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**Depiction of Philosophy in Marvel Comic Books:
The Case of Thanos**

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the requirements for Master's degree in Literature and Civilisation

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Dedications

This work is dedicated to my precious beloved Parents, who have been always my source of strength, and who raised me to be a successful man, and who continually supported me in every step of my life.

To my Teachers, who I had the honor to be their student all these years, including my supervisor Prof. Daoudi FRID, who I had the honor to be his supervisee, inspiring me and supporting me in the process of making this work.

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Abstract

This work is about the representation of philosophy in Marvel comic books, dealing with the character of Thanos as a case study. Marvel comics gained huge popularity globally, attracting readers with their fascinating stories and interesting famous characters. However, between these creative pages, various philosophical mindsets are represented and embodied and included within the stories, inside the fictional characters. At first, This dissertation introduces an overview of philosophy and comics, including Marvel and Thanos, then it analyzes Thanos's character, actions, and mindset through a philosophical lens. The process of this research was done by using reading and textual analysis of Marvel comic books as primary data specifically the issues where Thanos appears, supported by a comparative analysis with philosophical concepts, aiming to find the philosophical reflections and roots within Thanos's characteristics. This work has great importance because the results of this research shed light on the interaction of philosophy in Marvel comic books, highlighting the value of such a genre of books and entertainment tools as a platform for philosophy to readers.

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General Introduction

Comic books are a unique work of art, a brilliant entertaining tool that combines narratives artworks, and sequential illustrations to create fascinating stories, a stunning merging between drawing and writing which provides a wonderful genre of visual entertainment, full of captivating stories and characters.

Marvel comics have become an essential iconic part of the global culture, attracting audiences with their amazing complex stories, and incredibly interesting characters. Their tales and characters have expanded outside their main environment, throughout the film industry, Tv shows, and commercial merchandise.

Philosophy as a field tries to understand and investigate basic issues, analyzing the diversity of actions and mindsets, diving into topics such as ethics, nature, reality, and knowledge, as well as explaining the different perspectives of thinking from a philosophical lens. Marvel comic books due to their interesting stories and plots, and their ethically complex characters, provide a specific exceptional platform for philosophical concepts, it is a home of philosophy shaped in popular culture of entertainment.

Philosophical themes appear within the pages of Marvel Comic books as characters, telling stories that have complicated moral actions, and deal with existential issues and ethical choices. These stories motivate readers to think about complicated topics and issues, ask questions and analyze the traditional views, as well providing an alternative viewpoint for readers about such dilemmas. Besides the fictional characters and plots and entertainment, these comics provide readers with an easy and interesting tool to study serious philosophical issues.

Among various characters in the Marvel universe, Thanos shines out as an interesting representation of many philosophical ideas, This villain attracted readers with his loyal passion for the pursuit of balance and a better universe. Thanos, using multiple philosophical beliefs, challenges the traditional concepts of morality and requires us to consider the consequences of extreme actions taken for the sake of a better world. Thanos symbolizes philosophical principles that have been debated by audiences for a long time through his behaviors, a combination of multiple philosophical beliefs inside on single character, including Nihilism, Utilitarianism, and other concepts.

This work is about the depiction of philosophy in Marvel comic books, basically focusing on Thanos's character, it aims to explore how philosophical principles are applied and portrayed in Thanos's character through his actions, and how his behaviors are inspired and motivated based on many philosophical concepts, through this research, we will explore the culture of comic books, some philosophical concepts, in addition, we will attempt to answer the following questions:

- How philosophy is applied in Marvel comics?
- How significantly philosophical concepts are reflected in Thanos's actions?

This dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first one is an overview of philosophy and comic culture, diving into the definition of comics and philosophy, and exploring the Marvel comics and their famous characters including Thanos, and how he appears, portrayed within the pages of these books. The second chapter is an investigation into Thanos's character, and how his actions are based on philosophical beliefs, exploring how he symbolizes each philosophical idea through his actions within the events of the stories that appeared in the comics.

This research is important in many ways. To begin, this work deals with a specific kind of literary work, which is comic books and graphic novels, providing the readers with background information about comic book culture and its history, otherwise, it studies the connection between philosophy and comic culture, highlighting some of the important philosophical ideas found in Marvel comics, it also provides a better understanding of how philosophical concepts are portrayed and involved in modern media by analyzing the representation of philosophy in these books, specifically via the complex character of Thanos. Moreover, using Thanos as a case study allows readers to gain knowledge about the moral problems and ethical effects of extreme ideas, in addition to exploring some philosophical concepts, it also allows them to see and analyze the artistic works using a philosophical lens, along with inspiring them to discuss philosophical thinking in modern media and culture, by identifying the philosophical roots within Marvel comic books. Finally, this work provides an academic study of philosophy in literary works, as well as the cultural value of comic books as an instrument for philosophical discussions and study.

Chapter One: An Overview of Philosophy and Comics

1.1 Introduction :

Philosophy is an extensive and comprehensive investigation of basic problems including questions about wisdom, truth, and the essence of life. Comic books for many years told stories based on imagination and using graphics and words, Marvel is one of the most adored comics in the industry and contains legendary characters, somehow these characters portrayed many philosophical concepts several times. In this chapter, we will explore the meaning of philosophy and comics with a particular focus on Marvel comics.

1.2 Definition of Philosophy :

For centuries, philosophy has been studied and applied. It is a broad and a comprehensive topic that can be difficult to describe, but at its foundation, it is the investigation of basic problems about reality, knowledge, existence, and values.

Philosophy is “ A combination of two Greek words, *Philein Sophia*, meaning lover of wisdom” (Roark 7), besides its literal meaning many others illustrated the meaning of philosophy in their own way, according to Paul Kleinman philosophy is a love of wisdom that guides philosophers to explore the fundamental questions about who we are and why we’re here (Kleinman), in fact, it is the use of logic to answer questions and analyze the way how people think, “ Philosophy is an activity: it is a way of thinking about certain sorts of questions. Its most distinctive feature is the use of logical arguments ” (Warburton, *Philosophy: The Basics* 01).

However, at its most fundamental, philosophy entails using reason and critical thinking to comprehend the world around us, Philosophers ask questions such as :

- “ What is the meaning of life? ” (“The Top Three Philosophical Questions”)
- “ Is life worth living? ” (Harper)
- “ What is the truth? ” (Liles)
- “ What is good? What makes actions or people good? ” (*What Is Philosophy? / Department of Philosophy*)

All these topics have been discussed since the dawn of human civilization and are still argued by philosophers today.

According to the Department of Philosophy at Florida State University philosophy is “ An activity people undertake when they seek to understand fundamental truths about themselves, the world in which they live in ” (*What Is Philosophy? | Department of Philosophy*).

Somehow, through philosophy, we will be able to analyze the ideas used by humans, asking questions about what kind of beliefs led this person to act like that, looking for reasons that explain such action, thus, this process leads to concluding a way of thinking based on a belief or a concept that can be used by people, such as Stoicism, Nihilism, Idealism.

According to the University of Alaska “ Philosophy is the systematic study of ideas and issues ” (*The Study of Philosophy | Department of Philosophy and Humanities*). Every action made by a human being is based on a philosophical concept, which is why we explain such actions with a philosophical concept, “ Philosophy is often regarded as the mother of all the sciences because it was the pre-Socratic philosophers who first tried to study the nature of the world ” (“Philosophy: The Mother of All Knowledge.”).

For centuries, philosophers created different branches of philosophy to focus on each and certain elements of human life, the main four branches are Metaphysics, Epistemology, Logic, and Axiology.

Metaphysics: It is the study of reality, the existence of nature, of being .“ The study of what is really real. ” (*Branches of Philosophy*), It analyzes questions and issues such as: What is the nature of existence? What is spirit or soul? “ The study of fundamental nature of reality ” (Edu).

Epistemology: it deals with knowledge, “ The study of knowledge ” (*Branches of Philosophy*), it investigates questions like: What is knowledge? What are the limits of knowledge?

Logic: it studies reasoning, how to make a valid argument, how to know the good or bad argument, and How to avoid fallacies, “ The study of correct Reasoning ” (Maden).

Axiology: It is the study of value, it investigates the nature of value, its criteria as well as its metaphysical aspects, and it is divided into two parts :

- a. **Ethics:** It studies the value of human behavior, defines what kind of actions is wrong or right, and what kind of things or attitude is morally right, “ The questioning of morals and personal values ” (Lynch).
- b. **Aesthetics:** It studies the value of arts, investigates the nature of creative expressions, beauty standards, and evaluation, and the value of art in society, it also analyzes the different perspectives of beauty and art, “ Aesthetic is the examination of what is beautiful, enjoyable, or tasteful ” (Lynch).

Throughout these philosophical tenets and branches, many philosophical concepts have emerged, especially Ethical philosophies such as Nihilism, Existentialism, Consequentialism, Utilitarianism, and Malthusianism. These schools provide theories about important human issues such as morality, existence, and the meaning of life.

1.3 Definition of comics :

Comics, often known as comic books, are a storytelling media that employs a combination of visuals and texts to tell stories sequentially, it is a combination of words and pictures to narrate a story, “ An art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea ” (Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* 5), Scott McCloud in his book “ Understanding Comics” wrote “ Master comics artist Will Eisner uses the term sequential art when describing comics ” (McCloud 5).

However, it has many forms, such as graphic novels, comic strips, and manga, each community has its form of comics, the Americans have comic books while others such as the Japanese have manga.



Figure 1: *Tintin Cigare of Pharaoh 1934 - Plane Crash*



Figure 2: *Attack on Titan - Chapter 130*



Figure 3: *Asterix and Obelix by Albert Uderzo*

Comics are frequently linked with superheroes and action, and adventure stories, although they can include romance, comedy, drama, horror, and science fiction. In fact, this genre of art existed for a long time, back to the ancient civilizations, as stated by

Thierry Smolderen “ Since the end of the twentieth century, French comic artists had exhibited a growing interest in literature and now enjoy speaking about drawing as if it were a form of writing ” (Smolderen).

Accordingly, this art existed even before the invention of the printing machine, back in time, somehow our ancestors used comics to tell stories and narrate the events of that time, art was commonly used to tell stories and express ideas by many civilizations such as Greece, Roman, and Egypt, ancient Egyptians used to paint, draw and sequentially write on walls and papers, to be sure that such stories will be narrated to the next generations, As observed by Scott McCloud in his book when he tried to define comics saying: “ Egyptian painting is another matter. Some, like this, seem to be concerned with sequence but are actually showing two different locations, events and casts ” (McCloud 13).



Figure 4 : From *the Book of Dead*, c.1375 B.C., Egypt

Through time, the Japanese were the first who start the comic industry, using simple paper and ink and imagination, in 1775 a Japanese called Koikawa Harumachi published the world’s earliest comic, “ The world’s earliest comic book industry didn’t start in America or Europe, but in Japan. In 1775, Koikawa Harumachi published (Master Flashgold’s Splendiferous Dream) ” (“5 Oldest Comic Books in the World - Catawiki”).

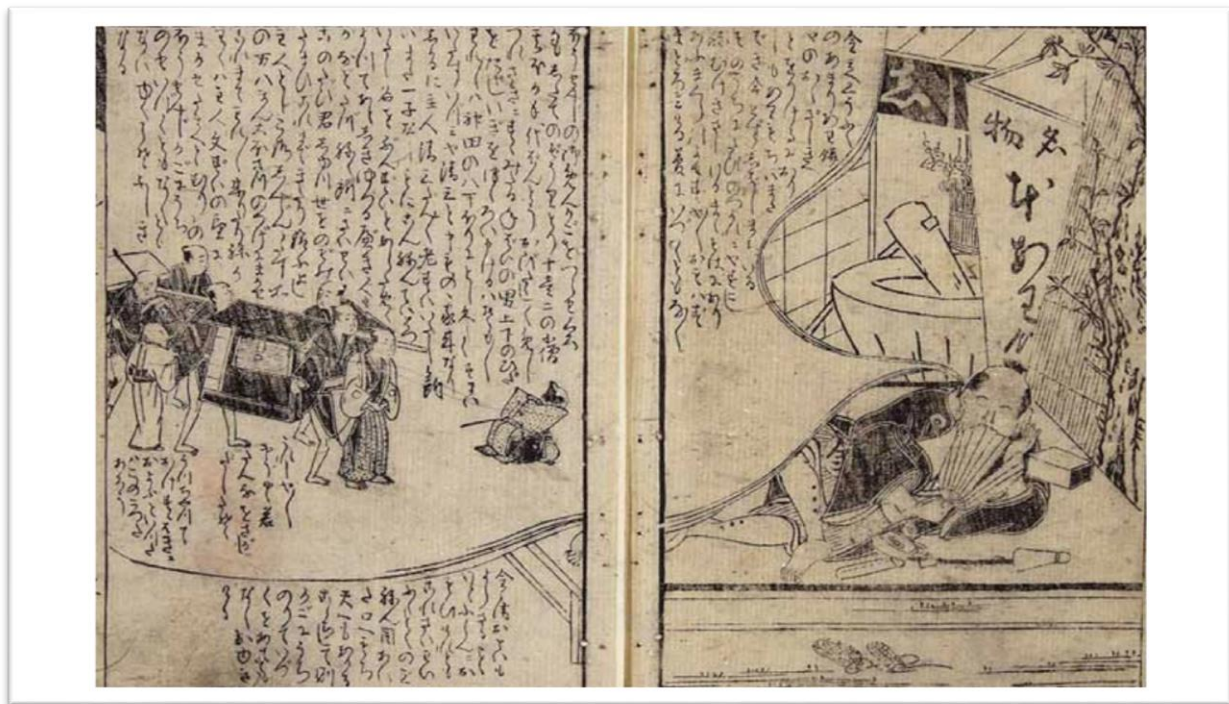


Figure 5: Kinkin sensei eiga no yume' (Master Flashgold's Splendiferous Dream) by Koikawa Harumachi – 1775-

Although its early existence, but comics industry gained popularity in the United States of America in the 1930s with the coming of DC and Marvel and their superhero characters, the decade witnessed the development of the superhero genre, the establishment the comic book companies, and the expansion of comic book fandom.

As the comic culture expanded, Many companies such as Marvel developed heroes like Captain America and Spiderman, who became now symbols and icons for duty, responsibility, heroism, and being an example of goodness for many generations, in fact, comic books are still a popular form of entertainment across the world today, that even nowadays, film industry entered the race and made adaptations and movies based on stories and characters from the comics.

1.4 Definition of Marvel comics :

Marvel Comics is “ a comic book publishing house ” (“Marvel Comics | Marvel Databae | Fandom”), it produces comic books about fictional stories, these stories are

mainly about superheroes, and many famous characters were made by this company, such as Hulk, Captain America, and the Avengers.



Figure 6: Marvel comic books - wordsrated.com

These books and their stories went viral in the 1930s, Marvel played a huge role in spreading the comic culture, embracing the new genre of superheroes, Marvel introduced a new era of comics and a new brand of heroes, “ Readers were introduced to creators Stan

Lee, Jack Kerby, Steve Ditko, and the original Bullpen, with stories that embraced a modern brand of hero. This is where it all began! ” (*Marvel’s Origin | Marvel Universe | Marvel Comic Reading Lists*).

Nowadays, Marvel expanded its industry through another genre of art, the film industry merged with comics and created a cinematic universe based on these characters and stories, “ Today, Marvel’s heroes are blockbuster stars on the silver screen ” (“Marvel Comics | Marvel Database | Fandom”).

Figure 7: Page from *Marvel Comics Library. Avengers. Vol. 1. 1963–1965*



Marvel comics now like any other comic book company, is still an entertainment option for many people, In addition to their movies, Tv Shows, and other products.

1.5 Famous Marvel Comics Characters

There are many characters created by Marvel, heroes, Villains, anti-heroes, and teams such as the Avengers, X-men, and Guardians of the Galaxy. Iconic characters are known nowadays in pop culture including movies and animations.

The world of Marvel is rich in heroes, many iconic heroes were made by this company, the most known one is Stan Lee’s masterpiece “ Spiderman ”, in an interview, Lee said that he likes Spiderman because: “ he’s become the most famous ” (Matter).

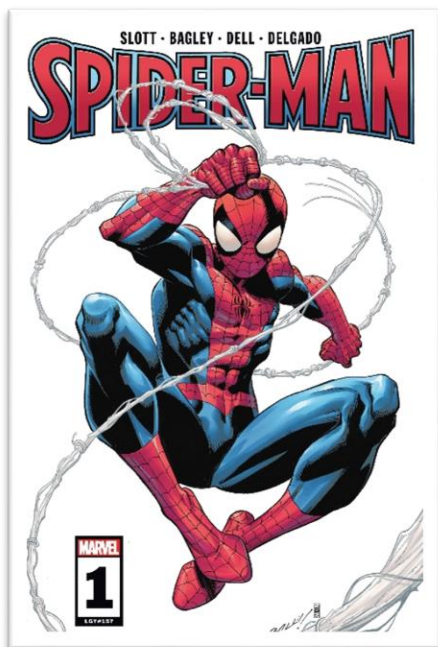


Figure 8: *Spider-Man (2022) #1* cover.

A normal teenager with spider superpowers, the idea by Stan Lee pushed Marvel steps away in the race of the comic industry, he was Marvel’s star, “ Silver Age Marvel was quickly taking the spotlights from their distinguished competition, but they weren't running until Spiderman debuted.” (Harth). Since then, he became Marvel’s most popular character, “ The Amazing Spiderman is still Marvel’s best-selling book ” (Harth).

If this picture is shown to any consumer in the world or told him that “ with great powers, comes great responsibility” he will absolutely recognize the character, and today the whole world knows who is spiderman.

We cannot end the list of Marvel’s famous heroes without mentioning our green friend, The Hulk, a scientist who becomes a big green giant monster when he is angry, as usual, the idea was unique and iconic, “ The Hulk is the strongest one there is, but that’s not all. He’s also been mega-popular for a very long time.” (Harth).



Figure 9: Hulk Suicide Page from the comic *The Incredible Hulk: Last Call* – By Peter David, Dale Keown

Nowadays, the idea of anger is always related to the character of Hulk, some brands and companies used Hulk's popularity to promote their products, such as *NIKE*, in 2014 released a commercial video on youtube, a crossover of many football game stars in one video and one of the players in the commercial was the Brazilian football player “Givanildo Vieira de Sousa” known professionally as Hulk, the company took that chance and used the idea of Hulk in their commercial video, making the footballer known as Hulk becoming the real Hulk from the comics, and as it was expected, the video went trendy.

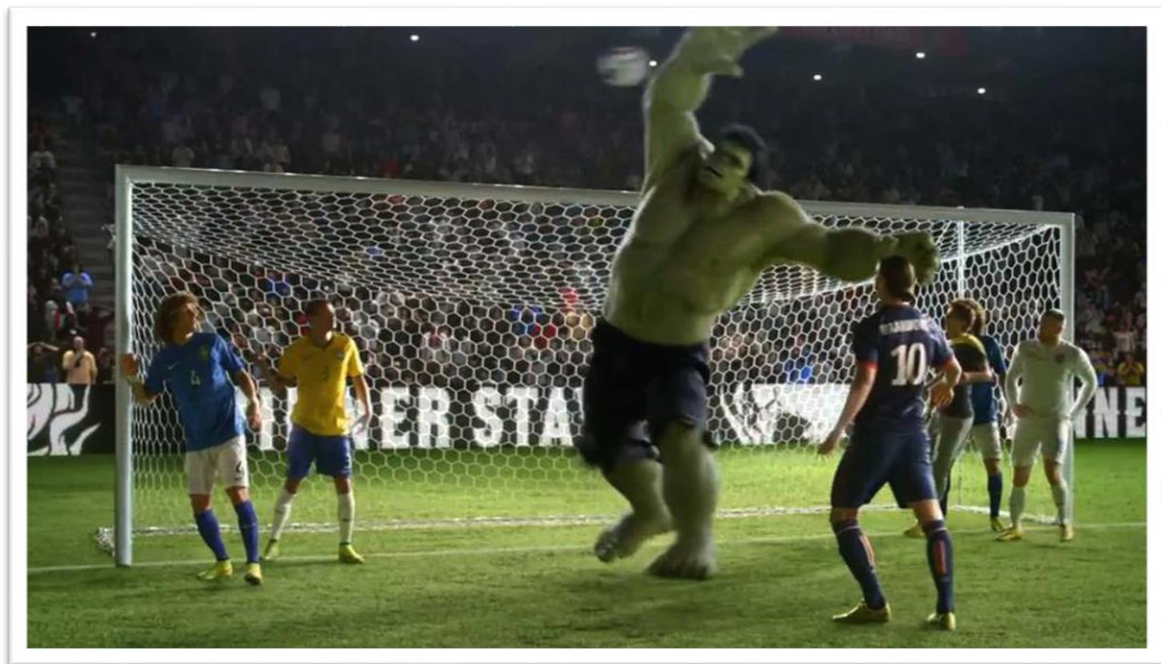


Figure 10: The Hulk scene from NIKE's commercial video (*Winner Stays*) 2014

When it comes to the Evil side, the most popular villain is Thanos, the mad titan who believed in an idea and wanted to kill half of the living creatures in the universe, claiming that he wants to do that because there are a lot of creatures and the universe is unbalanced and through time it is going to be messed up, “ Thanos killed half of the universe to stop resource depletion and to balance the population that was driving the universe to ruin. ” (Kraljik, “Why Did Thanos Kill Half the Universe in 'Avengers: Infinity War'?”).

Thanos gained more popularity in recent years, it all began when the movie “ Avengers Infinity War ” was released, Thanos’s philosophy and beliefs influenced many people, and unexpectedly it turns out that many people agree with his point about the sacrifice of the half for allowing the other half to live in a better way, another reason for his popularity, is the fact that in order to beat him, all the heroes should team up together.



Figure 11: Thanos in the movie *Avengers Infinity War 2018* and the comics

1.6 Thanos in Marvel comics :

In the movie, Thanos is a villain who wants to make a balance in the universe by killing half of the population in the universe, justifying his actions by the fact that biological life growth will lead to the depletion of resources, “ He strongly believed that if biological life can grow unchecked, eventually, the resources will run out. ” (Kraljik, “Why Did Thanos Kill Half the Universe in 'Avengers: Infinity War?'”), using the “ Infinity Gauntlet ”, which is one of the most powerful weapons in the universe, a gauntlet made of five infinity stones, “ The Infinity Gauntlet is one of the most powerful objects in the universe, it was designed to hold six of the soul gems, better known as the Infinity Gems. When used in combination their already impressive power makes the wearer able to do anything they want.” (“Infinity Gauntlet (Item) | Marvel Database | Fandom”).

Unlike the movie, the comic books contain many details about Thanos, that have not appeared in the movie, such as his origin story, according to the comics, Thanos was born on Titan, which is the biggest moon in Saturn, his birth wasn't normal because he had a purple skin unlike his parents, he was hated by his mom, ostracized because of his skin nature form, when his mom saw him for the first time, she grabbed a knife and tried to kill him because she saw death in his eyes, “ We have to kill it! we have to kill it before it grows! look at its eyes! don't you see the death in its eyes? ” (Aaron), this was his mother's words when she tried to kill him, luckily the doctors stopped her by order of his father, unlike his mother, he loved him.

Years after, he grew up, in his childhood he was unsocial, he used to be a respectful, polite, and clever child, these good characteristics made the kids around him accept him despite his weird form, Although he was innocent, he had a hidden evil side inside his character, like drawing animals dead bodies, he wanted to be a scientist like his father, he asked him to teach him anatomy but due to his father's work time, he always ignored him.

One day, some girls were talking about his weird form, and a girl appeared and claimed that he is very special, she had some interest in Thanos. At school, he was asked to make an anatomy of a creature, but he couldn't resist and he left the classroom.

When he went outside, he met that girl, he didn't know who she is, she showed an interest in him and explained to him that anatomy is always hard at the beginning, she told him that she will help him to do anatomy and asked him to join his friends to explore a dangerous cave, and he did what she told him.

However, while exploring that cave, something bad happened, a rockslide happened, which separated him from his friends, and he was stuck underground for three days, in the three days he was trying to escape the cave and save his friends. When he finally escaped, he found out that the animals in that cave had eaten and killed his friends.

After this tragic event, the people blamed Thanos for the death of those kids, he became lonely and depressed, and suddenly, the girl appeared again, she told him that if he really loves his friends then he should avenge them and kill these animals, and that's what exactly happened, he brought a knife and killed these animals while that girl was enjoying the scene.

A few years before, Thanos became the best student in his school due to his liberation from his fear of killing animals, the girl became his best friend, somehow, he had a secret laboratory for his anatomy experiments, and he used to haunt animals and do anatomy so that he learns more, he wanted to know about his special case, yet, he tried anatomy on an animal that looks similar to him, a monkey, but it was useless, at this moment, the girl told him that he may be looking in the wrong place, and she suggested to him trying anatomy on normal people, and that's what exactly happened.

Thanos kidnapped two people and killed them for an anatomy experiment, after that, he felt guilty but that girl told him to stop lying to himself and denying that he really enjoyed killing them, he realized that she is right and confessed to her about his feelings saying he loves her, but she rejected him.

Unfortunately, he continued killing people saying that that was the only time that he will not feel alone, later, he killed his mom, joined a gang of pirates, and became a total criminal that he even killed his boss, the girl kept visiting him every time, he confessed that he does not really feel happy only when she is with him, then, she told

him that she will not love him back only if he will become a god and rule the whole world, and destroy it by using only a snake by his fingers.

After what she said, Thanos rejected this terrible idea and order his guards to take her out of his room, and then, at this moment, he realized a lot of things, he realized that the guards couldn't see the girl, no one ever saw this girl only him, all that time he was talking to her like talking to a ghost, he realized that they were friends since childhood but he never asked her about her name, and in a moment when he asked her about who is she, the girl turns into her real form, saying that she is “ Death ”, the literal death was talking to Thanos all that time because she saw in him the love of killing and evil, and that's what attracted her on him.

Furthermore, Thanos realized that he will serve her forever, so he ordered his ship staff to destroy his homeland planet “ Titan ”, from that moment, Thanos kept his life for her, trying to destroy the universe and kill people searching for a way to lead the world.



Figure 12: Thanos's mother trying to kill him - from *Thanos Rising* 2013 comic

Besides, the Infinity Gauntlet events happened in another comic book, “ The Infinity Gauntlet ”, but before, there are other books that led to that event, it all started when Thanos was killed when he tried to conquer a planet, then he was brought back to

life by the Death (Mistress Death) to correct what she sees as a great unbalance in the universe, and that's what happened in Silver Surfer 34th issue, Thanos had a conversation with the Silver Surfer and he explained the reason of his mission, he sees that due to the development of human medicine and technology, the life of humans became longer than any time, and because of the horrible side effects of human products such as pollution, he believes that earth is going to be desolated, “ Earth is a world rushing on its way to desolation and doom! ” (Englehart, *Silver Surfer Epic Collection: The Return of Thanos*).



**Figure 13: From page 9 *Silver Surfer* (1990) comic -
*Issue #35***

Justifying his actions, Thanos thinks if he will not act, the population will grow uncontrollably, life will continue to flourish until it does not, In addition to that, he sees that the resources will be gone if he will not complete his mission, that's why Mistress Death asked him to kill half of the universe population, not all of them, and absolutely, Death will enjoy having a lot of deaths at once.

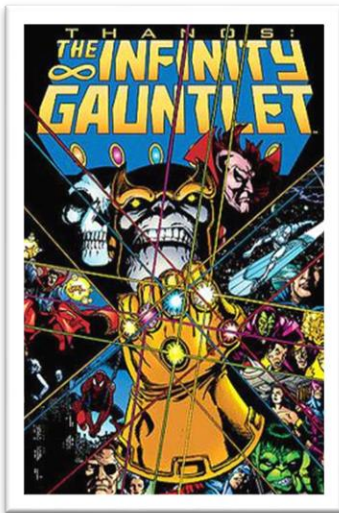


Figure 14: *The Infinity Gauntlet* 1991 Cover

Thanos was capable of doing his mission without the Infinity Gauntlet, but he needed to do that quickly before any hero will come to stop him, he was a reason for teaming up all the heroes of the Marvel universe just to stop him, that's what happened in the Infinity Gauntlet, the heroes worked together for the sake of stopping Thanos from killing half of the universe.

“ His arrival could herald the End of the universe... Thanos is coming! ” (Starlin), this was what Silver Surfer said to Doctor Strange when he went to warn him about what Thanos is about to do in *The Infinity Gauntlet* comic book.

1.6.1 The Infinity Gauntlet

The *Infinity Gauntlet* is a comic book published by Marvel in 1992, Written by Jim Starlin, and divided into 6 issues. It is the book that narrates the events of Thanos while doing his mission, the story which its events were translated into a live-action movie in 2018 and 2019, Marvel's two masterpieces “ *Avengers: Infinity War* ” and “ *Avengers: Endgame* ” was based on this comic book.

The content of this book is a story about Thanos's mission and pursuit of cosmic balance, aiming to wipe out half of the universe's population, by using the Infinity Gauntlet and having a conflict with Marvel's heroes. However, the work is full of interesting characters and plots.

Thanos appears as the main character, being a complicated and interested character, he appears as the ultimate antagonist obsessed with death and purchasing to restore the cosmic balance. Thanos is characterized by his eternal power and superior intelligence. While he has incredible physical strength, his ultimate power comes from his ability to use the infinity stones, which provide him with control over reality. Thanos is portrayed as an intelligent logical villain who believes that his extreme actions are for the greater good, a murderer who believes in the good consequences although the horrible negative impacts.

Besides Thanos, two other characters played an essential role in this story, Adam Warlock and Silver Surfer. Both are powerful cosmic figures. Adam as an essential participant in the war against Thanos, having a special connection to the Soul Stone, he is portrayed as a deeply complex and ethically contradictory character, due to his balancing of goodness and evilness he is considered as an Anti-Hero figure, having a deep awareness about the universe and its balance, Warlock tries to defeat Thanos by uncovering his weaknesses. On the other hand, Silver Surfer is an iconic cosmic hero, he has extraordinary speed in addition to strength and the ability to control energy. He has an important role in the story since he has cosmic experience, Silver Surfer joins Adam Warlock's crew and fights Thanos.

However, other characters appeared in this book as secondary characters, such as the Avengers team as Heroes, including Spiderman, Captain America, Doctor Strange, Hulk, Thor, and Wolverine, in addition to other ethically complicated characters such as Mephisto, Nebula, and without forgetting Mistress Death and cosmic entities such as Eternity and Galactus.

About the story, It all began when Thanos was brought back to life by Mistress Death, asking him to kill half of the Cosmic's population aiming to make balance, because she realized how Human technology and medicine development helped humankind to avoid death and live longer than any time, causing less death reception by her and an imbalance.

As a matter of fact, she knew that Thanos is ready to do anything for her, so she resurrected him back to life and asked him to do this mission using the Infinity Stones with just a snap of his fingers.

The Mad Titan collected the six infinity stones and provided himself with control over the six aspects of existence: soul, mind, power, space, time, and reality. When the Silver Surfer knew that Thanos is alive, he looked for him and tried to stop his plan, Thanos won easily and trapped the Silver Surfer's soul inside the soul stone. When his soul is in the Soul world, he met Adam Warlock, thus, he sent him back to life asking him to warn the Avengers about Thanos's danger, and as it was planned, the Silver Surfer fell into Doctor Strange's house and told him the whole story

At this moment, Thanos snapped his fingers, and the universe realized the weird events, in the earth, Spiderman, Captain America, and Doctor Strange realized people disappearing. Adam Warlock and the Avengers worked together and decided to defeat Thanos, Adam sent them to Thanos and they lost easily, most of the heroes were killed by Thanos.

After the Avengers failed, The Cosmic Entities joined the war, all the most powerful entities against Thanos, but he won again and trapped them in an area where time is stopped, after that, he turned into an astral form and considered himself a winner, while this moment, the Infinity Gauntlet was stolen by Nebula, and she tried to attack him, Thanos was saved by Doctor Strange and sent to planet earth with some conditions, they asked him to help them to stop Nebula, he agreed and defeated Nebula with the help of Adam Warlock.

After that, Nebula lost the Infinity Gauntlet and Thanos tried to get it back again, but luckily this time the heroes won, Thor kicked him away using his hammer, and the Mad Titan committed suicide. Adam Warlock suggested keeping the Infinity Gauntlet for himself, but the heroes decided to keep it safe on Earth.

Consequently, Thanos in the comics was the most terrifying villain, the most dangerous one, he believes in nothing, and the only love in his blood is for death, a criminal who is ready to do anything to attract Mistress Death and win her love, he is literally in love with death, according to him, life is trivial, and death is what gives life meaning, Death is the one who brought him back to life and made his life meaningful, Death was his only friend who cared about him and had some interest on him. A paranoid arrogant nihilist, who could change the whole reality just to fit his wishes, view, and philosophy about the universe, trying to impress death and claiming that he is not doing it for fun, but to protect life from its own danger.

1.7 Conclusion :

In this chapter, we explored the definition of philosophy and comics, we talked a little bit about the history of comics and their culture, then we focused on Marvel comics and its popular characters, specifically Thanos, and his image in the comics.

Through this chapter, we analyzed the character of Thanos based on the comics, and his motivation for collecting the Infinity stones and destroying half of the universe, we also explored his beliefs and concepts.

This chapter led us to discover that Thanos has a lot of philosophical beliefs that urged him to do such actions, in addition to his philosophical perception of life, followed by philosophical concepts such as morality, ethics, and the meaning of life.

Chapter Two: Philosophy in
Marvel Comics “Thanos as a
Philosopher”

2.1 Introduction :

Philosophy and comic books may appear to be a usual connection, yet the Marvel universe is the home to some of the most complex and interesting characters, each with its own set of motivations and beliefs, and a lot of characters have some philosophical beliefs. Thanos, the Mad Titan, is a villain well-known for his destructive activities and behaviors in order to gather the infinity stones and restore balance in the universe. Beyond his evil acts, Thanos may be seen as a philosopher in his own right, with opinions and actions based on a variety of philosophical principles.

However, Thanos’s evil actions in the comics were always justified based on different philosophical beliefs, the creator of these comic books applied many philosophical concepts to the character of Thanos, including Nihilism, Existentialism, Malthusianism, and Consequentialism, Throughout the comics, each of these philosophical beliefs influenced Thanos’s motivations and behaviors. Thanos was shown as a complex character with a well-developed philosophical point of view, despite the terrible nature of his acts, his ideas on death, especially, were important to his personality, since he felt that death is an essential part of life and existence, and by removing half of the lives in the universe, he thinks that he was restoring the balance to the universe and assuring the survivals of the surviving species.

This chapter will investigate the ways in which how Marvel comics combine philosophical themes and concepts into their stories, allowing readers to interact with complicated philosophical ideas in a simpler and more enjoyable manner, by diving into Thanos’s philosophical principles and his attitude and behavior toward different events.

2.2 Thanos as a Nihilist :

In the comics, Thanos is often portrayed as a villain seeking to wipe out half of all life in the universe with the infinity stones, while his actions may seem harsh and brutal to others, they are essentially based on Nihilism, a philosophical belief.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, Nihilism is: « The belief that life has no meaning or purpose and that religious and moral principles have no value » (*Nihilism Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com*). It is a philosophical concept

that believes in the meaninglessness of life, it suggests that life has no inherent meaning or purpose, Nihilists think that life is pointless, and they reject religious, moral, and political values, and it has many forms such as Ethical Nihilism, Political Nihilism, and Existential Nihilism.

Thanos was considered a nihilist in the Marvel comics, and it was clearly mentioned when Doctor Strange said “ Such a force in the hands of a madman, a Nihilist ” (Starlin, *The Infinity Gauntlet*), and also in the second issue when Thanos said “ Let Nihilism reign supreme! ” (Starlin, *The Infinity Gauntlet*), it was literally mentioned in the comic books that he is a nihilistic character.



Figure 15 : Doctor Strange speech with Silver Surfer from *The Infinity Gauntlet*

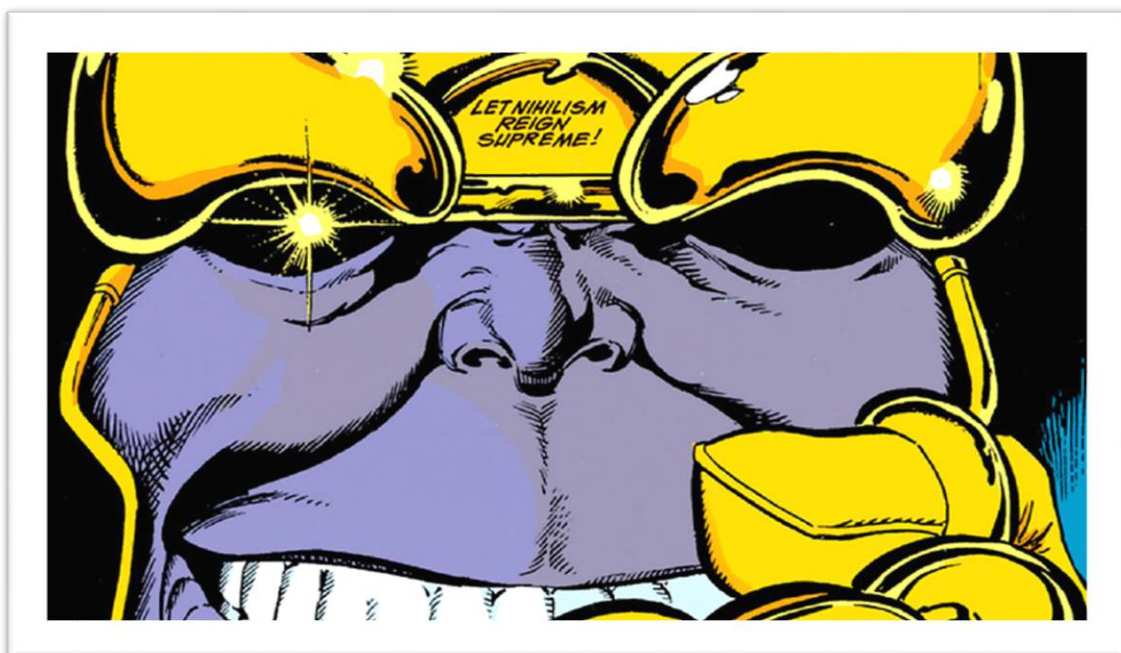


Figure 156: Let Nihilism Reign Supreme! - *The Infinity Gauntlet* 1991

Besides the literal claim, Thanos’s nihilistic perspective is clearly shown in his attitudes, his actions, and behaviors about wiping out half of the living creatures in the cosmos were motivated based on nihilistic principles and ideas.

When it comes to his mission, it can be seen in many different ways, Thanos didn't care about that half of the population that would be dead because of him, and this is a nihilistic act because we can see that he does not care or believe in ethics or morals, this attitude is considered as an Ethical Nihilism.

Therefore, Thanos considers life meaningless in many events, he thinks that death is what gives life meaning, not only that, but even the only love in his blood is for the literal manifestation of life’s absence (Death), according to the story, Mistress Death is the one who brought him back to life, based on this fact, he thinks that the only meaningful thing in life is its absence, according to him, once he was speaking about his daughter, he said: « She is my living tribute to the blasphemy of life and the glorious promise of death » (Starlin, *The Infinity Gauntlet*) confirming that he denies the value of existence and life and its meaning, showing his sanctification to death.



Figure 17: Thanos speaking about Nebula - *The Infinity Gauntlet* 1991 -

3.1 Thanos and Existentialism :

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that focuses on someone’s experience of life and existence, « We are each responsible for creating purpose or meaning in our own lives. » (Centre), it believes in the idea that the individual purpose is not given by god or government, it suggests the personal liberty, each person is free to choose his essence and meaning in his life, each one has the freedom to define his

own purpose and take responsibility about his consequences, as the french philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre argued that: “ existence precedes essence ” (Lesso).

Thanos’s actions and behaviors align with the concept of Existentialism, throughout his mission, he shows some existentialist characteristics :

Creating a meaningful life: His main goal is to restore the cosmos’s balance, by destroying half of the living creatures in the universe, through this act he thinks that he would bring meaning to this chaotic meaningless world, this goal reflects the Existentialist side of Thanos, considering himself responsible for creating a universe based on his own vision.

Individual Freedom: Thanos illustrates this idea by practicing the liberty of choice, he enjoys his freedom while making decisions, and he chooses to refuse social norms, thus, he chooses to make a difference in the world by restoring the balance to it and creating a meaning for it, unlike the others.

Ethical Choice and Responsibility: Existentialism focuses on ethical decisions and the individual responsibility for each taken decision, Thanos reflects this idea in his mission, he thinks that his extreme acts and decisions, such as killing innocent people, are correct, Thanos knows the consequences of his decisions and he understands the moral importance they have, this attitude shows the reflection of the existentialist idea that says that people must take control of their actions and chosen decisions, and accept the responsibility that comes with them.

2.4 Utilitarianism and Consequentialism :

The Mad Titan has always justified his actions, claiming that no matter how brutal and harsh his actions look, in the end, all that he is doing will lead to happiness, through this behavior we can realize that Thanos is two philosophical concepts, Utilitarianism and Consequentialism, in which they focus on the effects of acts and its consequences.

Consequentialism is a moral philosophy that judges the rightness or wrongness of an action by its consequences, “ A theory that says whether something is good or bad

depends on its outcomes” (Centre, “Ethics Explainer: Consequentialism”), it means that we should not judge an action or a decision till we see its consequences.

Thanos’s consequentialist side can be seen when he is justifying his actions, he feels like the sacrifice of half of the lives would minimize the cosmic’s suffering, and that it is an essential way of achieving balance in the universe, claiming that his aim justifies his actions and that the future result will benefit everyone.

Moreover, Thanos’s philosophy is also compatible with Utilitarianism, a type of Consequentialism, a concept that says that the best decision or action is the one that promotes overall pleasure, happiness, and well-being, as De Lazari-Radek and Singer wrote in their book *Utilitarianism: A Very Short Introduction* that the core precept of utilitarianism is that we should make the world the best place we can, it is about sacrificing in order to realize the overall happiness, an example about this idea, China’s president Mao Zedong utilitarian reaction about the Famine in his country when he said: “ When there is not enough to eat people starve to death, It is better to let the half of the people die so that the other half can eat their fill.” (Times, “Opinion | Mao’s Great Leap to Famine”).

Furthermore, Thanos is considered a utilitarian due to his perception of the future result of his actions, he believes that by eliminating half of the population, the survivors will have an environment where there is no misery or competition about resources, he thinks that sacrificing of the half would bring overall happiness and maximize general well-being as a result, he claims that his actions are benefits for the universe balance.

These two philosophical concepts were used by Thanos to justify his actions, claiming that what should be judged, is the result of his actions and that his decisions are morally right, somehow his perspective shows us how Thanos is considered both Utilitarian and Consequentialist according to these ethical and moral philosophies basics.

2.5 Malthusian Thanos :

Malthusian philosophy is based on the works of The British economist and demographer Thomas Malthus, especially his book *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, according to his idea, the overgrowth of the population would cause

problems and global crisis, “ Population growth will always tend to outpace the supply of food ” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). According to Malthus, if The overgrowth of the population is left unchecked, it will reach the Earth’s maximum capacity, leading to catastrophic effects such as starvation and famine, illness, social collapse, and other crisis.

According to the Marvel comics, Thanos is portrayed as a Malthusian, his motivation to wipe out half of the population is clearly based on Malthusianism philosophy, like Malthus, Thanos is worried about overpopulation and resources of the universe, he believes that the cosmos is on a damaging process, a deadly direction, as a result of unchecked population growth and the lack of resources. To solve this issue, he aims to decrease the population to a level that is better for the environment and everyone, and it will be happened by killing using the Infinity Gauntlet.

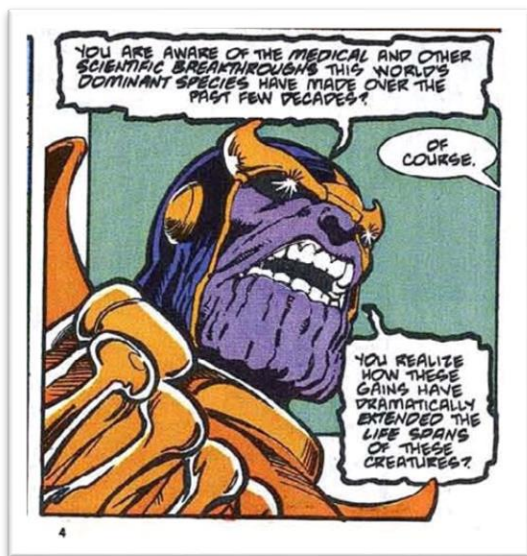


Figure 18: Thanos’s speech with Silver Surfer in *The Silver Surfer: The Return of Thanos 1987*

In the #35 issue of Marvel’s *The Silver Surfer – Thanos’s Guide to the Galaxy*, Thanos met The Silver Surfer and they had a conversation, Thanos explained and justified his evil plan using a Malthusian perspective, he thinks that due to the development of human science and technologies, humans avoided death and they lived more than they used to, all these medicaments are leading to the long living of humans, causing an overgrowth of population, saying “ You realize how these gains have dramatically extended the life spans of these creatures? ” (Englehart, *Silver Surfer Epic Collection: The Return of Thanos*).

However, Thanos focused also on the environmental side, he was concerned about the fact that the overgrowth of the population is messing with the environment, claiming that humans are making a lot of rubbish every day, in addition to the nuclear bombs and all that makes the air dirty, “ Earth is a world rushing on its way to desolation and doom! ” (*Silver Surfer: Rebirth of Thanos*), Thanos thinks that if the unchecked population

growth continued, the earth will become a dirty place and it will lead itself for desolation because of the dirty production made by humans.



Figure 160: *The Silver Surfer/issue #35 page 6*



Figure 19: *The Silver Surfer/issue #35 page 9*

Otherwise, Thanos always used the term “ Balance ” in his mission, his view of the world as a chaotic overpopulated place that needs a restoration of balance is a pure Malthusian view, and his aim of reducing the population in order to restore balance to the population is a clear example of the Malthusianism theory.

2.6 Conclusion :

This chapter explores the investigation and analysis of philosophy in Marvel Comics, with a particular focus on the complex character of Thanos and his aim to kill half of the living creatures in the universe, Throughout this chapter, we analyzed

Thanos’s character through many philosophical lenses, diving into his philosophical core and investigating his representation of Nihilism, Existentialism, Utilitarianism, Consequentialism, and Malthusianism. We also analyzed how these philosophical ideas inspired and motivated Thanos to do such horrible things justified by these philosophical concepts.

General Conclusion

In this work, we explored the relationship between philosophy and Marvel comic books, using Thanos as a case study, aiming to investigate how philosophy is applied in Marvel comics, and how significantly philosophical concepts are reflected in Thanos's actions. We started by defining philosophy, then delving into its branches and schools, highlighting its importance in answering fundamental issues about reality, morals, existence, and the meaning of life. Following that, we dealt with the definition of comics, highlighting their special mix of sequential art, stories, and narratives. Moving on to Marvel comics, the dissertation presented a summary of Marvel's history, cultural relevance, and effects on popular culture, it also highlighted Marvel as a driving force in the comic book industry, introducing numerous famous comic characters, then it delved into Thanos's character and position in Marvel comics specifically in the work of *The Infinity Gauntlet*.

After that, the work focused on Thanos's character, analyzing it using a philosophical lense, this section investigated how Thanos actions reflect various philosophical concepts in the comics, exploring the similarities and reflections between his behaviors and some philosophical beliefs such as Nihilism, Utilitarianism, Consequentialism, Existentialism, and Malthusianism.

Through this research, we found out that Marvel's depiction of philosophy through the character of Thanos is found in his actions and behaviors, his goal and thinking reflect many philosophical concepts. His idea about killing half of the population of the universe and denying the value of life and morals in addition to loving death, reflects his Nihilistic mindset. The aim of bringing a meaningful life to the universe by restoring balance to it and being responsible for taking such extreme decision align with the concept of existentialism. His justification for his extreme actions by claiming that the result and the consequences of those actions will provide overall happiness and cosmic balance as a rightful and good effect symbolizes the Consequentialist and Utilitarian sides of his personality. And finally, his idea about the dangerous effects of the overgrowth of the human population is based on Malthusianism.

In conclusion, Philosophy is connected with Marvel comics, it is applied by using complicated ethical issues and philosophical ideas inside the stories and the characters,

Thanos's actions and characteristics illustrate the application of philosophy in Marvel comics and its importance in these works, his goal to realize global balance, even if it will involve sacrificing lives, reflects many philosophical concepts such as Utilitarianism, Nihilism, Consequentialism, Existentialism, and Malthusianism. This study effectively proved how Marvel expands the storytelling experience by introducing philosophy within the pages, providing readers with a platform for philosophy illustrated in the stories of comic books.

However, This dissertation provides opportunities for future research. Concerning this topic, there are plenty of chances to explore other Marvel characters and their philosophical mindsets and investigate the merging between philosophy and comics or other artistic works, such as analyzing the movies based on these comics aiming to find philosophical roots in these movies.

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The Depiction of Philosophy in Marvel comic books: The Case of Thanos

ملخص :

هذه الدراسة تتعلق بالمواضيع الفلسفية المعروضة من خلال شخصية ثانوس في كتب القصص المصورة الخاصة بمارفل. تتناول الدراسة ثانوس كتجسيد للعديد من الأفكار و المفاهيم الفلسفية، حيث تتعمق في الأسئلة الوجودية و الأخلاقية و الأفعال الناشئة عن أيديولوجية ثانوس، عن طريق تحليل شخصية ثانوس و سلوكياته و كيف يستند أفعاله من العديد من المعتقدات الفلسفية، باستخدام أدوات بحث متنوعة. من خلال دراسة ثانوس كشخصية فلسفية، يسلط هذا العمل الضوء على التفاعل بين ثقافة الكوميكس و الفلسفة، و كيف تجسد شركة مارفل مثل هذه الفلسفات في كتب القصص المصورة الخاصة بهم.

كلمات مفتاحية :

كتب مارفل كوميكس، مارفل، القصص المصورة، ثانوس، ثقافة الكوميكس، فلسفة، مفاهيم فلسفية.

Summary

This study is concerned with the philosophical themes presented through the character of Thanos in Marvel comic books. The study examines Thanos as a representation of many philosophical ideas and concepts, it delves into the existential and ethical questions and actions raised by Thanos's ideology, analyzing Thanos's character and behaviors and how his actions are based on many philosophical beliefs, by using various research instruments. By examining Thanos as a philosophical character, this work shed light on the interplay between comic culture and philosophy, and how Marvel company embodies such philosophies in their comics.

Keywords:

Marvel comic books, Marvel, Comic books, Thanos, Comic culture, Philosophy, Philosophical concepts.

Résumé :

Cette étude concerne les thèmes philosophiques présentés à travers le personnage de Thanos dans les bandes dessinées Marvel. L'étude examine Thanos en tant que représentation de nombreuses idées et concepts philosophiques, elle plonge dans les questions existentielles et éthiques soulevées par l'idéologie de Thanos, analysant le caractère et les comportements de Thanos et comment ses actions sont basées sur de nombreuses croyances philosophiques, en utilisant divers instruments de recherche. En examinant Thanos en tant que personnage philosophique, ce travail éclaire l'interaction entre la culture des comics et la philosophie, ainsi que la manière dont la société Marvel incarne de telles philosophies dans leurs bandes dessinées.

Mots clés:

Livres de bandes dessinées Marvel, Marvel, Bandes dessinées, Thanos, Culture des comics, Philosophie, Concepts philosophiques.