

Our Dark Passenger:
The Ethics of Serial Killer Sympathy in
***Dexter* (2006)**

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22 May 2019

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Introduction

The Staircase (2004), *West of Memphis* (2011) and *Making A Murderer* (2018) are only three titles of an increasing amount of true crime shows and TV murder mysteries that have appeared world-wide in the last two decades. Millions of people around the globe are fascinated by these shows¹ and this trend probably will only develop faster and reach larger audiences in the coming years. Not only has the number of television shows that have the concept of the killer as their focal point increased, so has the amount of people watching them. Stephen Asma explains the rise in popularity of such “killer” TV: “We live in a consumer culture, and consumption not only fulfills desires but also is a means of imposing order and control. Commodifying a horror is one way of objectifying and managing it” (280). Of all types of murderers, the serial killer has garnered the most public attention in the popular media and even the collectors’ market. Asma points out that “the Internet has fueled a significant underground industry for” what he calls “monster property” memorabilia associated with famous serial killers such as John Wayne Gacy and Richard Ramirez (280).

The serial killer was a topic of fascination long before the invention of television, however, when the only information available came from print media such as newspapers and street gossip. For example, the Victorian era’s most famous serial killer, Jack the Ripper, captivated the citizens of London where he committed his crimes in the 1880s. Newspapers such as the *Guardian* frequently theorized on how he might have murdered his victims and reported in gruesome detail on the state in which their bodies were found: “Her clothes were disarranged, her throat cut, and her body mutilated in a manner too horrible for description” (“Another Brutal Murder”). Another example, closer to home, is the female serial killer Maria

¹ For example, 7.8 million people watched the season finale of *Making a Murderer* within a month of its release (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-crop-true-crime-shows-seduces-audiences-compels-them-dig-n546821>).

Swanenburg who murdered at least 102 people in Leiden by arsenic poisoning and continues to be the topic of many books and articles.²

Nowadays gathering information on serial-killer cases is easier than ever: the development of television and the Internet has ensured that much information is only a click of a button away. Apart from the development of the available media formats, it is also important to note that the focus of that fascination with killers seems to have shifted. Criminals and killers have been subject to psychoanalysis ever since psychology came into its own as an academic field in the early twentieth century, the “Leopold and Loeb” case (1924) being one of the most memorable ones in American history (see Asma 205). However, it is not only psychologists and psychotherapists who are interested in the minds of killers: audiences and fans of true crime shows too have become fascinated with the workings of a criminal mind, attempting to discover a killer’s potential motivations and acknowledging their humanity aside from the monstrosities they have committed rather than simply condemn them for killing. This trend actually goes far beyond simply reading about murderers and commenting about them on Internet forums or articles: a type of dark tourism has developed, where people visit notorious serial killers’ houses, send them love letters (even go as far as marriage proposals) and show up at their trials to declare their support, even believing they have some sort of spiritual, deep connection to a serial killer (Hobbs n.p.).

Not only actual real-life serial killers such as Ted Bundy or Jeffrey Dahmer have grown in popularity and have sparked this type of morbid fascination; so have their fictional counterparts. The serial killer has become a common presence in literature (*American Psycho*, *Silence of the Lambs*), film (*Seven*, *Zodiac*) and television (*Dexter*, *Hannibal*), instilling a sense of sympathy with these killers within the audience. Take for example Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), in which the audience is presented with a man-monster who is

² See for instance: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/goeie-mie-de-grootste-gifmengster-aller-tijden~bf2e6f58/>

clearly lonely, incapable of connection, and desperate for his mother's attention. Therefore, he murders both her and her lover out of jealousy. Despite being a killer, there is something very human and relatable in Norman Bates's motivations for murder: the wish to be loved and nurtured is universally recognizable. Another example is Hannibal Lecter, who became immensely popular through the novel and film *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988; 1991). He has earned the status of the quintessential American serial killer. Almost an opposite of Norman Bates, he is calm and collected, polite, an accomplished medical doctor and psychiatrist, and an excellent and charming conversationalist. His magnetic pull on audiences worldwide can be explained by the fact that he seems to represent the deepest fears that live within a society: "he is something more than human (or something less): a vampire, a devil, or some infernal combination of the two" (Oleson 30).

Oleson's explanation for the public interest in serial killers like Hannibal is that they are born out of a long tradition of monsters that seem to be human or can take on a human form. He names Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as an important early example, but also Milton's Satan, both of which are personifications of evil from a specific ethical viewpoint. Ghost and horror stories have been around as long as humanity itself: to fear something monstrous creates a bond between human beings, and to realize that monsters such as devils and vampires do not exist still allows people to get beyond their fears. Yet the serial killer is very much real, and is far more elusive and less easy to define within the realms of what is human and what is not. It is precisely the fact that they cannot be defined as mythical monsters that can only do harm within a fictional realm that makes them both terrifying and attractive: they are like everyone else in their humanity, and they confront people with the uneasy idea that humans are capable of committing terrible crimes.

Serial killers like Hannibal Lecter or Norman Bates (who are in a sense at two ends of the spectrum in terms of serial killers and who could in fact be actual existing people) are

easy to classify as “wrongdoers”: they commit their murders for selfish purposes, and therefore cannot be called “righteous” or “justified” in their actions. An audience can rest easy as well as bond over their moral judgment here: it is an idea held universally to be true that murder is wrong, no matter how much sympathy or interest one feels for the murderer. However, out of the tradition of that condemnable serial killer that has so often been portrayed in books and on television, a type of anti-hero has come forth in some recent serial killer narratives. This anti-hero exists somewhere in the middle on the spectrum that places humans on one end and monsters on the other. These ambiguous protagonists blur the hard lines between what is right and wrong and confront audiences with the uncomfortable responsibility of rethinking their moral judgments concerning the killer’s actions and their own ethics. One of the most popular and much lauded examples in television of such an anti-hero is the titular character of the television show *Dexter* (2006).

Dexter is a serial killer who witnessed his mother’s murder as a young child. Failing to overcome this traumatic event, he develops and eventually fails to suppress his own killing urges. He himself considers these urges a separate part of him, which he calls “The Dark Passenger” – he actively distances himself from this murderous side of him initially, explaining to the viewers it is The Dark Passenger who takes over whenever he kills someone. In Dexter’s mind, The Dark Passenger is an entity all of its own who cannot be contained.

Dexter was taught by his adoptive father to use this Dark Passenger to only kill criminals and murderers, rather than people innocent in the eyes of the law. Despite his status as a serial killer he presents himself to the outside world as the ordinary man next door, seemingly living happily with his wife and children. Throughout the show Dexter struggles to balance his urge to kill with his wish to not only be seen as a “normal” person, but to actually be human. For Dexter, the definition of being human (and it is Dexter’s definition that will be followed throughout this thesis) is to feel: to be able to feel sympathy with others, to

experience emotions like happiness and grief, not having to fake them. Dexter is a loveable character, easy to sympathize with; he is funny, good with children, and absolutely clueless about how to make his family happy. Still he gives it his best effort, as he believes any “normal” person would, even if at the start he is incapable of actually feeling those emotions. As a fictional hero of a television show, he is a popular character worldwide and therefore is the perfect case study for an analysis of the ethical themes and moral paradoxes that the life of this new brand of likeable serial killer illustrates. Dexter is a killer – he has earned himself the nickname “The Bay Harbor Butcher” – and yet from the first episode of the series he has managed to gain an large audience’s sympathy.³

This thesis will explore the attractive character of Dexter as a serial killer within a framework of ethical philosophy and will explain how an audience can be confronted by, but also accept, the ambiguous morality of feeling sympathy for a serial killer like Dexter. In order to critically explore the complex ethics of the TV show *Dexter* and analyze the representation of its central anti-hero, Dexter Morgan, as both the show’s protagonist and serial killer, this thesis will build on earlier research, for example by Dietrich and Fox Hall (2010), Jarvis (2007), and Schmid (2006) who discuss fascination with the concept of the serial killer within society. This thesis will also build on research conducted specifically on *Dexter*: for example, Gregoriou (2012), Green (2012) and Danesi (2016). The first chapter will introduce two relevant ethical theories: utilitarianism and Kantian deontological (duty-based) ethics, as discussed by Van Hees, Nys and Robeyns (2014). The ethical theories outlined in this chapter will play a key role in the three chapters after, which will give an in-depth analysis of key episodes of several seasons of *Dexter*, all three focusing on Dexter in different aspects of his life. The second chapter will discuss the friendships Dexter attempts to build with two other serial killers in seasons 3 and 4 (and how he is ultimately disappointed

³ Dexter fan clubs abound across the globe, on social media platforms and Internet sites.

by them for even though they are all killers, Dexter's type of violence is very different from theirs). The third chapter will focus on Dexter in the role of both vigilante and savior in seasons 5 and 6, in which he attempts to save a young woman traumatized after having been captured by a group of killers, and a man who kills out of the delusion he is trying to serve God. The final chapter will analyze episodes from seasons 7 and 8 that focus on Dexter's origin story, how he came to be whom and what he is and will dive deeper into his family relationships (particularly those between him and his adoptive father and him and his adoptive sister).

The total analysis will reflect on Dexter's humanity and his moral choices that develop throughout the show, in relation to the theories of utilitarianism and deontological ethics. The analysis reveals that the writers and producers of this immensely popular TV show followed the ethical philosophy of utilitarianism to construct their sympathetic anti-hero's arc. Utilitarianism shows the importance of context in making ethical decisions and could be considered more humane than deontology, making it a very applicable theory for *Dexter* whose protagonist's arc is all about the development of awareness of consequences, emotions and context. Dexter's story moves him from a killer who follows a deontological (prescribed) code of conduct (created by his father) towards a realization (through his encounters with other killers, who can be best described as psychopaths in their incapability to display sympathy or empathy) that he has to develop a utilitarian code of his own to become more human, which he himself often mentions as his greatest wish. This thesis will show that *Dexter* confronts its audience with their own (often contradictory) ideas on right and wrong and seeks to show them how to judge those that do not fit into the framework of the ruling ethical order. This analysis ties into the bigger picture of how society views 'the serial killer' (the ultimate criminal) and the attached moral implications of sympathetic responses to criminals in our current day and age.

Chapter 1: Methodological framework – Deontological versus Utilitarian Ethics

In her study of Showtime's message board on the topic of *Dexter*, Christiana Gregoriou discusses several of the responses given by a number of viewers of the show and ultimately concludes that:

Contributors revealed a tendency to accept Dexter's ethical consequentialist behavior, while they also admitted to being conflicted whenever their hero took the life of victims not straight-forwardly code-fitting. Mostly though, fans tend to accept Dexter, even when he attacks non-guilty victims himself. [...] It seems that it is through playful, online and anonymised responses to such fictional shows, that people's (at least) implied killer-related ideologies can come to light, confronting and yet also reflecting the culture they are derived from. (284)

As is reflected by the clashing ideas and occasionally heated discussion about the show on the message board, *Dexter* undoubtedly calls up many different opinions about what is considered "right" and "wrong"; and it is precisely that fuzzy boundary between the two, which *Dexter* highlights, that this thesis will explore. Many ethical dilemmas are difficult to resolve when the subjects caught in those dilemmas are anonymous, or remain merely abstract. *Dexter* presents its audience with fully fleshed-out characters, each of them with their own moral strong and weak points. The ease with which a viewer can identify with these characters invites all kinds of different ethical questions which are hard to answer: How can "right" and "wrong" even be defined within the particular context of Dexter's fictional universe, in which a serial killer is also a hero? Should *Dexter* be accepted as a purely fictional TV show without any ties to what is real, existing within its own realm where other rules and ethics might apply, or should the show be considered as set in a fictionalized version of the real world? Should sympathizing with Dexter as a character be rejected or is it justified to do so, and in

what way? How can an audience grapple with the ethical implications of Dexter's murderous actions and importantly: should they even consider ethics whilst performing an activity that is often still considered nothing more than a form of thoughtless consumption, put forth by "a bureaucratically organised regime of pleasure" (Creeber 159)? How could a discussion of ethics within this particular context of popular culture shape the way an audience views and reflects on the media in general and *Dexter* in particular? And what ethical theories could be applied to *Dexter* in order to conduct an analysis of the show that attempts to provide an answer to some of these questions?

This thesis will respond to these questions. This chapter in particular will explain the ethical theories (each with their own definition of "right" and "wrong"), which will provide the framework through which several episodes of *Dexter* (relating to each of the chapter's specific themes) will be analyzed. It will also provide a justification for choosing these particular theories. In order to thoroughly examine *Dexter*'s ethics and its ethical implications for the audience, this thesis will build on and engage with earlier research on the topic of morality and *Dexter* in order to provide an explanation for the relevance of this particular thesis within the existing debate on philosophical ethics and popular media.

While the Western world (which is the setting of *Dexter* and the everyday reality of the major part of *Dexter*'s audience) is becoming more and more secularized⁴. Yet the modern worldview is still very much shaped by ethical principles developed within Christian tradition. Several of the Ten Commandments (as formulated in Exodus 20:1-17, King James Version) have left a lasting idea of what is considered "right" and "wrong" in the West, with "thou shalt not kill" as one of the most deeply rooted ones within society. Yet in the domain of utilitarianism and deontological ethics, it is not always the case that murder automatically equals "wrong". Whereas some ethical theories follow these ideas on which the modern world

⁴ See for example Steve Bruce's *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (2002) and *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (2011)

was built and therefore continue to condemn such acts as murder, others have developed in another direction and provide a different view on what such actions mean in terms of morality. Ethical philosophies can be conflicting and confusing, especially when it comes to examining dubious situations where there does not seem to be a clear-cut “right” choice and more nuance is needed in considering the options.

In this thesis two ethical theories, which differ greatly in their approach to ethical dilemmas, will form the lens through which the analysis of *Dexter* is conducted. The first one is the theory of utilitarianism, first formulated by Jeremy Bentham in the 1780s; but this thesis will use the more modern and broader definition given by van Hees, Nys and Robeyns (2014). The other theory is deontological (duty-based) ethics: an idea first introduced by Immanuel Kant in the same era in which Bentham developed his utilitarianism, but the theoretical definition will also be taken from van Hees, Nys and Robeyns. Van Hees, Nys and Robeyns base themselves on the original ideas of Bentham and Kant, but take into account the shifting view of these theories from a very rigid perspective to a more broad and open one, where the concept of motivation and consequence plays a more important role than initially formulated by Kant and Bentham. According to van Hees, Nys and Robeyns utilitarianism has developed from consequentialism. This theory of consequentialism offers that the moral properties of an action (properties such as “morally right” or “wrong”) are fully determined by the results of that particular action (96). In itself this is a rather vague statement – and in their book this theory is therefore further elaborated by explaining the concept of utilitarianism as a specific form of consequentialism. According to utilitarianism, the moral properties of an action are fully based on the effects of said action on the total amount of subjective welfare in the world (97). In other words: what is the key to utilitarianism is that an action provides the greatest amount of well-being for the largest amount of people. It focuses on the welfare of a group, rather than that of an individual; and the outcome of an action (is it as useful and good as

possible for the largest group of people that would benefit from it?) is more important than following a set of prescribed rules in order to determine whether an action should be undertaken or not.

Deontological ethics theorizes that the morality of an action is based on whether the action itself, rather than its outcome, is right or wrong based on a set of rules that everyone has to follow. For deontological theorists duty is the most important thing in determining whether an action is considered “right” or “wrong” (van Hees, Nys and Robeyns 113) based on a moral code (which is determined by the traditions of a society, for example the aforementioned “thou shalt not kill”). This is also why it is described as duty-based ethics. The outcome of the action does not matter in determining its moral status. For example, if a person makes a promise, that person has the duty to always keep that promise, even if breaking the promise means better results could be achieved. Deontological ethics are therefore much more individual-based than utilitarianism, because it encompasses the responsibility of the individual to strictly keep to a set of rules as its point of focus.

Utilitarianism and deontological ethics therefore can be seen as contrasts: they have very differing ideas in terms of what can be defined as “right” and as “wrong.” In order to further clarify the way both theories function as opposites, the following moral dilemma will be used as an example: A man takes his son to the hospital, for the boy has suddenly fallen very ill. The doctors tell the man that the only way to save his son’s life is to perform a very expensive surgery on him. The man does not have the money to pay for the surgery, nor does he have the time to work and save up for it since his son is in critical condition and will die within days if he is unable to get the surgery. The man does not know what to do to save his son and therefore he decides to lie. He goes to a rich business acquaintance and pretends to be an entrepreneur himself, wishing to invest in a new business that is guaranteed to gain a lot of revenue. The businessman gives the man the loan he has asked for, believing that he will get

the loan back, for the “business” appears to be legitimate and will seemingly make a lot of money. The man goes back to the hospital and pays for the surgery, which ultimately saves his son’s life. According to the utilitarian perspective, the man did the right thing. By lying he managed to pay for the surgery which provided the greatest welfare for the largest group of people: his son, who did not die of his illness, himself for he was able to keep his son by his side, and the surgeons and nurses working in the hospital who were able to do their jobs and save a life. The businessman who loaned the money to the man has lost his investment and therefore is the losing party here, but he is only one person that suffers from the man’s decision to lie. According to deontological ethics, the man has not made the right choice: lying is morally wrong (this is part of the ruling moral code in modern Western society) and therefore always the wrong decision to make. Even if it means he managed to save his son, the man should not have lied, for in deontological ethics the consequences of an action are not relevant: the important thing is whether society’s moral rules were followed.

As is frequently the case in academic discourse and particularly when it concerns the crossroads between two disciplines (philosophy and media studies, in this case), both theories have received criticisms in terms of their usefulness as analytical tools. In the case of utilitarianism it has been accused of being too morally flexible and a nihilistic theory (by Nietzsche in 1886, and by Bernard Williams in 1973). Deontological ethics has been frequently labeled too rigid. For example, Arthur Schopenhauer claimed in 1840 that it is absolutist, not allowing for any sort of wiggle room within a moral dilemma. In a paper on the subject of objectivity in ethics, Elinor Mason notes that for absolutist deontology, it is not possible to look for a second-best option. In the eyes of a deontologist, there is no such thing as something other than the “right” thing to do: “It is not the right option (by stipulation) and it is not a good option, because according to absolutist deontology, goodness is not relevant – there is only rightness” (13). An absolutist form of deontological ethics (as Kant’s original

form of deontology was) does not allow for grey areas – an action is black or white, right or wrong. However, the problem here is that many moral dilemmas cannot be neatly categorized in what is good or what is bad. Often a choice can be considered “the lesser of two evils,” rather than “undoubtedly the right thing to do.” An interesting example to examine in this light is the Trolley Problem, introduced in a 1967 paper written by Philippa Foot. In this situation, there is a tram that has spun out of control, and the driver is unable to adjust the speed or use the brakes. The driver of the tram only has the option to steer and by doing so to make a choice. The driver can choose to steer the vehicle onto either one of two different tracks, but not to any others: those two tracks are the only options he has. On the one track where the tram is currently riding, there are five men at work to improve the rails. Over on the other track, there is one man who is working on the rails. All six of them are not aware of the coming tram and therefore will remain in the position they are now in rather than run. The driver has to choose here: does he pull the lever and switch to the track where one person is at work? Or does he **not** pull the lever and therefore stay on the track he is on, which is the one where the tram will hit and kill five people (Foot 2)? Absolutist deontological ethics cannot provide a satisfactory answer to this dilemma. According to Kant’s original theory of deontology, no one is ever allowed to use human beings as a means to an end (Kant 429), and therefore one must do nothing in this case: if the driver would pull the lever, he would use that one person that would be hit by the tram as means to an end, the end being the other five people saved from getting hit by the oncoming tram. Yet by doing nothing, it means five people will die.

Deontological ethics does not allow for the fact that people often have conflicting duties: is it one’s (moral) duty to save as many lives as possible? Or is it one’s duty to not use anyone as means to an end? The Trolley Problem seems to be easier to solve in the context of utilitarian ethics. The goal is to create the greatest amount of welfare for the greatest amount

of people. In the Trolley Problem, therefore, the driver should pull the lever: one person will die, but the driver will have saved five others and therefore created the maximum amount of happiness possible in this particular situation.

If the Trolley Problem is slightly adjusted, it also becomes a more difficult case for utilitarian ethics. This holds true for a variation of the Trolley Problem, named the Fat Man Problem (this problem does not seem to have a definitive author – it can be found on several websites⁵). In this situation, a person is standing on a footbridge, watching a tram speed toward five people working on the rails. Near this person, also standing on the bridge, there is a fat man. If the person throws the fat man onto the rails in front of the oncoming tram, his weight will stop the tram and therefore save the five workers on the track, but the fat man will die in the process. Self-sacrifice is not an option in this scenario, for the person's own weight is not enough to stop the tram and therefore throwing themselves in front of the tram would only cause a useless death. In numerical terms, the Fat Man case is exactly the same as the Trolley Problem: one versus five, and by strictly adhering to utilitarianist theory the conclusion would be that the morally right thing to do is to push the fat man onto the rails and save the group. Yet in this variation on the Trolley Problem people struggle with utilitarianism as an approach: instinctively it feels more wrong to actively push a person towards his death rather than flipping a switch, even if the number of deaths caused are the same. Furthermore, the utilitarianist course of action in the Fat Man case means that the person who pushes the fat man will have committed murder – hence the accusation that utilitarianism is morally flexible, for murder can be considered as “wrong” for many ethical theories but in this case could be argued to be “the right choice” (or at the very least, “the least wrong choice”) by the utilitarianist approach.

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/books/review/would-you-kill-the-fat-man-and-the-trolley-problem.html> and <https://capebretonspectator.com/2017/05/31/trolley-problem-ethics-fat-man/> for example

It is precisely because of these criticisms and the fact that deontology and utilitarianism are considered to be opposing ethical theories that they are relevant to use in analyzing a TV show like *Dexter*, due to the fact that they ultimately are not as rigid as the original forms of these theories. For an absolute deontologist, Dexter's actions are to be categorized as irrevocably wrong (for killing can never be justified, no matter what positive outcomes the action of killing can lead to). However, many modern-day deontologists reject the absolute stance of Kant's deontological ethics. They are much more moderate in theorizing about what is morally right or wrong, able to consider the agents undertaking an action rather than only considering the action itself:

They believe that the constraint has a *threshold*: up to a certain point – the threshold point – it is forbidden to kill or harm an innocent person, even if a greater good could be achieved by doing it; but if *enough* good is at stake – if the threshold has been reached or passed – then the constraint is no longer in force, and it is permissible to harm the person. (Kagan 79)

This notion of motivation and intent is absolute key for utilitarianism. Utilitarianists could argue that *Dexter* creates the largest amount of welfare for the greatest number of people (the murder of one serial killer means Dexter saved several lives), yet the question about what Dexter's intentions and motives are in fact important to take into account. Brian Earp, research fellow at Oxford Uehiro Center for Practical Ethics, said about the Fat Man problem that choosing to push the fat man off the bridge does not necessarily mean one adheres to the principle of utilitarianism: "You might just like shoving people off bridges" (Goldhill n.p.). The same is true for a character like Dexter. From the start of the show, it is clear that for Dexter killing is something he enjoys. Throughout the show, it becomes clear that his intent to only kill those who deserve it is not always fulfilled. Yet at the same time, he is unable to ever stop – it is not a choice to commit murders, and he is overtaken at times by his killing urges.

Dexter makes a very interesting topic for an ethical study. He decides to only hunt and kill (serial) killers but occasionally fails to do so. Furthermore the show reflects on how Dexter influences the people around him with the choices he makes in his personal life, which is not always a good influence (but not always a bad one either). Dexter is very much a character who exists in the grey area (he is loveable but has his own demons and faults), and the modern-day approach to deontological ethics and utilitarianism (which are less rigid (even though deontology is still very much rule-based whereas utilitarianism allows more room for context)) do as well, making them very useful tools in engaging with a television show like this one.

Earlier researchers such as Sultan Ahmed (2011) discuss what Dexter's motivations are for killing and where his urges come from. Simon Riches and Craig French' (2010) essay delves deeper into the concept of the moral code created by Dexter's father Harry. Lisa Glebatis Perks (2015) shortly compares Dexter's backstory to that of other fictional characters who have also been through a trauma in their childhood and Susan Amper's (2010) paper researches why audiences are so infatuated with Dexter as a character and how he can be seen as a superhero. These articles have in fact delved deeper into the ethics and morality as represented in the TV show and some of them have particularly discussed deontological ethics and utilitarianism in relation to *Dexter*. However, these discussions have drawn general conclusions on the show's premise as a whole, rather than dive into an in-depth analysis of particular episodes as this thesis sets out to do. Their research is an important stepping-stone for the analysis of the show that will be executed in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this thesis. These analyses will discuss specific scenes, which relate to the topic discussed in the chapter (friendships, vigilantism and family dynamics as mentioned earlier) and therefore expand with new insights on already existing research. As mentioned in the introduction, these analyses will focus in turn on Dexter's "friendships" (in so much they can be considered

friendships), his role as a vigilante and savior, and his family relationships and backstory. By applying the theories of deontology and utilitarianism in analyzing the choices Dexter makes throughout the show as well as discussing whether or not these ethical theories can be useful in the particulars of these analyses, this thesis will show his moral development: from following the Code, which can be considered a problematic deontological framework towards a more utilitarian position as he becomes more and more humanized in the course of the show through his encounters with psychopathic killers and Dexter's disassociation from them, instead finding more common ground with "ordinary" human beings.

Before any analysis can be conducted the parameters of such an analysis have to be defined. It is difficult to pinpoint within what genre *Dexter* exists. In *The Television Genre Book*, Mareike Jenner describes the show as "a generic hybrid mixing the serial killer genre, the police procedural and the detective serial" (23). In answering the question of genre, it is important to answer one of the questions put forth in the methodological framework (chapter 1) of this thesis. Should *Dexter* be considered pure fantasy without any viewer responsibility that exists in its own realms where other ethics from our own might apply? Or does *Dexter* fictionally reflect the reality of the viewer? To be able to answer this question, the concept of the serial killer genre, the police procedural and the detective serial must be further explored in order to define within what world the show exists. This thesis will follow the definitions of these genres as stated in *The Television Genre Book*. Lez Cooke defines the police procedural as "a sub-genre of the police/crime series that attempts to realistically depict the activities of a police force as it goes about its day-to-day work" (26). Toby Miller describes the detective serial's narrative as containing the following elements: "the law is violated; the state finds out about it; the heroes try to find out why and how this happened and who was responsible; they encounter informants (some useful, others dangerous) and have initial struggles with the enemy; the villain is revealed and defeated in a fight sequence; and a coda restores

equilibrium” (28). The serial killer genre does not have such a clear-cut definition. However, in her article Jenner notes that there is a close connection between the serial killer genre and the detective serial, “possibly because of the irony inherent in their apparent opposition to each other” (23). If they are indeed opposites (and this thesis will follow this idea) the definition of the serial killer genre is similar to the detective serial genre, but simply turned around with the serial killer as protagonist and the police/detective as antagonist. This does apply to *Dexter*, where the police are often incapable of putting a criminal behind bars and are at times even an adversary. Key to these genres just discussed is that despite their status as a work of fiction, they depict a type of realism: the scenarios shown could actually happen in the real world. Therefore, *Dexter* can also be viewed as a part of this type of realism: there are no “unrealistic” elements present (as could be the case if it belonged strictly to, for example, the horror genre). This thesis will therefore analyze *Dexter* within the context of the real, actual world, and the implications of this for (ethical) viewer responsibility will be discussed.

Chapter 2: Friendship: Sympathy and Trust within an Ethical Framework

As discussed in the introduction, each chapter of this thesis will discuss two different seasons of the show in detail, relating to a specific theme. This chapter will first give the context within which the analyses will be conducted.

The analysis of seasons 3 and 4 (a synopsis of every season can be found in appendix B) will focus on two other killers (Miguel Prado and the Trinity Killer) Dexter encounters and their motivations to kill. Through the theme of friendship, and specifically the betrayal of friendship, Dexter learns to distinguish from a more utilitarian ethical perspective between different categories of violence. By learning to distinguish between true and false friendships Dexter is able to further develop his humanity by contrasting his own motivations for violence with those of others which he deems truly evil, showing Dexter's developing arc from follower of a deontological Code to utilitarian thinker.

Season 3: Miguel Prado's Betrayal of Harry's Code

In episode 1 of season 3, Dexter is on the hunt for a murderous drug dealer named Freebo. He is applying his usual method of learning his intended victim's routine when he stumbles upon a fight between the drug dealer and another man. When the other man attacks him, attempting to strangle Dexter, Dexter stabs the man in self-defense and kills him. It is the first time Dexter has killed someone without fully following the rules of the Code.

The Code is a set of rules designed by Dexter's adoptive father Harry, when he first found out about Dexter's murderous urges when Dexter was only a child. Harry understood he could not contain Dexter's tendencies and rather than attempting to repress them Harry tried to find a way for Dexter to act on his urges in the most useful way possible (reflecting on the show's utilitarianist outlook on Dexter's urges) by teaching Dexter to only kill those "who deserve it." This is already very difficult to define in ethical terms: who decides who deserves to be killed, and following what guidelines? In the show, Harry (who functions as Dexter's

conscience; this idea will be elaborated on in chapter 4) has defined these guidelines. The Code of Harry is as follows:

- Don't get caught
- Never kill an innocent (i.e. someone who has never hurt another person with their actions)
- Targets must be killers who have evaded the justice system
- Killing has to serve a purpose (i.e. ensuring that Dexter's victim will never be able to hurt an innocent again); if it does not, it is just murder
- Maintaining appearances is key: blend in with society
- Fake normality and emotions: act as if you care (indicating Harry clearly did not believe Dexter was capable of actual emotions)
- Control and channel the killing urges
- Always prepare: don't leave traces or evidence
- Remain calm and collected, whatever happens
- Don't let personal feelings get in the way of judgment⁶

The Code is comprised of the "commandments" (as Dexter calls them) by which Dexter lives his life and it forms the only moral compass he possesses. This Code is set in stone: it consists out of strict rules, which makes it fit perfectly into a framework of deontological ethics.

Dexter does sometimes bends the rules of the Code, since a set of rules simply cannot be applied to the context of every situation. This kill that Dexter commits out of self-defense is a perfect example of how deontological ethics do not work in making ethical judgments. This is the first time Dexter does not follow Harry's Code (for he has no idea whether the man he just killed is an innocent or not, potentially breaking the second rule) and it leaves both Dexter as well as the audience shaken: the audience who has followed Dexter throughout seasons 1 and

⁶ Taken from https://dexter.fandom.com/wiki/The_Code_of_Harry

2 has most likely already accepted the premise of Dexter being a serial killer (no matter how problematic that premise is). But so far, he has only killed “the bad guys” (who kill for their own personal good, making them ethically wrong according to both utilitarianists as well as deontologists) and not made such mistakes: he has always been the hero of the story in his quest to clean up the streets of Miami, but now neither Dexter nor the audience knows who precisely he killed and if they were guilty of any crime. It is from this murder onwards that they are confronted with a less clear-cut image of Dexter.

The man Dexter murdered is Oscar Prado, younger brother of District Attorney Miguel Prado, who is popular with the police force due to his reputation as an attorney who is tough on criminals. Miguel is distraught by Oscar’s death and asks Dexter to explain what happened to Oscar (for Dexter is working the crime scene as a forensic analyst) and Dexter tells him what happened without telling Miguel it was him who killed Oscar. Miguel is grateful to Dexter for giving him an explanation and asks Dexter to come to Oscar’s wake. Dexter feels uneasy and even guilty about killing Oscar, worried he might have broken Harry’s Code. This is the first utilitarian (since for deontologists murder is always wrong) moral dilemma of season 3.

Normally, killing cannot be justified from either a deontological or utilitarian perspective. However, as mentioned in chapter 1, one’s intentions must be considered for every action or crime committed. Dexter kills out of self-defense: the other man attacked him first with the intent to hurt him. Still, Dexter feels uneasy because Oscar’s behavioral pattern seemingly did not fit the Code. This is why Dexter attends the wake: to find out if Oscar had a criminal past. But even if Oscar did have such a past, he can never truly justify killing Oscar simply because Dexter did not know at the time; if Oscar was indeed a criminal, Dexter just got lucky. However, it can be questioned whether this can be called a murder: Dexter did not act with the purpose of killing Oscar, he just reacted to Oscar’s attack in self-defense and as a

consequence, Oscar died. The two sides of the coin in this situation is uncomfortable for Dexter, and the show clearly intends it to be uncomfortable for the audience as well in terms of making an ethical judgment on Dexter's behavior.

When, in the second episode, Dexter kills Freebo he was being followed by Miguel, who almost catches him in the act. To Dexter's surprise, Miguel thanks him: "Just know you did the right thing, my friend. And it will never be forgotten" (S3, E3, 15:45 - 15:52). This is the moment their friendship starts. However, Miguel is manipulative and Dexter, who has never had a friend before and is desperate for normal human connections, does not see it. His "principal motivation is emotional, and his interactions with Miguel demonstrate that" (Ahmed 166). Miguel succeeds in creating a bond with Dexter, one that is mostly on Miguel's terms and is mostly based on Dexter's usefulness to Miguel, even if Dexter is not aware of this:

The friendship "blossoms" into a vigilante alliance of sorts—a male homosocial relationship that is predictably destined for failure—but not before Miguel has courted the confused and uncomfortable Dexter in a series of environments that are supposed to support the male homosociality that Miguel seeks to nourish and that Dexter cannot understand. (Arellano 138)

They bond over the sometimes-strained relationships they both had with their fathers: Miguel's father saw Miguel as a failure; Harry committed suicide because he could not accept who Dexter truly was. However, it turns out Miguel lied about beating his father up, which he claims is the origin of his need to kill. Miguel's lies only benefit himself and therefore his actions are to be rejected both from a deontological and a utilitarianist perspective. This is reinforced when Miguel ensures that a client of one of his rivals, Ellen Wolf (who Miguel is spiteful of) is incarcerated for a crime he did not commit.

Miguel continues to work to gain Dexter's trust by giving Dexter the bloodied shirt he was wearing the night of Freebo's murder (implicating Miguel's involvement). Dexter ponders Miguel's intentions: "Is it possible I've actually made a friend? Someone I can trust with my dark secrets? Or am I being foolish for even asking myself those questions?" (E3, S3, 40:50 - 50:00) Throughout the season they get closer. Dexter secretly kills a felon Miguel was unable to put in prison (whilst following the rules of the Code). Miguel finds out about it but rather than being shocked, he says: "You don't have to lie to me. [...] You have nothing to explain to me, nothing to apologize for. Ever. I'm with you. I'm behind you. And I respect you" (S3, E5, 44:58 - 45:26). Dexter is surprised: "When Harry saw what I truly was, he was repulsed. It destroyed my brother, consumed Lila. But not Miguel Prado. Somehow, he looks at me and he's... Proud" (S3, E5, 45:40 - 45:53). This emotional approach towards Miguel makes Dexter very relatable and vulnerable. The audience is more aware of Miguel's darkness than Dexter is, and in their relationship, Dexter is the naive, "innocent" one. In their case, the utilitarian idea of being "the least wrong" certainly applies: Dexter is the one who keeps referring to the Code, the only moral framework he has to live by, and he clearly wants to stick to it.

The irony of his clinging to the Code is that Dexter is the only one who actually follows this Code. Harry designed it, but he himself has never felt the urges Dexter does and he is capable of following the prevailing moral code prescribed by the dominant ideology. Therefore, it is possible to ask how ethical Harry's Code really is, since the majority of society would not agree that the rules of Harry's moral code are in fact ethical. However, Harry knew he would never be able to form Dexter into a "normal" human being who would be capable of feeling guilt, remorse, sympathy or empathy and who would be able to align themselves with the ruling ethical order: giving Dexter the deontological Code was the best he could do, hoping that Dexter would stick to it.

Because Dexter fervently believes in Harry's Code as a moral guidebook, he refuses to follow Miguel's suggestion to kill Ellen Wolf; from Dexter's perspective she is an innocent. Miguel gets aggressive when Dexter refuses. Miguel eventually apologizes for his behavior, but his dark side has manifested itself more clearly than ever. Dexter is slowly catching on to this dark side and realizing at the same time that he is actually not like Miguel at all. Dexter would never kill for his own personal gain, and the fact that Miguel would is eye opening to Dexter who (quite innocently) seemed to think other killers would have the same utilitarianist motivations (keeping society safe) to commit murder.

Miguel's motivations for killing however are very different from Dexter's: "Dexter has an overwhelming internal compulsion to kill – whereas Miguel kills to gain more personal power" (Brace 108). Miguel does not feel the need to kill, nor does he want to make the world a better place (which Dexter, in his own way, does). He just wants to kill because of his selfish need for power which is wrong according to both the theories of utilitarianism and deontology (showing that these theories do not always have to be mutually exclusive in judging situations, which is why context is key in drawing ethical conclusions), and he refuses to acknowledge the Code's value: "Why are you not gonna help me here? Just because we broke this little rule from your Code?" (S3, E8, 37:50 - 37:55) Soon after Miguel kills Ellen Wolf by himself, to make his life and career easier. Dexter feels guilty and disappointed; he believes he taught Miguel how to kill without getting caught. This reflects on how Dexter does have an internalized moral compass that exists separately from the deontological Code: he is capable of feeling guilt and remorse. However, this is not the only thing Dexter taught Miguel; not to get caught is only a small part of the Code, and Miguel has ignored the rest of the rules Dexter lives and acts on, which is not his fault.

Dexter has made a mistake in trying to teach Miguel the Code, which was a dangerous thing to do. The negative result of this failed attempt indicates that the Code is only a personal

moral framework, not meant to be followed by others. Dexter is the only one who is able to understand and follow Harry's Code; killers like Miguel could interpret the Code as a set of instructions on how not to get caught when perpetrating criminal acts, making it a dangerous instrument in the wrong hands. Like Dexter, the Code exists in a moral middle ground: it is neither a force for good nor a force for evil, its moral status depends on the individual's interpretation of the Code. Dexter's uniqueness in being able to use the Code for good shows how he does have an internal utilitarian sense of ethics, and is capable of considering the context of a situation.

Dexter knows he needs to stop Miguel, but initially he does not want to kill him. Instead, he plans to frame Miguel with the shirt Miguel gave him: again, such an action itself would be considered an immoral thing to do from a deontological perspective since framing someone is illegal, but within this context it is the best utilitarianist solution Dexter can think of. However, the blood on the shirt turns out to be cow's blood, and Dexter concludes: "I didn't create a monster. I was used by one. He used me" (S3, E9, 47:15 - 47:20). Dexter feels the urge to destroy his office in his disappointment and rage, feeling deeply betrayed by a man he considered his "first good friend" (S3, E6, 50:30): finally, he experiences a human emotion he does not have to fake. The show reveals here that Dexter undergoes actual emotional development, making him more human in the eyes of the audience who can now root for Dexter to kill bad guy Miguel.

Dexter is enraged precisely because he thought he understood Miguel and made his best effort to be kind to him. His interactions with Miguel show Dexter's shift on the moral spectrum towards the "good" side. Miguel has killed an innocent and now fits the definition of an evil man according to Dexter's Code; it is morally permissible for Dexter to kill Miguel because it would ensure that innocent lives would be saved. Dexter carries Miguel into his kill room. Dexter says: "I had higher hopes for you, for us. But I finally just have to accept it, I

will always be alone” (S3, E11, 44:28 - 44:36). Miguel says he just wanted Dexter to let him in. Dexter tells him there have been many people who have been let in, seen the real him; all of them on his kill table: “You’re all just unchecked versions of myself, of what I would have become without my father’s Code” (S3, E11, 45:30 - 45:46). Here Dexter acknowledges the importance of having a moral compass, and reinforces the fact that he does have a sense of morality, which makes him different from Miguel. Before he strangles Miguel, Dexter gives Miguel the answer he has been looking for ever since he met Dexter, the only kindness he can offer Miguel now. Miguel says: “I accept you, Dexter. I accept you like a brother.” Dexter replies: “I killed my brother. I killed yours too” (S3, E11, 45:55 - 46:03). This is a perfect example of how Dexter and Miguel are different: Miguel constantly keeps secrets from Dexter in order to be able to manipulate him and use him for Miguel’s own gain, but even after Miguel has betrayed him Dexter feels a sense of loyalty to Miguel, feeling that he owes Miguel to tell him the truth before his death. Dexter follows the deontological ethics of the Code to kill Miguel, but his motivation to do so comes from Dexter’s own rejection of Miguel’s cold-hearted and selfish drive for power.

Season 4: The Trinity Killer’s Torture of Family

Season 4 introduces a man who seems as likeable as Miguel first was. Arthur Mitchell is a husband, father, deacon of his local church, and in charge of a charity organization that builds houses for the poor. However, the audience finds out even before Dexter does that Arthur is a serial killer, creating moments of dramatic irony. Arthur, nicknamed the Trinity Killer, has a specific kill pattern: every year, he kills three people in the same city in the same sequence. First, he murders a young woman in a bathtub, then pushes a mother off a building, and ultimately bludgeons a father to death. This season shows how Dexter comes to realize through his interactions with Trinity (who turns out to be extremely aggressive and abusive towards his own family) how the people he initially used as a cover to the outside world to

show his “normality”, now have become far more than just a cover. Dexter now genuinely cares for them and to keep them safe becomes Dexter’s number one priority, showing that Dexter has gone from following the Code’s rule of maintaining appearances to establishing actual nurturing relationships. To maintain such relationships one needs to have the capability of feeling emotions such as love and sympathy, and Dexter has gone from faking these emotions to actually feeling them.

In episode 3, Trinity has taken a woman hostage and forces her to jump off a building. After the woman plunges to her death, Trinity whispers: “Mommy” (S4, E3, 10:00). This is the audience’s first indication something is not entirely right about Trinity. This is confirmed when Trinity is seen offering a glass of whisky to an empty chair, aggressively saying: “Drink up, you’re next” (S4, E3, 33:05). This is another hint towards Trinity’s unstable mind which is developing towards a more aggressive state, seen first in episode 4. This is when he taunts a man until he beats Trinity up. Trinity says to the man: “It’s your fault” (S4, E4, 15:55). In episode 5 the violence is reversed: this is when Trinity actively engages in murder, when he (clearly upset) bludgeons a man to death whilst telling his victim: “You were no father! You made me... do this” (S4, E5, 42:40). The audience knows from the start that Trinity is mentally unstable. His character gives off an atmosphere of danger, made all the more uncomfortable for the audience knowing that Trinity and Dexter are bound to cross paths at some point.

Trinity’s motive to kill can definitely be considered ethically wrong both for utilitarianism as well as deontology: he kills out of a sense of justice, but it is a justice that only serves himself. Dexter too kills out of a self-serving justice, but rather than taking revenge on criminals who have hurt innocents Trinity is taking revenge on innocents for his own suffering in the past. However, because he is clearly deeply traumatized, it is difficult for an audience to immediately condemn him. Through its portrayal of Trinity as a mentally

disturbed killer, the show appeals to the audience's pity; as the writers did for Dexter they provide a backstory for Trinity that explains why he kills and suggest that these urges may be caused by another part of his personality, created by the trauma Trinity went through as a child (just like Dexter has his Dark Passenger).

Dexter hears stories about Trinity from FBI agent Frank Lundy. When Debra and Lundy get shot at the end of episode 4 (Lundy dies in the shooting) Dexter vows to find him, convinced that it was Trinity who shot them. Dexter says: "If Deb dies, I'll be... lost" (S4, E5, 4:15) and "My sister doesn't deserve to be in this kind of pain. But I know who does" (S4, E5, 37:53). Deb is one of the most likeable characters of the show, and the audience can sympathize with Dexter's wish to take revenge upon the man who hurt his sister. Dexter's idea of justice (getting back at those who have hurt innocents: the ultimate vigilante role, which will be further explored in chapter 3) is realigned with the audience's idea of justice. Both Dexter and the audience are motivated here by personal reasons (their fondness for Debra) as Trinity is, but they are nowhere near as sinister as Trinity's reasons. By killing Trinity he would never come close to Debra again; it would also offer Debra (and the police force) some peace of mind and sense of justice being done over Lundy's death. From this perspective, killing Trinity would be a good act; it would keep him from ever hurting anyone else ever again and prevent him from using his victims as means to an end. The end here is reliving his trauma; as was discussed in the previous chapter deontologists reject the idea of using people as means.

When Dexter follows Trinity to his family home, he is astounded: "Lundy was wrong. I was wrong. Neither of us knew pieces of the puzzle were missing. Trinity is a husband. A father. He's... like me" (S4, E5, 45:47). Dexter is fascinated by Trinity balancing what seems to be a loving home life and charity work with his killings, especially since Dexter himself is struggling to find that balance. What interests him the most is that Trinity's family life does

not seem to be an act put on to disguise the murders: “But why the show? I’m the only one watching. Unless... It’s more than just camouflage. That’s honest affection, sustained for years. But he’s like me. How does he do it? I will kill him, I need to. But right now I need to save my family more [...] and I have so much to learn” (S4, E6, 16:25). Dexter decides to keep Trinity alive to learn how he can salvage his own family situation. It is a selfish decision on Dexter’s part and he is warned about it by Harry’s presence in his mind. But Dexter feels he and Trinity might be similar and could really understand each other. From a utilitarian standpoint, not killing Trinity is the more unethical option, as it is based on Dexter’s personal desires to learn from him, rather than a desire to serve the greater good; Dexter will ultimately be punished for it. This reflects on the show’s suggestion that utilitarianism is the only possible framework to apply for Dexter. It is key to not give precedent to his own selfish needs over the greater good of the society he lives in – if he does not do that, his actions as a killer could never be justified, and therefore the show punishes Dexter for not sticking to a utilitarian framework.

Dexter learns that Trinity lost his sister and his parents in the same way as Trinity kills his victims. Trinity becomes extremely agitated when Dexter touches the urn with his sister’s ashes: he shoves Dexter up against a wall and chokes him before regaining his composure and apologizing. Dexter pretends to be shocked but forgiving, and they strike up a bond. The friendship between him and Trinity (who gives Dexter advice on how to be a good husband and father) is working out for Dexter: Rita is happy he is trying to be a good husband and father. However, in episode 7, Dexter kills an innocent man by accident (he has been so busy following Trinity he did not prepare his intended kill properly), breaking the Code again. However, the show wants the audience to blame Trinity more than Dexter: Trinity distracts Dexter because Dexter is trying to do the right thing for his family. His slip-up is a result of

having to focus on Trinity: this of course is Dexter's own choice and fault, but the audience is willing to forgive him for it.

Dexter asks Trinity if he can come with him on Trinity's next trip with his charity organization (building a house out of town) and confesses to Trinity that he has killed someone. Dexter wants to get more information about Trinity's background, but is also genuinely trying to connect with Trinity. Trinity takes Dexter to the house he grew up in and describes to Dexter how his sister slipped and died in the bathroom after being startled by Trinity, how his mother committed suicide and how his father was abusive. Trinity says he never told anyone about this. When Dexter asks why Trinity told him, he replies: "So you'd know you're not alone. You're just like me. We're both responsible for the death of an innocent. We share that" (S4, E8, 34:25). For the first time it is explicitly mentioned that Dexter too is responsible for the death of a person who did not deserve to die. This forces the audience to reconsider Dexter's role as the "hero" of the show, and to reflect on whether a sympathetic response to the plight of the show's protagonist is morally problematic.

Dexter finds out that Trinity's family only seems perfect because they are actually traumatized by their husband and father. He attacks his son during dinner and Dexter grabs him by the throat, not allowing Trinity to hurt his son:

Dexter may be a violent monster, but he is no monster we know. He is not a sexually sadistic serial killer, a military killing machine, a vigilante, or an abuser. Within a representational world where dominant masculinity is synonymous with violence (and particularly violence toward women), this opens a space for Dexter's unusual heroism. (Arellano 143)

By defending Trinity's helpless family Dexter reinstates himself in his anti-hero status. He acts instantly; it is his duty to keep Trinity's family, all innocents, safe, even if they are so brainwashed by Trinity that they do not appreciate Dexter stepping in to help them. This once

again shows that Dexter is not only acting based on the Code, he is also acting based on his growing innate moral sense. He feels it is wrong for Trinity's family to suffer, wanting to alleviate it and stop the man causing their pain.

Dexter figures out that the killing pattern does not start with the woman in the bathtub but rather with Trinity kidnapping a boy, who he ultimately puts into a pool of cement. Dexter manages to get the child out, but Trinity escapes. By saving the child's life, Dexter is unable to go after Trinity and kill him. That night, Dexter tells Harrison: "I promise you, no one's ever going to hurt you again. Especially me" (S4, E10, 53:20). This is key when it comes to the relationship between *Dexter* and its audience:

Dexter's secret source of sympathy is children. He has a special affection for kids. [...] It's not just that "kids are different" and (as Dexter says in the opening episode of the television show) he has "standards" that don't permit him to kill them. Avoiding child victims is much more than professional ethics for Dexter. "I like them," he says - and he shows it. If children were among Dexter's victims, there would be no story. (Cassuto, qtd. in Howard 138)

Dexter himself longs to have the innocence that children have which is why he likes spending time with them: they are unable to see the darkness in him, for they are not aware of any darkness even existing. Not hurting children is not part of the Code: it is ingrained in Dexter's own utilitarian sense of morality, and it makes an audience realize that Dexter does indeed have a moral compass of his own that goes beyond the Code. Since Dexter is such a likeable protagonist and apparently does have a concept of ethics that he developed on his own, the audience is willing to believe in Harry's Code too (especially now the Code is functioning more as a supplement to Dexter's innate moral sense, rather than the external code that used to govern his behavior).

When Dexter thinks Trinity might go after his family, he sends his family on holiday to keep them safe and gets Trinity on his kill table. Dexter says: “I can’t believe there was a time I thought I could actually learn something from you,” and Trinity replies, “You think you’re better than I am?” To which Dexter answers: “No. But I want to be” (S4, E12, 41:40). Dexter realizes that to Trinity, his family was a mere human shield and that they never meant anything at all to Trinity; Dexter has learned to actually love his family, as much as he is capable. Dexter kills Trinity and feels he defeated his dark passenger this time. However, when he comes home he finds Harrison crying in a pool of blood and Rita with her wrists slit in the bathtub: Trinity’s final victim. “Born in blood. Both of us. Harry was right. I thought I could change what I am, keep my family safe. But it doesn’t matter what I do, what I choose. I’m what’s wrong. This is fate” (S4, E12, 47:35). Trinity has taken the one thing Dexter learned to love. However, Rita’s murder does show that Dexter has become more human than ever: for the second time (the first after Harry’s death) in his life Dexter grieves, and more deeply than ever before. He is genuinely upset by Rita’s death, which is a real character development for Dexter.

In these seasons, Dexter is desperate to connect to someone who will fully understand him. Yet his relationships to the men he thought were like him fail. Dexter is searching for a community of like-minded people (which he needs to make his own personal ethics a proper ethical code) and believes he can find it with other killers, but Miguel and Trinity are actually nothing like Dexter at all. While their motivations may be different, they ultimately enjoy death and violence because it gives them a sense of power:

In the culminating failure of each of these relationships, Dexter decides that there is something illegitimate about the violence represented by each of these other men—a paradox that is central to the Dexter character and to the overall structure of the show. While the Dexter voiceover may reference the

character's monstrosity, the evolving plot pattern repeatedly insists that Dexter is unable and unwilling to engage in what he (and the frame of the show) deems "bad" or "wrong" violence. (Arellano 139)

Dexter's form of violence, of course, is still gruesome: but it is shaped by the Code and by Dexter's own (admittedly somewhat twisted) developing set of morals. Miguel and Trinity exist in the realm of "evil": they are not part of society, even if they pretend to be. They cannot be part of society because they have no sense of ethics at all. Dexter's place on the spectrum of good and evil is more in the middle: he shifts towards both ends of the spectrum, depending on the context and his own motivations in individual murder cases, but the show never positions Dexter on either extreme. He partly belongs to society and partly is an outsider: he does have an ethical code, but it differs from the one governing the society in which he lives. Juxtaposing Dexter next to Miguel and Trinity shows Dexter's fruitless struggle to connect to them. Dexter can never fully fit into the description of "evil" that they fit into. It is their lack of a moral conscience and Dexter's growing one that separates them. It is clear that there is ethically "better choice" to root for, definitely for utilitarianists but for deontologists as well, and this is ultimately what the audience does.

Chapter 3: Vigilantism: The Significance of Context in Moral Judgments

This chapter will analyze seasons 5 and 6, in which Dexter is shown to develop a greater ethical awareness when he adopts the roles of vigilante as well as protector. It will reflect on Dexter's ability to feel sympathy and empathy with both a victim and a killer, which further enhances his development towards greater humanity, and the audience's potential to connect with him as the anti-hero of the TV show. I will discuss the concept of vigilantism (a morally problematic concept within U.S. and broader Western society) in relation to Dexter in detail, and will analyze how Dexter functions as a paradoxically "heroic" vigilante. It is in these seasons that Dexter is described explicitly as a "vigilante" on the show rather than as "murderer," which reveals his shift on the ethical spectrum towards a more heroic, if still problematic role. By placing Dexter within the context of vigilantism the show reflects on how Dexter's actions are affecting the reactions from the police force (the show intends that these reactions mirror those of the audience watching) and how the police struggle with the concept of an ethical spectrum on which there exists a middle ground where "good" and "evil" meet. unthinkable in the deontological form of ethics that the police have so far stuck to, believing in the strict rules of the law. The police now have to come to terms with the fact that both good and evil are ambiguous moral categories, and that perhaps utilitarian ethics might be better suited to handling cases than deontological ethics. This chapter will also critically explore the role that faith and religion play in Dexter's life and how the notion of a "higher power" ties into ethical responsibility.

Season 5: Lumen's Appeal to Dexter's Humanity

The fifth season opens with Dexter feeling lost after Rita's death, questioning his capability of becoming human more than ever before. In his grief and rage Dexter kills a man he encounters in the bathroom of a petrol station when the man calls Dexter a retard. Dexter beats him to death before bursting into tears. Harry, who is a constant presence throughout the

show (as a representation of Dexter's own conscience) says, "That's the first human thing I've seen you do since she died, Dexter" (S5, E1, 45:48). Dexter delivers a eulogy at Rita's funeral, saying: "I wasn't even human when we first met. I never expected that to change. She reached out and found something I didn't even know was there" (S5, E1, 50:00). His capability of becoming more human is greater than ever, and this analysis will show that through losing Rita and meeting another young woman who needs his help to escape from a group of men hunting her (offering Dexter a type of salvation for being unable to keep Rita safe) Dexter goes from taking care the well-being of anonymous society to taking care of a specific young woman because he feels strong emotions for her. For Dexter, it is not just about following Harry's Code anymore; his urge to save this young woman comes from his own innate moral instincts, showing that Dexter's emotions are more genuine and present than ever before.

Dexter's increasing awareness of his humanity is foregrounded in episode 3 of season 5, in which he kills a criminal named Boyd Fowler. It turns out Dexter was seen by a young woman who has been kept locked up in the next room – one of Boyd Fowler's victims. She is very weakened and frightened, and Harry (in Dexter's mind) tells him to kill her because she has seen the real Dexter and could turn him in to the police: "She's not your responsibility" (S5, E4, 4:20). However, Dexter ignores Harry (going against Harry's deontological Code and instead choosing another ethical framework), and steals medication from the police station to help her get better. He finds out her name is Lumen and that Boyd captured her, and that he was not working alone. Boyd was one of a group of men who captured, raped and killed a large number of young women. Lumen asks Dexter for help; she wants revenge on every one of these men by killing them. He initially tells her: "I want you to get on with your life" (S5, E5, 7:00), and that he wants to keep her away from the darkness in which he spends his . However, when he finds her trying to locate and kill these men on her own (which almost gets

her killed), he reluctantly agrees to help her; mostly, it seems, because he thinks this is how he can redeem himself. He believes it was his fault that Rita was killed, and by helping Lumen he can make amends: “As a husband, I failed. But I’m a very neat monster. I won’t make the same mistake again” (S5, E6, 3:50). The fact that Dexter is capable of feeling such a strong sense of guilt humanizes him, as well as the fact that he feels it is his moral duty to help an innocent. Apart from his wish to save Lumen, he identifies with her: “Lumen didn’t witness her mother’s murder, but she was born in blood. Like me. Some experiences are so big they change your DNA” (S5, E6, 30:55).

After they have killed one of the men who held Lumen captive, Dexter sends her back to the house he shared with Rita to make sure she remains safe. Lumen tells him: “Tonight I felt this... peace. [...] I don’t even have a name for what I’m feeling” (S5, E6, 45:15). Dexter thinks to himself: “I do. The dark passenger. I can’t get revenge for Rita’s death, but I can help Lumen avenge what was done to her” (S5, E6, 46:55). Dexter is surprised at how he has not only agreed to find these men together with Lumen to make himself feel better about Rita’s death; he actually wants to help her because what has happened to her is inherently wrong, according to Dexter’s innate utilitarian moral compass. He is not only operating on the basis of the Code here but also on the internal sense of morality he has slowly developed over the past seasons. Lumen asks him why he has chosen to help her, what is Dexter getting out of this? “I like knowing that the men who did this to you won’t do it to anyone else,” he replies (S5, E8, 29:25).

Dexter is confused about how Lumen fits in his world and in his life. He is still desperately searching for acceptance and understanding from another person: “Miguel couldn’t. My father couldn’t. Can anyone live with the truth of what I am? Is Lumen what will make me whole?” (S5, E8, 43:55) Unsurprisingly, a romantic relationship starts to grow between them. Yet again, the concept of forming a human bond makes Dexter wonder about

where he stands on the ethical spectrum that has monstrosity and humanity as its poles:

“Harry tried to mould me into the image of the monster he thought I was. He told me to flee human connection, so that became a way of life for me. But with Lumen...I’m someone different. In her eyes...I’m not a monster at all” (S5, E10, 47:50). He is determined to keep her safe. He sees her as the person he could share his life with for she is fully in the know about who and what he is and does not reject him outright. Acceptance is very important for Dexter, and his need for companionship humanizes him. This suggests that a lack of community and companionship through being ostracized for being different leads to precisely that “normal” people are afraid of: killers.

After they have managed to kill all men involved in hurting Lumen, she tells Dexter she has to leave him, because she no longer feels the need to kill. Her dark passenger has vanished, while Dexter’s never will. Dexter is truly emotional, close to tears. He tells her she is right and that he will carry her burden, which is crucial for his development, him saying that he will make his own life a bit more difficult to make hers easier, a form of self-sacrifice: “We’re not the same. [...] Don’t be sorry your darkness is gone. I’ll carry it for you. Always. I’ll keep it with mine” (S5, E12, 44:50).

Shortly after Lumen leaves, he talks to Astor, Rita’s daughter, who has been lashing out after Rita’s death. Dexter is struggling in his role as the only parent-figure she has left. She asks him if helping Lumen made Dexter feel better about Rita being murdered. Dexter only tells her that he loves her (and means it), as he thinks: “You can’t do one thing to make up for another. That’s what Jordan Chase [one of Lumen’s attackers] says. But he’s wrong, because we do that all the time. That is the way the world works. We try to make things right. Even me” (S5, E12, 51:15).

Dexter is left with mixed feelings as he, his sister and the rest of the police force come to celebrate Harrison's first birthday and Harrison blows out the candles on his cake whilst people tell Harrison to make a wish:

Lumen said I gave her her life back, a reversal of my usual role. Well, the fact is, she gave me mine back too. And I'm left not with what she took from me but with what she brought. Eyes that saw me, finally, for who I really am. And this certainty that nothing, nothing, is set in stone. Not even darkness. While she was here, she made me think, for the briefest moment, that I might even have a chance to be human. [...] But wishes, of course, are for children. (S5, E12, 51:45)

In dealing with the vigilante, the police (and Debra in particular) have their own moral codes to consider. This man (of course they are not aware it is Dexter) presents them with the difficult dilemma that the audience has been facing all along; they need to find the man who is killing a group of known criminals one by one, but are not entirely sure they want to bring the vigilante to a stop. They are struggling with what can be considered the difference between the law and justice. Jacques Derrida has defined the law as something that is man-made and prescriptive, whereas justice is a quality that transcends the law:

But justice is not the law. Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law... justice is not reducible to the law, to a given system of legal structures... A judge, if he wants to be just, cannot content himself with applying the law. He has to reinvent the law each time. If he wants to be responsible, to make a decision, he has not simply to apply the law, as a coded program, to a given case, but to reinvent in a singular situation a new just relationship... (16)

Deontological ethics presents a universalist morality (namely that the idea that killing is wrong functions as a universal law for all people under all circumstances, it is one's obligation to avoid to take any action that cannot be justified across the board) but *Dexter* shifts toward a more "quasi-universalist", utilitarian morality as described by Derrida in the quote where the particularities of intent and consequence come into play. Dexter's actions cannot be justified in universalist terms ('It is all right to kill a human being'), but it appears that one could do so in quasi-universalist terms: 'It is universally justifiable to kill particular individuals, namely those who murder other people indiscriminately, and whose killing existing agencies of the law have proven (for various reasons) unable to prevent'. This, I believe, is the (quasi-universalist) principle, or intuition, underpinning vigilante-narratives such as *Dexter* and other, similar films, some of which I have referred to, and would explain their popularity. (Olivier 55)

As the vigilante, *Dexter* is appealing, though mostly to American audiences. The concept of vigilantism is deeply ingrained in American popular culture, and most famously expressed through Charles Bronson's performance as the-good-citizen-turned-killer Paul Kersey in the recently rebooted *Death Wish* film franchise of the 1970s and 80s. Paul Robinson gives several examples of real-life vigilante groups⁷ in *The Moral Vigilante and Her Cousins in the Shadows* (2015). The concept of American vigilantism goes back to the Old West of the 1800s when disputes were resolved with gun violence, and "each generation encounters new but similar issues of popular will conflicting with established laws and traditions. As a consequence, the American people have never agreed totally on firm boundaries between the ultimate sovereignty of the people and the tyranny of the majority" (Culberson 3). Combined with the strong belief in rugged individualism and the desire to be able to defend oneself, the

⁷ Such as the San Francisco Vigilance Committee (founded in 1851), the Lavender Panthers (founded in 1973) or the Deacons for Defense and Justice (founded during the 1960s)

“law” of the survival of the fittest (and the (gun) violence that irrevocably comes with that) has become part of everyday life in many parts of the US.

Dexter’s identity as a vigilante is foregrounded as early on as season 2, when his victims are found at the bottom of the ocean. He overhears people discussing their approval of the Bay Harbor Butcher’s attempts to clean up the streets of Miami. Dexter then imagines the public thanking him for his action [killing a notorious serial killer]: “We Love Dexter,” “Protecting Our Children,” and “I’m Your Number One Fan” the banners proclaim as Dexter walks in slow-motion through swirling red, white and blue confetti. He is hailed as a savior by law-enforcement and the media. A wink at US flag-waving, the family-evoking will to vengeance gestures to the events of 9/11, and the sequence parodically links Dexter’s highly illegal activities with those of the President who has, like Dexter, pledged to “rid the world of evil-doers” by any means necessary.

(Blake 49)

Dexter’s decision to help Lumen avenge the harm done to her, is a portrayal of the strong white male defending a damsel in distress. As the success of the Death Wish franchise, but also film-series such as Clint Eastwood’s Dirty Harry have shown, this stereotype has appealed to American audiences for decades. American audiences make up a major part of the audience for *Dexter* all together. For context: 2,6 million Americans tuned into the season 4 finale (Hibberd n.p.). It is partly because Dexter fits the popular American vigilante stereotype that his actions are accepted (and even encouraged) by the predominantly American audience. It is also due to the fact that the audience has seen him develop from following the deontological Code to the letter to realizing that the Code is not always adequate when it comes to deciding what is the right thing to do. Harry, creator of the Code, discouraged Dexter from going after Lumen’s captors. The Code is meant to help society as a

whole, not any individual cases. Yet Dexter felt compelled to help Lumen, whom the show portrays as very relatable in her desire for revenge and her need to feel safe again, because of his growing innate moral compass, making him a relatable character as well by reflecting on his internal desire to help those who are in need.

Season 6: Saving Travis From His Dark Passenger

By protecting Lumen Dexter also took on the role of savior; in season 6, this aspect of his character is further developed when he attempts to save not an innocent victim, but a killer. Throughout this season Dexter is confronted with his feelings about faith and God, as is the audience with their own perspective on these topics in relation to ethics. Season 6 presents the audience with the question of the morality of religion. Dexter is not anti-religious but merely unfamiliar with the concept of human spirituality. Wrong and right are separated by hard facts and evidence for him, and not by believing in any kind of higher power that has determined a priori what is right and what is wrong. Dexter questions what religion means to other people, for he himself cannot understand it. Batista, one of Dexter's colleagues, tells him about believing in God that "it's all down to faith. It's something you can feel, not something you can explain" (S6, E1, 32:50). Dexter has developed much of his humanity over the years but still struggles with the idea of simply believing in something without proof. This holds true when Brother Sam, an ex-con who is now a priest, is asked by the police to assist on the case of the body with the snakes inside. Dexter cannot believe Brother Sam has truly changed his ways from the past and he struggles to understand that he shapes his life based on the idea that life is given direction by the will of God; Dexter views himself as an independent agent who will decide for himself (based on his Code) what the right decision is. When Brother Sam is attacked by a group of thugs because he had been protecting a young man who was once part of that group of thugs but wanted to leave, Dexter decides to help him and they strike up a friendship. During their talks Dexter concludes for himself that Brother Sam is truly a

reformed man, and it makes Dexter think about his own humanity and morality: why is he basing his decisions on a set of rules made by a man who was never able to truly understand him? Will following these rules make him capable of becoming human, or does he need to listen to his own moral compass?

The audience is also introduced to two men: an older professor, and a younger man who is perhaps his student. They approach a street vendor and quote a passage from the Bible to him; then the younger of the two gets a large rusty knife out of his bag and they kill the vendor. In that same first episode, the police find the intestines of the street vendor placed carefully onto a set of scales and later on find his body, washed up ashore, the stomach cavity filled with seven snakes. This is the first of what will later turn out to be a set of tableaux from the Bible, all re-enacted with human bodies. Dexter is unaware of the two men who are carrying out the religiously themed murders, but the audience frequently see them interact. The younger one, who is named Travis, is clearly under the control of the older professor named Gellar. When Travis visits his sister against professor Gellar's wishes, the professor burns himself to make Travis feel guilty, saying: "You see how I suffer for your sins?" (S6, E2, 38:35) Travis says he will behave from now on and asks for mercy. When they take a man prisoner (presumably to use him for their next tableau), Travis asks the professor if they really have to let him suffer so much, clearly uncomfortable with causing another person pain. The professor sternly tells him that the man needs to be purified or God will not be satisfied with their work.

The next tableau presented is that of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, where body parts of their victim are sewn onto the body parts of mannequins and put on four horses and let loose onto the streets of Miami. This is when the police figures out that the inspiration for the kills comes from the Book of Revelation. Dexter does research into the Bible and the concept of Christian religion and concludes he finds it to be quite unforgiving. He asks

Brother Sam: “But if faith makes people do such crazy bullshit, what’s the point of it?” “It’s human nature. Gotta believe in something,” Brother Sam replies (S6, E4, 19:45). Dexter finds out just how true that is when Harrison is taken into hospital with a burst appendix, and Dexter decides to give praying a try. The doctors tell him Harrison will be fine, and Brother Sam tells Dexter he cannot prove that God exists, but Dexter cannot prove He does not.

Meanwhile Travis has not been obeying professor Gellar’s orders; he went on a date with a woman and slept with her. He returns to the church that he and the professor use as a hideout to find that same young woman tied up: she will be the victim in their next tableau, as a punishment both for her and Travis.

This next tableau is where Dexter first sees Travis, watching as the police investigate the body (positioned as an angel, with spikes in her throat). He describes Travis as having a look of true faith on his face, and Dexter is fascinated by it. Dexter manages to find out who Travis is, and decides not to tell the police. He wants to have this Doomsday Killer to himself rather than in prison, so he can give Dexter the answers about faith and religion he is searching for. He manages to capture Travis, who tearfully tells Dexter that he is a failure in God’s eyes because he could never bring himself to do any of the killing: he only composes the tableaux, Gellar is the one who murders their victims. Dexter realizes Gellar is the one who is in charge and who fits the Code, and he decides to let Travis go: “It’s the choices we make when we reach a fork in the road that define who we are” (S6, E6, 3:15). Travis goes back to the church where Gellar has another woman tied up for their next tableau. She has a broken arm and is in pain, but when Travis asks Gellar for permission to get her some painkillers Gellar says no. Travis is clearly bothered by her pain and feels sorry for her.

When Brother Sam gets shot by one of the boys he took in and helped to get back into a normal life Dexter visits him in hospital, thinking: “If you’re lying there because of my dark passenger, I promise you, my dark passenger will make amends” (S6, E6, 10:40). Dexter is

clearly upset by the attack on Brother Sam. There is a conversation between him and Harry (again as a figment of Dexter's imagination) in his mind:

“Why is it so hard for you to admit? You care about Brother Sam,” Harry says.

“It doesn't make sense. Who is he to me?”

“A fellow traveler. He was a killer at one time.”

“But he found a new path, a path I could never take.”

“It's because he has traveled both roads that he understands the darkness in you and he sees the light. I wish I did. Maybe things could've been different.”

“What-ifs are a waste of time. I've accepted my dark passenger.”

“But there's more to you than that. Brother Sam sees it, and he's helped you see it. That's what he is to you.” (S6, E6, 18:45)

Brother Sam tells Dexter he knows who shot him, and that he has forgiven the boy. He asks Dexter to do the same. Dexter says he cannot do so, that he is desperate to take revenge. He struggles to understand why Brother Sam is not longing for revenge. Brother Sam tells him before he dies: “Just let it go. Can't live with the hate in your heart. Eat you up inside. We gotta find some peace in life. [...] Dexter, if you don't let that darkness go, it won't let go of you. Let it go. Let it go” (S6, E6, 38:13); but Dexter cannot do it even though he knows it would disappoint Brother Sam. He is so overcome with rage that he drowns the boy in the ocean when they see each other. Dexter's ethics are not those of forgiveness for the people who do not deserve it: he is unable to align with Sam's sense of morality. The audience supports Dexter killing the boy however, because the boy laughs when he hears Sam is dead; the viewer wants Dexter to take revenge on this killer who hurt Sam (who through his conversion has become an innocent).

Shortly after Dexter receives the news that Trinity's (the serial killer from season 4 who murdered Rita) wife and daughter are dead. It turns out the daughter committed suicide

and that the son, Jonah, killed his mother because she kept defending Trinity. Dexter goes over there, and he is accompanied by a vision of his dead serial killer brother Brian who encourages Dexter to kill Jonah. However, Dexter does not. He tells the vision version of Brian: “What is this was my son? [...] He’s not a monster” (S6, E7, 45:48). Brian calls him weak, but Dexter replies: “I’m stronger than you” (S6, E7, 46:22). By forgiving Jonah (which he does while thinking of what Brother Sam would do, basing his moral judgment of Jonah on the best example of ethics he has had even if Dexter himself could never fully subscribe to those ethics due to what he is), the vision of Brian disappears and Dexter feels some peace over Brother Sam’s death.

When Dexter finds out that Travis has let the young woman that he and Gellar had captured escape, Dexter wonders if this means that he has become more human, by telling Travis that there is a way out for him: “Is it possible that Brother Sam changed me? I didn’t kill Jonah when I had the chance. Did Sam somehow bring out a little bit of light in me? And did I pass on that light to Travis as well? Is that why he let Holly go?” (S6, E8, 10:20) Dexter goes to see Travis and tells him Travis did the right thing: he is trying to reassure Travis and to make him feel better, empathizing with Travis: a very human thing to do. It is also a new thing to do for Dexter, considering that up until this point he has always simply killed other killers, regardless of what motivations those killers might have had for their murders. With Travis, he is willing to acknowledge the importance of context. Dexter tells Travis he can take care of Gellar and that Travis will be safe, but Travis tells him they both need to stay away from Gellar. Travis is unwilling to talk because he is scared Gellar will hurt his sister. He first wants to get her to a safe place, and then he will do whatever Dexter says. However, they are too late; Gellar has already used Travis’ sister for his next tableau. When the police find her, Dexter immediately goes looking for Travis, worried about what has happened to him. He finds Travis in the abandoned church in chains, and Travis agrees to help Dexter: “I’ve gotten

Travis to trust me. In my own way, I'm going to eliminate a small bit of darkness and let some light in" (S6, E8, 49:15). He wants to help Travis get rid of his own dark passenger: Gellar. To the Harry in his head, Dexter explains that by killing Gellar, Travis will be set free and get a second chance: like the one Dexter never got. However, he eventually finds Gellar's body stuffed in a freezer in the church.

Dexter realizes that Travis is suffering from dissociative personality disorder and for a moment it halts Dexter's ethical development. Dexter thinks: "Travis' dark passenger is a part of him. He can't be saved from it any more than I can be saved from mine. I should've never listened to Brother Sam. [...] From now on, I'm only putting my faith in myself" (S6, E10, 6:30). Dexter decides he will not subscribe to Sam's utilitarian ethics like he did when he spared Jonah, but rather go back to following the Code. However, Dexter's moral compass ensures that when Travis releases a poisonous gas within the Miami Metro building he immediately acts: he gets everyone to safety. While doing so he inhales some of the gas himself, giving him nosebleeds and making him dizzy: he is putting his own safety on the line for his colleagues, and did it without even thinking about it, his own utilitarian ethics making his instincts kick in. He has now come to accept that even though he wanted to, he cannot save Travis for Travis will never stop. He puts Travis on his kill table, which Dexter prepared in the church. Dexter tells Travis that the people he knows who believe in God would never use their faith as an excuse for murder. This shows that even though Dexter himself does not affiliate himself with any religion, he is able to understand people might find a sense of safety in it, reflecting on Dexter's ability to sympathize. Dexter says: "Maybe there is a place for me in this world... just as I am. Light cannot exist without darkness. Each has its purpose. And if there's a purpose to my darkness, maybe it's to bring some... balance to the world." (S6, E12, 46:15) Just as Dexter stabs Travis, Debra enters the church and sees him kill Travis. "Oh God," Dexter says. (S6, E12, 48:15)

There is an interesting connection between Dexter and this season's main adversary Travis: if Dexter's Code is the one devised by Harry, Travis' Code is the Bible. Both of them believe to be acting in the name of justice; but if viewers of the show can perceive Dexter's Code as unethical, they can see Travis's as unethical as well. Both Dexter and Travis are ruled by a higher power (albeit an instinctive, biological one in Dexter's case (his urge to kill) rather than Travis' higher power which is spiritual) and importantly, by the need for a ritual as is also customary in Church. Believers have Holy Communion, the wine and host representative of body and blood; Dexter has his plastic-wrapped kill room with actual bodies and blood. It is during the ritual that Dexter's Dark Passenger takes over, and he

gets to be his sacred self: killer. However, because his sacred self is tethered to his secular self, Dexter's activity as killer can be seen as sanctifying his activity as a policeman: it circumscribes and declares holy the act of criminal apprehension. His kill is secular police work perfected, streamlined, and freed from the shackles of bureaucracy. During this time, his killing activity ushers him into transcendence. For a few moments, Dexter's sacred self is in control of his secular self, and the corresponding layers of deception he maintains in accordance with the code are jettisoned. (Pittman 178)

In a sense, Dexter's personality is split into his "human" (secular) side and his Dark Passenger (which is a part of him mentally, but Dexter believes he is not in full control of it and therefore considers it as an entity within himself). He needs to placate the Dark Passenger in a channeled way; if he does not do so, the Dark Passenger will strike when the need becomes too great and he might kill an innocent. Travis similarly suffers from a split personality. His Dark Passenger has manifested in the form of Professor Gellar, but was present long before he killed his mentor; it has simply taken on the form of the Professor to soothe Travis' conscience, to make it seem the ritualistic kills are someone else's

responsibility and Travis is a mere pawn in the plot. Travis clearly is mentally unstable and for a very long time he is unaware of his Dark Passenger, and therefore has never learned how to deal with its existence. Dexter has learned how to cope with its need for blood from Harry; but Travis' God is not corporeal and could never teach him how to channel his need to kill. The difficulty with the concept of ethics in this particular season is that in a way, there is no one to blame. Travis truly believes he has to perform his tableau kills because he is following God's order to bring about the end of days. He murders people who are perhaps in the eyes of Dexter and the audience innocents, but in Travis' eyes are guilty of being unethical. The street vendor whose stomach was filled with snakes for example was a reformed ex-convict who had been to prison for possession of drugs, and therefore worthy of dying in Travis' eyes. Another example was the girl in the angel costume, killed with spikes to her throat. She had slept with Travis, and therefore she was a whore and deserved to die according to Travis' logic.

Travis' ethics do not correspond with the moral majority of society, which consists more and more out of secularized individuals (as discussed in Stephen Johnson's article on the decline of religious affiliation in the U.S.), and this is where the main difference between Dexter and Travis comes in. Ethically an audience is willing to forgive Dexter for his Code is based on the idea that a target must have killed someone and continues to be a threat to society and could possibly hurt far more innocent people. They are much less willing to forgive Travis because his targets never hurt other people with their actions (the street vendor did not deal the drugs to other people) or because Travis hurt them himself in a way (the girl in the angel costume whose only unknowing mistake was having sex with Travis). The audience would consider Travis' idea of right and wrong a twisted and immoral kind of ethics. However, since Travis is clearly mentally ill, it is also difficult to condemn him. He does not kill out of a selfish purpose, but because he truly believes this is God's plan for him.

This is also why it is the ethically right choice to kill Travis, for Travis would never have stopped killing innocents as long as he had not brought about the end of times (and therefore had not yet satisfied God). Dexter was convinced he could save Travis, and in a sense to kill him was to save him. Travis' mental disorder would never be resolved without medication and professional help, but since he has murdered so many people he would never be able to actually receive that help. By killing Travis the show follows through with its religious theme of the season; death (and returning to God, as Travis believes will happen) is a type of mercy for Travis, and Dexter gives it to him. Dexter himself seems to be aware of this as well when he has Travis on his killing table: "Travis looks up to the ceiling and into the familiar face of a towering crucifix. As he says sleepily, "Hello, Jesus," Dexter moves into frame so that his face displaces that of Jesus. With outspread arms, Dexter pronounces a parody of the Christian Benediction: "I am the Father, I am the Son, the Serial Killer"" (Macleod 228). This is the moment Dexter takes responsibility for who and what he is. He acknowledges his status as a serial killer, but first and foremost calls himself a father and a son. These have now become the most important parts of Dexter's personality and his family takes precedence over his killing. His developing character arc has ensured his human side is now the largest part of him rather than The Dark Passenger, and the ethics he subscribes to now are his own rather than the Code.

Chapter 4: Family: The Relationship Between Loyalty and Ethics

The last two seasons of *Dexter* delve deeper into his background and family relationships, particularly with his adoptive father Harry and adoptive sister Debra. This chapter will be divided into three different sections, analyzing Dexter's relationship with Debra, Harry and with Dr. Vogel, a character introduced in season 8 as co-creator of the Code who sees herself as Dexter's spiritual mother. By doing so this thesis will reflect on how Dexter views the concept of family (and how his family perceives him and his urges) and how he is able to feel genuine emotion for them, reiterating Dexter's shifting position on the ethical spectrum from strict deontologists following the Code to a fully-developed human being with strong emotions who functions within a utilitarian ethical framework.

Season 7 and 8: Debra

In season 7 Dexter's relationship with Debra is put to the test. It picks up from the moment Debra sees him stab Travis. Debra is shocked and her first instinct is to grab her phone to call in the crime scene. Dexter stops her, saying he will lose everything if she does and that this was a one-time mistake. Debra reluctantly agrees to help him make it look like a suicide, but she is highly uncomfortable with it. The audience has come to know Debra as well as they know Dexter. Dexter has frequently described Debra as the most important person in his life, and she gets much screen time, in interaction with Dexter and by herself. Harry raised both Dexter and Debra, but she never knew about Dexter's killing urges or the Code. Instead, she identifies far more with the public persona of police officer that Harry displayed to the world. She is presented as one of the hardest-working officers at Miami Metro. She is not driven by an ambition to make promotion but to find out the truth about the cases on which she works. She is shown as a selfless character that gets emotionally invested in the cases she works and takes it as personal failure when she is unable to lock up an offender. By not turning Dexter in she has saved him, but the result is that she has compromised her deontological work ethic of

locking up every criminal on the streets. This is only further reinforced when she finds out Dexter is actually a serial killer. She finds out similarities between the Ice Truck Killer and Dexter's murder of Travis, and confronts Dexter: "Did you kill all these people?" "I did," Dexter admits. "Are you a serial killer?" Dexter says: "Yes" (S7, E1, 51:10).

When Dexter explains that he only kills people who slip through the cracks of the justice system, effectively describing himself as a vigilante rather than as a killer, Debra walks out saying he is himself one of those people. Debra's ethics are deontological: there is only good and evil. In her line of thinking, there is no space for an ethical spectrum. This idea (which has formed so much of her personality and motivation) is put to the test when her brother seemingly falls into the latter of the two categories. Debra does what she always does: she tries to find a solution. She wants to treat Dexter like an addict and keep an eye on him 24/7, so he might conquer the addiction. Dexter is skeptical, for he has never been able to control his urges. Yet Debra firmly believes in her ability to keep him on the right path. She has never failed before at what she does, and she will not fail now: "In spite of all this, I still believe that there's good in you. Maybe more than is in most people" (S7, E2, 14:55). Dexter tries his best. He calls Debra when he feels the urge to kill: "I promised Deb" (S7, E2, 45:50). She comes to him, and Dexter tells her he is a monster as Harry always told him and she needs to get him off the streets. Debra's prioritizing Dexter above her own ethical instincts and Dexter prioritizing Debra over his innate killing urges show that family relationships and the emotions that come with them clearly impact a character's moral judgment, revealing that good and evil are not objective categories.

So far the audience has experienced the show from Dexter's perspective, for whom it is far easier to dismiss the kills he makes in the name of serving justice – Debra's definition of justice is very different from Dexter's, however, and it forces the audience to consider Dexter's actions from a different perspective. Debra's own personal code is the opposite of

Dexter's: "Debra's belief in law and order is rock solid. Almost everything about her is squeaky clean and by the book, a tribute to her conviction in the justice system. [...] While Dexter chooses to kill as a means of managing his mounting distress with life, Debra chooses one of society's most popular and palatable outlets" (Clyman 120). This is why Debra tells Dexter that they could beat this "addiction" together – there is no other viable outcome for her, she needs to get Dexter aligned with what she believes is the right thing to do.

She is forced to look at what actually is the right thing to do when Dexter tells her there is a criminal named Speltzer whom he has been tracking. Speltzer is planning his next kill, and Dexter wants to prevent it. Debra is angry with Dexter for tracking a potential victim, but goes to Speltzer's house nonetheless. She finds a dead girl in his house and is attacked by Speltzer himself. Dexter manages to knock Speltzer out (who eventually escapes). She tells Dexter: "You were right. If I had let you do things your way, then Speltzer would be dead and that girl would be alive. But he's out there, free to kill again." [...] "I hate it, but I get it." "So you accept it?" Dexter asks. "I understand it. I understand that it might be a necessary evil," Deb replies. (S7, E3, 50:50) Even though at this point Dexter feels Debra accepts him for who he is, Debra is struggling immensely to come to terms with the fact that Dexter is a killer and Harry tells Dexter not to be so sure she actually does accept him. Debra confronts Dexter about earlier kills he made, criminals who were on the police's radar: "What happened to you only taking care of people that slip through the cracks of the justice system? You can't rip a case wide open so that it conveniently falls into your fucking lap!" (S7, E5, 15:15) He promises he will never take a case from her again, but she knows she can never be certain if he is lying or not. She cannot accept what he does, for it goes against her deeply ingrained ethical standards. Dexter says: "From here on out, I'll face the depths by myself" (S7, E5, 54:10): he knows now Debra will never be able to accept him for what he is, or support.

Meanwhile, Dexter becomes infatuated with a young woman named Hannah McKay. She was the killing companion of a serial killer named Wayne Randall but managed to get immunity from the police. To Dexter, she is the ultimate woman, for “she isn’t drawn to my darkness like Lila, or blind to it like Rita, and she doesn’t need it like Lumen. She accepts both sides of me” (S7, E7, 26:50). Debra is deeply angered by Dexter’s connection with Hannah. She believes Hannah herself committed some of the crimes Wayne Randall was convicted of and got away with it, which goes against Debra’s feelings of justice. To make matters more complicated, Debra has realized in therapy that she herself is actually also in love with Dexter. Dexter’s crush on Hannah does not only challenge Debra’s ethics, but also hurts her feelings, clouding her judgment. This is where Debra shifts into murkier ethical territory. She asks Dexter to kill Hannah, basically ordering a murder and shifting even further away from her deontological ethical outlook on life. She does so presumably because the police are unable to put her in prison, but also because on a sub-conscious level, Debra feels she has to compete with Hannah for Dexter’s love. When Dexter refuses to kill Hannah (his personal motivation of course his infatuation with Hannah) the show wants the audience to sympathize with Debra and to feel like Debra was betrayed. This is partly because the audience has always portrayed Debra as a very lovable, often relatable character, but also because Debra gets so much screen time on her own away from Dexter. The audience has seen her suffer from the knowledge Dexter is a killer far more than Dexter (she is now taking copious amounts of anti-anxiety medication) and the show wants to steer its audience towards the sentiment that hat Dexter should make amends for the situation he has put Debra in by making her part of his secret. Dexter starts to doubt Hannah when Debra is in a car accident. It turns out Debra is not the only jealous woman in this scenario: Hannah tried to poison Debra to get her out of the way. When Dexter finds out, he gives Debra evidence (of a murder in which Hannah actually committed the act) necessary to put Hannah in prison: “As long as

she's free, you're not safe" (S7, E11, 51:30). Debra arrests Hannah and Dexter visits her in prison, saying he misses her but he needed to do this to keep Deb safe: he is acknowledging Debra's importance in his life, reassuring both Debra and the audience. Soon after, Hannah manages to escape.

Debra's shift from deontological ethics towards a more utilitarian one culminates in the season finale. Dexter's secret identity as the Bay Harbor Butcher has been uncovered by LaGuerta. Dexter lures her to a shipping container where he plans to kill her. However, Debra followed him and plans to stop him. LaGuerta yells at Debra to "put him down" (S7, E12, 50:20) and Dexter says she is right and that Debra is a good person. He drops his knife as he tells her: "It's OK" (S7, E12, 51:00). Debra shoots, but she shoots LaGuerta instead of Dexter, and then breaks down in tears whilst holding LaGuerta's body.

Dexter's life is back on track when season 8 starts: "A better person would feel bad about LaGuerta's death. But the truth is it solved all my problems. It's gotten me back on track" (S8, E1, 5:30). Debra is the opposite of back on track. She has quit the force and has not been in contact with her new boss (who runs a private investigation firm). Dexter is unable to reach her. In one scene from episode 1, Debra is shown doing drugs in a motel room with a man who is clearly involved in criminal business.

Dexter decides to find Debra, feeling uncomfortable about her disappearance (showing his care for her), but does not consider the actual reason of why she decided to leave: after all, Deb killing LaGuerta was a clean and easy solution for him, but he does not consider how it has affected Debra. He eventually tracks Deb down, but she does not want to talk to him at all, angry at his arrival: "I shot the wrong person in that trailer" (S8, E1, 20:40).

Debra's personal ethical integrity was compromised the moment Dexter asked her to help set the church where he killed Travis on fire, and her shooting LaGuerta is a culmination of guilt for her. Debra never really had a choice but to go against her own deeply ingrained

ethical beliefs. In her article “Emotional Intelligence and Familial Relationships”, Diane Williamson states:

There is no magical, moral super-glue that holds families together, and yet these relationships do often seem to be different from other relationships: either we end up valuing them more or we feel more frustrated and ambivalent about them. It is this quality that makes them special sites for the development of self-understanding. It also makes the relationships and our behavior more important to the other person, our brothers, sisters, parents, or children. They need us and we need them, not just for care (in all of its varieties), but for our personal development of happiness and self-understanding. If we choose to ignore these relationships, we are choosing to ignore the specificity of our duties to promote the happiness of others and our own perfection. (Williamson 341)

Debra's options were to shoot Dexter, shoot LaGuerta or walk away. Debra and Dexter's bond is a vital part of Debra's life: she loves him more than she loves herself. Her loyalty to him stems from her belief that she has always needed him in her life, not just for care as Williamson writes but indeed for her own personal development and happiness. She is still unable to acknowledge that at this point, Dexter is halting both her development as a human being and her happiness. Therefore, shooting him was never a viable option. Neither was walking away: she would leave LaGuerta in Dexter's hands knowing exactly what Dexter would do to her. Her ethics would not allow her to leave LaGuerta in that position. In Dexter's hands (known for his tendency to draw out the kills he performs) LaGuerta would be under considerable emotional duress. Debra knows what it is like to be in the hands of a serial killer, and by shooting LaGuerta she would spare LaGuerta that experience. It was a terrible decision to make, however, and she rightfully blames Dexter for forcing her into that position.

After their confrontation Dexter has no choice but to give up on trying to get Deb back for now. He starts to investigate the man he saw in Debra's motel room when Dexter first managed to find her. The man is a criminal and part of a large network of drug dealers. Dexter discovers someone is planning to kill him. Fearing for Debra's safety he goes to warn her. She says she does not care, that bad people like her deserve to die: "I'm not lost, I'm in some shitty fucking hell which is exactly what I deserve" (S8, E1, 45:05). She feels that the position she is currently in is her punishment. Debra's ideas on ethics (there is only good or evil) have left her believing that she is now evil and a murderer, and she has always believed murderers deserve to suffer. She does not think about it any different now it concerns herself: she judges herself as harshly as she would any other killer.

When Dexter kills the criminal Debra has been staying with, she blows up at him and tells him to leave, since she is starting to realize her loyalty to Dexter does not have to be without limits: "All my life I thought that I needed you, that I couldn't survive without you, fuck! Fuck! It was the other fucking way around. It was the other way around" (S8, E1, 45:50). Debra has gone beyond her own limit, attempting (and failing) to change her own ethical standards to be able to have Dexter in her life. Dexter admits she is correct: "Debra was right. I was wrong. It's me who is lost. A better person would let her go, but I don't know how. Without her, I don't know who I am anymore" (S8, E1, 48:00).

Season 8: Dr. Evelyn Vogel

The audience first meets neuropsychologist Evelyn Vogel in episode 1 of season 8 when she is brought in to assist on a case. From the start she seems very interested in Dexter and in the same episode she gives him a folder, containing drawings Dexter made when he was a child. He is shaken up and goes after her. She tells him he cannot kill her: "I don't fit Harry's code" (S8, E1, 49:40). It turns out Harry asked for Vogel's help when Dexter's urges started to manifest, and together they drew up the Code. Vogel thinks of herself as Dexter's spiritual

mother, indirectly claiming responsibility for how Dexter developed and turned out as a killer. She seems to have no trouble with what he is; instead she is fascinated with him and even seems proud of him and how he has responded to the Code. Dexter feels somewhat uncomfortable with the way she sees him: “You keep talking about me like I’m some alternate species. Like I’m less than human.” “On the contrary. [...] I believe psychopaths are not a mistake of nature. They’re a gift,” Vogel replies. “A gift?” “They’re alpha wolves, who help the human race survive long enough to become civilized. An indispensable demographic” (S8, E2, 37:15). Whereas Harry felt there was no other option for Dexter than the Code and was uncomfortable with it, Dr. Vogel is fascinated with him and Dexter cannot do wrong in her eyes, going beyond the idea that the Code is a necessary evil as it was for Harry.

Dexter asks her why she has come to him now, and Vogel tells him she needs his help; one of her former clients is threatening her. The presence of Harry in Dexter’s mind suggests helping Vogel, for she in turn might be able to help Dexter with Deb. When they track down a suspect who might be stalking Vogel, a hitman who was sent to kill the man Debra was with turns up dead. He tells Vogel he will help her as soon as he has ensured Debra is safe. Vogel seems fascinated by this: “People like you don’t usually seek an emotional connection” (S8, E2, 23:50). It turns out it was Debra who killed the hitman. Dexter knows it is his fault she has spiraled, and feels guilty: “I’ve destroyed Deb. She’s gone. You were wrong about me,” he tells Vogel. “I’m a mistake” (S8, E2, 52:30). Vogel hugs him and tells him he is perfect, an example of how Dexter cannot do wrong for her. She is fascinated by his emotional reaction to Deb’s distress: “You really feel bad, don’t you?” (S8, E3, 15:30)

This conversation to a large extent determines how the audience perceives Dexter. Vogel tells Dexter he is special and that no psychopath should be able to feel such strong emotions as he does. Such a representation of events is meant to sooth the audience’s

conscience: Dexter is the protagonist of the show and throughout the series he has been represented sympathetically; the show's producers can assume that their audience will be fond of Dexter and do not want to see anything bad happen to him, but are also struggling with Debra's emotional turmoil. Vogel's words reassure the audience that it is not ethically wrong to sympathize with Dexter: after all, he is not just any psychopath according to Vogel (who is shown as an expert in her field, making her judgment of Dexter believable and trustworthy).

The show reassures the audience that it is not wrong to sympathize with Dexter when Debra finally agrees to meet Dexter for dinner: if Debra can forgive Dexter for what he has put her through, so can the audience. He asks Vogel to help Debra work through her trauma (again, never asking Debra if she actually wants Vogel's help). Vogel agrees, but warns Dexter he might never be able to return in Debra's life. Dexter selfishly cannot agree to this; he needs Debra. Vogel tells him that due to him being a psychopath, he cannot understand the concept of love; he only needs Debra in his life not because he loves her but because he loves what she does for him. Dexter disagrees; he knows he loves Debra, and "Vogel can go to hell" (S8, E4, 40:50) with her theory. Shortly after Debra finds out Harry committed suicide because of a kill Dexter performed, and when they are in the car together she drives them into a lake. Someone pulls Debra out, and after a moment of hesitation she goes back under the water to also free Dexter from the car. Dexter is hurt by what Debra did and shuts himself off from both her and Vogel. However, when Vogel is kidnapped Debra comes to him for help. He asks her why she pulled him out of the car. "Because I couldn't imagine my life without you in it," she replies (S8, E5, 18:50). They manage to find Vogel and Dexter kills the man who kidnapped her, with both Vogel and Debra present. Vogel asks Debra if she is okay. "I'm good," Debra replies (S8, E5, 42:50). From here on out, Dexter and Debra's bond is somewhat repaired, but not thanks to Dexter. He never allowed Debra the time she needed to work through the trauma and to come to her own conclusions as to whether she wanted

Dexter in her life after he destroyed her ethical integrity. His motivations for wanting Debra to heal are mostly about himself, as Dr. Vogel accused him of: he is using Debra as means to an end here (ethically unsound) rather than giving her the opportunity to be autonomous about her decisions.

Dexter has managed to find out that the man who is after Vogel is her own son. As a child, he displayed the same urge to kill as Dexter did. When Vogel tried to teach him the Code, he did not respond to it: once again proving that the Code is not universal, that it is a personal tool for Dexter (who already has a moral compass of his own) and clearly cannot be applied in general. When her son ultimately murders Vogel, Dexter is distraught. He holds her body as he starts to cry, promising he will make things right (“right” meaning of course Dexter’s own personal idea of justice): “The last time I was in a pool of my mother’s blood I was too young to do anything about it, but I’m no longer a child” (S8, E11, 4:40). He gets the chance to kill Vogel’s son but does not, instead decides to let Debra arrest the man. For Dexter he finally lets Debra’s ethics prevail over his own: this time he is able to understand that there could be another solution than murder. This is when the presence of Harry tells Dexter: “I never thought this day would come. You don’t need me anymore” (S8, E11, 46:50). He disappears from Dexter’s mind: Dexter no longer needs a visual representation of his conscience through Harry, since his moral conscience has now been fully internalized, making Dexter an actual human being. However, his decision to let Debra arrest Vogel’s son goes awry when Vogel’s son shoots Debra. She ends up in the hospital. Dexter visits her and breaks down: “Ever since you found out who I am... I’ve screwed up your life, Deb.” “It’s not yours to screw up, Dexter. I am responsible for my life, do you hear me? I don’t want you to feel guilty about this. I don’t want you to feel guilty about anything, you hear me? You were meant to be happy. So you need to go fucking be happy” (S8, E12, 14:00). After this conversation Debra suffers a stroke and is put on life support, never to recover. Dexter does

kill Vogel's son now, believing that he was wrong to think it could be any other way and that his own idea of justice will always be the only way of solving these situations. He apologizes to Debra, for the first time truly understanding (now that he has become more human than ever before) what he has done to Debra and how she has suffered from his decisions: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But I can't leave you like this. I'm your big brother" (S8, E12, 42:15). He takes her off life support before taking her body out onto the ocean, where a massive storm is coming. "I destroy everyone I love. And I can't let that happen to Hannah, to Harrison. I have to protect them from me," (S8, E12, 49:25) he thinks as he sails into the storm. Debra's death has made Dexter realize more than anything else in his life before this moment ever could have that he will never be able to keep everyone safe. The deontological rules of the Code made him believe he could if he simply followed those rules, but Dexter has learned that life and society are far too complex to be categorized in a set of rules. He understands now that the Code can never guarantee everyone's safety. By involving Debra in his secret life, she died; and according to his utilitarian moral compass the best solution for everyone is for Dexter to disappear.

Harry

Despite his death, Harry is present in Dexter's mind throughout the show. He was Dexter's main parental figure and Dexter looked up to him. However, it becomes clear Harry is not as perfect as Dexter once thought. Harry was convinced Dexter would never be able to develop a sense of ethics on his own, and that is why he taught Dexter the deontological Code.

However, it is through realizing that Harry was not the role model Dexter thought he was and that Harry was wrong in saying that Dexter could never grow a moral compass of his own that Dexter is further enabled to develop his own utilitarian ethics independently from Harry's influence. This ultimately leads to the culmination of Dexter's arc, where he becomes as human as the "normal" people around him.

As early on as season 2, Dexter figures out his mother Laura was a police informant and had a romantic relationship with Harry (whilst Harry was married). Dexter struggles to come to terms with this, but eventually does because there is no one else in his life he can look up to. Harry is the only father Dexter ever knew. The Harry the audience is introduced to is a construct made up by Dexter's mind, influenced by Dexter's memories of Harry, and this is also what makes their relationship so ambiguous. From the few scenes the audience sees where Harry is actually alive (in flashbacks), it is impossible to determine whether the ideals and thoughts the Harry in Dexter's mind expresses correspond to the ones held by the living Harry.

Harry has always been Dexter's moral compass and spiritual guide: "Dexter's life has been about being a Morgan. But this identity was superimposed on a boy found in a shipping container sitting in a pool of blood. Harry Morgan was not only Dexter's father, he was his maker" (Foster 195). Dexter has based all the knowledge he has of himself on what he was told by Harry: different, monstrous, a killer. Their relationship is difficult because Dexter has placed Harry on a pedestal. Harry seems to feel much more ambiguous about his adoptive son, even committing suicide over seeing what he himself has created in Dexter by providing him with the Code, which can be considered a rejection of the Code itself. Dexter feels guilt over Harry's death, but the show itself is more ambiguous about who is to blame. The audience learns that Harry played a key role in making Dexter into what he has become. It was a major gamble to teach Dexter the Code: neither Harry nor Dr. Vogel could predict how and if Dexter would respond to it and if he would continue to do so without their vigilant monitoring. The fact that Dexter needed to be monitored already indicates the Code is not an internalized ethical code: it was imposed on Dexter, rather than brought forth out of his own conscience. In his essay on Dexter and the question of luck, Daniel Malloy argues that Harry simply got lucky: had Dexter not managed to learn from his interactions with the world

around him and from there on out develop his own ideas about ethics, Harry could have created a killing machine, with all the knowledge and tools necessary to commit mass murder (156). Malloy is right: it is because Dexter does have his own internal moral compass that has been developed out of a utilitarian framework that he is able to follow the Code. Killers like Miguel or the Brain Surgeon did not respond to the Code because they do not have that same internal moral compass, and this shows that Dexter is a very different killer than they are.

The Code is based on Harry's own ideas about morality. The show continuously tells its audience that this was the best option for Dexter; by making Harry a deeply flawed character the show also comments on the character's choices. Harry uses his own ideas on ethics and justice to impose on Dexter rather than society's prevailing moral standards. Harry is dictating the concept of right and wrong, a very deontological approach to ethics:

Here we have a mentor, who is not only deciding the agenda for his learner's development, but imposing his own version of a moral framework upon the whole learning relationship. Harry is an extreme, but nevertheless, potent illustration of why mentors must avoid imposing their own values on their learners. As soon as we do this, we not only imply that our code is the correct one and we are the sole arbiters of right and wrong, but we also become more directly responsible for the learner's consequent actions. (Gravells and Wallace 53)

In a published academic debate, the philosophers Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel (1976) formulate what they call the "problem of moral luck." According to these philosophers, people tend to intuitively connect the concept of responsibility to the concept of voluntary action. Blame is assigned based on whether an agent was acting on their own behalf without coercion from an outside influence and whether an agent was fully aware of the consequences of their actions. People tend to be judged less harshly if they acted without

being fully aware of the consequences (or if the action was an accident), were coerced into the action or had to deal with an external circumstance out of their control. Examples of this are Dexter and his brother Brian. They were both in that shipping container in which their mother was murdered. Dexter became an avenger of innocents, as he likes to perceive himself, whereas Brian grew up to be just another serial killer, murdering precisely those innocents Dexter is trying to protect. The difference between the two of them (and Dexter's "moral luck") is Harry, who took Dexter in after their mother's murder whereas Brian was sent into foster care. Harry's choice to teach Dexter the Code is definitely an ethically questionable one. It is due to the fact that Dexter has ingrained the Code into his entire being and managed to develop his own ethics (which partly correspond to those held by the majority of society) that he has not become just another mass murderer. The image of Harry in Dexter's mind is exactly that: an image, a manifestation of Dexter's own conscience. It is Dexter himself who tells him what to do, and the conflicts he has with Harry are really conflicts within himself. The choices Dexter has made are founded on the Code, but ultimately come from his own moral compass. Whether Harry was right or wrong in teaching Dexter the Code will always be a grey area consisting of the "what if" question: if Dexter had been a different person with a different kind of personality (and different sense of ethics), would he still have responded well to the Code? Dexter has undoubtedly made massive mistakes, and his treatment of Debra might be the biggest one. However, Dexter does learn from the mistakes he makes. Debra's death is the catalyst for Dexter to leave civilization so that no one will ever have to suffer from his choices again. His biggest regret is not the murders he has committed but rather how the people he loved have suffered from being who he is: Dexter's moral behavior is based on whether his actions will hurt the people he loves. In a sense the show has come full circle in the season finale when he sits in a cabin at a lumberyard by himself, without any human contact. In the first season he was a part of society, pretending to be human. Now he has

opted out of that society precisely because he knows what it is like to feel human, with all the pain that comes with leaving the people he loved behind: “As much as I may have pretended otherwise, for so long all I’ve wanted was to be like other people, to feel what they felt... Now that I do, I just want it to stop” (S8, E12, 40:45). He no longer wants to let the people around him suffer because he is what he is; he knows that the only way to do that is to exile himself so he is the only one suffering, and that might be the most human and ethically sound decision Dexter has made throughout the show.

Conclusion

In this thesis, the topics of friendship, vigilantism and family in relation to the concept of ethics in the TV show *Dexter* have been discussed in detail in order to prove that the show aligns itself with the ethical theory of utilitarianism.

The premise of the show in itself (a killer who murders other killers) could be considered unethical or at least highly sensationalistic and morally dubious.

Whilst *Dexter* does try to entertain its viewers (like all television shows,) its complex representation of the moral dilemmas faced by the central characters that carry the show's season's has ensured that the TV show offers viewers more than just entertainment. For a show that has the concept of murder at its forefront, remarkably little blood or gore is actually shown; this is because the goal of *Dexter* is not to let its audience mindlessly revel in horrific murders. Through its ethical themes it actually has a message to convey to its audience about the complexity of making moral judgments within modern Western society.

Dexter's writers decided to present a sympathetic, yet ethically questionable protagonist, who lets viewers in on his thought process (and his moral Code) every time he has to make a decision. It is easy to sympathize with a man who has a complex personality like Dexter, who struggles to justify his own actions and feels both remorse and guilt. Yet the audience is also constantly reminded of the fact that Dexter is not just the clumsy, somewhat awkward father next door, but in the eyes of most members of society, a dangerous serial killer. It is because of this constant reminder of what he is in the eyes of mainstream society, whilst also showing Dexter as a good friend and devoted family man, that the show confronts its viewers with an apparently unsolvable ethical conundrum: how to justify their sympathetic interest in a murderous protagonist. In presenting the audience with such a paradox, they must reflect on their own ideas about what it means to be "right" or "wrong" and whether such concepts can even exist outside of subjective experience and social context.

This thesis has shown that in *Dexter* there is no such thing as "good" and "evil" without an in-between, and that this line of thinking about morality is too rigid. Rather, the show considers ethics to consist of a spectrum between those two concepts of good and bad, and as a character Dexter constantly shifts within the grey area on that ethical spectrum. To judge Dexter as either purely good or purely evil is an impossible task, and by making it impossible the show comments on real-life ethical dilemmas (for *Dexter* shows a scenario that, as argued in chapter 1, could very well exist within the real world of the viewers) and how these dilemmas could (and should, according to the stance the show's writers seem to take) be considered.

This thesis has reflected on how this show has tried to teach its audience the importance of motivation when making ethical decisions. The writers have made Dexter a character driven by his ingrained need to kill, but it is not that premise that defines him: it is rather the choices he makes, and he has attempted to make the world around him a better place (even if this ambition to do so came about out of pure necessity).

By showing Dexter as the man who could live next door, with his lovable traits as well as his mistakes, *Dexter* has challenged its audience to consider ethics beyond the safety of their own couch. It is easy enough to turn the television off – but because the show is so recognizable in its setting and characterization for many of its viewers, it has sparked debate and conversation on the concept of morality in real life. Throughout the years audiences have seen Dexter develop from one of society's outsiders (utterly confused by the concepts of emotions and relationships) to a part of that very same society. He has always wondered what it would be like to be "human" (for Dexter, this means not only being able to understand emotions but to actually feel them) and after 8 years, he has become "human".

Like the character, *Dexter* was built on a type of Code: the audience first started watching with their own ideas about right and wrong, based on the moral code of the society

they live in. To sympathize with a serial killer is most likely not part of that code: but the show has challenged that notion, showing that moral judgment is very much based on interpretation. Dexter's constant repositioning on the ethical spectrum (from a strict follower of the Code to a more context-based approach to ethical dilemmas) has invited the audience to constantly think and re-adjust their own ideas about that spectrum. The choices Dexter makes and the ethical implications they have shown that the TV show *Dexter* can be categorized as ascribing to utilitarianism, as the analyses in this thesis have shown.

In his book *Beyond Good and Evil* (1990), Nietzsche states: "moralities too are only a sign-language of the emotions" (Kerruish 11). Morality, Nietzsche argues, hinges on interpretation and intent rather than only on a set of rules. Deciding what constitutes as a "good person" is determined by how one intends their actions to come across, as well as how others interpret those actions. The show goes beyond that notion by indicating that the concept of the "good person" does not exist. Whilst generally a society does have a large prevailing moral code (such as the notion that killing innocents is bad, or helping the poor is good), everyone's own personal ethics differ when it comes to the spectrum based in between those two opposites of good and bad. The show suggests that utilitarianism therefore is most workable as a theoretical framework when analyzing *Dexter*, because it highlights the importance of motivation and context, and this is reflected throughout Dexter's arc from killer following a deontological Code to a fully-fledged human being who has developed his own utilitarian moral compass.

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Appendix A - Character list

The characters in this list are organized by season (first appearance) and relevance - not all characters who have ever featured on *Dexter* are mentioned in this appendix, only those who are necessary to mention in order to understand the plotlines of the series (a synopsis of each season can be found in appendix B).

Season 1

Dexter Morgan - the protagonist and narrator of the series. Forensics expert and blood spatter analyst with the Miami Metro Police Force.

Debra Morgan - Dexter's younger foster sister and biological child of Harry Morgan. Also works at Miami Metro Police Force.

Harry Morgan - Dexter's adoptive and Debra's biological father. Former detective at Miami Metro. Committed suicide when Dexter was 19. Creator of the Code, which is used by Dexter to who to kill.

Rita Bennett - Dexter's girlfriend (wife from season 4 onwards).

Cody and Astor Bennett - Rita's children from a previous marriage.

Paul Bennett - Rita's ex-husband and father of Cody and Astor. Used to beat Rita.

James Doakes - sergeant at Miami Metro. Always had suspicions something was off about Dexter and finds out about his killings. Is ultimately killed by Dexter's former lover Lila.

Angel Batista - detective (and sergeant from season 3 onwards) at Miami Metro. Calls himself one of Dexter's friends.

Maria LaGuerta - lieutenant (captain from season 6 onwards) at Miami Metro.

Brian Moser - the main antagonist from season 1 (the Ice Truck Killer), who killed prostitutes and also tried to kill Debra. Dexter's biological brother.

Laura Moser - Dexter and Brian's biological mother. Murdered in a shipping container whilst her two young sons watched.

Season 2

Frank Lundy - a high ranking FBI agent who has spent years of his life trying to catch the Trinity Killer (see season 4).

Lila West/Tournay - Dexter's lover in season 2. Main antagonist of season 2.

Santos Jimenez - one of the men responsible for the murder on Laura Moser.

Season 3

Miguel Prado - main antagonist of season 3 (along with George King). Assistant District Attorney. Befriends Dexter and becomes Dexter's partner in crime.

Ramon Prado - Miguel's brother and county sheriff.

Oscar Prado - Miguel's younger brother. Drug user who was killed by Dexter.

Ellen Wolf - defense attorney and main rival of Miguel. Murdered by Miguel.

Freebo - drug dealer and murderer. Killed by Dexter.

George King - other main antagonist of season 3, also known as The Skinner.

Season 4

Arthur Mitchell - main antagonist of season 4, also known as The Trinity Killer. Befriended by Dexter. Ultimately kills Rita Bennett.

Sally Mitchell - Arthur's wife.

Rebecca Mitchell - Arthur's daughter.

Jonah Mitchell - Arthur's son.

Christine Hill - Arthur's daughter.

Joey Quinn - cop at Miami Metro.

Harrison Morgan - Dexter's infant son.

Season 5

Lumen Pierce - survivor of rapist-serial killer Boyd Fowler and his friends.

Stan Liddy - main antagonist of season 5. Corrupt narcotics cop who is hired by Quinn to look into Dexter. Ultimately killed by Dexter.

Jordan Chase - other main antagonist of season 5. Highly regarded author and motivational speaker. Secretly runs a secret group of men which participate in the rape and murder of women.

Boyd Fowler - one of the men working for Chase and raping and killing women.

Cole Harmon - one of the men working for Chase and raping and killing women.

Dan Wendell - one of the men working for Chase and raping and killing women.

Alex Tilden - one of the men working for Chase and raping and killing women.

Season 6

Travis Marshall - main antagonist of season 6, also known as the Doomsday Killer. Suffers from dissociative identity disorder.

Professor James Gellar - Travis' former teacher who was killed by Travis. However, in Travis' mind, the professor is still alive.

Brother Sam - a reformed criminal and born-again Christian, friend of Dexter's.

Nick - one of Brother Sam's protégées, murders Brother Sam and is killed by Dexter.

Mike Anderson - detective at Miami Metro.

Jamie Batista - Angel's younger sister and Harrison's babysitter.

Louis Greene - intern at Miami Metro and Jamie's boyfriend.

Steve and Beth Dorsey - religious fanatics who team up with Travis.

Season 7

Hannah McKay - former accomplice of Wayne Randall and Dexter's romantic interest.

Wayne Randall - serial killer and former romantic interest of Hannah McKay.

Isaak Sirko - high-ranking member of the Koshka Brotherhood (Ukrainian crime syndicate), main antagonist of season 7.

Hector Estrada - leader of the three men who murdered Dexter's mother.

Sal Price - investigative writer who is writing a book about Wayne Randall and suspects Hannah McKay was more involved than she lets on.

Season 8

Dr. Evelyn Vogel - neuropsychiatrist specializing in child psychopaths. Co-architect of the Code.

Oliver Saxon - the main antagonist of season 8, also known as the Brain Surgeon. Dr. Vogel's estranged psychopathic son and serial killer.

Zach Hamilton - teenager who has the same uncontrollable killing urge as Dexter does.

Becomes Dexter's protégée.

Appendix B: Season synopses

This appendix contains a synopsis for every season of *Dexter*.

Season 1

By day, Dexter Morgan works as a blood spatter analyst for the Miami Metro Police Department. By night, he is a serial killer with uncontrollable killing urges, caused by the traumatic murder of his mother that occurred before his eyes when he was three years old. He was adopted by Officer Harry Morgan, who noticed Dexter's murderous urges from a young age, and realized killing animals would never be enough for Dexter. Harry designed 'The Code', a set of rules by which Dexter now lives. Only to kill murderers and violent criminals who have escaped justice deserve to meet their end at Dexter's hands, and he is adept at gathering evidence for their guilt and killing them in neatly, plastic-wrapped rooms, disposing of the bodies at sea. He only keeps a blood sample of each victim on a glass slide, hidden away in a box in his apartment. No one else knows about Dexter's nightly activities, not even his foster sister Debra who also works with Miami Metro or any of his colleagues, though sergeant James Doakes thinks Dexter has something to hide. To appear like any normal person, Dexter is dating Rita, a mother of two young children who divorced her previous, abusive husband. Rita has little interest in intimacy; and since Dexter is highly uncomfortable with any type of feelings, she is the ideal smokescreen for what Dexter really is.

Miami Metro investigates a series of murders in this season. Several prostitutes have been killed, their bodies kept chilled before dumping them, which earns this serial killer the nickname of the "Ice Truck Killer". Dexter informs Debra about the pattern he sees, hoping to help the department catch the killer. On her investigation, Debra meets a man named Rudy Cooper, a prosthetic expert (the Ice Truck Killer always takes women with a fake limb) and they start dating. Dexter discovers that the Ice Truck Killer has been in his apartment and has left him a doll as a clue. Dexter is fascinated by the game the Ice Truck Killer wants to play with him.

Dexter's memory is triggered by a particularly gruesome crime scene and for the first time remembers how exactly his biological mother, Laura Moser, died. She had been working as an informant for Miami Metro and her involvement in a case went wrong: the people she was investigating put her and her two young sons (one of them Dexter) in a shipping container, where she was killed and dismembered in front of her children. Dexter and his brother were locked up in the container with her, where Harry found them two days later in a pool of blood. Harry never told Dexter, and altered any records from the case to keep him from finding out. Meanwhile Rudy seems very interested in Dexter, and Dexter figures out that Rudy is actually the Ice Truck Killer. Rudy then kidnaps Debra and tries to persuade Dexter to kill Debra, after revealing to Dexter that his real name is Brian Moser and that he is Dexter's real brother. Like Dexter, Brian suffered from what he saw in the shipping container: but he was sent to live in mental institutions and did not have the guidance that Dexter did from Harry, and so became a serial killer without a moral compass. Dexter refuses to kill Debra, instead saves her, and Brian gets away in the scuffle of it all.

As the police investigate Debra's kidnapping, Doakes mentions his suspicions of Dexter, but Debra vouches for him for she would not be alive if it had not been for Dexter. Dexter goes looking for Brian and apologizes to him before killing him. He leaves Brian's body to be found and makes it look like a suicide. The police declare the case closed, but Doakes keeps his eye on Dexter.

Season 2

It has been over a month since Dexter killed anyone, still shaken up from killing his brother Brian and being under the constant surveillance of Doakes. When Dexter finally has a victim in his kill room he is unable to go through with it. Debra is traumatized by what happened to her in Season 1 and moves in with Dexter, making it even harder for him to channel his urges.

The bags containing the dismembered bodies of Dexter's victims are found in Bay Harbor, the dumping ground where Dexter disposes of all his victims. The police start up an investigation into the killer they quickly dub "The Bay Harbor Butcher".

FBI agent Frank Lundy comes in to give advice on the case and starts a romantic relationship with Debra later on in the season. The Bay Harbor Butcher becomes popular with the citizens of Miami as they discover he only kills criminals.

Dexter is now even more unable to kill and it makes him withdrawn and fidgety, leading Rita to believe something is wrong. Initially she thinks he is cheating on her, but then believes he is an addict. Dexter is quick to agree on her idea of him as a heroin addict, leading her away from the actual reason he is so wound up. She compels him to join Narcotics Anonymous, where he meets Lila West. She becomes his sponsor. Lila herself is a pyromaniac and has obsessive tendencies towards Dexter, and she is quick to start pursuing him. Dexter believes she really understands him for who he is, and he ends the relationship with Rita to be with Lila.

Doakes, who is still stalking Dexter for any signs of suspicious activity, runs into Dexter leaving a NA meeting and also believes Dexter's behavior can be explained by his drug habit. However, his suspicions soon return and again starts looking into Dexter and his routines. Doakes loses his job when he physically attacks Dexter at work. Dexter believes himself to be safe, but Doakes breaks into Dexter's apartment and finds his blood slides. Doakes takes the blood slides to get them analyzed and find out the truth about Dexter. However, the FBI find the slides in Doakes' car and he becomes the prime suspect of being the Bay Harbor Butcher. At this point, Dexter has lured Doakes to a cabin in the Everglades and locked him up in there. A manhunt for Doakes begins, while Lieutenant Maria LaGuerta is the only one who believes Doakes is innocent. Dexter plants evidence to further frame Doakes as the Bay Harbor Butcher.

Dexter has dug deeper into his past, recovering old files, and finds out two upsetting things about Harry: he was romantically involved with Dexter's mother Laura Moser, and Harry committed suicide after he saw Dexter kill someone, unable to deal with the guilt over teaching Dexter the Code. It causes Dexter's faith in the Code and in Harry to waver, and he imagines what it would be like if he turned himself in.

Lila, still obsessed with Dexter even though he has found out how crazy she is and attempted to break up with her, stalks him to the cabin in the Everglades where Dexter is keeping Doakes. She causes a fire which leads to an explosion, killing Doakes. When the police investigate the scene they believe Doakes was the Bay Harbor Butcher and made a mistake, and the case is closed.

Dexter lures Lila into a trap, making her believe that he loves her and wants to spend his life with her. He asks her to meet at an aquarium in town. However, Lila figures out he actually intends to kill her, and kidnaps Rita's children and uses them to lure Dexter to her house, intending to burn all of them alive. Dexter however manages to get the children out and save himself as well, before following Lila to Paris where she has fled and stabbing her to death.

The season ends with Doakes' memorial service, attended only by his family, Maria LaGuerta and Dexter. Dexter buys a new box for his blood slides and determines that from now on, he will choose his own path rather than let Harry (who disappointed him) dictate it.

Season 3

After his fling with Lila, Dexter's relationship with Rita is rocky. She finds out she is pregnant and tells Dexter that she will keep the baby and raise him, no matter whether Dexter will help her or not. Dexter then proposes to Rita, and eventually she accepts.

Meanwhile Dexter is also on the hunt again; he is stalking Freebo, a drug dealer who has killed some of his customers. When he stumbles upon a fight between Freebo and another man and Freebo flees. Dexter is forced to kill the unknown man in self-defense, but he has no clue whether the man he doesn't know is actually guilty of anything. The victim turns out to be Oscar Prado; Miguel Prado's little brother, the famous Assistant District Attorney and old fling of Maria LaGuerta. Miguel presses the police to be allowed to keep tabs on the case, and he befriends Dexter in the process.

Dexter locates Freebo and kills him, but when sneaking out of Freebo's hiding place he encounters Miguel, who has followed a lead he got to Freebo's location. Dexter tells Miguel he killed Freebo in self-defense, worried that Miguel might turn him in, but instead Miguel thanks him and offers to help Dexter in covering up the murder. They become closer friends during their attempt to keep Freebo's death a secret, as do Rita and Miguel's wife.

Miguel tells Dexter about a case that keeps frustrating him for the killer always gets out of being prosecuted, hoping that Dexter will offer to take care of it. Dexter does and Miguel realizes that Dexter is a killer. Miguel encourages him and tells Dexter that he hopes that he and Dexter could form a partnership, even take matters into his own hands under Dexter's guidance. To discourage Miguel Dexter suggests that they undertake the very risky action of freeing one of the members of the Aryan Brotherhood from prison in order to kill him, but Miguel actually agrees and they go through with the plan. In Miguel, Dexter sees his first and only true friend that he can be fully honest with, and asks him to be his best man at Dexter and Rita's wedding.

Debra starts working with a new partner during this time, on a case where they investigate a serial killer nicknamed "The Skinner", whose murder method is to skin his victims alive.

Miguel wants to perform his own kill at this point in the season. Dexter agrees reluctantly, and he watches as Miguel kills his first victim (and relishes in it). Soon after, Ellen Wolf disappears. As Miguel's adversary in the courtroom, Dexter quickly discovers it was Miguel who took and murdered her, and that Miguel is not really the friend he thought he was for he has been manipulating Dexter throughout the entirety of their partnership/friendship. They start working against each other now, Dexter leaving Ellen Wolf's body out in the open to be found and investigated, while Miguel starts an investigation into a key witness in the Skinner case who has been in a romantic relationship with Debra, which Miguel threatens to expose (which would cause Debra to lose her job). Dexter realizes Miguel cannot be allowed to continue, and this is when Dexter decides to kill him and make it look like one of The Skinner's kills. Miguel on his end uses his job to help The Skinner escape police custody in exchange for The Skinner's promise to kill Dexter. Meanwhile LaGuerta has found a connection between Miguel and Ellen Wolf's death. When Miguel finds out, he decides to murder her, but Dexter captures Miguel when he discovers Miguel's plan. Before he actually kills Miguel Dexter confesses it was him who killed Oscar.

When the police find Miguel's body his death is immediately ruled one of The Skinner's crimes, but Miguel's brother Ramon is now suspicious about Dexter. He barges in on a dinner between Dexter and Rita, pointing a gun at Dexter, and is taken into police custody. Dexter visits him in prison and they talk about Ramon's upbringing and family, and Dexter helps Ramon to face his demons.

Dexter is captured by The Skinner on the night before his wedding, but manages to distract The Skinner and break free, hurting his hand in the process. During the fight that follows Dexter snaps The Skinner's neck and then pushes his body in front of a police car, making it look like an accident. Dexter gets his hand put in a cast and arrives just in time for his wedding to Rita.

Season 4

Dexter and Rita are now married and their new baby Harrison has been born. They have settled down in what seems to be domestic bliss, with Rita's children and their newborn, but Dexter's double life is putting a strain on his job and his home life, especially with the lack of sleep. Dexter and Rita's marriage is in rough waters after she finds out he has kept on his old apartment (where he has his blood slides stashed).

The police are investigating a series of killings they have dubbed the "Vacation Murders". FBI agent Frank Lundy returns to Miami, following a case that the other FBI agents refused to handle. He is on the track of the so-called "Trinity Killer", a serial killer who murders three people in the span of roughly a year in the same city, always with the same pattern: a young woman in a bathtub, a mother killed by a suspicious fall, and a father bludgeoned. The first two of the sequence have happened in Miami, and Lundy believes it is the work of the Trinity Killer. He also thinks he knows when and where the last murder will take place, but is prohibited from taking action. He and Debra rekindle their relationship and soon after are shot in a parking lot by an unknown attacker. Debra survives, but Lundy dies from his injuries. The police rule his murder an act of the "Vacation Murderer".

Dexter learns about Lundy's research into the Trinity Killer and steals his files, then locates the Trinity Killer while he is murdering his third victim. Dexter follows the killer to his home and is surprised to find out it is a man with a family. He discovers the Trinity Killer is Arthur Mitchell, who seems to be the perfect husband and father. Dexter keeps following him and is fascinated by Arthur's ability to combine his murderous streak with his home life. Using the alias of "Kyle Butler", Dexter joins the church Arthur works at and befriends him, asking Arthur advice about how he should improve his relationship with Rita. Arthur advises him to get rid of the apartment and Dexter does, giving it to Debra whilst transferring his blood slides and killing tools to a shed behind his and Rita's family home. Meanwhile, the police discover that the Trinity Killer leaves small amounts of cremation ashes at every murder scene, and upon analyzing the ashes learn that Trinity and the ash share genetics but are unable to match Trinity to any criminal records in the database.

Arthur takes Dexter on a trip to his hometown of Tampa and shows him the house he grew up in. He tells Dexter that his sister died in that house when he was ten years old, in the bathtub, after he inadvertently surprised her in the bathroom and she slipped and fell through the glass shower door, severing her femoral artery. Like Dexter, Arthur went through a trauma that shaped his homicidal tendencies. Dexter prevents him from committing suicide in that house, and discovers Trinity's murders represent the deaths of his sister, mother and father, and that Arthur has been using the homebuilding charity he leads as a cover-up for any tracks he might leave. Dexter also starts to feel the tension present in Arthur's family, which is not so perfect

after all; Arthur abuses his son and keeps his daughter locked up in her bedroom, and Arthur becomes violent at Thanksgiving dinner. Dexter is convinced of Arthur's guilt and makes a plan to murder him.

Meanwhile Debra, obsessed with finding out who attacked her and Lundy, discovers it could not have been Trinity who attacked them. She figures out that reporter Christine Hill, who has been hanging around Quinn and seducing him to get more information on the Vacation Murders, is genetically related to Trinity and is in fact his illegitimate daughter. She has been desperate for her father's approval and has been going out of her way to cover up for his crimes, and when Lundy and Debra got too close she shot them both. When Arthur rejects her harshly, not acknowledging her sacrifices, Christine confesses to Debra what she did and then immediately shoots herself in the head. The police now start to narrow down the list of suspects and Dexter realizes he has to move fast if he wants to kill Trinity before the police get to him.

When Dexter stalks Arthur, he figures out that both he and the police have missed a part of the puzzle when he sees Arthur abduct a boy from an arcade. The real start of the Trinity cycle is the abduction of a ten-year old boy, a few days before he kills the woman in the bathtub. Dexter is able to locate Arthur before he can kill the boy but Arthur gets away. Dexter, still under the name of 'Kyle', tries to blackmail Arthur by threatening to expose him as a pedophile to try and get Arthur to meet him in secret. Arthur on his part tries to find 'Kyle', and in the process kills an innocent with the same name. Arthur follows Dexter back to the police station, where Arthur finds out what Dexter's real name is. Dexter now feels the pressure to act fast and Dexter follows him to the parking lot of a bank. He drugs Arthur and prepares to move him to a kill room, but he is stopped by the police because he was seen sideswiping another car in his hurry to get away. The police take Dexter to prison from which he is quickly released, but by then Arthur has already disappeared from the van Dexter put him in. Dexter is now worried about his family and arranges for them to take a trip to the Florida Keys to protect them, under the pretense of a holiday. Dexter manages to find Arthur and kill him. After disposing of the body, he comes home to find a voicemail from Rita, saying she forgot some stuff at home and came back by herself, having Cody and Astor already settled in in the Keys. He immediately calls her and hears her phone ringing in the house, followed by the sound of Harrison crying. He runs to the bathroom and finds Rita, wrists slit in the bathtub, with Harrison sitting on the floor crying in a pool of his mother's blood.

Season 5

The police arrive at Dexter's house which is now a crime scene. He is in shock and says 'it was me', distraught over Rita's death. Quinn is suspicious of how Rita died, considering it did not fit in with how Trinity usually went about his kills, and Dexter's seemingly unemotional state further encourages his suspicions. Cody and Astor are also shocked over their mother's death and Astor blames Dexter for it. She and Cody leave Miami to move to their grandparents in Orlando.

Meanwhile a severed head is found in a Venezuelan neighborhood and the police find several related cases, nicknaming the murderer the "Santa Muerte Killer". The FBI are unable to locate Arthur Mitchell (knowing that he is Trinity) and therefore focus on the only other lead they have, namely the name of Kyle Butler (Dexter's alias). Arthur's family is interviewed and the police use the descriptions they give of this man to draw up a sketch. Quinn recognizes the similarities between the sketch and Dexter.

Dexter tries to distract himself from the unfamiliar feeling of grief and finds a new victim to hunt; Boyd Fowler, who has killed several women. Dexter hires a nanny named Sonya to care for Harrison, so he can keep going out at night and stalk Fowler and learn his routines. Dexter captures and kills Fowler. He then hears a sound and in the next room, finds a young woman who is covered in dirt and tied up, and who has clearly witnessed the whole thing. Dexter's first thought is to kill her (she has seen far too much), but she is an innocent and clearly shaken up. He tries to care for her but she is terrified of him and has clearly been abused, asking him if he is going to sell her.

Quinn tracks down the Mitchell family who are in a witness protection program and asks Jonah, Arthur's son, if he recognizes a picture of Dexter. They are interrupted by an undercover FBI agent before Jonah can answer. Quinn is then suspended by LaGuerta for not following her direct orders and she defends Dexter against Quinn's accusations. Quinn then seeks the help of Stan Liddy, a disgraced narcotics cop, and asks him to follow Dexter. Debra meanwhile is investigating the Santa Muerte case and gets closer to the killer.

Dexter has managed to slowly win Lumen's trust and she tells him she was attacked and captured by a group of men, not just by Fowler. She asks him to help her find and kill these men. He initially refuses, but after Lumen sets out on her own and accidentally targets the wrong suspect, Dexter teaches her some parts of the Code. He then accompanies her to the airport to put her on a flight out of Miami to get her life started elsewhere. Dexter believes Lumen has left the city, but she never did; instead she has stayed behind in secret and manages to shoot one of her attackers. She then calls Dexter in a panic, asking him to help her clean up the crime scene. Dexter reluctantly agrees and they manage to get rid of the evidence just before the police find the crime scene. Lumen tells Dexter that it gave her just a moment of peace to kill one of the men, and she cries as she tells him the only way she will ever find peace for a longer period of time is to kill them all. Dexter knows all too well what it is to carry such an urge with you; a Dark Passenger is what he calls it, and this is Lumen's Dark Passenger. He decides to help her and believes that helping Lumen will in part atone for his inability to save Rita.

The subplots of the season focus on the relationship between Maria LaGuerta and colleague Angel Batista, who have gotten married but who are having some problems, and of the relationship between Quinn and Debra which has blossomed. Angel gets into a bar fight and LaGuerta manages to avoid an investigation into his behavior by helping to set up a sting on Stan Liddy, the narcotics cop who Quinn has paid to keep tabs on Dexter. Debra is unaware of Quinn's suspicions of Dexter and of his deal with Liddy.

Throughout the season Dexter and Lumen hunt the other people responsible for capturing and torturing her. Liddy has taken pictures of Lumen and Dexter on his boat together, throwing out large plastic bags, and he has managed to secretly make a video of them practicing for a kill together. Quinn tries to get him to stop investigating Dexter for his relationship with Debra is getting more serious, but Liddy refuses. Liddy manages to capture Dexter and calls Quinn to come to his location (a van in one of the Miami harbors). Dexter manages to kill Liddy after a struggle and deletes any footage he has of Lumen and Dexter. Before Dexter has a chance to clean up the scene, he learns Lumen has been kidnapped by one of her former torturers (a man named Jordan Chase), and he is forced to leave. Quinn arrives at Liddy's van to find it locked; a drop of Liddy's blood drips out from under the door onto his shoe, but he does not notice.

Dexter arrives home to gather his kill tools to take care of Jordan Chase, but is called back to Liddy's van which has been discovered and is now a crime scene. At the crime scene, Quinn is taken to the station for he is a suspect in the murder due to the blood on his shoe. Dexter

hurries to where Lumen is being held. Dexter overpowers Jordan in a fight and allows Lumen to kill Jordan. After the kill, Debra walks into the kill room, having figured out there was a group of men who was torturing and killing women and that there is now a vigilante who is getting rid of these men. Dexter and Lumen are behind plastic and so Debra cannot see them directly. Debra feels sympathetic for she has figured out that this vigilante must be an escaped victim, and she leaves so that they can escape. Lumen tearfully tells Dexter she now is at peace now all her torturers are dead and that it is time to move on, leaving Dexter as distraught as he was at the start of the season.

The season closes with Harrison's birthday party, where Quinn thanks Dexter for tampering with the blood on Quinn's shoe, making it seem as if it was not Liddy's blood on Quinn's shoe since Dexter knows how much Quinn means to Debra. Dexter helps Harrison to blow out his birthday candle, wondering if there is any chance for him to be truly human and to have real relationships - but he doubts it.

Season 6

Maria LaGuerta has been promoted to Captain after she has blackmailed the former Captain, now Deputy Chief Matthews, who has been visiting prostitutes. Her marriage to Angel Batista has fallen apart; they try to remain friends, but Angel being passed over for the vacant lieutenant position which is instead filled by Debra (Matthews' decision) is difficult for him and he thinks he was passed over because of the feud between LaGuerta and Matthews. LaGuerta keeps trying to make Debra look bad as the new lieutenant by offering Debra bad advice. Debra goes against LaGuerta's advice when she hires Mike Anderson as her replacement as detective.

Angel's sister Jamie has become Harrison's new babysitter. Dexter and Debra visit a Catholic pre-school recommended by Angel in the hopes of signing Harrison up. Quinn proposes to Debra, but she refuses and they break up as a result. Afterwards, Quinn hears about her promotion and presumes that is why Debra broke up with him. He falls into a pattern of heavy drinking and one-night stands. His unprofessional behavior angers his new partner, Angel, and even puts Angel in danger.

This season focuses on the Doomsday Killers: Professor James Gellar and his student Travis Marshall. They believe they are on track to bring about the end of the world by carrying out murders based on the Book of Revelation. They create tableaux to represent the Apocalypse. The first tableau is that of the Seven-Headed Serpent, where the victim's intestines were removed and replaced with seven snakes before the victim was sewn up. The second tableau is that of the Four Horsemen, where a victim was cut into several pieces and the limbs attached to mannequins and put onto four horses who were then let loose onto the streets of Miami. The third tableau is the Angel of Death. The victim was a young woman that Travis found attractive and slept with, and to punish him for his sinful act Gellar made him put her in a greenhouse within a trap construction. When the police found her they triggered the trap and she was spiked in the throat by a collar, after which a storm of locusts was released from a cupboard nearby. The fourth tableau was the Whore of Babylon; Gellar forced Travis to kill his own sister for this tableau after Travis had let their intended victim go because he felt sorry for her. The fifth tableau was the Bowls of Wrath, where Gellar and Travis set up another trap for the police. When they touched the victim's body, seven bowls of the victim's blood (his body had been drained) were emptied onto the police's heads. The sixth tableau is Wormwood; one of Gellar and Travis' followers, Beth Dorsey, was instructed to take a canister of poisonous gas into the police station and release it. Thanks to Dexter, it was released in an interrogation room with the door locked and only Beth Dorsey herself inside. The seventh tableau is that of the Lake of Fire, where The False Prophet and the Beast are

hurled into a circle of flames in the water. Dexter was the intended victim, but managed to escape.

The season also introduces Brother Sam, an ex-convict who has turned his life around and now believes in God. He runs a garage where he offers jobs to other ex-convicts to try and keep them on the straight path. First Dexter believes that Brother Sam is behind the first tableau and he wants to kill Sam, but Dexter is proven wrong and he actually comes to like and befriend Sam. However, their friendship does not last long for Brother Sam is murdered by ex-convict Nick, whom he had taken under his wing. Brother Sam asks Dexter in the hospital to find it in himself to forgive the man who wounded him; but when Brother Sam dies from his injuries, Dexter kills Nick.

Dexter hears that Arthur Mitchell's wife and daughter have been found dead at their witness protection location in Nebraska. Jonah, Trinity's son, reports it was his father who did it, but Dexter knows Arthur is dead. Dexter suspects that it was Jonah who killed his mother and sister and goes to Nebraska to confront him. He is encouraged by a vision of his dead brother Brian to kill Jonah, but Dexter learns that Arthur's daughter committed suicide and Jonah killed his mother in a fit of anger and lured Dexter there so Dexter would kill him; Jonah feels so guilty he wants to die. Dexter decides to leave Jonah alive and to follow Brother Sam's example of forgiveness, and leaves Jonah to struggle with his own demons.

Dexter's investigation of the Doomsday Killings leads him to Travis Marshall, who says that he has acted on the orders of Professor Gellar. Dexter asks Travis to help him find Gellar, thinking that he can save Travis. However, Dexter eventually discovers Gellar's dead body in a freezer; it has been three years since Travis killed Gellar. Travis is suffering from dissociative personality disorder; in his head, Gellar is alive and giving him the orders. Travis first calls Dexter The False Prophet, who has been leading him astray from the path of God, and later on believes that Dexter is the Beast (the devil) himself. He tries to kill Dexter in the Lake of Fire tableau, but Dexter manages to escape. Travis needs to have a final victim to bring about the end of the world and so he kidnaps Harrison to use as his final sacrifice, believing that The Beast (Dexter) is dead. Dexter follows Travis and knocks him out, saving Harrison. He takes Travis to the church where Travis committed all of his murders and puts him on the altar, which he has set up as a kill room.

The subplots of the season include Jamie Batista dating an intern at Miami Metro named Louis Greene. Louis is eager to impress Dexter (whose work as a blood spatter analysis is very precise and accurate) and it turns out he has stolen a prosthetic arm from the Ice Truck Killer case back in season 1. He mails it to Dexter, suggesting he might know something of the connection between Dexter and the Ice Truck Killer. Debra meanwhile refuses to close the case of the overdose of a prostitute, eventually discovering that it was Deputy Chief Matthews who was with her when she overdosed. Matthews is forced to retire when LaGuerta leaks the information. Debra is also attending court-ordered therapy after the shooting incident during which Lundy died, and whilst talking to her therapist realizes that she might be in love with Dexter. She goes to find him to talk to him about it; she knows he is at the church, for he has told her he is doing some forensic work there to justify his absence at work. She winds up walking in on him just as he plunges a knife into Travis' chest. Dexter speaks the last words of the season: "Oh, God."

Season 7

The season picks up where season six left off, with Dexter standing over Travis' body. He claims he killed Travis out of self-defense. Debra seems to doubt his claims and is very upset, but agrees to help Dexter cover up the murder by making it look like a suicide and setting the

church on fire. They then hide out until they are called back to the church, which has been found and is now a crime scene. Travis' death is indeed ruled a suicide. However, LaGuerta finds the blood slide Dexter dropped when he was caught by Debra, and she pockets it, knowing that the modus operandi of the Bay Harbor Butcher (Doakes) was to use blood slides. Back at the station, Debra looks into the Ice Truck Killer files and finds connections between how the Ice Truck Killer killed his victims and how Dexter killed Travis.

Mike Anderson, the new detective who replaced Debra, is found killed. Dexter finds out the man who killed Mike is a member of the Koshka Brotherhood, Viktor Baskov. He locates Viktor at the Miami Airport and tracks him. Dexter kills him and takes him out on his boat to dispose of the remains. When Dexter comes home he is confronted by Debra who is holding his box of blood slides, and he confirms to her that he is indeed a serial killer. He tells Debra about his urges and about the Code, and Debra believes it is some sort of addiction when she does some research into the concept of serial killing and she thinks she could help Dexter beat his addiction. She tells Dexter she will now watch him 24/7, but Dexter is angry when he receives the prosthetic arm that Louis Greene sent to him and he puts a sedative in Debra's food. When she is asleep he sneaks out of the house and confronts Louis. Instead of killing him however, he takes a major step; he calls Debra and tells her he has the urge to kill, and she comes to pick him up, leaving Louis knocked-out on a park bench.

Dexter meets Wayne Randall, a serial killer who has made a deal with Miami Metro for less prison time if he gives up the locations of his other victims. He tells Dexter about his former girlfriend who was his accomplice, who goes by the name of Hannah McKay.

The members of the Koshka Brotherhood are now looking for Viktor, the man that Dexter killed, and their leader Isaak Sirko finds out through a GPS signal that Viktor is at sea. He goes to the marina where the signal leads him to Dexter's boat. Louis is on Dexter's boat at that moment, trying to sink it. Believing that Louis killed Viktor, Isaak shoots him in the head, inadvertently helping Dexter. It is revealed that Isaak has a great personal interest in Viktor's whereabouts because Viktor was his romantic partner.

Meanwhile Deb keeps struggling to understand what Dexter is, but after a run-in with a criminal who has killed an innocent victim which Dexter could have been able to prevent if Debra would have let him, she feels guilty and is willing to admit that maybe what Dexter does could be considered a necessary evil. She says she feels glad when Dexter manages to kill the criminal in question, and it shocks her; but Dexter tells her that that feeling is part of being human.

Dexter becomes acquainted with Wayne Randall's former girlfriend Hannah McKay when Miami Metro goes to interview her about the murders to try and locate all the victims, but she is unwilling to cooperate. Dexter believes she is hiding something and starts looking into her, gathering evidence of her possible guilt. He tries to get closer to her by making conversation and telling her he is interested in her. When taking her on a date he is setting up to kill her, even going as far as to put her on his kill table, but instead of going through with it he cuts her loose and they sleep together. Dexter seems to have genuine feelings for her and they develop a relationship, keeping it secret from Debra who is desperate to put Hannah, who is much more involved in the Wayne Randall murders than everyone originally believed, behind bars.

Isaak Sirko has discovered there is a connection between Louis Greene and Dexter, and starts to figure out that it was Dexter who killed Viktor. Dexter notices that the Koshka Brotherhood has started monitoring him and he figures out that they know he killed Viktor. Dexter knows he needs to get to Isaak before Isaak gets to him. He follows Isaak to a bar (which turns out to be a gay bar) and goes in. They have a drink together and Isaak talks about how he was in

love with Viktor, and that if the circumstances were any different he and Dexter could have been great friends.

The Koshka Brotherhood seems to have turned on Isaak for being too absorbed in Viktor's death and neglecting his other duties, and Isaak comes to Dexter for help. Eventually Isaak is killed by other members of the Brotherhood, but Dexter kills them in turn as revenge.

Meanwhile Dexter seems to truly care deeply about Hannah and is worried about her when she is kidnapped. Eventually it is Debra who finds her and after some hesitation calls an ambulance. Debra is struggling with the relationship between Dexter and Hannah, because of her dislike for Hannah and her own feelings for Dexter. It turns out Hannah also wants to be rid of Debra and will go to great lengths to make that happen. Dexter, afraid for Debra's safety, gives Debra the evidence she needs to lock Hannah up. He apologizes to her, but he needs to keep Debra safe. Shortly after, Hannah comes up with a plan to escape prison. Her friend comes to visit her and manages to slip her a pill. Hannah swallows the pill which causes her to have a seizure and she is taken from the emergency room. She then manages to escape from the hospital.

LaGuerta meanwhile has had the blood slide analyzed; she does not believe that Doakes was the Bay Harbor Butcher, and she uncovers that really Doakes was right all along and that Dexter is the Bay Harbor Butcher. Dexter has found one of the men (Estrada) involved in his mother's murder and he captures him, taking him to a shipping container like the one where he killed Dexter's mother. Both Debra and LaGuerta follow Dexter to the shipping container where he kills Estrada. Both LaGuerta and Debra enter the shipping container. Dexter tranquilizes LaGuerta and plans to make it look like she and Estrada had a shoot-out, killing each other in the process. Debra begs him not to go through with it. LaGuerta wakes up and begs Debra to shoot Dexter. Dexter drops his knife and tells Debra that she can go through with it. Debra then shoots LaGuerta and then holds her body, sobbing.

Season 8

Six months after LaGuerta's death, Dexter feels his life is back on track and the danger of people finding out that he is actually the Bay Harbor Butcher has subsided. However, Debra has gone completely off the radar. She has quit her job at Miami Metro and no one has heard from her in two months. He goes by her new job at Elway Investigations where she now works for a private investigator, but he has not seen her either and Dexter is concerned. When he eventually finds her, she tells him to go away and not disturb her on the case she is currently working.

The police department is introduced to Doctor Evelyn Vogel, a neuropsychiatrist who has been brought in to assist on a case where the killer has taken a piece of the victim's brain. Vogel is quick to start asking Dexter all kinds of questions about his job and himself, and he feels uncomfortable. She gives him a folder filled with drawings that Dexter made when he was a child; when he confronts her she tells him she knows about the Code, that in fact she helped to create it when Harry came to her concerned about his new adopted child. Dexter does not react too well to her revealing she created the Code together with Harry because he is concerned with the effect his actions have had on Debra. Vogel believes that the killer who removes pieces of the brain (they have dubbed him "The Brain Surgeon") might be after her, and she asks Dexter to kill him. Dexter refuses. However, when the Brain Surgeon leaves a tape of his next kill in Vogel's house as well as a piece of brain on her doorstep, he decides to help her. In return, he asks her to help Debra process what happened with LaGuerta if she decides to come back.

Debra returns to Miami and reluctantly accepts Vogel's help. Whilst Vogel takes her to the shipping container to try and relive the trauma and get through it, She also sees some of the videos that Vogel has in her office, which is footage of Harry and Dexter talking about Dexter's urges. Dexter goes through Vogel's list of patients to try and find the Brain Surgeon.

Debra and Dexter, whilst in Debra's car, talk about Vogel and how she is connected to their family. They both agree that Vogel does not really understand them, and Debra asks Dexter if Harry killed himself because of what Dexter is. Dexter admits that he did and Debra jerks the steering wheel suddenly and sends them straight into a lake. Debra is saved by a fisherman passing by, but Dexter is still stuck in the car. Eventually, Debra decides to save him.

Vogel is still being threatened by the Brain Surgeon and Debra and Dexter decide to give her another chance and attempt to keep her safe. She is kidnapped by one of her patients and Debra and Dexter arrive just in time to save her. However, it was not the Brain Surgeon who attacked her; he is still out there. Dexter finds out the Brain Surgeon is actually related to Vogel and she tells him she had two sons. One of them was a psychopath and killed the other. Vogel does not want her son to die at Dexter's hands and Dexter pretends to play along, but plans to kill him. However the Brain Surgeon (whose real name is Oliver Saxon) gets to Vogel before Dexter can catch him, and he slits her throat in front of Dexter's eyes. Dexter rushes to get to her and she dies in his arms.

When investigating a crime scene, Dexter spots a teenager taking pictures. He seems very excited at the whole concept of a crime scene and Dexter decides to keep an eye on him. This boy, named Zach Hamilton, turns out to be planning to kill his father because he was cheating on his mother. When Dexter puts him on his kill table, Zach says he cannot help feeling the urge to kill. Dexter realizes that Zach is similar to himself, but that Zach never had a Harry to guide him and he cuts Zach loose, taking on the role of a mentor for Zach. However, Zach is ultimately killed by the Brain Surgeon, and Dexter feels guilty for not being there enough for Zach.

Hannah has also reappeared, now the wife of a rich businessman. She and Dexter reconnect and they make plans to escape Miami together, for Hannah is still a fugitive. They plan to go to Argentina, together with Harrison. First however Dexter has to catch Oliver Saxon and avenge Vogel's death. Together with Debra, he lures Saxon into a trap, but he does not kill Saxon: he allows Debra to arrest him, knowing Saxon will receive a death sentence and die in the electric chair. However, Debra was being followed by a federal marshal who believes Debra and Dexter are harboring Hannah McKay. He follows her to where Dexter and Debra lured Saxon to trap him, and upon seeing Saxon (who plays the innocent victim and screams for help) strapped to a chair he shoots Debra.

When Dexter and Hannah and Harrison are at Miami Airport, getting ready to leave for Argentina, Dexter receives the call that Debra is wounded. He tells Hannah and Harrison to get on the plane and that he will join them later, then rushes to the hospital. Saxon has also gotten wind of the fact that Debra is in the hospital and goes there to finish the job, but he is arrested on the spot by Angel Batista. Meanwhile a hurricane is developing over Miami, and Dexter knows he will not be able to join Hannah and Harrison any time soon. Dexter is torn apart when he sees his sister in a vegetative state, knowing that she will never recover from her wounds. He takes her off life support and gets out onto the ocean in his boat. He tells Debra he loves her as she dies. He calls Hannah for the last time and tells her they will meet soon. He then drops both his phone and Debra's body into the ocean, then steers his boat into the eye of the storm. When the wreckage of his boat washes on shore, everyone assumes Dexter is dead. In Argentina, Hannah reads about Dexter's presumed fate in a newspaper.

The season ends with a scene at a lumber mill, where a man is logging wood. He then goes into a cabin, takes off his vest and sits down. He looks weathered and rough. He faces forward and the audience looks into the face of the Bay Harbor Butcher. He closes his eyes for a moment and then opens them, looking straight into the camera.