⁴⁵ Herbert Kelman talks about humanity and the motives behind which people are capable of this kind of violence. He cites the deliberate decimation of the rural population of South Vietnam, which had genocidal dimensions. These actions of killing and destroying were meant to bring the rural population under control.⁴⁶ When Post-Flare Coalition attacks people with virus-filled darts,

⁴¹ James Dashner, *The Kill Order* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2012), 292.

⁴² Dashner, *The Kill Order*, 171.

⁴³ Charlet, "The New Killer Pathogens," 178–179.

⁴⁴ Kate Charlet, "The New Killer Pathogens: Countering the Coming Bioweapons Threat." *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 3 (May/June 2018): 180.

⁴⁵ Dashner, *The Kill Order*, 295.

⁴⁶ Herbert Kelman, "Violence Without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of the Victims and Victimizers." *Journal of Social Issues* 29, no. 4 (1973): 31–32.

there are also small communities living in close quarters that the attackers seek to destroy. Kelman also talks about why a particular group is the target of violence. He explains that eliminating a group of people might be seen as a useful tool or that the population's continued existence is an obstacle in the execution of policy.⁴⁷ These reasons are similar to the ones in Dashner's books. The Chancellor and The-Post-Flares Coalition discuss the matter in a correspondence: "If we don't do this, the world will run out of resources. I firmly believe it is the most ethical decision—the risk of race extinction justifies the elimination of a few."⁴⁸ The Post-Flare Coalition assumes that part of the population is expendable and a barrier for the chosen few to live on. They are firmly convinced that it is the right thing to do. They cannot see any other alternative than sacrifice other people and consider it moral and ethical in order to save humanity. Hannah Arendt, a famous political philosopher, talks about the Wannsee Conference regarding discussing the Final Solution of the Jewish question in Europe. They discussed the "complicated legal questions" or "various types of possible solutions", which meant the various methods of killing innocent people. There was more than "happy agreement on the part of the participants", Arendt states.⁴⁹ Similarly to the Wannsee Conference, The Post-Flares Coalition in Dashner's book also seeks a solution to the problem that meant the annihilation of half of the world: "I expect all the members to come prepared to present a solution, no matter how extraordinary it seems."⁵⁰ The Coalition needs a quick and effective solution regardless of humanity and moral constraints.

Many people are willing to participate in the mass killing of defenceless victims. Kelman asks why. He states that authorisation, routinisation and dehumanisation play a significant role. When acts of violence are explicitly ordered and tactically approved, they seem to carry automatic justification: "Armed forces will be stationed to ensure that the process ensues in as orderly a manner as possible."⁵¹ Armed forces do not hesitate when they are supposed to shoot innocent people in *The Kill Order* because they feel it is something that has to be done. Another reason can be that an individual feels obliged to obey the orders whether or not these correspond with his personal preferences.⁵² Soldiers may have different opinions about their tasks, but their training tells them to obey in any case. They also might not feel

⁴⁷ Kelman, "Violence," 32.

⁴⁸ Dashner, *The Kill Order*, 294.

⁴⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 211.

⁵⁰ Dashner, *The Kill Order*, 292.

⁵¹ Dashner, *The Kill Order*, 295.

⁵² Kelman, "Violence," 39.

responsible for the consequences of their action. It is the same with the characters in the book: “‘Just following orders, son,’ the lady replied. Not a hint of emotion in her voice.”⁵³ Within authority situations, people cannot differentiate whether it would be right or wrong to obey orders.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the authorities accept full responsibility for the consequences of the actions: “We the Coalition take full responsibility for this action...”⁵⁵ People seem to assume that superior orders override moral considerations. According to Kelman, the authorities determine the national interests that can be pursued without reference to moral considerations.⁵⁶ When the authorities tell people they take full responsibility, the ones who perform their will feel obliged to obey and do not think about the ethical side of the matter because it is not their decision.

Routinisation also helps people with obeying orders. Kelman says the normalisation of the processes reduces the necessity of making decisions and minimises the occasions when moral questions may arise.⁵⁷ Because the people are used to that and consider it every day, routine work, they have fewer problems with obeying orders. Arendt also states that routine helps follow orders. She talks about Adolf Eichmann, who, soon after the legislation process of the Final Solution, routinely evacuated the Jews and helped with their transportation without even thinking about the consequences.⁵⁸ The principle of routinisation is used by the doctors of WICKED when they constantly repeat the phrase: “WICKED is good.”⁵⁹ They instil it into their minds and into the minds of their subjects to cooperate. The doctors believe that if they repeat the words often enough, they will become true. This is the slogan they constantly use to justify their actions because it carries the message that the whole organisation is trying to find a cure. They are trying to express that their purpose is ultimately right and moral.

The last term that Kelman mentions is dehumanisation. He says it means that we deprive other human beings of identity. The victimisers can only justify what is being done by coming to believe that the victims are subhuman.⁶⁰ An example of this is when WICKED doctors call all the children subjects. They see them only as someone to be experimented on and not as fully human beings: “The subjects will be allowed one full night’s sleep before Stage 2

⁵³ Dashner, *The Kill Order*, 40.

⁵⁴ Kelman, “Violence,” 41.

⁵⁵ Dashner, *The Kill Order*, 295.

⁵⁶ Kelman, “Violence,” 46.

⁵⁷ Kelman, “Violence,” 46.

⁵⁸ Arendt, “Eichmann,” 212.

⁵⁹ Dashner, *The Fever Code*, 101.

⁶⁰ Kelman, “Violence,” 50.

implementation.”⁶¹ Kelman also states that dehumanisation also happens to the victimisers. They lose their capacity to act as moral beings and their personal identity. They become alienated by their tasks.⁶² This is also reflected in the behaviour of doctors of WICKED, who behave in a business-like manner:

None of them wore any kind of discernible facial expression—they were all sallow and gaunt, miserably sad to look upon. They continued to stare at the Gladers; a man shook his head, a woman nodded. Another man reached up and scratched his nose—the most human thing Thomas had seen any of them do.⁶³

They are cold-hearted and do not show emotion; if they do, it is usually sporadic or robotic. They act stiffly. They learn not to show emotions and work in a detached manner. Their means of experimenting on children are amoral, and they learn to be cynical and emotionally cold through dehumanisation.

In conclusion, this chapter discusses children’s behaviour and scientists’ behaviour. The children maintain their moral values and humanity despite the harsh extreme living conditions they are subjected to. Thanks to the rules and communication, they live peacefully in their community. They do not succumb to chaos but try to maintain civilised behaviour. On the other hand, scientists do not care about preserving their moral values, and they solve their problems through authorisation, routinisation and dehumanisation. The motives for their behaviours are the same; Thomas and his friends strive for the good of the community of Gladers through moral values and ethical decisions. The scientists’ goal is also the good of the community, but they achieve it through questionable, amoral choices. The following chapter focuses on manipulation and isolation as amoral means to achieve scientists’ goals.

⁶¹ Dashner, *The Maze Runner*, 374.

⁶² Kelman, “Violence,” 51.

⁶³ Dashner, *The Maze Runner*, 352.

3 Manipulation and Isolation

With this thesis in mind, this chapter maps the relationship between isolation, manipulation and the characters' humanity. It focuses on the impact the manipulation has on the characters' minds in Dashner's books and how inhumane it is to disorient, confuse and isolate them. The term manipulation is discussed in terms of experiments on children and compared with actual experiments on children and humans in general. The chapter discusses torture in terms of mind control and its motives and illustrates cases where torture is performed in the name of humanity. Next, the chapter addresses the power of humans through mind control. The final topic of the chapter is controlled isolation, especially of children, and its effects on humanity.

Mind games are a distinctive part of experimenting on children in Dashner's books. At the beginning of *The Scorch Trials*, the boys are saved from the WICKED by their rescuers. They take them to a safe place vivid with colours, give them food and a place to sleep and treat them well. In the morning, the boys discover that their rescuers have been killed and hanged in the hall, and they are locked in the building surrounded by Cranks, the mad people infected by the Flare: "It seemed as if everything they'd dared hope for the previous night had dissolved to nothing."⁶⁴ Thomas thinks it is almost too much after all those past weeks in terror. No food is left, and they cannot escape because of the Cranks outside and because they are locked from the inside. An alarm bell rings, and then all of a sudden, the hanging bodies of their dead rescuers disappear, including the Cranks. Instead of the windows, a solid brick wall appears. They are left to starve for three days. Then a doctor, nicknamed Rat Man by the boys, appears out of nowhere and informs them that they [the children] are all study subjects placed under challenging situations called Variables so that the doctors can study their brain responses. He says that all the children are intentionally infected with the Flare virus to motivate them to cooperate, and if they finish the tests successfully, the doctors will give them the cure. By attempting to save themselves in Phase Two of the experiments, which means they have to travel for two weeks in unhostile conditions and weather, Rat Man says they will ultimately save the world from disease. The boys must go through all types of Variables, such as losses, injuries, pain, hunger, fear, betrayal, death, etc., until they reach the Haven, the place where they are promised to get their cure:

If I can tell you anything today, it is that you should never, ever believe your eyes. Or your mind, for that matter. This is why we did the demonstration with the hanging bodies and the bricked-up windows. All I will say is that sometimes what you see is not real,

⁶⁴ James Dashner, *The Scorch Trials* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2010), 8.

and sometimes what you do *not* see is real. We can manipulate your brains and nerve receptacles when necessary.⁶⁵

This shows that the things they saw were only a manipulation of their minds which was supposed to scare them and enable the doctors from WICKED to study their brains. They can control their mind if necessary. The children are subjected to the constant frustration of being unable to tell what is real and what is not, being told that nothing they see may be true. This could be defined as torture-based mind control. Ellen P. Lacter defines torture-based mind control as the systematic use of acute torture. She says that torture-based mind control is practised by individuals and groups who seek to maximally control and exploit others, especially children.⁶⁶ The children in Dashner's series are tortured by heat when they reach the outside world scorched by the sun. They are tortured by brain stimulation, illusions, and tricks. They constantly fear for their lives. Because of these mind games, the children are unable to distinguish between what is true and what is a lie, but later, they at least manage not to trust anyone but their closest friends.

The doctors justify the torture with the urge to save the world from a horrific disease. Ironically, the effort to invent the cure for the disease could be interpreted as a seemingly altruistic attempt to disguise the harmful effects of the virus released intentionally as a biological weapon. Due to this urge, they study the children by various methods to understand what happens in their brains and resolve how to prevent the spread of the disease:

'Many of the things that happen to you are solely for the purpose of judging and analyzing your *responses*. And yet it's not really an experiment as much as it is...constructing a blueprint. Stimulating the killzone and collecting the resultant patterns.'⁶⁷

Doctor Janson, nicknamed Rat Man, explains that they analyse the brain's reactions to construct a map of the brain, the blueprint. They stimulate the killzone, the part of the brain affected by the Flare virus, to detect how the virus behaves and how exactly it decomposes the human brain. To compare the doctors from WICKED and Nazi doctors who conducted medical experiments on human beings during the Second World War, many of the accused Nazi doctors argued that extraordinary circumstances made human experiments unavoidable. Total war threatened the very survival of the German nation. The doctors considered it legitimate to make an exception to general morality in the name of the defence and security of the Reich. The doctors seemed convinced that their experiments would contribute to German victory. According to them, it

⁶⁵ Dashner, *The Scorch Trials*, 56.

⁶⁶ Badouk-Epstein et al., *Ritual abuse and mind control*, 58.

⁶⁷ Dashner, *The Scorch Trials*, 55.

was reasonable to sacrifice a small number of prisoners from the concentration camps to benefit tens of thousands of soldiers. Nazi doctors such as Eugen Haagen or Claus Karl Schilling boldly expressed it “in the name of humanity”.⁶⁸ The same can be observed in the case of doctors from WICKED. They did experiments on children without their consent and even erased their memories. They put them into the Maze, which seems like prison: “What was this place? Was it some kind of prison?”⁶⁹ The boys are unable to understand why they are trapped there; they even think that in their previous lives, they were brutal killers, and maybe they deserve this prison. “Think about it. Our memories are wiped. We live inside a place that seems to have no way out, surrounded by bloodthirsty monster-guards. Doesn’t that sound like a prison to you?”⁷⁰ All this torture is also “in the name of humanity”: “We exist for one purpose and one purpose only: to save the world from catastrophe.”⁷¹ They capture the children and take them away from their sick parents in the hope that this new generation of people is the key to preserving humankind. However, they seem to misunderstand the term humanity because their methods are cruel and radical.

Manipulating the children to do something they do not want to do is another theme in Dashner’s series. In *The Maze Runner*, a boy named Alby goes through the Changing. As already mentioned, it is a process of recovering lost memories, after which no one is the same anymore. Alby wants to reveal to Thomas that he remembers him from their former lives, that Thomas and Teresa work for WICKED, and because of them, they are all trapped in the Maze. However, when he tries to talk about his past, he grabs his throat and starts to choke, but it looks like someone else is trying to strangle him. Later, Alby admits that it was not him strangling him, but: “something was controlling his body”.⁷² The doctors from WICKED managed to control the children’s minds so they would not divulge crucial information. The children have been allowed to remember their past lives, but on the other hand, they cannot share this experience with the Gladers. Another example of manipulation is at the end of *The Maze Runner*. The boys manage to escape from the Maze and find themselves in a room full of doctors who sent them to the Maze. Something unexpected happens. A boy named Gally is there, whom everyone assumes to be dead, and he looks like someone controls him. He says they can control him, and Thomas can see that: “His eyes bulged, a hand went to his throat as if he were choking.

⁶⁸ Daan de Leeuw, ““In the Name of Humanity””: Nazi Doctors and Human Experiments in German Concentration Camps.” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 235.

⁶⁹ Dashner, *The Maze Runner*, 11.

⁷⁰ Dashner, *The Maze Runner*, 64.

⁷¹ Dashner, *The Scorch Trials*, 55.

⁷² Dashner, *The Maze Runner*, 172–174.

Each word was a croaking cough. Then he stilled, his face calming, his body relaxing.”⁷³ After this scene, Gally pulls a dagger from behind his back and throws it at Thomas. Little Chuck, the youngest of the group and Thomas’s friend, jumps in front of him and saves him, but unfortunately, Chuck dies. The doctors tell them this is all part of the plan – Gally was supposed to kill Chuck so the doctors would have more variables from Thomas’s brain. They need him to experience the loss of a close friend: “The boy’s murder and the “rescue” proved to be a valuable finale.”⁷⁴ The doctors manipulated a young boy to kill a child in their endeavour to find a cure.

In the past, there were many attempts, and many were successful, to programme a person to behave in a certain way according to the wishes of their abusers. The books suggest that the children are controlled by small devices in their heads, implants. In *The Death Cure*, Thomas needs to remove the implant from his head, so he and his friends visit a former employee of WICKED who can do it. When they try to remove the implant, Thomas has a seizure, his body is shaking, and his legs kicking. Then, his body starts moving even though he is not telling it to. He repeats that he cannot let them do it and tries to kill the former employee and his friends. He even tries to kill himself. Something foreign has taken over his body, he says. He has a fail-safe programmed into his implant to prevent it from being removed.⁷⁵ WICKED protects itself. The doctors want to avoid the removal because they need the device to study Thomas’s and the other children’s brains, and they can also control them when necessary. They have the urgency to preserve order among their subjects. As already mentioned, in the past, people were programmed to behave in a certain way. For example, Lacter reveals a report from a man. When he was a child, he and also other children were programmed to be suicide bombers in the 1960s in supposedly a NATO project (including the CIA) to defend West Germany against the Warsaw Pact with tactical nuclear weapons. The report says the children were programmed to lie and wait in foxholes, ready to detonate these mini-nuclear bombs against Soviet tanks.⁷⁶ Those previously mentioned examples from Dashner’s book, with the boys Alby, Gally and Thomas, correspond to the mind control experiments that took place in the past. Doctors, scientists, and members of NATO and the CIA attempted to control people’s minds to get the desired result. The experimenters from a secret CIA program, MK-ULTRA, consisting of experiments on children to study mind control, asked: “Can we get control of an individual to

⁷³ Dashner, *The Maze Runner*, 355.

⁷⁴ Dashner, *The Maze Runner*, 373.

⁷⁵ James Dashner, *The Death Cure* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2011), 127–129.

⁷⁶ Badouk-Epstein et al., *Ritual abuse and mind control*, 67.

the point where he will do our bidding against his will and even against such fundamental laws of nature as self-preservation?”⁷⁷ It is evident that the experimenters wanted to achieve complete control of human beings, subduing them. They needed the subjects to lose their will and cooperate as the experimenters ordered. Controlling people to achieve something, even for the greater good, is considered inhumane, especially the manipulation of children. However, it seems that the doctors from WICKED and the actual experimenters from certain organisations only care about what they assume to be necessary, regardless of what is moral or humane.

Some of the strongest supporting evidence for mind control is the confirmation from the survivors of experiments. In 2007 internet survey was conducted in which 1471 people from at least forty countries responded as survivors of the Extreme Abuse Survey. There were these types of questions: “Secret government-sponsored mind control experiments were performed on me as a child”. More than two hundred and fifty respondents said “Yes” (26%), and more than two hundred of them remembered seeing abusers wearing white doctors’ coats. Seventy-one professional helpers from at least six countries reported working with survivors reporting government mind control experimentation.⁷⁸ The experiments on humans are not something unreal. This anonymous survey gives evidence of abusing children, and torturing them, not by some criminals, but by government-approved experiments supporting the research on human mind control. There is no specific mention of the motive for these projects, such as MK-ULTRA or Subproject 136, a subproject of MK-ULTRA, which would use “psychological tricks”, reward, punishment, and electroshock to control behaviour, including that of children. Those “psychological tricks” can be seen in the aforementioned disappearance of Cranks or the hanging bodies in *The Scorch Trials*. In the MK-ULTRA project or Subproject 136, the scientists explored how the human brain works, what it is capable of, and how it could be used. For example, they investigated whether torture could induce eidetic memory in humans or whether electric shocks could completely erase a person’s identity and replace it with a new one.⁷⁹ The lack of humanity and humanness is quite evident in those cases, the same as overlooking the qualities such as morality.

Isolation is a part of the torturing process and also a part of the manipulation. An example of isolation is seen at the beginning of *The Death Cure* when Thomas is captured in solitary confinement. There are white walls, only a tiny toilet, and a desk for which he has no use. There are no windows, and the lights are never turned off. They feed him the exact same

⁷⁷ Badouk-Epstein et al., *Ritual abuse and mind control*, 57.

⁷⁸ Badouk-Epstein et al., *Ritual abuse and mind control*, 65.

⁷⁹ Badouk-Epstein et al., *Ritual abuse and mind control*, 67.

meal three times a day at a different time, and he is completely alone for about three weeks. Thomas feels as if they want him to feel disoriented. Still, he tries to preserve his humanity and habits, but there is one thing which worries him. He feels like he is losing his mind. He has been told that he is infected by the Flare, the deadly virus decomposing his mind and personality, and the one thing that drives him slightly mad is the smell of his body:

He didn't know why the stench of his own body was the thing that scared him the most. Perhaps that in itself was a sign that he'd lost it. But for some reason his deteriorating hygiene pushed against his mind, causing horrific thoughts. Like he was rotting, decomposing, his insides turning as rancid as his outside felt. [...] Logic told him that being filthy had nothing to do with the strength of your heart or the functioning of your lungs. All the same, his mind was beginning to believe that his unceasing stench represented death rushing in, about to swallow him whole.⁸⁰

These thoughts represent the madness of the idea that he might die very soon. They never allow him to bathe or give him a rag to wash his face or new clothes to change into. The smell scares him and creeps into his thoughts as something he cannot stand, even though he feels physically fine and knows how irrational it is to think like this.

Torture by isolation and deprivation is related to the actual survivors who survived experiments in the past. Commonly, the victims report torture, including isolation, confinement (cages, coffins, etc.), being held over the fire, hunger, thirst, or sleep deprivation.⁸¹ Jeffrey S. Kaye talks about isolation and sensory deprivation. He mentions the CIA training manual, which explains that solitary confinement acts on most subjects as a powerful stress and produces “unbearable” anxiety for most subjects.⁸² That might be why Thomas feels like he is losing his mind. Andrew B. Clark talks about the vulnerability of the adolescent brain and the fact that although several states have abolished this, it remains a common practice in many facilities. Clark states that adolescents are especially vulnerable to the extraordinary psychological stresses associated with placement in solitary confinement.⁸³ Youths placed in segregation might be at their time of most significant need for close mental health contact. Therefore, Clark says that: “forgoing those services may be a high cost to this vulnerable group.”⁸⁴ Clark is not the only one concerned about this issue. Sharon Shalev, already mentioned in the first chapter,

⁸⁰ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 8.

⁸¹ Badouk-Epstein et al., *Ritual abuse and mind control*, 59–60.

⁸² Jeffrey S. Kaye, “Isolation, Sensory Deprivation, and Sensory Overload: History, Research, and Interrogation Policy, from the 1950s to the Present Day,” *Guild Practitioner* 66, no. 1 (spring 2009): 6.

⁸³ Clark, “Juvenile,” 350.

⁸⁴ Clark, “Juvenile,” 354.

states that children and young adults are still developing physically, mentally and socially, so holding in solitary confinement makes them particularly vulnerable to its negative effects.⁸⁵ Shalev also discusses the effects of solitary confinement, and one of them is paranoia and psychosis, ranging from obsessional thoughts to full-blown psychosis, for example, recurrent and persistent thoughts often of a violent and vengeful character. This might be the case with the above-mentioned thought of the stench of Thomas's body, intrusive thought that he is unable to stop thinking of while in isolation. He also has violent thoughts: "The rage crept in. [...] WICKED had done all this to him. [...] And for that, they would pay. Thomas swore this to himself a thousand times a day."⁸⁶ He has violent thoughts and wants revenge on the victimisers who keep him there. Jean Casella and James Ridgeway discuss a report which revealed more than 125 young people who had spent time in solitary as children across 19 states. To cope with the extreme isolation, sensory deprivation and loneliness, some children made up imaginary friends or played games in their heads; others hid under the covers and tried to sleep as much as possible, while some could not sleep at all. Casella and Ridgeway also state that solitary confinement is cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and rises to the level of torture when applied to vulnerable people.⁸⁷ This implies that placing children or youths in solitary confinement is inhumane and immoral. Doctors from WICKED do not care about the mental health of their subjects because they need different Variables. For them, it is rather convenient that the person feels miserable. They collect the responses of children's brains, and to do that, they put them in many environments, one of which is solitary confinement.

Overall, this chapter discusses the inhumane methods used on the children in Dashner's books, which are consistent with actual experiments conducted in the past in the belief that they were for the greater good. Deprived, confused and manipulated children face harsh conditions and separation from the society that can affect their adolescence and negatively alter how they perceive events in their future lives. Children will remain traumatised by this experimentation experience, and it is doubtful whether it should be tolerated even in horrendous living conditions and desperate situations. This is why the following section discusses the justification of a means to an end.

⁸⁵ Shalev, "Solitary Confinement as a Prison Health Issue," 30.

⁸⁶ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 2–3.

⁸⁷ Casella, and Ridgeway, "Kids in solitary confinement," 1.

4 Mad Scientist and Means to an End

This chapter discusses the characters of doctors (scientists), specifically the ways in which they act towards children without abandoning their endeavour to find the cure for the Flare – a deadly disease of madness. This section focuses on the fact that the doctors behave with cool practicality and emotional coldness. One of the central issues is the ethical aspects of sacrificing individuals for the sake of communal welfare, a question that has haunted mankind for centuries. The chapter concludes with close attention to Dashner’s literary treatment of the moral aspects regarding inhumane experimental methods in relation to preserving the human race.

The doctors in Dashner’s series act towards the children with emotional coldness, lack of empathy, and cruelty. In the first chapter of *The Fever Code*, WICKED needs Thomas to forget the name Stephen his parents gave him. Stephen is about four years old and refuses to be called Thomas, but a doctor called Randall tells him they do not have time for him to keep refusing his name. He ties Stephen to a chair and injects him with a pain stimulator. Randall then asks Stephen to say his name, and when he says Stephen, Randall uses the stimulator:

“I tried to tell you, Thomas,” Randall said, with perhaps, *perhaps*, some compassion in his voice. Possibly regret. “We don’t have time to mess around. I’m sorry. I really am. But we’re going to have to try this again. I think you understand now that none of this is a bluff. It’s important to everyone here that you accept your new name.”⁸⁸

It seems that Randall does not have a problem hurting a small child. He tortures the boy because he needs him to forget his name and accept the new one, Thomas. He is devoted to the WICKED’s plans and beliefs and is ready to use any means necessary to achieve their goal. As mentioned above, the American Board of Internal Medicine was concerned about the humanistic qualities in medicine, which should involve respect and compassion and said that the training residents should be responsible for their interns.⁸⁹ Before, Randall says that because of the people he works for and all that has happened, his heart has turned into “a small lump of black coal.”⁹⁰ This may imply that his personality has changed, and he has become cruel and cold-hearted because of the circumstances he had to face. Randall shows the opposite of kindness mentioned in the first chapter: selfishness and mean-spiritedness.⁹¹ Stephen has never experienced such pain in his short life; he is puzzled and desperate, so he asks: “How could you

⁸⁸ Dashner, *The Fever Code*, 14.

⁸⁹ Krevans et al., “Evaluation,” 720–724.

⁹⁰ Dashner, *The Fever Code*, 12.

⁹¹ Peterson et al., *Character strengths and virtues*, 297.

hurt me? I'm just a little kid.”⁹² This pathetic question does not affect Randall, and he just keeps torturing him until Stephen really forgets his real name and accepts his new one, Thomas.

In the past, many experiments have been conducted on children. Perhaps the infamous experiment, as mentioned earlier, that stands out is MK- ULTRA (1953 – 1973), a secret CIA program consisting of experiments on children to study mind control. Without their consent, children were given Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD), so the scientists could brainwash them. Children were interrogated in special rooms with bright lights while doctors sat in the back, observing them and taking notes. To confess secrets, the children were threatened, tortured, raped, and verbally abused; sensory deprivation, chemicals, and electrical shocks were used on them.⁹³ Many children died during the process, while others were subjected to amnesia so they would not remember the horrific sessions. The program ended after ten years in 1962. This project is similar to the experiments conducted under the WICKED program in Dashner's series. The government ran both projects to study children's brains, and their memories were erased; they were injected with serums and brainwashed. Speculating about human experiments, officially conducted by doctors, is not just something from a distant past because some people still do not see it as an ethical problem. In 2020, two French doctors publicly discussed utilising African subjects in experimental trials for a tuberculosis vaccine as an antidote to the coronavirus.⁹⁴ The thought that some lives are disposable and can be wasted for experimenting is inhumane and unethical. The fact that these thoughts occur even nowadays shows that inhumane experimentation may still be an issue and that doctors do not have a problem experimenting on innocent people when it is for the greater good.

The doctors of WICKED believe in the Machiavellian justification of means to an end. According to Richard Christie, Machiavellianism can be examined as a character trait. He identifies that Machiavellianism can be associated with a certain way of approaching the world and behaving and that most people can promote Machiavellianism at some level. Christie describes a personality profile of a Machiavellian that includes five traits which are manipulation, amorality, cynicism, emotional coldness, and lack of empathy.⁹⁵ These traits are also reflected in the behaviour of doctors of WICKED. The prologue of *The Kill Order* describes how Thomas is sent to the Maze. Teresa, the girl raised by WICKED to be

⁹² Dashner, *The Fever Code*, 14.

⁹³ Kate Marcello, *Conspiracy Fact: Mkultra and Mind Control in the United States: Declassified* (United States: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 3.

⁹⁴ Matiangai Sirleaf, “Disposable lives,” *Columbia Law Review* 121, no. 5 (June 2021): 71.

⁹⁵ Richard Christie, Florence L. Geis, Leon Festinger, and Stanley Schachter, *Studies in Machiavellianism* (Massachusetts: Academic Press, 1970), 3–4.

experimented on and Thomas's best friend, is present for the procedure, and she is wondering what it would be like to forget him. Even now, in this horrifying situation, she is calm and steady when she should be angry and refuse to help. She is emotionally cold and uncritically trusts WICKED's purpose. She is convinced that WICKED will find the cure:

WICKED had no choice. She and Thomas—*they* had no choice. How could she shrink at sacrificing a few to save the many? How could *anyone*? She didn't have time for pity or sadness or wishes. It was what it was; what was done was done; what would be ... would be.⁹⁶

She is convinced they are doing the right thing. She becomes one of those doctors who do not care how painful it is to finish what they started. She built a wall at the same time as they were creating the Maze. Inside, she feels nothing, and when there is a moment of crumbling, she still thinks there is no return for them. She constantly works for the WICKED without shaking her loyalty. She proclaims: "I also want to make it clear that I believe in what WICKED is doing."⁹⁷ Even when her best friend is taken from her, or at least his and her memories of them, for her, the question of the means to an end is undeniable and unquestionable. She shows the emotional coldness mentioned above, and also the lack of empathy for her best friend and makes an amoral decision by sending him to the Maze.

Warren G. Bovee outlines the issue of a means to an end when discussing the ethics of journalism. He argues that it is not hard to disagree with this statement, but it is hard to resist using unethical means to achieve invaluable ends.⁹⁸ However, he states that it is important to realise that a good end does not justify using the wrong means. Even when talking about journalism, it is the same as in the case of medicine. Bovee says journalists do anything to achieve their goal, whether lying or cheating, but the main difference is that journalists never commit murder to get to the front page.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, that is the main difference from the doctors in Dashner's series. Nothing stops the doctors from WICKED, and no crime is too immoral or too unethical:

"Let me ask you this—are you telling me that the lives of a few aren't worth losing to save countless more?" Again, the man spoke with passion, leaning forward. "It's a very old axiom, but do you believe that the end can justify the means? When there's no choice left?" Thomas only stared. It was a question that had no good response.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Dashner, *The Kill Order*, 3.

⁹⁷ Dashner, *The Fever Code*, 344.

⁹⁸ Warren G. Bovee, "The End Can Justify the Means – But Rarely," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality* 6, no. 3, (1991): 135.

⁹⁹ Bovee, "The End Can Justify the Means – But Rarely," 136.

¹⁰⁰ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 9.

This very old axiom is used by Janson, one of the devoted doctors who cooperates with WICKED with passion and deep conviction in their cause. It is evident that even though he knows how horrible their experiments and trials are, he sees no reason to stop them. Moreover, he believes it is moral to do it for humankind's greater good. Janson believes there is no choice but to torture the children for the desired results. In *The Kill Order*, there is also a woman doctor from WICKED who talks about what she used to think, that they are making questionable decisions, but now, not anymore, after what she has seen out there, how the deadly virus destroyed the world.¹⁰¹ She believes WICKED has to act by any means necessary, even killing someone. She does not care about the effect on humanity. The woman doctor seems to think it is justifiable to behave this way.

The question of a means to an end is also discussed when several doctors from WICKED get infected, and the Purge must take place. Dr Paige, the Counsellor, tells the oldest children, Thomas, Teresa and others, that they have to kill nineteen doctors because they [the children] are the only ones immune to the Flare. Because there is no cure for the Flare, there is no other option but to kill the infected people before more of them get sick. The second option would be to leave the sick people to their faith and send them out to the wilderness, where they would slowly die in pain and lose their sanity and themselves. The children are asked to inject a serum which will quickly kill them. They say: "So...we're just going to kill them all? [...] They'll die anyway. It's *be tough now* or everyone dies later." However, the only one horrified is Thomas. The other children are convinced that it is the right thing to do: "The ends justify the means. [...] If you could save a billion people by killing a million people, shouldn't you do it? If you really had that choice and said no, then aren't you *actually* killing a billion people? I'd rather kill a million than a billion."¹⁰² This statement depicts that they feel there is no other option; they also think it is the best option because they can save the rest of the people who are still healthy. Children raised by the WICKED are aware of the urgency of the situation and are willing to do anything to stop the spread of the virus, even if it involves killing people. Hannah Arendt states that violent action is affected by the means to an end and that the danger of it is to be overwhelmed by the means that justify the violence and which are needed to reach the end.¹⁰³ That implies the children's desire is to believe they do the right thing. They want to be overwhelmed because they cannot see any other option.

¹⁰¹ Dashner, *The Kill Order*, 333.

¹⁰² Dashner, *The Fever Code*, 257–258.

¹⁰³ Arendt, *On Violence*, 4.

The Machiavellian belief is also accented at the end of the last book. In *The Death Cure*, Thomas is said to be the final candidate, the best subject with the best results, that has been experimented on. Janson, nicknamed Rat Man, and other doctors need Thomas to decide whether he is ready to sacrifice himself for the good of humankind. They tell him they must disassemble his brain to finalise the blueprint's data. It is the last piece of a puzzle to find the cure. Janson says: "We will do whatever it takes to find a cure. With as little loss of life as possible. Nothing else needs to be said on the matter."¹⁰⁴ This comment suggests they will never abandon their endeavour to find the cure. However, even though nothing stops the doctors, they still do not want to kill innocent people for no reason. They only want to kill when necessary for the greater good. This is something mentioned by Basil S. Nnamdi and Tamunosiki V. Ogan. Many sacrifices ought to be made to promote the public interest, which should be the primary goal of any political action. They cite the example of Ghana's economy, which has an effective and socio-economic development today. That is because its former President, Jerry Rawlings, undertook executing those behind the country's economic woes. Today, the country is better off as the citizens reap the benefits of the huge sacrifice undertaken by Rawlings to attain their full potential.¹⁰⁵ This behaviour is immoral in the traditional moral sense, but on the other hand, it is desirable, and the end result translates into good that brings positive improvements in the lives of citizens. It is the same as with the cure for the Flare because the end result is in the public good.

However, only some believe that the end justifies the means. Thomas believes torturing is not a justifiable way to achieve goals. Even though he was once manipulated to believe in WICKED's purpose, he changed: "He couldn't understand who he'd been before. How he could have thought any of this was okay."¹⁰⁶ At the beginning of *The Death Cure*, Thomas realises that he and his friends are going through medical abuse. He tells Doctor Janson that he wants to end the experiments because: "Living through this kind of abuse is a lot different than planning it. It's just not right."¹⁰⁷ Thomas, as stated before, shows moral values; he is compassionate and cares for others, so he is convinced that the means used by the scientists are wrong. He believes there has to be an ethical way to achieve the goal. Romain Rolland claims that it is not true that the end justifies the means. He argues that the means are far more

¹⁰⁴ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 264.

¹⁰⁵ Basil S. Nnamdi, and Tamunosiki V. Ogan, "Niccolo Machiavelli and the Morality of "The End Justifies the Means" in *The Prince: A Philosophical Perspective*," *Journal of Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa* 4, no. 3 (March 2019): 36–37.

¹⁰⁶ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 9.

important than the end because it shows the progress of humanity and that “the means shape the mind either according to the rhythm of justice or according to the rhythm of violence.”¹⁰⁸ With this statement, Rolland refutes the notion that the end justifies the means because humane methods should always be a priority. As such, humanity is far more important than the results and outcomes.

Finding the cure is not the only purpose WICKED has been created for. It also strives to preserve humankind as such. In *The Scorch Trials*, Thomas and Aris, a boy from the second group, group B, who has gone through the same experiments and Maze, discuss why there are two groups. In group A, there are only boys and one girl, Teresa, and in group B, there are only girls and one boy, Aris. Aris says he thinks he knows the reason. His idea is that WICKED is trying to select the best candidates of both groups to use them somehow, to breed them. The next suggestion is that only one group will live through the end.¹⁰⁹ Mayada Zuhair Al-Khafaji and Ansam Yaroub Khyoon point out many references to Human population control throughout the trilogy that can be easily overlooked. They say that the reader is left to wonder why there are two groups, one with females and the other with males, introducing the arrival of the opposite sex as a trigger to the end and forcing the subjects to escape the Maze.¹¹⁰ Thomas in *The Death Cure* says: “I don’t care if the whole shuck human race ends. Even if that was the only thing that had to happen to find the cure, I’d still be against it.”¹¹¹ It is clear that Thomas, even though raised by WICKED, still preserves his humaneness. He realises the awfulness of what they have done and is ashamed of himself. He believes that the experiments of WICKED are against humanity and should end regardless of their purpose.

Thomas unconsciously follows the exact plan of Chancellor Ava Paige, a figure that remains obscure throughout the series. Thomas liked her as a child; she was the only kind to him. She seems to be better than the other doctors because when Janson and others want to dissect Thomas’s brain to get the final blueprint, she stops them and saves his life. She writes a letter to him: “It’s my belief that the Trials are over. [...] Your participation, and that of the other subjects, is no longer necessary.”¹¹² Thanks to her, he gets to the Flat Trans, a

¹⁰⁸ Romain Rolland, “The End and the Means,” *Fellowship* 2, no. 2 (February 1936): 9.

¹⁰⁹ Dashner, *The Scorch Trials*, 110.

¹¹⁰ Mayada Zuhair Al-Khafaji, and Ansam Yaroub Khyoon, “Human Lab Rats in James Dashner’s *The Maze Runner* Series (2009 – 2011): Historical References, Present Allusions, and Dystopian Future,” *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews* 7, no. 5 (November 2019): 1126.

¹¹¹ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 97.

¹¹² Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 276.

transportation device which sends him and the other immune people to an island, free of the Flare, where they can start over. In the *Epilogue* of *The Death Cure*, she says: “And so, we have failed. But we have also succeeded. Our original vision didn’t come to fruition; the blueprint never came together. We were unable to discover either a vaccine or a treatment for the Flare.”¹¹³ She is the only one who can admit the failure and is aware that it is better to fail the Trials than kill all the children, all the selected subjects who are supposed to be the new hope for this world:

The Immune are the only resource left to this world. And if all has gone according to plan, we have sent the brightest, the strongest, the toughest of our subjects to a safe place where they can begin civilization anew while the rest of the world is driven to extinction. It is my hope that over the years our organization has in some part paid the price for the unspeakable act committed against humanity.¹¹⁴

This part shows that Ava Paige realises how horrible their acts are in the name of finding the cure. She hopes that in this last act, when she makes arrangements for the Immunes to get to a safe place, she slightly atones for what WICKED has been doing all the time. She feels guilty about all this, but at the same time, she thinks it is necessary. She believes that their goal is only to preserve the human race and that they manage to keep it. After all the horrible things they have done, she still believes that WICKED is good:

And though we have failed in that effort, we can at least say we’ve planted the seed for mankind’s future. The organization only ever had one goal: to preserve the human race. And in this last act, we have done just that. As we tried to instill in each of our subjects over and over, WICKED is good.¹¹⁵

In the end, they succeeded in preserving the human race, albeit through inhumane experiments on helpless children. As Cristina Paravano cites, understanding the real importance of the word WICKED proves hard for Thomas and the Gladers because of the immoral and unethical nature of scientific experimentation on human beings. Even though WICKED is only an acronym of the name of the organisation, the question is to what extent the name represents the spirit of the organisation.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 323.

¹¹⁴ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 323–324.

¹¹⁵ Dashner, *The Death Cure*, 324.

¹¹⁶ Cristina Paravano, “Consciousness explored in The Maze Runner Trilogy,” in *Novelistic enquiries into the Mind*, ed. G. Maziarczyk, and J. K. Teske (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 176.

To sum up, this chapter highlights the cruel methods used on powerless children. It also highlights the question of the means to an end. Some of the characters in the series undoubtedly believe this concept because they are exposed to extreme living conditions, meaning that a deadly disease has struck the planet, and they, in their desperation, are looking for every possible way to survive. Even though doctors use cruel and inhumane methods, some of them, especially one particular doctor, strive for something more important than finding the cure, which is preserving the human race.

Conclusion

This paper aims to analyse the concept of ‘humanity’ in *The Maze Runner* pentalogy consisting of *The Maze Runner*, *The Scorch Trials*, *The Death Cure* and the two prequels, *The Kill Order* and *The Fever Code*. The first of the four chapters presents the theoretical concepts of humanity and other related areas. It describes humanity as kindness towards each other. The importance of humane medical methods is also mentioned. It links humanity to the community in which it applies its principles. Next, it examines morality and moral values and defines general moral values according to several thinkers. Machiavelli’s principle that the end justifies the means only when the end is morally good is examined. Another concept discussed in the first chapter is manipulation as a tool for reprogramming and deceiving the person. Lastly, isolation is mentioned as an immoral way of controlling people. In particular, the isolation of children in solitary confinement is considered horrible, as is the torture and mind control of other people.

The analysis in the second chapter shows that the children in Dashner’s series manage to maintain their moral values and humanity despite the harsh extreme living conditions they are subjected to. Thomas, the main character of Dashner’s series, shows compassion and persistence as he helps his friends. The Gladers live peacefully and preserve order instead of chaos in their community thanks to the rules they developed and through proper communication. The question of humanity is accented when Thomas voluntarily gets stung by a Griever, an act that demonstrates courage and self-sacrifice. Also, he shows his humanity by realising that the experiments performed on his friends are neither humane nor moral, even though they aim to save humankind. The analysis reveals that scientists strive for the good of the community through amoral and unethical decisions and do not hesitate to release a dangerous biological weapon in the form of a virus. It shows that scientists feel obliged to comply because they are ordered to do so by authority. Doctors do not ponder the consequences of their actions due to routine and also due to the dehumanisation of the children by calling them subjects. Because of these approaches, scientists are able to make controversial decisions, such as wiping out half the population to keep the other half alive.

Manipulation and isolation are the themes of the third chapter. It reveals the experiments on human beings performed in the past and compares them with the ones in Dashner’s books. The same inhumane methods, as in the CIA torturing projects, are used on the children in the belief in the greater good. The chapter looks primarily at the impact on the psychological state of the adolescents and, with the support of several secondary sources, concludes that the harsh conditions and separation from society can negatively affect them and that they remain

traumatised by this experimental experience. It comes to the conclusion that it is considered immoral and inhumane to manipulate and isolate children.

The final chapter highlights the cruel methods used on powerless children and focuses on the question of the means to an end. Some of the characters in the series undoubtedly believe this concept because they are exposed to extreme living conditions, meaning that a deadly disease has struck the planet. In their desperation, they seek all possible ways of survival involving cruel experiments and controversial decisions. However, the chapter concludes that the scientists' main goal is preserving the human race, placed above finding a cure.

Overall, this paper primarily stresses the impact of extreme living conditions and separation from society on the nature of humanity. The ancient concept of “the end justifies the means” is an old axiom author James Dashner wanted to emphasise in his *Maze Runner* series. He says he included this theme WICKED is good deliberately. He loves the concept that nothing is purely good or evil and wanted readers of his books to question whether they could be desperate enough to do certain things. He wants the lines to blur just enough to make readers ask whether the ends sometimes justify the means. He argues that it is a timeless moral dilemma when someone hurts a few people but saves millions, and it is not a straightforward black-and-white message.¹¹⁷ The analysis shows that James Dashner portrays the children as moral superiors who surpass the principles of adults because the children believe that if saving others means destroying someone else, it is not humane. At the same time, the author does not reveal what is good and what is evil but leaves the question open for readers to ponder whether the end justifies the means. This paper opens the question of humanity in our society for further research.

¹¹⁷ Ben Fulton, “James Dashner: Writing through the ‘Maze Runner’”, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, October 5, 2011.

Resumé

Tato práce se věnuje knižní sérii *Labyrint* (*The Maze Runner*, 2009–2016) současného amerického romanopisce Jamese Dashnera. Tato pentalogie se skládá z knih *Labyrint* (*The Maze Runner*, 2009), *Zkoušky ohněm* (*The Scorch Trials*, 2010), *Vražedná léčba* (*The Death Cure*, 2011) a dvou prequelů *Rozkaz zabít* (*The Kill Order*, 2012) a *Kód horečky* (*The Fever Code*, 2016). Tato post-apokalyptická, dystopická knižní série pojednává o dětech, uvězněných v bludišti ze kterého musí naleznout cestu ven. Postupně odhalují, že to celé je vládní experiment vytvořený v honbě za lékem na smrtící virus, který se šíří vzduchem a napadá mozek. Nakažení lidé postupně ztratí rozum a zemřou. Najít cestu z bludiště je prvním ze strastiplných úkolů, kterým musejí dospívající děti, kteří jsou vůči viru imunní, projít. Během experimentů dochází k různým zjištěním ohledně organizace, která si říká ZLOSIN, což je akronym pro organizaci Zánik lidstva: oddělení smrtící izolace nezletilých. Tato organizace vznikla poté, co Země sežehly sluneční erupce a vyhladily polovinu obyvatelstva. Vzápětí byl vypuštěn virus, nazvaný Erupce, který měl zajistit vyhlazení takového množství obyvatelstva, aby pro ty, kteří zůstanou, zbylo dostatek zdrojů pro přežití. Virus se ale vymkl kontrole, a proto se začalo jednat o vyvinutí léku, což se ovšem mělo podařit pouze s pomocí nehumánních experimentů na imunních nezletilých. Vědci a lékaři v těchto testech nedbají na otázku lidskosti a ve svém snažení najít lék přehlíží morální zásady. Heslo „účel světí prostředky“ je tím hlavním, v co lékaři věří. Na konci série dojde k zastavení experimentů dříve, než dojde k vyhlazení oné generace imunních, kteří mají být nadějí pro zachování lidstva, což je ve finále hlavním cílem vědců a lékařů ze ZLOSINu.

První část práce nastiňuje teoretické aspekty související s lidskostí jako jsou například morálka, morální hodnoty, komunita, manipulace a izolace. Vychází z filozofických postojů k otázce lidství. Zmiňuje například Martina Seligmana a Christophera Petersona, kteří pojednávají o laskavosti a o jejím protějšku. Dále první kapitola zmiňuje otázku humánnosti na poli vědy a lékařství. Vysvětluje pojem komunity nebo společenství a to, jak je provázán s lidskostí. Zabývá se morálkou a morálními hodnotami, vysvětluje pojmy a přidává názory několika teoretiků, například P. F. Strawsona, nebo Jonathan Haidta a Craiga Josepha, kteří vytvořili Teorii morálních základů. Oliver Scott Curry, Matthew Jones Chesters, a Caspar J. Van Lissa tvrdí, že morálka se vyvinula jako biologicky a kulturně vyvinutý soubor řešení problémů spolupráce a sepsali sedm základních morálních hodnot. Kapitola vysvětluje i pojmy jako odvaha, sebeobětování a vytrvalost. Dopodrobna se zabývá Machiavelistickým pojmem „účel světí prostředky“, uvádí názory například Quentina Skinnera nebo Hannah Arendtové.

Toto téma je shrnuto tak, že dle Machiavelliho jsou prostředky k dosažení cíle ospravedlnitelné, pokud je cíl morálně dobrý a slouží veřejnosti.

V první kapitole je zmíněna i manipulace jako forma ovlivňování nebo podvedení, může zahrnovat i lest či nátlak na druhou osobu. Posledním rozebraným tématem v této části je izolace, hlavně uvěznění na samotce, které mnozí považují za nehumánní. Vyjadřují se k tomu například Andrew B. Clark či Jean Casella a James Ridgeway, kteří referují o dopadech samoty na nezletilé. V tomto případě by se mohlo jednat o mučení, o kterém je také samostatně pojednáno a hlavně o mučení v souvislosti se zmanipulováním mysli.

Druhá kapitola se již zaměřuje na Dashnerovy romány a pojednává o lidskosti, morálních hodnotách a komunitě. Kapitola se nejprve zaměřuje na chování hlavních hrdinů, dětských postav, kteří si zachovávají svou lidskost a morální hodnoty i přesto, že jsou vystaveni drsným podmínkám, což znamená, že jsou uvěznění v labyrintu, nepamatují si svou minulost a nevědí, kdo je uvěznil. Navzájem si v této vybudované komunitě pomáhají, mají nastavená pravidla a řád a trestají jejich porušení. Nepodléhají chaosu a naopak se snaží zachovat si civilizované chování. Vědci, kteří je na tento experiment poslali, se naopak nezastaví před ničím a nevidí žádnou jinou možnost, než pokračovat do konce. Vytvoří zdánlivé řešení na nalezení léku proti viru a pomocí autorizace, rutiny a dehumanizace ospravedlňují své činy. Motivy chování dětí a dospělých jsou stejné: děti usilují o dobro komunity prostřednictvím morálních hodnot. Cílem vědců je také dobro komunity, ale dosahují ho prostřednictvím amorálních rozhodnutí.

Manipulace a izolace je tématem třetí kapitoly. Manipulaci rozebírá z hlediska zmatení mysli pomocí psychologických triků a porovnává příklady z Dashnerových knih s reálnými experimenty prováděnými v minulosti na lidech i na dětech. Zmiňuje například nacistické lékařské experimenty, jejichž realizaci lékaři považovali za ospravedlnitelnou a „ve jménu lidskosti“. Rozebírá manipulaci dětí pomocí implantovaného zařízení v jejich hlavě, díky kterému je vědci mohou nejen pozorovat, ale i přímo ovládat jejich reakce, pokud je třeba. V rámci pokusu donutí pomocí manipulace „subjekt“, což je označení, kterým vědci nazývají děti, zabít další subjekt. Dále se práce zabývá v souvislosti s manipulací důkazy o zneužívání a pokusech na dětech organizacemi jako je CIA, například tajným programem MK-Ultra spočívajícím v experimentech na dětech za účelem ovládnutí mysli. Poslední, na co se třetí kapitola zaměřuje, je izolace a hlavně uvěznění na samotce. Organizace ZLOSIN využívá izolaci k pokusům na dětech. Podle Andrew B. Clarka či Jean Caselly a Jamese Ridgewaye je uvěznění nezletilých na samotce nejen nehumánní, ale také nebezpečné pro jejich budoucí vývoj a vnímání světa.

Poslední kapitola se zabývá chováním doktorů, především jejich snahou nalézt lék bez ohledu na lidskost. Jednou z ústředních otázek jsou etické aspekty obětování jednotlivce ve prospěch všeobecného blaha, což je otázka, která lidstvo pronásleduje po staletí. Doktoři neváhají provádět experimenty na dětech, ačkoli to znamená jejich mučení. Doktoři a vědci ze série jsou natolik zasvěceni tomu, že najdou lék, že si nepřipouští žádnou jinou možnost a jsou odhodláni dokončit, co začali bez ohledu na následky. I když však lékaře nic nezastaví, přesto nechtějí bezdůvodně zabíjet nevinné lidi, jen tehdy, je-li to nutné pro vyšší dobro. Kapitola kontrastuje toto chování lékařů s chováním dětí, převážně hlavní postavy Thomase, který věří, že pokud nalezení léku znamená mučení a zabíjení jeho přátel, či ostatních nevinných lidí, není etické ani morální se o to pokoušet, i když to znamená potencionální záchranu lidstva. ZLOSIN ale neusiluje pouze o nalezení léku, ale také o zachování lidské rasy, což se v určitém bodě stane hlavním cílem, který se jako jediný naplní. V závěru práce nechává pro čtenáře otevřenou otázku, zda „účel světí prostředky“ a co je vlastně z hlediska lidskosti tím morálním a etickým.

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