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The Ethics of Buffy: An Analysis of the Soul and Human-Monster Relationships within Buffy the Vampire Slayer

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The Ethics of Buffy: An Analysis of the Soul and Human-Monster

Relationships within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*



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Introduction

Over the years, television companies have produced many gothic and supernatural shows aimed at teenagers. Series such as *The Addams Family* (1964-1966) and *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971) helped the gothic genre become prime-time teenage television entertainment. This close relationship between the gothic genre and teenage audiences is not new, in fact. As early as the publication of Ann Radcliffe's (1764-1823) gothic romances, in the 1790s, the gothic genre was associated with adolescent consumers (Wallace). Together, these predecessors created a space for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) to become a major television series in the 1990s. The show quickly grew into one of the most influential teenage-series of its time, with seven seasons, a spin off show, five more seasons in comic book form and multiple video games. On the level of plot, Buffy is a straightforward teenage Gothic melodrama about a high-school girl who happens to be a vampire killer as well; but within this conventional, sensational, gothic plot, the series explores more serious and complex themes such as what it means to be an outcast, struggles with loneliness, addiction, the injustice and pain of bullying and difficult family dynamics. One of the central questions explored throughout the show is the question of how to distinguish good from evil, ethical from unethical behaviour, the humane from the inhumane. As such, *Buffy* belongs in the category of contemporary television shows that according to Gay Hawkins "offer ethical instruction usually without any appeal to large-scale authorities" (418). Such shows, "offer advice rather than categorical imperatives" (Hawkins 418) and allow the audience to actively shape their own moral framework. While Hawkins focusses mostly on non-dramatic and non-fictional television formats, this thesis shows that teenage supernatural melodrama can also be ethically enlightening.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer follows the experiences of Buffy, who is sixteen years old at the start of the show. She has just moved to the town of Sunnydale, where her new high school is located on top of the Hellmouth (a portal to a demon dimension). The school's unfortunate geographical situation attracts vampires and other demons to this spot. A few months before moving there, Buffy

finds out she is the Chosen One, a vampire Slayer. With the help of her Watcher¹ Giles, the high school librarian, and her friends Willow and Xander, Buffy fights vampires and other demons in the course of the series. The group, also referred to as the Scooby Gang, fluctuates throughout the series with new members joining and leaving but these four are at the centre of it every season. The name “Scooby Gang” is a reference to the children’s mystery cartoon *Scooby Doo*, which shows a tongue-in-cheek self-awareness about the pop-culture tradition and the genre to which the show belongs. This meta-level gives *Buffy* a postmodern character that distinguishes it from other shows of the same genre; it allows the producers to play with the traditional gothic conventions. Significantly, one of the most significant alternations to the gothic tradition *Buffy* makes is in the representation of its monsters, which prove to be much more complicated creatures than the soulless villains in many teenage gothic melodramas.

As Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, once explained in an interview:

We think very carefully about what we’re trying to say emotionally, politically, and even philosophically while we’re writing [*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*]. The process of breaking a story involves the writers and myself, so a lot of different influences, prejudices, and ideas get rolled up into it. So it really is, apart from being a big pop culture phenomenon, something that is deeply layered textually episode by episode. (“10 Questions with Joss Whedon”)

This complex textuality is clearly seen in the representation of the monsters with which the main characters are confronted. These monsters are often metaphorical representations of personal and social problems that human characters, or audience members, struggle with in the “normal” human world. As Patricia Pender explains:

The series is justifiably famous for turning conventional teenage clichés (‘High school is hell’, ‘My mother is an alien’) into spectacularly literal, horrific incarnations. In *Buffy*, the

¹ A Watcher within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a trained individual who is assigned to a (potential) Slayer by the Watchers council. The Watcher helps the Slayer with identifying and researching demons. They are the ones who teach the Slayer the rules regarding which demons to slay and how to slay them.

rituals of girlhood are similarly and spectacularly fraught. Buffy's first date, her high school prom and various early sexual encounters are all presented with a hyperbolic hysteria that somehow serves to foreground, rather than minimise, the fundamental pathos of growing up: adolescence is *unheimlich*, and adults don't know the half of it. (5-6)

As the protagonists grow up, the problems they face in their day-to-day life become more serious and complicated; dealing initially with failing grades and popularity contests, they move on to struggling to pay the bills and working through the grief of losing a parent. This shift in the human characters' struggles is reflected in the monsters they fight as well. In the earlier seasons, the gang deals with a girl who turned invisible because she felt ignored and unseen at school (1.07). Similarly, everyone in Sunnydale turns into their Halloween costumes and forgets who they really were (2.06). In later seasons, the problems the main characters face become more intense and high stake. For example, they have to fight a god² because she wants to kill Buffy's little sister Dawn (5.22), and in the next season Willow almost destroys the world because she is dealing with grief and a magic addiction (6.19).

Early in the first season there is a hard line between good and evil in Buffy's eyes. All monsters are evil, all humans are good. Vampires are humans who have lost their soul and are inhabited by a demon, as is explained: "When you become a vampire, the demon takes your body, but it doesn't get your soul. That's gone. No conscience, no remorse. It's an easy way to live" (1.07 36:00). This creates a strong divide in which all vampires are inherently evil because they have no souls. This belief in the inherent evil of all vampires is in line with the deontological ethical code taught to Buffy by the Watcher's council. The Watchers believe it is the Slayer's duty to slay all vampires and all other demons without exceptions as soulless monsters can only be evil. However, this belief is quickly challenged as Buffy meets the mysterious Angel, a vampire cursed with the return of his human soul. Buffy starts to realise that the boundaries between good and evil are not as

² This god, Glory, was the god of a hell dimension. She was banished to earth as she was too cruel in her own dimension. She was not written to resemble or represent any kind of God known within religion. Instead, she was used to explore the theme of family, both blood and found, within *Buffy*.

strict as she once believed and that there is no one single ethical framework from which to judge all humans or even all monster's actions as either right or wrong.

The blurring of the ethical categories of good and evil is also represented in some of the “weekly monsters” that Buffy and her allies fight. Many turn out to be high school students with normal problems lashing out against their parents or other kids at school. This divide between good and evil is continually challenged in the series through storylines involving various supernatural beings who ally themselves with Buffy and her friends. As Chris Richards put it:

Buffy falls in love with Angel, Willow with Oz. But as both of them transform into grotesque figures, their neat features, smooth skins and enviable haircuts turn out to be both unstable and unreliable. On the other hand, some demons turn out not to be so irrevocably demonic (Anya in seasons four and five, Doyle in season one of ‘Angel’) and some ‘ordinary people’ turn out to be manipulative and damaging. (128)

Although not all the monsters who seem good turn out to be trustworthy, there are also humans in the show that turn out to be evil, even though there is nothing inherently demonic within them. The chapters below will explore these problematic characters in detail and reveal how they challenge the Watchers’ deontological ethics that Buffy lives by initially, and how through her confrontation with the problematic monsters she has to change her ethical outlook from a deontological position into a more utilitarian one.

Throughout the seasons, Buffy starts relationships and alliances with several demons, sometimes out of convenience, at other times because the demons are not (as) evil as she had expected. Her boyfriend Angel is a vampire; Willow’s boyfriend Oz is a werewolf; Xander’s fiancé Anya is an ex-vengeance demon; Willow's girlfriend Tara is a witch; and Spike is a vampire who starts out as an antagonist but eventually becomes part of the group. These human-monster relationships are an important factor in Buffy and the rest of the gang learning about the moral grey area that exists between good and evil. They help the gang to utilise a utilitarian framework when it comes to decisions about slaying demons. Especially Buffy’s connection to both Angel and Spike

allows her to see positive aspects in their personalities which other characters do not perceive. These relationships also influence the different demons and vampires, as his relationship with Buffy is what convinces Spike to pursue a soul. Laura J. Shepard comments on the relationships in *Buffy* as follows: “[*Buffy*] is, primarily, a series of reflections on emotional and relational attachments; from the opening credits of the first episode until the closing scene of the final episode, relationality is a core theme of *Buffy*. Buffy does not often ‘stand alone’ in either minor or major battles, contrary to the voice-over statement of Slayer Mythology” (27). The voice-over statement to which Shepard refers is the opening statement of the show in the first two seasons that says: “In every generation there is a chosen one. She alone will stand against the vampires, the demons, and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer” (1.01). Buffy is reminded of this part of her destiny multiple times throughout the show, especially by the Watchers council, who have been guiding Slayers for centuries. However, it is often shown that her insistence to work alongside her friends and family is what gives her strength and helps her survive. This also extends to the human-monster relationships that Buffy maintains throughout the show with multiple vampires and demons.

Next to exploring the monster-human relations, this thesis will also critically explore the function of the concept of soul in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and how the human soul is related to ethical questions concerning good and evil. This thesis will mostly focus on dialogue within the show since characters’ ethics are often showcased through what they say. Chapter one will briefly explain the different ethical frameworks that will be applied within this thesis. Chapter two will analyse Angel’s storyline in the first three seasons of the show. It will focus on how his relationship with Buffy and his soul change the way that the gang approaches ethical questions from a deontological framework to a soft utilitarian framework. The third chapter will focus on Spike in the last four seasons of the show, with an emphasis on season five and six. It will focus on his chip implant that stops him from hurting humans and his relationship with Buffy that causes him to want to be good and eventually makes him search for a soul. It will explore how the utilitarian ethics of the gang shift from a flexible to a full utilitarian approach through their relationship with Spike. The last chapter will focus on Warren and Willow in season six of the show, specifically how the gang

presume their human souls are inherently good. It will explore how Warren still grew to be an evil villain although he was not taken serious at first as he was human. Lastly in regards to Willow it will explore how grief caused her to act evil but how she can be forgiven for these acts.

Chapter 1: Ethical Frameworks

This chapter will outline the three ethical frameworks that will be applied within this thesis, deontology, utilitarianism, and ethical egoism. This chapter will also touch upon Stephen Asma's theory on the monstrosity of human beings. Although his theory is not an ethical framework, it will be touched upon as the ethical framework of the gang will be explored through the monstrosity of Warren and Willow.

Within deontology the morality of an action is based upon people following their duties (Moore). As long as people follow their duties, they are acting in an ethical manner, regardless of their feelings about, or the consequences of their actions. The philosopher of ethics Gordon Graham summarizes the deontological position as follows: "Be we rich or poor, clever or stupid, handsome or ugly, jolly or sad, every one of us can aim to do what is right just because it is right, and if we succeed in this we succeed in living amorally good life" (116). What is right in this framework is determined by "considering what actions are categorically forbidden or required, not because of their consequences or outcome in a particular case, but on grounds of pure reason alone" (Graham 116). In other words, the ethical standards are objectively determined by an external moral code.

Within this deontological ethical framework, it is possible to position the ethical beliefs of the Christian Church, also known as Divine Command Theory. According to this framework, a person's duty is decided upon by the word of God. One is to follow the word of God to act in a moral way (Austin). Graham summarizes this position succinctly: "If God is the creator and loves His creation, if He is both all powerful and all good, what He commands cannot fail to provide both prudential and moral reasons for action" (180). The deontological ethical framework is the ethical framework that the Watchers council follows within the series. Although the Christian religion is not a major subject within the show, the origin of the Slayers and the Watcher's council is said to precede the origin of organised religion (7.15); within the series, the Watcher's council functions similarly to the Christian Church. They represent an institution of moral authority external to any individual human being and expect Slayers to perform their duty as defined according to their moral law, and to follow this moral law in order to act in a righteous manner. They do not question this list of rules they have attached to

this duty, even though it is centuries old. Thus, it can be argued that for the Slayer, the Watchers council functions, as the Church does, within divine command theory.

At the start of the show both Buffy and the rest of the gang follow the Watchers' deontological ethical framework, as this is what they were taught when they were first introduced to vampires. Eventually, the gang moves to a utilitarian ethical framework. Exponents of Utilitarian ethics say that actions should only be judged morally based on their outcomes: "the consequences of an action [are] the basis upon which it is to be judged" (Graham 137). Consequently, "that action is best which leads to the greatest happiness of the greatest number" (Graham 135). For example, within the context of *Buffy*, slaying a vampire is a good moral decision as keeping the vampire alive would result in the vampire killing humans. But if the vampire proves no longer to be a threat, and may become a benefit to the gang's operations, then killing the vampire would no longer be the right course of action to take. Graham explains that "utilitarianism has come to be the main element in contemporary moral thinking" (133). Its attraction as an ethical framework lies with how it "insists that everyone's welfare should be treated as equal" and how it "allow(s) us to be concerned with our own welfare, though not to the exclusion of others" (134). It is this utilitarian approach to right and wrong, good and evil, that allows Buffy and the gang to question the Watchers' deontological moral framework and to enter into more complex relations with the monsters they encounter.

Within the show there are also characters who follow the moral framework of ethical egoism. This ethical framework is similar to utilitarianism, as it is based upon the outcome of one's actions. However, while in utilitarianism the ultimate goal is to cause as much happiness as possible for everyone. Within ethical egoism the ultimate goal is to achieve as much happiness as possible for the individual (Shaver). Graham defines it as follows: "I lead the best life when I get what I want, regardless of how this affects others" (21). In other words: "I only have reason to do what matters to me" (Graham 21). This is not the same as selfishness, popularly understood, because "other people can matter to me" (Graham 21). The key difference between an altruistic act and an act performed within the framework of ethical egoism is that the altruistic act is selfless, whereas the egoistic act concerns the self as much as the other.

Lastly, Stephen Asma attempts to define what makes someone a human monster rather than a criminal, according to human law:

Sometimes the criminal is difficult to understand because his rageful behavior is so extreme, but sometimes our bewilderment is based on the absence of *any* motive whatsoever. A criminal who kills for economic gain or for romantic revenge is odious to be sure, but at least he's understandable in principle. Such a villain is certainly a tragedy, but still a distant relation in the human family. The label of monster, on the other hand, is usually reserved for a person whose actions have placed him outside the range of humanity. (205)

Asma differentiates between criminals whose motives are understandable to outsiders and those whose motives are not. Criminals whose motives are justifiable in principle are possible of redemption. This will be explored within chapter four, when Willow lashes out in grief over the death of her girlfriend. Although her actions are immoral, they are understandable to Buffy. Asma further explains his theory: "One aspect of the monster concept seems to be the breakdown of intelligibility. An action or a person or a thing is monstrous when it can't be processed by our rationality, and also when we cannot readily relate to the emotional range involved" (10). A human becomes a monster when their motive is no longer understandable, when they act evil for reasons that cannot be rationally explained. This will be explored through the character of Warren who acts evil, albeit having a human soul, for reasons that are not understandable to Buffy and the rest.

The moral frameworks explained above will be applied throughout this thesis in relation to the ethics of the characters in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Chapter 2: The Shift in the Perception of Good and Evil caused by the Monster Angel

At the outset of the show, Buffy (and soon the rest of the group) has a deontological understanding of the difference between good and evil. Vampires and other demons are evil, humans are good, as taught to them by the Watchers Council. This belief is soon challenged when Buffy meets and befriends Angel, a vampire with a human soul. The relationship between Buffy and Angel features several instances in which Buffy is forced to make decisive choices about morality. At the start of their acquaintance Buffy is unaware that Angel is a vampire. Once his identity is revealed Buffy tries to keep her distance because she cannot be involved with a vampire; according to the deontological ethics of the Watchers it is her duty to slay Angel. However, she soon enters into a romantic relationship with the vampire, which makes her rethink her ethical framework. This relationship turns sour when Angel loses his soul in a moment of pure happiness and Buffy is forced to kill him. When Angel returns from Hell, he and Buffy try to resume their relationship; but it is soon made clear that Buffy and Angel cannot continue. Angel leaves for LA, where the later spin-off show *Angel* begins. This chapter will solely consider the character of Angel as he is portrayed in the original *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, without considering his development in the eponymous spinoff. As Angel and Buffy's relationship develops, Angel's possession of his soul, while still being a vampire, forces Buffy and the gang to rethink the Watchers' deontological ethical framework from which they have developed their view on the morality of humans and vampires. This change is reflected in a change of their ethical discussions and actions as they slowly shift to a utilitarian framework.

2.1: The Hard Line between Good and Evil

The first episode opens with Buffy, having just moved to the fictional town of Sunnydale, going to her first day at her new high school. Here she soon meets her new Watcher Giles, who is tasked to watch over her and help her in her duty to slay the vampires, and her friends Willow, Xander and Jesse, who quickly find out she is not a normal girl. In the two-hour premiere of the show, Buffy's deontological perception of good and evil is soon made clear.

Before the end of her first school day, Buffy accidentally reveals to Xander that she is the

vampire Slayer, when he overhears a conversation between Buffy and Giles. That same evening, Buffy reveals her duty to Willow and Jesse and confirms it to Xander; she has to save Willow and Jesse from a vampire at the Bronze, the local club. However, Willow, Jesse and Xander are soon cornered by more vampires. Willow and Xander manage to escape alive, but Jesse is split from the group and taken by the vampires. The gang holds out hope that Jesse might still be alive and thus they start a rescue mission. When they find Jesse, they first believe him to be unharmed as he looks and acts human. However, Jesse soon reveals his vampire face and thus his fate.

Xander apologises for not saving him, but Jesse explains that he feels good and strong, clearly enjoying the transformation. Xander tries to appeal to him “Jesse, we are buds remember?” (22:10), but Jesse answers “You are like a shadow to me now” (22:15). Jesse shows that, as a vampire, he has disconnected from his human identity, making his friendship with Xander unimportant. Upon returning to the library, Buffy and Xander have to break the news of Jesse’s transformation to Willow and Giles. Xander comments: “I don't like vampires. I'm gonna take a stand and say they are no good” (27:45). He has decided that all vampires are evil based on his experience with them so far. Giles reinforces this sentiment when he reminds the gang right before a big fight against the vampires: “Jesse is dead. You have to remember that. When you see him, you’re not looking at your friend. You are looking at the thing that killed him” (36:30). This opinion of the unredeemable vampire is a notion that both Giles and Buffy have been taught by the Watchers council.

The Watchers council is an institution that keeps track of and helps out Slayers and has done so for centuries. They are shown to be rigid in their beliefs regarding vampires and other demons. This is proven when Angel is poisoned and the Watchers council refuses to help. Wesley, Buffy’s temporary Watcher at that time, explains: “It’s not the council’s policy to cure vampires ... not under any circumstances. ... We’re talking about laws which have existed longer than civilization” (3.21 32:00). At this point, the Watchers council was aware of the anomaly that Angel posed, the vampire with a soul. However, they stand behind their beliefs as they think that curing vampires is morally the wrong choice. This shows that the Watchers council follows deontological ethics as they believe that it is a Slayer's duty to slay all vampires as vampires are bad. Even if there is a rare exception to the overall rule that vampires or other demons are bad, it is still the moral choice to slay the good vampire

or demon as that is one's duty. Moreover, the duty to slay vampires has proven to be the morally correct choice for centuries. This ethical belief in the evil nature of all vampires makes it impossible for them to concede to cure Angel as it is their duty to assist the Slayer in ridding the world of vampires, not helping them survive. According to the council, Angel should be slayed, regardless of the status of his soul. However, as Buffy is the only Slayer, the council is forced to accept that Angel will not be killed since Buffy cares about him.

The notion of the unredeemable vampire is something that Xander clearly struggles with. When he confronts his friend, he says: "Jesse, I know there's still a part of you in there" (40:30). However, Jesse denies this and says: "Jesse was an excruciating loser who couldn't get a date with anyone in the sighted community. Look at me. I'm a new man!" (40:45). As David Kociemba explains:

Xander here recognizes the humanity within the human-demon hybrid that is the vampire in Buffy. Although Giles harshly rebukes Xander's empathy in the pilot (...) Through Jesse, the series starts its examination of the endless cycle of violence in which victims become victimizers. When we look on the vampire's visage, we see the abuser's face layered over the human face of the abused. That recognition begins with Xander looking at Jesse's vampire face with empathy and dismay (25).

Xander still holds on to the idea of his friend being present somewhere and able to come back from being an evil vampire. However, this hope is short lived as Xander accidentally kills Jesse only a few seconds later when he holds a stake to Jesse's heart and Jesse is pushed into it. It is unclear if Xander would have been able to stake Jesse himself as he was clearly holding out hope for his friend. However, soon after, the gang (including Xander) seems to let go of Jesse because they understand that he was never going to return to being their friend.

The storyline of the first two episodes clearly shows the deontological ethical position of the gang towards vampires, as Giles and Buffy were taught by the Watchers council. Once someone turns into a vampire, they are evil, even if it is hard to deal with at first. As Giles explains it, a vampire is "a

human form possessed, infected by a demon soul” (1.02 3:00). Here is the first mention in the show of a soul, used to explain that vampires are evil because they are inhabited by a demon soul instead of a human one. The soul is proven to be an important concept when it comes to determining the moral nature of a monster throughout the show. However, in the first few episodes, its existence is only important to underline that vampires cannot be good as they do not possess a human soul anymore. As Lynn Shofield Clark explains: “When a person is “sired” into vampirism in *Buffy*, the soul leaves the body and is replaced by a demon. Staking kills a demon; the soul of the person is already long gone. Thus, in *Buffy*, tales of vampires and those of demon possessions blur, with little hope for the redemption of the lost ones” (52). This notion is challenged by Angel throughout the next three seasons.

2.2: The Exception to the Rule

In the first episode Buffy also meets Angel. Although unknown to both Buffy and the audience at this point, Angel is a vampire. He manages to keep his identity hidden for multiple episodes by always lurking in the shadows, giving Buffy information but never assisting in her fights with other vampires and demons and hiding his vampire face from her. As Giles explains, in the first episode: “A vampire appears to be completely normal until the feed is upon them. Only then do they reveal their true demonic visage” (28:50). This demonic visage is still close to the human face underneath; however, he now has the trademark vampire fangs, new eyes that have a different colour and a bumpy protruding forehead. When not showing the vampire visage, a vampire appears identical to their human form from before being bitten, as was shown by Jesse for a few minutes when Xander and Buffy found him. Most vampires can change between the human face and the vampire face at will, with the exception when they are drinking blood or fighting.

Angel uses this ability of appearing human to keep his vampire side hidden from Buffy and the audience for most of the first season. In S1E7 “Angel,” he accidentally reveals his true nature to Buffy. Before this episode, Angel’s encounters with Buffy have mostly concerned updates and warnings about vampires and other demons that are terrorising Sunnydale. However, both Buffy and

Angel have become attracted to each other. Early on, Buffy tells Willow she likes Angel. During the first half of S1E7 there is some mutual flirting between Buffy and Angel. This flirting results in the two of them kissing in Buffy's bedroom. However, the excitement and nerves of the kiss prove to be too much for Angel who accidentally reveals he is a vampire by changing from his human face into his vampire visage. He immediately runs away but not before Buffy sees and recognises his true identity. This comes as a shock to both Buffy and the rest of the group as they still firmly believe that all vampires are evil. The next day, Buffy asks the group: "Can a vampire ever be a good person? Couldn't it happen?" Giles replies that "A vampire isn't a person at all. It may have the movement, the memories, even the personality of the person it took over, but it is still a demon at the core. There is no halfway" (1.07 17:40). This is upsetting to Buffy as she admits she is in love with Angel but as the group points out, she is the Slayer and she should kill Angel. Buffy's agreement to this statement shows that she still agrees with the deontological ethics of the Watchers council at this point, which makes it her duty and thus the moral choice to slay the vampire Angel, regardless of her feelings. Giles's words quoted above also reveal a significant aspect of the Watchers council's definitions of good and evil. Giles mentions how vampires are not people. This sets the binary that humanity is associated with goodness, while monstrosity or animality is associated with evil. Therefore, vampires are unable to do good as they have no humanity within them. This also sets the precedent that humanity and a human soul, something all humans inherently possess, is what causes someone to be capable of good. This is a belief that will be further explored in chapter four.

In the next scene, the audience sees Angel's fridge filled with blood bags as he speaks to the vampire Darla. Although not much is known about him yet, besides the fact that he is a vampire who has been helping Buffy for the past few episodes, this moment shows that Angel does not drink directly from humans, something he confirms later in the episode. This supports the notion that maybe vampires can be good to some extent, or at least, less evil. As Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr point out: "In the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the character Angel was the first mainstream vampire that truly rejected feeding on humans, because he was cursed with a soul" (16). To the audience, the notion that Angel rejects human blood is still a new concept. Thus, this is a compelling argument for him being morally good, despite being a vampire. In the same scene, Darla

reminds Angel that although he is living as a human, he still is a vampire and she believes the “true him,” meaning the evil version, cannot be suppressed for much longer.

As the gang tries to find more information on Angel, they find out that he came to America about eighty years before and that there is no record of him hunting there. Willow draws this conclusion from that information: “So he is a good vampire. I mean, on a scale from one to ten, ten being someone who is killing and maiming every night, and one being someone who is not”. Giles is reluctant to believe it: “I said that there is no record. But vampires hunt and kill, it’s what they do” (22:30). Or, as Xander puts it, “Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly.” They also mention that before Angel came to America he was like all other vampires “a vicious, violent animal” (23:00). Clearly, the gang still believes that being evil is just part of being a vampire and that there are no exceptions. During this scene they are unaware that Angel has a soul. However, both Buffy and Willow have their doubts about him being inherently evil. Angel could have attacked Buffy many times already, but he never did; instead he helped her. This doubt is also in part because at this point, Buffy has come to know Angel. By being involved in a relationship with him Buffy begins to doubt his presumed evil nature. She talks to Willow about her doubts concerning Angel’s evil nature; she explains how she knows she has to fulfil her Slayer duties, even though Angel has never done anything to hurt her. This sentiment is what stops Buffy from killing him later that night when she comes home and finds Angel with her unconscious mother in his arms. Buffy is unaware that this is a setup; although she is capable of slaying him, she instead sends him out of the house and tells him to stay away from her and her family. However, as she meets with the gang in the hospital, and after seeing her mom in a hospital bed, she makes up her mind and decides to slay him anyways.

When Buffy confronts Angel in the Bronze, she quickly has a clean shot on him with her crossbow. However, she does not take it. This is partly due to the fact that when she aims the crossbow at Angel he changes from his vampire face back to his human face, reminding Buffy of the Angel to which she is attracted, instead of the monster she is fighting. Buffy also stops fighting because she wants answers from him about why he helped despite being a vampire.

Angel explains that he fed on a Romani, or “Gypsy,” girl once and her clan cursed him with his soul. Gaining his human soul back is regarded as a curse because “You have no idea what it’s like to have done the things I have done and to care. I haven’t fed on a living human being since that day” (1.07 36:00). He even warns Buffy about himself: “I can walk like a man, but I am not one. I wanted to kill you tonight” (36:00). Although he has his human soul back and he has not hurt a human in almost a century, he still believes himself to be evil; his actions before he regained his human soul still haunt his conscience. They are interrupted by Darla and a fight ensues, during which Angel stakes Darla and saves Buffy before walking out without saying anything. They meet again in the Bronze a few days later where they agree that they cannot start a relationship but do kiss, which leaves a cross shaped burn mark on Angel’s chest from Buffy’s cross necklace. This serves as a reminder to the audience and Buffy that although his true nature is not always visible and he might have a soul, he is still a vampire. Buffy no longer believes he is evil. However, besides sharing a kiss, they keep their distance for the next few episodes. Tamara J. Nichols explains that

Angel is crucial in the transformation of the war between vampires and slayers. His contradictory inner life is complex and irresistible to the Slayer. Ultimately he is a catalyst for a shifting of attitude necessary for the Slayer to become not only more powerful but also for her to attain wisdom. Due to the influence of Angel, Buffy stops thinking in the black-and-white terms promulgated by the Watchers Council. Instead of seeing vampires as only prey, she ultimately learns a greater complexity from association with Angel and other vampires and demons (84).

Through this relationship with Angel, Buffy learns to not always trust the deontological ethical framework she was taught to follow by the Watchers council. Instead, she starts noticing that certain demons and vampires are more complex than the evil vampire stereotype she used to adhere to.

In S1E11, Angel returns after keeping his distance from Buffy and saves the lives of Giles, Xander and Willow from a monster without Buffy knowing. This leads the gang to accept that Angel is not a threat to them in the final episode of season one, even considering him an ally. Giles calls upon him for help with a prophecy and Xander goes to him for help tracking down Buffy, albeit

reluctantly. After Buffy and the gang save the world from ending, Angel joins them to celebrate, clearly trusted as part of the team.

When Angel joins the group as an ally, Buffy and the rest of the gang take another step away from the deontological ethics of the Watchers council, and the council itself. Instead, they introduce more utilitarian ethics into their handling of vampires, albeit slowly for now. The council was presented as a moral authority at the onset of the show. Stepping away from them, gives Buffy and the gang the space to develop their own ethical framework. Although Buffy still trusts the council at this point, she has made an exception to their biggest rule, to slay all vampires. As Buffy and the rest fully believe that Angel is good and not a threat to them or other humans, they have let him live. Killing Angel, although he is a vampire, would not have an overall mostly positive outcome; it would be negative for Angel who would die and go to hell. It would be negative for Buffy and the gang who have grown attached to Angel on an emotional level. And there would be a negative outcome, rather than a positive one, for the human population of Sunnydale as Angel has often proved helpful to Buffy and thus helpful in their fight to save humans from the threat of evil vampires and demons. Thus, from a utilitarian ethical perspective, the right decision is to let Angel live. However, the gang had initially imbibed the notion that all vampires are evil from the council's teachings. As such they still keep a distance from him as a vampire is still a monster and monsters are still a threat to human wellbeing within their traditional moral framework.

This underlying lack of trust in vampires is foregrounded by Buffy herself, when she tells Angel in S2E1: "I don't trust you, you are a vampire" (30:30). However, the more Buffy and the gang interact with Angel and start to trust him, the more they start seeing him as a human. Trust is seen as an example of a positive trait, connected to their idea of a traditional good human. However, through Angel they learn that these characteristics of a good human can also extend to vampires and other beings. They are learning to be more inclusive in their beliefs, different no longer immediately means evil. This causes Buffy to start slowly building a romantic relationship with Angel, although still aware of the issue at hand as she discusses with Willow:

Willow: “You two are so right for each other, except for the uh...”

Buffy: “vampire thing”

Willow: “That doesn't make him a bad person, necessarily”

Buffy: “I'm brain sick, I can't have a relationship with him” (2.05 4:00).

Although they pause on the idea of him being a vampire, Willow convinces Buffy she can still ask Angel out for a coffee. Angel tries to take it slow and stay away from Buffy too as he is aware of the risks. But despite their best efforts, they still end up in a relationship not much later. As Nichols explains: “Angel straddles the world of the demonic and human because he is an anomaly— a vampire who has regained his soul. This contradiction aids Buffy in deconstructing the literal. She cannot relegate the demonic to a tidy category because the one she loves most is both "Angel" and demon” (95). Although at this point, she has already accepted that Angel is no threat to the humans in Sunnydale, she is still hesitant to build any kind of relationship with him. However, the feelings she has for Angel are the exact reason she learns to accept that there are nuances in what she believes to be good and evil.

2.3: The Loss of Humanity and Importance of Human-Monster Relationships

The relationship between Buffy and Angel is short lived as Angel's curse involved more than just the return of his human soul. The return of his human soul is already torture for Angel; he has to live in the shadows, knowing how much pain he has caused humans for centuries. However, if he manages to feel true happiness, the curse lifts and he loses his soul again. Thus, this returns him to his full vampire form, including his tendencies towards evil instead of good. True happiness is hard to define as any definition of happiness differs per individual (Barrow 68).³ There are also no more details revealed about his curse and what is defined as true happiness. Angel is never absolved of his guilt for his past actions thus it can be assumed that it is not a perfect happiness. However, before

³ Robin Barrow asks the pertinent question: “Granted many people may indeed need certain things, like money, sex and good health in order to be happy, is that because of something about the nature of happiness or because of something about the way people happen to be” (68). Barrow further claims that “there is no list of material conditions, A, B, C such that anybody who has A, B, C must *ipso facto* be happy” (69).

Angel is accepted within the group, he was an outcast and unhappy about his situation. He is shown being homeless, talking to no one, without a goal or purpose in his life before meeting the group (2.21). In the episode where Angel loses his soul, he has found a purpose, a home, and a community. His relationship with Buffy and the rest of the gang is what causes him to feel this true happiness. Buffy and Angel are in love with each other, and Angel has found a place within a group where he is actively able to help innocent humans and protect them from other monsters. He is becoming happy for the first time since being cursed. This happiness is not the same as goodness. Barrow explains that evil people can also feel happiness (70). This claim is supported by multiple monsters throughout the series who are regarded as villains but yet manage to feel happiness.

In SE13, “Surprise,” on Buffy’s seventeenth birthday, Buffy and Angel take the next step in their relationship by openly sharing their love for each other and sleeping together. At this moment Angel realises that he is truly happy. As mentioned above, true happiness is hard to define. However, as this moment of happiness for Angel happens during and after sex with Buffy, it could be argued that what he felt was intense happiness. This intense happiness is derived from small moments such as pleasure (Barrow 82-83). Afterwards, while Buffy is sleeping, Angel stumbles outside into a storm and while in a lot of pain he loses his soul. This is soon confirmed as the monster of the week, known as the Judge, is able to burn the humanity out of people. When he touches Angel, nothing happens. Instead, the judge confirms: “He is clean ... there is no humanity in him” (2.14 9:15). As explained in 2.2, humanity within the ethical framework of the Watchers council was associated with goodness. The Judge revealing that there is no humanity within Angel anymore reveals to the audience that there is no good within Angel anymore.

Angel soon makes a plan to hurt and eventually kill Buffy, claiming “she made me feel like a human being. That’s not the kind of thing you just forget” (2.14 11:00). This moment clearly shows that the human soul that Angel had been given by the Romani as a curse had caused him to develop a human sense of goodness. The soul gave him a conscience and a drive to be a good person. However, as he lost his soul, he immediately lost his ability to think and act in ways that the human characters would consider morally right. Angel immediately plans to hurt Buffy; he joins Spike and Drusilla, the

evil vampires that terrorised Sunnydale and Buffy before. As Nichols points out, “Angel’s loss of soul transforms his once transcendent love for Buffy to an all-consuming hate, in essence a reverse awakening of soul” (95). This turn of events sets a precedent for the gang. Angel’s transformations have taught them that vampires are not inherently evil and that humans are not inherently good; instead, they now know that there are exceptions to the general rule and that good and evil are to some extent relative ethical categories, reliant at times for their meaning on the context in which words are said and actions are performed. When Angel loses his human soul, the group sees their belief that having a human soul is what allows someone to develop a proper understanding of goodness (and to speak and act accordingly) reinforced. This understanding is still close to the beliefs of the Watchers council. However, the Watchers council does not recognise any exceptions to their belief that all demons have to be slayed. The gang has learned from Angel that there are exceptions. Certain demons need to be approached with a utilitarian ethical framework to decide if they can be allowed to live. As not all monsters are soulless.

As the group is at first unaware of Angel losing his soul, they still trust him. Jenny, the computer lab teacher and a member of the Romani clan that cursed Angel in the first place, figures it out first. When Angel grabs Willow in the school hallway and Xander witnesses this, they are confused, until Jenny says: “He’s not Angel anymore. Are you?” Angel responds by saying: “Wrong, I am Angel, at last” (20:00). When Buffy sees Angel threatening Willow, she says: “This can’t be you. (...) Angel, there must be some part of you inside that still remembers who you are” (20:30). This reaction is similar to Xander’s reaction when his friend Jesse turned into a vampire in the pilot episode as shown in 2.1. Both him then and Buffy now hope for a sign of recognition of the person they knew before. However, in Angel’s case, he had turned into a vampire long before he met Buffy. Angel responds to Buffy’s plea with “Dream on, schoolgirl. Your boyfriend is dead” (21:00). The gang draw a clear line between Angel with a soul and Angel without a soul: they call him Angelus when he is evil. However, Buffy is still aware that she has to kill him; Angelus’s torture of her makes it easier for her. The gang often reminds Buffy of this divide too. Within her mind, Buffy has fully separated the Angel that she knew and loved from Angelus. When she faces him head on for the first time, he taunts her, and she responds saying: “It doesn’t matter. You’re not Angel” (39:30). Although

he is undeniably evil at this point, Buffy still cannot kill him. She has a good opportunity to kill him during this fight. However, Angelus is fighting Buffy while wearing his human face, and their emotional relationship stops Buffy from staking him. Instead she knocks him down and lets him go. As Tamara J. Nichols explains:

Buffy loses herself in Angel during sex, but reconstructs herself afterward. She needs more heat in order to get to the next level. Angelus stalks Buffy using Angel's familiarity with her to devise vicious games and cruel insults that cause her great pain. She is agonized by the loss of Angel, but her worst suffering is seeing the body of her lover inhabited by a wicked demon. (107)

It is the familiarity of Angel's face and body that withholds Buffy from killing him in this fight, although she is aware that he is no longer the Angel that she once knew.

As Angelus, Angel commits many horrible acts against Buffy and her friends. Angelus tortures Buffy from a distance for months and kills Jenny Calendar, who at that point is Giles's girlfriend and an appreciated and much-loved member of the gang (2.17). He kills Jenny when she is close to replicating the original curse that gave Angelus his human soul, which would prevent Angelus from carrying out his plan to turn earth into a demonic dimension. Jenny is doing her research on this matter in secret, the information she finds is unknown to the others until Buffy and Willow find a floppy disk with the research (2.21). When they find this disk, they immediately tell the rest of the gang, and they discuss whether Angel deserves to regain his human soul. Buffy believes he deserves his humanity back as "what happened to Angel wasn't his fault." But Xander counters with "Yeah, but what happened to Ms. Calendar is. You can paint this any way you want but the way I see it is that you want to forget all about Ms. Calendar's murder so you can get your boyfriend back" (20:00). On the one hand, Buffy is holding on to the Angel that she knew. Although she is right, based on how remorseful Angel becomes once gaining his human soul back, his current actions are not his fault, Angelus still did cause a lot of harm. Xander, on the other hand, is less influenced by his bond with Angel, which was never strong. Instead, his critical stance towards Angel is influenced by his grief for Jenny Calendar. Angelus is responsible for her death and Xander is blaming Angel for it

fully. Only Buffy is still affected by her relationship with Angel. Her friends understand and sympathise, but they do not hold out hope for Angel anymore. Later on in the episode, Buffy makes it clear that she wants Willow to attempt to curse Angel with a human soul again. However, she is willing to kill Angel nonetheless. The curse is a backup plan in case she arrives too late or loses the fight. Thus, her intentions are not to return Angel's soul so she can have her boyfriend back. Her intentions are to save the world from the demon dimension that Angel wants to unleash, returning Angel's soul would make that easier. This fits within the utilitarian ethical framework because returning Angel's soul will prohibit Angelus from opening the portal to the demon dimension, thus causing the best outcome to the most people as the portal will turn the earth into a demon dimension. However, if Willow is too late to return Angel's human soul then Buffy is still willing to kill Angelus, thus again preventing him from turning earth into a demon dimension. Either outcome is focused on what is best for the most people. Within the deontological ethical framework of the Watchers council Buffy should not attempt to return Angel's soul as it goes against her duty of slaying all vampires.

At the final battle of season two, between Buffy and Angelus, Buffy is left no choice but to kill Angel. At the last minute, Willow succeeds in giving Angel his human soul back. Angel does not remember what he did during the last few months; it takes a minute for his memories to return. However, before they do, Buffy is still forced to kill him. Before regaining his soul, Angelus had activated a portal that would suck the earth into a demonic dimension. While rejoicing that Angel has returned, Buffy notices that the portal is forming and thus she is forced to kill him in order to save humanity. This is traumatising to her as she does not receive the comfort of killing Angelus, who she could compartmentalise as a different person from Angel. Instead she has to kill and mourn her boyfriend who she loves, and who does not know what is happening or what he has done in the course of the last few months. Buffy's relationship with Angel has withheld her from killing him for the last few months. However, with the state of the entire world in the balance, and with her new-found utilitarian ethical framework, she is left with no other choice but to kill him.

Angel's banishment to hell is short lived as he returns to Sunnydale at the start of season three. On earth this was a few months later, to Angel it had been centuries as time worked differently in hell. When he returns, he is treated with a lot of mistrust. Buffy tries to keep her distance but does

not manage for long as Angel is still important to her. Within a few episodes Buffy and Angel develop a romantic relationship again. However, both are aware they cannot let it come to the same point as it did the first time, with the risk of Angel losing his soul again. The rest of the gang has a harder time accepting Angel's return. When they first find out they stage an intervention for Buffy. When the group expresses their concern for Buffy and Angel, Buffy says: "He's better now" (3.07 19:30). This phrasing is significant as it makes clear that Buffy compares Angel losing his human soul to an illness, which is something he can recover from. Xander does not accept this: "Better for how long Buffy? I mean, did you even think about that?" Although Buffy focuses on Angel's personality and identity from the time before he lost his soul, Xander is mostly reminded of how easy it was for him to lose it. When Buffy claims she was waiting to tell the group, Xander asks: "For what? For Angel to go psycho again the next time you give him a happy." He refers to how Angel lost his soul after he and Buffy slept together. Buffy realises that she cannot start a relationship with Angel again: "It was wrong, okay? I know that and I know that it can't happen again. But you guys have to believe me. I would never put you in any danger. If I thought for a second that Angel was gonna hurt anyone..." Xander interrupts her "You would stop him. Like you did last time with Ms. Calendar" (20:00). Xander has always been the most sceptical when it comes to trusting Angel. However, Willow also expresses her concern: "Buffy, I feel like when it comes to Angel, you can't see straight" (20:30). Even Giles who trusts Buffy's judgement in regard to demons on a daily basis is hurt about Angel being back. He tells Buffy she has "jeopardized the lives of all that [she] holds dear by harbouring a known murderer" and reminds her that "Angel tortured me, for hours, for pleasure. You should have told me he was alive. You didn't. You have no respect for me or the job I perform" (22:30). Giles was not only hurt by the grief Angelus caused when he killed Jenny. He was also physically hurt himself, and therefore takes Buffy's actions personally. The gang has a hard time accepting Angel back into their fold. However, slowly, throughout season three, Angel once again proves to them that he is a good person. He shows them that the actions that the group hold him responsible for were committed by Angelus instead of him.

A few episodes earlier, Giles made a clear distinction between different kinds of monsters: “In my experience there are two types of monsters. The first can be redeemed, or more importantly, wants to be redeemed. ... The second is void of humanity. Cannot respond to reason, or love” (3.04 20:00). By turning to the notion of redemption – a traditionally Christian notion concerning the forgiveness of human sins – Giles reveals that the gang is beginning to look differently at the nature of monsters than before they knew Angel. Their new-found belief in the possible redemption of monsters also allows them to trust Angel again, eventually. As Jeffrey Hause and Krysta Larson explain:

Angel’s example gives Buffy hope for others’ redemptions as well, and she works to achieve that outcome whenever possible. This hopefulness, itself based on openness to new perspectives, even about “monsters,” contrasts with the unimaginative bureaucracy of the Initiative, which indiscriminately labels all vampires and demons as “hostiles.” Buffy’s hopeful perspective and its transformative power serve to make her a better slayer than any before her (1029).

This hope does not only widen Buffy’s perspective on monsters; it also becomes the perspective of the rest of the group. After his initial return, the group is still hesitant to accept Angel back, because of all the hurt he has caused in the past. However, he proves to them that he belongs within the first category of “monster.” Angel strives to be redeemed, it is the main point in his story arc in his spin-off show *Angel*, doing good to atone for the evil acts he has committed against humanity as Angelus. This drive to be redeemed is what makes it a morally good decision – from a utilitarian perspective – to keep Angel alive and even to trust him again. Although the risk of Angel once again losing his soul persists, as long as Angel and Buffy keep their distance and Angel holds onto his human soul, he will do anything to better the world and help rid it of vampires and demons. Thus, keeping him alive has positive consequences for many humans even though the Watchers council would disagree and believe it to be Buffy’s duty to kill all demons regardless of the consequences.

Through their relationship with Angel, Buffy and the gang not only find out about the importance of the human soul when it comes to ethics. They also set their first steps away from the

rigid, duty-bound, deontological ethics of the Watchers council. Instead, they start moving towards utilitarian ethics that align better with their belief that if someone is helping people in a cause that should lead to greater collective happiness and wellbeing, even if they are a vampire, they deserve to live and be accepted as “one of us,” so to speak, rather than a monstrous other. The same insight stopped Buffy from slaying Angel after he had lost his soul, thus proving that relationships with monsters can be both dangerous and beneficial to an individual as well a human society at large.

Chapter 3: The Moral Grey Area Represented by the Monster Spike

From the perspective of the human characters in the show, the vampire Spike is unequivocally evil, because he has no soul, and his thoughts and actions correspond to what is defined as evil within that society. Nevertheless, Spike challenges the human characters' initial deontological moral framework because his thoughts and actions are not unequivocally evil, and he shows a potential to do good. In season four, Spike returns to Sunnydale and has a chip inserted into his brain that prevents him from hurting humans. Because he is no longer an active threat to the destruction of human lives, and the gang now follows a more utilitarian ethical framework in deciding which monsters need to be slain, Buffy decides to let him live. Although not a physical threat anymore, Spike still causes havoc for the rest of the season until he realises he is in love with Buffy. Eventually, in season six, Buffy and Spike enter into a sexual relationship, which ends when Buffy says she cannot be in a relationship with him as he is still a soulless vampire. However, their short-lived intimate relationship motivates Spike to go in search of a human soul, which he finds in the course of season seven. In Angel's case, when he had a human soul, he was unquestionably good. However, when he lost his soul, he became unequivocally evil. In Spike's case, he is less unequivocally evil without a soul. This chapter will explore Spike's storyline throughout the show, how his chip and his relationship with Buffy cause him to make morally justified decisions, which lead him to desire a soul, which in turn helps the gang to further develop their utilitarian ethics that allow them to adopt Spike into their fold.

3.1: A More Humane Vampire

Spike and his girlfriend Drusilla, or Dru, come into Sunnydale with a plan to kill Buffy and cure Dru from her illness. Angel sired both Spike and Drusilla, meaning he turned them into vampires. They have a run in during S2E3 in which Spike is mad about Angel having his soul back. Which leads to Angel saying, "Things change," and Spike responding with "Not us, not demons" (37:00). This is a significant exchange, as Angel at this point has changed from the old, soulless Angelus to Angel, the vampire with a human soul. As this chapter will show, Spike will undergo

moral and mental changes in the upcoming seasons before gaining a human soul. This shows that he is capable of moral and mental change, even if he currently believes demons are not.

Before any scientific or soul-related solutions were found to alleviate Spike from his monstrous character, Spike was already a more human-like vampire than most other vampires in the show, up until that moment. Most vampires in the show resemble animals in their behaviour. They only think about feeding or killing. Yet certain vampires show clearer leadership or planning skills than others. Spike even shows a capacity for empathy and love. Before becoming a vampire, Spike was known as William the Bloody; in fact, he was a sensitive poet and his nickname, “The Bloody,” referred jokingly to his “bloody awful poetry” (5.07). Tamara J. Nichols explains his ability to love as follows:

Spike exhibits some typical Aurelian traits such as natural leadership over lesser vampires, charisma and ultraviolence. He also has one unique quality: his ability to experience love is partially intact. Most vampires have feelings of love but in a more stunted and ephemeral manifestation. He also retains his love of poetry and, when not posturing as a street-wise cockney, he has a knack for an elegant turn of phrase. (141)

The aforementioned Aurelian traits refer to one of the original vampires, Aurelian, from whom Spike is a distant descendant. This partially intact ability to love others is illustrated by Spike’s treatment of Drusilla. He arrives in Sunnydale with his girlfriend Drusilla, a vampire who at first is very weak and sick. As a human, back in the 1800s, she had possessed psychic powers; after Angelus had killed and tortured her entire family, she went insane, at which point Angelus turned her into a vampire.

Throughout the earlier seasons, Spike shows that he cares about her deeply. He takes care of her, has much patience with her and constantly tries to make her happy. Dee Amy-Chinn comments on how patient and endearing Spike is as Drusilla’s boyfriend: “he was presented as the perfect boyfriend to Drusilla: loving, attentive, forgiving, and willing to take untold risks for the woman he loved. Even with the shallow and annoying Harmony ... he demonstrated a resigned patience that few could equal” (321). Spike himself says at one point: “I may be love’s bitch, but at least I’m man enough to admit it” (3.08 30:00). Spike is not only capable of love but when he does love someone, he shows it clearly.

In an attempt to kill Buffy, Spike and Drusilla wake up the Judge. As explained in 2.3, the Judge is a demon who can sense and destroy humanity by a simple touch. When he is newly resurrected, he shows a certain disdain towards Spike and Drusilla as he claims: “You two stink of humanity. You share affection and jealousy” (2.13 35:30). This shows that although both Drusilla and Spike are at this point soulless vampires, they still manage to hold onto some sense of humanity within them. The capacity to love and care for others is something that is written as a human characteristic within the universe of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. These are qualities that require a certain amount of humanity. Although the Judge still is not able to hurt Spike or Drusilla, as they are still soulless and do not have any actual humanity within them, he is able to sense, or smell, a certain affinity for humanity and human characteristics within them. Mary Alice Money explains what being human in a world full of demonic supernatural forces means:

What makes them human is their capacity for feeling emotions; what makes them demons is their inability to change; their emotions don't grow or lead to good as human emotions can....

In Whedon's universe, at least, there seems to be a continuum running between the opposite poles of human and demon; in other words, some demons are more human than others, and some humans behave like demons. Or, to put it another way, what makes us human is our capacity to change, to feel emotions, to choose good over evil. (99-100)

Following Money's analysis of the show's perspective of humanity, Spike is one of the demons that is more human than other demons, while Angel retains none of his human qualities when he does not have his soul. However, not only is Spike already more human than other demons, but he also shows a capacity for love and empathy. He starts to change over the seasons, without the help of a human soul. As will be shown in this chapter, Spike never turns fully towards the good side until he earns his soul. However, he does manage to choose good over evil, without his soul, when it fits his own agenda or needs, which is in line with ethical egoism.

In season two, Spike and Drusilla are at first set up as that season's “Big Bad,” the meta-textual label that the gang attaches to the end of the season monsters in a self-reflective nod to modern monster-movie and video-game conventions. However, with Spike ending up in a wheelchair after an accident for most of the season, and with Angel losing his soul, this role is played by Angelus, who

teams up with Drusilla and Spike. This team works together until Spike starts planning against Angelus, not appreciating Angelus flirting with Drusilla and his plans going too far for Spike's liking. This leads to Spike being the first, albeit reluctant, fully demonic ally of Buffy. As Spike explains, while trying to convince Buffy to trust him: "I want to stop Angel, I want to save the world ... The truth is, I like this world. You've got dog racing. Manchester United. And you've got people. Billions of people walking around like Happy Meals with legs. It's all right here. But then someone comes along with a vision. With a real passion for destruction. Angel could pull it off" (2.22 10:00). Although Spike and Buffy have the same end goal, saving the world from Angelus, their reasons to do so differ. Spike wants the world to survive because he likes drinking from humans and he wants Drusilla back, who is swept up in Angel's big plan. His intentions are egoistic, following Gordon Graham's explanation of ethical egoism: "being successful at getting what you want" (21). Instead of the deontological or utilitarian morally reasoning for wanting to save the world, as employed by the Watchers and Buffy, Spike only helps others to help himself.

Despite his ethical egoism, Spike and Buffy strike a deal. Spike helps Buffy defeat Angel and save Giles and in return Buffy lets Spike and Drusilla leave town with the promise to never return. This allyship shows that Spike's priorities lie with his relationship with Drusilla and his own love for the world. He is already much more than just a blood-lusting and destruction-loving vampire. However, he is also clearly not a good person yet. He only helps others when it suits his own needs and desires. When he sees that Angelus almost kills Buffy, he walks away without a second thought because he is still a vampire without a human soul. Spike fails to see that "what is in my interest need not always coincide with what I want or desire at any given moment" (Graham 36). Consequently, he initially does not care about Buffy's wellbeing, and neither is he concerned in doing a good deed, or helping someone in need.

When Spike returns for one episode, in season three, his capabilities for emotions are highlighted again. He returns to Sunnydale, drunk, grieving for his breakup with Drusilla. In an attempt to win Drusilla back, Spike kidnaps Willow, who has just started to show an affinity for magic; Spike wants Willow to create a love spell for him. While holding Willow and Xander hostage, Spike shares his feelings with her, saying: "She just left. She didn't even care enough to cut off my

head or set me on fire. I mean, is that too much to ask? Some little sign that she cares? It was that truce with Buffy that did it. Dru said I'd gone soft. Wasn't demon enough for the likes of her." (3.08 20:00). He is heavily affected by the breakup and wishes Dru had shown more clearly how much she cared about him by killing him. Spike's emotional struggle shows that he longs for being loved as much as he claims to love Dru, even though, at this point, his idea of love is still violent and homicidal.

For Dru, the fact that Spike made a deal with Buffy was reason enough to cheat on Spike, as she claimed he had "gone soft." Dru's notion of Spike's softness further highlights the soulless vampire's human-like characteristics, because he is acknowledged to have the capacity for real love. Spike's so-called "soft side" is foregrounded throughout this episode, as he cries about his breakup in the presence of Willow, Joyce, Buffy, and Angel. However, as Spike at this point is still a vampire, without a soul, he is soon reminded of his vampire nature. He forces Buffy and Angel to team up with him, as he has kidnapped Willow and Xander. Together they are attacked by a group of vampires that used to work for Spike. When one of them calls him "soft," Spike becomes angry and fights back vigorously. After they beat the vampire group, Spike gives up on his plan to give Dru a love potion; instead, he develops a new plan: "I'm gonna do what I should have done in the first place. I'll find [Dru], wherever she is, tie her up, torture her until she likes me again (38:00). This shows that although he has the capacity for love and change, he is not yet ready to embrace it.

After spending some time moping about the breakup, he is reminded of how much he loves violence, as that is part of his vampire nature. He comes up with a particularly violent plan to win back Dru by torturing her. Although Spike is still clearly evil in this episode, having kidnapped two people and killed another, Buffy still does not kill him. At first this makes sense, as Spike made it clear that if he dies so will Willow and Xander. However, by the end of the episode, he has told Buffy where Willow and Xander are hidden, which means she could kill him without any grave repercussions. Also, no intimate relationship has yet developed between the two, which could stop Buffy from using violence against Spike. Buffy points out how much she dislikes Spike multiple times in the episode. There is also no ethical reason why Buffy would keep Spike alive. Both utilitarian and deontological ethics would dictate that the morally right choice would be to kill Spike.

Yet Spike lives, which presents viewers with a moral conundrum. Maybe Buffy determined to prioritise saving Willow and Xander over killing Spike; this would save her much time as she would not have to enter into a physical fight with Spike, who is a strong enemy that cannot be defeated quickly. But this remains speculation. What is clear, however, is that Spike's coming to Sunnydale highlights the complexity of moral decisions and the difficulty to determine right from wrong, good from evil, when the circumstances in which actions need to be taken based on moral decisions are not straightforward and often shrouded in ambiguity.

3.2: The Ethical Implications of Spike's Chip

In season four, Spike becomes a protagonist on the show, after he returns to Sunnydale succeeding another breakup with Dru. Soon after his reintroduction, he is knocked out and kidnapped. When he wakes up, he finds himself in an underground facility that belongs to the agency called the "Initiative," which is a government agency that captures vampires and other demons, who can be seen in the neighbouring cells to Spike's (4.07). The "Initiative" conduct experiments on demons for military purposes. Spike quickly escapes the facility but not before he has had a chip implanted into his head. Spike blames Buffy for being kidnapped. Without being aware of the chip, he goes to her dorm room to kill her. However, Buffy is not at her dorm; instead Spike finds Willow there. When he physically attacks Willow, Spike is hit with a debilitating headache that makes him incapable of furthering his attack. The scene is filmed in a comedic way, as if he is unable to perform sexually with Willow. Despite the comedic framing, the situation is still quite serious for Spike; he is still a vampire and besides loving violence, he also needs blood to survive.

Midway through the same scene between Spike and Willow, Spike's capacity for empathy is once again shown as Willow takes it personally that he fails to bite her. At this point, Willow is going through a breakup with her now ex-boyfriend Oz, and is feeling insecure. Spike takes the time to comfort her, despite the fact that they are enemies. The theme of empathy returns when Spike is presented as the only character who notices that Willow is still struggling with her breakup a few episodes later. As Dee Amy-Chinn explains:

Spike's preoccupation with his inability to 'perform' is momentarily sidetracked when Willow begins to blame herself for his problem; faced with her lack of self-confidence he seeks to reassure her that she is attractive to men. Spike is subsequently the only character to empathize with Willow sufficiently to see her pain. While in 'Something Blue' (4:9) both Giles and Buffy think that she is 'coping better' and 'dealing' with having been left by her werewolf boyfriend, it is Spike who sees that 'she's barely holding it together.' (320)

This ability to empathize with humans and his perceptiveness of social cues and emotions set Spike apart from the other vampires without souls that have featured in the show up to this point. It is also what slowly brings on his desire to change from a fully evil vampire into a more sympathetic vampire knowledgeable and accepting of the large moral grey areas that he has to navigate as a more humane monster.

While hiding from the Initiative, kicked out of his crypt by his now ex-girlfriend Harmony, and starving because he cannot feed on humans anymore, Spike goes to Giles's apartment to ask for help from Buffy and the gang. At first, the gang denies him access to their apartment. As a vampire, he cannot enter uninvited. After he has explained that he cannot bite or hurt anyone, and that he is willing to trade entrance for information on the Initiative, the gang invites him in. Understandably, they still do not trust him and tie him to a chair. Although their eventual allyship is fragile on both sides, the gang does not intend to kill Spike. As Giles says: "We have no intention of killing a harmless creature. But we have to know what's been done to you. We can't let you go until we're sure that you're.... You're impotent" (4.09 26:45). After having dealt with Angel and some other harmless monsters, like Willow's werewolf ex-boyfriend Oz, the gang has adopted a more utilitarian ethical stance by determining not to kill harmless demons. Although they are aware that Spike used to be an evil vampire, and he does not currently have a human soul, as long as he cannot hurt any humans, they will let him live. They also provide him with pigs' blood and untie him after a few episodes, turning him into Giles's and occasionally Xander's unofficial roommate.

By this point in the show, both Buffy and Giles have officially distanced themselves from the Watchers' council and their restrictive policies, which shows in their treatment of Spike and the

occasional minor monster. This is reflected when Buffy talks to her new boyfriend Riley and he says: “Oz is a werewolf and Willow was dating him? ... I didn’t think Willow was that kind of girl ... Into dangerous guys. She seems smarter than that.” Buffy responds by saying: “Oz is not dangerous. Something happened to him that wasn’t his fault. God, I never knew you were such a bigot” (4.19 6:30). At this point, the gang has accepted that there are harmless monsters, and they use a more utilitarian approach when faced with one, something both the Watchers council and the Initiative struggle with as they follow strict rules instead.

As the chip prohibits Spike from his usual vampire activities, drinking blood and committing acts of violence, he falls into a crisis. He is found by Xander and Willow as he tries to kill himself by dropping on top of a stake. Although the scene is filmed comedically, the underlying moral conflict it addresses is serious. As Milly Williamson explains: “Not good enough to be loved by Buffy and, because of his chip, not bad enough to act vampirically, Spike inhabits an excruciatingly liminal self” (292). Spike himself expresses a similar sentiment later in the show, saying: “[The chip] won’t let me be a monster. And I can’t be a man. I’m nothing” (6.19 33:45). In season four Spike is still undoubtedly bad, he attempts to kill himself because the chip makes him feel useless. This is a feeling he struggles with until he obtains his human soul at the start of season seven. When his suicide attempt is interrupted by Xander and Willow they will not let him continue or kill himself as Willow exclaims: “It’s ooky. We know him. We can’t just let him poof himself” (4.11 26:45). Here “Poof himself” meaning kill himself, as vampires turn into dust with a little “poof” when they die in this universe. Willow also admits that she is no longer scared of Spike, which makes Spike feel worse. Although Spike is still a vampire, and the group is aware of that, their time spent together since the chip had been implanted has already caused Willow to become attached to Spike. The relationship that forms between them withholds Willow from causing Spike any harm. Spike tries to convince Willow that she can kill him as he is still evil “You know I’d drain you drier than the Sahara if I had half a chance” (27:00). However, this is not enough for Willow; instead, she tries to cheer him up. He reminds the gang often over the next two seasons that he is evil. These are good reminders that although Spike has been incapacitated by the chip in his head, he has not turned morally good. As Scott McLaren explains:

While the chip was designed to prevent evil action, Spike remained free to approach choices from the darker side of the moral divide—that is, he would still be basically evil—but with a soul, though the end choice might appear to be the same, the direction from which moral choice was approached became wholly different. (14)

The morality of Spike's decisions is especially blurred when he finds out that although he cannot hurt humans, he can beat up demons (4.11). As a vampire, he has a drive to commit acts of violence that has been suppressed because of the chip, but which is still present in his nature. Once he starts beating up other demons, as a way of release, he is often on the side of Buffy, but not because he morally agrees with her decisions. This notion to go along with Buffy's plans for his own reasons dovetails with Spike's ethical egoism, but is a challenge to the gang's developing utilitarian moral framework. He kills the demons because he enjoys killing, not because he disagrees with what the demons are doing or with the gang's motivations for fighting them. This is proven later in the season when he secretly teams up with the season's "Big Bad" Adam, a Franken-monster.

While Spike fails to hurt humans physically, he can still hurt them emotionally, a skill he uses repeatedly while talking to the gang. When he teams up with Adam, the Franken-monster, near the end of the season, he spends an entire episode turning Buffy, Xander, Willow and Giles against each other. He manages to do this because he, as shown above, is very perspective of other people's feelings and insecurities. As Terry L. Spaise explains:

For several episodes in season four, when he was assisting Adam in destroying The Initiative, Spike turned the Scooby Gang against each other and isolated Buffy from her friends. He cleverly focused on the unconscious fears of each member of the group—that Giles was unnecessary to Buffy, that Willow's witchcraft was a fad, that Xander was a millstone around Buffy's neck—so successfully that they did separate for a time. (751-752)

His motivation for helping Adam is that Adam promised to remove the chip in Spike's head. He quickly leaves Adam's side too when Adam does not hold up his end of the deal, choosing to instead help Buffy and the gang. Similarly, Spike sides with the gang because this allows him to let off steam

by beating up demons; occasionally, the gang even pay him money to do so. Spike only helps others when it benefits him. He does not look at who he is helping or with what but instead sees what he can gain. Morally, his thoughts and actions remain governed by his ethical egoism. He makes decisions based on what will bring him the most happiness, without considering who else he might hurt in the process.

From an ethical standpoint, the chip implanted into Spike's brain presents a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, the chip was implanted into Spike's brain without his consent, as Spike makes clear throughout the three seasons. Not only is he annoyed about having had the chip implanted; it also causes him great personal struggles, from physical pain to not knowing his place in the world anymore, which eventually leads him to attempt suicide. The chip implant also goes against Spike's ethical egoism, as the chip has caused him to be unhappy. The motivation of the Initiative as to why the chip was implanted in his brain, however, is morally justified from the gang's utilitarian ethical perspective. It was meant to prevent demons from intentionally harming humans, a cause that is beneficial for all the humans living in Sunnydale, and beyond.

In the end, the Initiative turns out to be a flawed government agency. Their protocols were developed along a similar deontological ethical framework as that of the Watchers' Council, which led to the creation of monster stereotypes that did not allow for the acknowledgement of "monsters" with potential to be morally good individuals. However, this does not lessen the fact that their attempt to incapacitate Spike with the chip was a morally just decision; at that point, he was an evil, soulless, vampire with plans to cause destruction of Buffy and Sunnydale. The consequences of implanting the chip into Spike prove to be almost all beneficial from the perspective of the gang. Although Spike experienced a great deal of pain because of it, many human lives were saved, including Willow's. Spike had attacked Willow right after his escape from the Initiative. Spike was a notoriously evil vampire and had tried to take over Sunnydale and kill Buffy before; he probably would have tried again had he not been stopped by the intervention of the scientific device implanted into his brain.

From a utilitarian perspective, the positive consequences clearly outweigh the negative ones in the case of Spike's chip. Spike is the only one who was hurt by the chip in the end, while many

people were saved from being hurt and killed by him if the chip had not prevented it. The chip turned a harmful monster into a harmless one. Another negative consequence of the chip becomes apparent many years later, when the chip starts to malfunction and almost kills Spike at a time that he has found his soul. Although this complication is painful for Spike, it is resolved when the chip is finally removed from his head. Without the chip inside of him, Spike probably would not have ended up finding his soul in the first place; the chip enabled him to form a closer bond with Buffy and the rest of the gang, which in turn allowed him to take the first step towards making the moral changes that he had to undergo in order to realise that he wanted his soul back. Therefore, while implanting the chip was a non-consensual act, which caused Spike much pain, physically and mentally, the positive consequences unambiguously outweigh the negative ones. Thus, from a utilitarian perspective the chip was a morally correct action.

3.3: The Moral Changes Caused by Falling in Love

Spike starts changing even more when he falls in love with Buffy. As the chip enabled Spike to stay close around Buffy and the rest, safely, his feelings for Buffy start to change. At the start of season five, the gang starts to notice something is different, claiming Spike had been “extra twitchy lately” (5.04). Tamara J. Nichols points out another moment from the same episode that shows Spike’s growing attachment to Buffy:

Gaining the chip seems to catalyze Spike's unconscious worship of Buffy. A key scene illustrating this change in their relationship is where Spike has helped Buffy slay a vampire. Buffy is angry at him for interfering and scolds him harshly. After she leaves he stares after her and intones: "I will know your blood, Slayer, I will make your neck my chalice and drink deep." Then he stalks away only to tumble into an empty grave. Spike is still openly antagonistic to the Slayer but his statement of revenge sounds like a ritualistic prayer. He is absorbed by her. His absorption causes him to be so distracted he is uncharacteristically clumsy. (147)

As of the scene described by Nichols, it is unclear if Spike is aware of his own feelings towards Buffy, which explains why he is still openly antagonistic towards her. At the end of the same episode, however, Spike has a dream in which Buffy comes to his crypt to kill him, a plan he supports, because he says he does not want to live in a world with Buffy in it (5.04). However, instead of fighting, they kiss, and Spike tells Buffy that he loves her, before he wakes up and realises he is falling in love with Buffy.

Experiencing love for a human being changes Spike's behaviour once again. At first, he is mostly angry about his feelings. He takes this anger out on Buffy; but he rarely uses violence because the chip still prevents him from doing harm to humans. In S5E6, Spike hears of monsters who plan to kill Buffy; he comes over to watch the fight because he wants to see Buffy murdered. However, when he sees Buffy fighting the monsters, he joins the fight on Buffy's side and helps her defeat them. In the same scene, he makes certain to still separate himself from the rest of the gang. The gang makes sure to declare Tara, Willow's girlfriend, as part of their family, Spike sets himself apart from the group. Christine Jarvis comments on this development by saying: "Spike's humorous insistence that he is not part of this and does not care what happens to Tara is not just incidental. He does not choose to commit to the new family. Spike's ambivalence about membership runs throughout season five; however, when he is most committed, they do not necessarily welcome him" (275). Although Spike is in love with Buffy, he does not want to be associated with the rest of the group yet. This changes later; in season six Spike comes to believe himself part of the gang.

Similarly, in S5E7, Spike tries to kiss Buffy and she harshly rejects him saying he is "beneath [her]" (37:00). In response to this rejection, he decides to kill Buffy with a shotgun. However, when he arrives at her house, he finds her crying over her mother's sickness and prioritises her feelings over his own. Nichols also comments on this scene: "In this scene it is plain from Spike's expressions that Buffy's pain is more important to him than his own; a quality of soul. The transformation of his raging anger to love and concern indicates that this moment is significant in his individuation process. It is an archetypal shift; he goes from the rage and might of Ares to the devotion of Aphrodite in a matter of a few seconds" (147). Spike putting Buffy's emotions and happiness over his own is a "quality of soul" as it moves away from his ethical egoism. Instead of continuing his own plan of killing Buffy,

because she has caused him such emotional pain, Spike comforts Buffy as her happiness matters to him. Although this scene shows a “quality of soul” within Spike, it is important to note that no matter his actions, he is still without a soul currently.

Eventually, he starts helping out the gang without being offered money or the change of personal gain as an incentive. Instead, being closer to Buffy becomes a key incentive for Spike to help out, reinforcing the show's romantic subplot of amorous human-monster relations. Spike also forms an attachment to Dawn, Buffy's sister. Eventually, he becomes the only one that Buffy trusts to watch over Dawn; Spike is the only other individual with enough supernatural strength to protect Dawn when there is a monster roaming around (5.12, 5.19, 5.22, 6.14). By helping the gang, it seems like Spike is making morally good decisions. However, what seems like increasingly altruistic motivations are for the most part still “corrupted” by his former egoism. He specifically helps in order to impress Buffy, or to keep Buffy specifically safe but not the rest of the group. His reasons for acting in the way that he does are still predominantly self-centred; thus, he is still functioning within the moral framework of ethical egoism.

For example, Spike finds out that Riley, Buffy's boyfriend at the time, is allowing vampires to feed off him, a metaphor for addiction. He shows Buffy and claims he told her because Riley needs help and Buffy should know (5.10). However, when confronted by Riley, at a later point, he admits he is “hot for [Riley's] honey” and believes that Buffy “needs some monster in her man” (5.10 24:00). Although showing Buffy what Riley was doing was the right decision, his motivation behind the decision was self-centred. He wants to break up the relationship between Riley and Buffy. As J. Douglass Rabb and J. Michael Richardson explain: “Spike started to reform in order to win Buffy, not really because it was the right thing to do. People who do the right things for the wrong reasons often end up doing them for the right reasons in the long run” (321). Spike does not understand this nuance in his actions, as is made clear in an exchange he has with Buffy after an attack. Spike is helping some victims and says to Buffy: “Look at all these lovely blood-covered people. I could, but not a taste for Spike. Not a lick. I know you wouldn't like it”; Buffy replies to this: “You want credit for not feeding off bleeding disaster victims?” Spike replies, “Well yeah” and Buffy retorts “You're disgusting” (5.11 32:00). Spike wants Buffy to recognize he is a good person, or vampire. However, Buffy believes that

helping people is what one is supposed to do as the default ethical position. At this moment in the show, there is a clear clash between Buffy and the gang's utilitarian ethics and Spike's ethical egoism. In utilitarianism, the goal of any moral actions should be to increase the happiness and wellbeing of as many people as possible. Thus, Buffy feels like she has to help the victims as they deserve to be happy. By contrast, within ethical egoism the goal is for the individual to become as happy as possible. Thus, Spike does not feel the moral need to help the victims as their happiness will not increase his own happiness. However, Spike is slowly moving away from his ethical egoism because it is not only his own happiness he is focused on anymore. He is also interested in making Buffy and Dawn as happy as possible and is become more selfless as a result.

Spike's growing contact with the group and other humans is important as these human-monster relationships allow him to grow attachments. As Scott McLaren explains:

This prolonged contact with humans allowed him to form strong attachments—in themselves movements of the will—especially to Dawn and Buffy. At a certain point Spike's love for Buffy became sufficient to allow him to cross some sort of moral divide so that, without a soul and eventually without a chip, he would generally, though certainly not invariably (cf. B6018), choose to do good. This sea change in Spike's moral orientation altered his agency to the extent that he was as likely to approach choices from a perspective that was basically good as from one that was basically evil. (14)

Before Spike had the chip inserted in his head, he was never able to spend a significant amount of time around humans. The chip and his relationship with Buffy gave him this opportunity to know a small group of humans on an individual level, which slowly caused him to care about them and thus to make decisions that not only benefited him but also these humans. As McLaren points out, Spike is not yet perfect and still makes morally bad decisions. However, it becomes easier to forget for the audience and the characters that he does not possess a human soul at this point. As Dawn herself says, after Buffy claims Angel was different from Spike because he did have a soul: "Spike has a chip. Same diff[erence]" (5.14 15:00). Buffy is quick to correct Dawn and explain that "Spike is a monster" (15:20).

In season six, Spike and Buffy's relationship changes from one of mutual attraction to a consensual sexual relationship, albeit not a romantic one. However, Spike makes it clear that he is still in love with Buffy. This change is important as it shows Spike's capacity for love. However, it also shows his love for violence as the relationship is a masochistic one. It shows that Spike has no issue with hurting Buffy, even though he loves her. Their first sexual encounter is the result of a fight between Buffy and Spike, both verbally and physically (6.09). The morning after, Buffy regrets what has happened between them. However, their sexual encounters continue for multiple episodes. This happens because Spike plays on Buffy's fears of being an outcast from her own friends, claiming he is the only one that understands her. Thus, he manipulates her into returning to him multiple times. However, she is aware of the limits to the relationship, as she explains: "I have feelings for you. I do. But it's not love. I could never trust you enough for it to be love" (6.19 24:30). Buffy knows that, without a soul, Spike cannot be fully trusted to do the right thing. Therefore, she does not let their relationship develop into a romantic relationship.

In the end, Buffy breaks off their sexual relationship as she realises she is using him to feel better about herself (6.15). Spike seems to accept this decision for a while. However, he soon decides he wants to win her back. This leads to Spike cornering Buffy in her bathroom, where he attempts to rape her. Buffy manages to fight Spike off and tells him: "Ask me again why I could never love you" (6.19 26:00). This is a harsh reminder to both Buffy and the audience that Spike is still a vampire without a human soul. Joss Whedon himself commented on this in the *New York Times* article "10 Questions for Joss Whedon":

Spike was definitely kind of a soulful character before he had a soul, but we made it clear that there was a level on which he could not operate. Although Spike could feel love, it was the possessive and selfish kind of love that most people feel. The concept of real altruism didn't exist for him. And although he did love Buffy and was moved by her emotionally, ultimately his desire to possess her led him to try and rape her because he couldn't make the connection. As Spike does not have a human soul there are certain things he does not understand. When Spike and Buffy were in the midst of their sexual relationship, he felt as if Buffy loved him. Thus, when Spike desperately wanted Buffy to love him again, he believed that having sex with her again would cause

these feelings again. When he realises how much he has hurt Buffy, he also realises that he has done wrong. This is the first moment in which Spike is shown to feel guilty, even before he has gained his human soul. As shown in chapter two, when Angel was cursed with his soul, he felt this immense guilt for all of the actions he performed as Angelus. Because Spike never had a soul, he never felt guilty for any of his actions as a vampire. However, after he hurts Buffy, suddenly he experiences guilt for the first time.

This intrinsically moral feeling of guilt is what leads Spike to go in search of his human soul. Unlike Angel, who was cursed with his soul as punishment, Spike decides he wants to acquire a soul to become a better vampire. He explains later to Buffy that “I wanted to give you what you deserve. And I got it” (7.02 40:00). It is his relationship with Buffy that made him want to become a better vampire than he had been before by developing a moral compass that is more in line with that of Buffy and the gang. Although without a soul Spike was able to become an ally to Buffy and the gang, he could not be trusted. He also was unable to distinguish between certain nuances of good and evil decisions. Once he experienced guilt over his actions, he decided he wanted to become a better person, for Buffy. Once Spike has acquired his soul, like Angel, he is overcome with guilt for all of his past actions. Morally this shifts him from away from his ethical egoism towards a more utilitarianism framework (7.02).

Spike showed Buffy and the group that even without a soul, certain vampires and demons can be good. As Anya, Xander's girlfriend, puts it: “Some [demons] are very very evil. And some have been considered to be useful members of society” (5.06 38:45). It is through Spike's character development that the group starts following a full utilitarian approach to their battle with monsters in which the soul is no longer the deciding factor in determining whether a demon deserves to live or die. Instead, it is about the actions of the demon and the consequences of these actions for human beings. Although Spike was soulless and against the group for most of season four, he was also harmless against humans and occasionally helped them out. Thus, he posed no threat towards the inhabitants of Sunnydale, and he was allowed to live. As his relationship with the group, especially with Buffy and Dawn, developed, he started making more morally right decisions, albeit not always for the right reasons. Specifically, his relationship with Buffy eventually made him want to become a

better person, which caused him to put himself through a series of difficult and painful tasks to obtain a soul.

Chapter 4: The Monstrosity of Humans

During season six, Spike is not the only character that challenges the utilitarian ethical code by which Buffy and the gang determine which vampires and demons need to be destroyed and which ones – like Angel and Spike – can be saved from their evil existence. This season’s “Big Bad” is called The Trio. They are a group of three human, young, adult men: Warren, Andrew and Jonathan. Warren and Jonathan were introduced as minor characters, prior to season six. When they are caught by Buffy, in season six, while in the midst of following through some evil plan⁴, Buffy does not take them seriously as a threat at first. They are only human, after all, and already familiar to Buffy from previous encounters. As a result, Buffy and the group overlook them as dangerous “bad guys” that threaten the wellbeing of the community. Near the end of the season, it becomes clear that Warren is in fact genuinely evil by any ethical standard. Because Warren is a human being, and the existence of his soul is never brought into question, the gang realises too late that he is capable of committing acts considered purely evil from their ethical perspective. As a result, Warren kills Tara, Willow’s girlfriend. This causes Willow, who is a powerful witch at this point, to lash out in grief against Warren. Three episodes before the end of the season, the audience sees Willow transform from the loving, soft-spoken character that they have come to know into “Dark Willow” who is grief stricken and murders Warren without a second thought. Willow then develops further into “Dark Willow” as she attempts to end the world because she does not want to live in a world without Tara. Willow is not stopped by force but by Xander’s words, as he reminds her of who she really is.

As a supernatural television show, *Buffy* had relied throughout on the main villain of the season being some sort of demon, or an evil supernatural force. By introducing a human being as the embodiment of unequivocal evil, in season six, the show’s producers deliberately subverted this tradition, presenting audiences with yet another ethical conundrum to solve. As Patricia Pender explains: “Seasons 6 and 7 stand apart from the rest as characters are forced to confront realities of

⁴ The Trio’s main plan is to take over Sunnydale and become Crime Lords, they do not explain their main plan in more detail. They act upon some smaller plans throughout season six, some of which are directly related to their plan of becoming Crime Lords.

mortality, injury, the limitations and pleasures of flesh and their own potential for monstrosity” (69). Humans are not always good, even though the existence of their souls is never questioned. This teaches the group that everyone in the world of Sunnydale, human, demon, or vampire, has the potential to become a monster. As such, the television show moves even further away from the Watchers’ deontological ethics in which the moral categories of good and evil are directly mapped onto the categories human and monster, and towards a more complex and nuanced ethical framework that foregrounds the gang’s utilitarian ethics that involves the judgement of thought and action within specific contexts and bases conclusions about morality on characters’ specific motivations within those contexts. The “Big Bad” of the season reveals that nobody is inherently evil and soulless, metaphorically or literally speaking, and that sometimes a person lashes out in pain, frustration, or bewilderment. The case of “The Trio” highlights the extent to which the TV series foregrounds the potential for moral corruption in anyone, depending on the social and emotional circumstances, the experience of mental and physical pain, and the motivations this can engender to do good or evil.

4.1: The Trio’s Monstrosity

The Trio consists of Warren, Andrew, and Jonathan. Both Jonathan and Warren were introduced to the show before season six. Jonathan went to high school with the group and made a few appearances in the course of the first three seasons. In S4E17 he appeared once, where he used a spell to make himself the most famous superhero alive. This was an introduction to Jonathan’s affinity for magic. Warren was introduced in S5E15. In this episode, Warren was followed by the robot girlfriend he built for himself. Andrew is a newly introduced character in season six. He is a talented demon summoner. Although Andrew has never met Buffy, Jonathan and Warren have. Thus, The Trio is aware of her role as the Slayer and what she is capable of. When The Trio is first shown in S6E4, they do not appear to be a big threat to Buffy and the group. Their first moment on screen is framed in a rather nonthreatening way as seen in figure 1.



Figure 1. Andrew, Jonathan, and Warren. Source: Whedon, Joss, “Flooded”. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, season 6, episode 4, 00:21:40. Accessed 22 December 2021.

The three men are sitting in a basement on bean bag chairs on the floor. They are badly organised and surrounded by money with a video game playing in the background. While the demon they summoned is pacing up and down towering over them. They introduce themselves as “super villains” and follow this introduction with awkward diabolical laughter (23:00). They quickly lose control of the demon and end up working for him. Although they are not directly presented as pure villains, in the course of the season their criminal plans become increasingly dangerous and harmful to Buffy and the rest of Sunnydale.

From their first episode in which they are together, it becomes clear that The Trio is morally divided. When the demon they summoned demands they kill Buffy for him, they have a meeting. Andrew and Jonathan are unwilling to kill Buffy. Jonathan explains why: “She saved my life a bunch of times. Plus, she is hot” (27:30). Warren disagrees with them: “It’s her or us. I mean, we have to do it” (27:50). This is the start of an increasingly large moral divide between the individuals in the group. Andrew and Jonathan approach the situation from one side, saying: “We are talking about murder.” Warren has a different perspective, however: “No, we are talking about staying alive” (28:00). Although they considered the moral implications too, it is revealed that Andrew and Jonathan are less bothered about the moral issues of murder. Instead, they are more worried about being in trouble:

“Aside from the moral issues and the mess, we can get in trouble for murder.” Warren reminds them that they already paid the demon for a bank robbery: “Duh. You know, the last I checked, the authorities also frown on bank robbery too, genius” (28:00). In turn, Andrew and Jonathan remind Warren that they did not team up to murder people. Instead, they want to take over Sunnydale, without revealing any details about their plan to become crime lords. Eventually, after a few minutes of discussion, The Trio takes a vote and decides to forgo murdering Buffy. Andrew and Jonathan are unsure how to make the demon leave. However, Warren claims he has a plan, and he goes to talk to the demon alone. Once out of ear shot from the other boys, Warren gives the demon Buffy’s address and phone number and tells it to kill Buffy himself. This scene shows that although their main plan does not involve murder, Warren is willing to break more laws, both criminal and ethical, and is less bothered by the moral dilemmas involved with breaking laws than Andrew and Jonathan. All three men follow ethical egoism, as they are not concerned with the moral implications of their actions beyond how they will affect themselves and which consequences they might suffer. However, Jonathan and Andrew are also still influenced by deontological ethics as they still condemn murder as intrinsically evil. Warren, by contrast, is not influenced by other ethical frameworks as he has no moral problem with murder when it suits the furthering of his own interests.

Many of the earlier plans of The Trio go unnoticed by Buffy and the rest of the gang. They summon a demon to rob a bank (6.04). They put Buffy through a series of tests to examine what her abilities are (6.05). And they make Buffy invisible, albeit accidentally (6.11). During these plans, The Trio often distract each other. They fight over pop-culture opinions and who is the leader. Thus, they are again framed in a nonthreatening way. These scenes suggest that The Trio is more of a comedic subplot within the show compared to the demonic forces that attack Sunnydale regularly. When The Trio turns Buffy invisible, their original plan was to turn themselves invisible to break into a women-only spa (6.11 13:00). They hit Buffy with the invisibility blast instead because they are fighting for the gun and the opportunity to turn invisible first. Warren quickly finds out that as long as Buffy stays invisible, she will eventually die from it as “The Slayer got slammed with a big ass dose of radiation. ... Eventually, her molecular makeup will start losing its integrity, and then pfft” (27:00). Again, this instigates a discussion between the three young men about how far The Trio is willing to go in their

attempt to take over Sunnydale. Jonathan becomes worried: “But wait a minute, we are not killing anybody, especially not Buffy.” Which Warren counters in an annoyed manner: “You guys are so immature. We are villains! When are you gonna get that through your thick skulls?” (27:30). Jonathan counters by saying: “We are not killers. We are crime lords” (27:45). This scene once again highlights the difference in moral frameworks between Warren and the other two characters. Although they are still a team, and Warren’s plan is outvoted again, he is clearly ready to commit worse crimes than Jonathan and Andrew. This is proven when later in the episode *The Trio* kidnaps Willow. They make themselves invisible and kidnap her when she finds their basement hideout. This is their plan to force Buffy to meet them and make her visible again. However, once they are together, Warren points the invisible ray on Buffy and Willow notices that he is on the “wrong setting” and is “trying to kill [Buffy]” (38:00). Jonathan and Andrew were unaware of this and feel betrayed. However, they do fight with Warren against Buffy as they are still afraid of being in trouble. Willow manages to turn the group visible again and Buffy and her recognise Jonathan and Warren. Buffy does not take them seriously: “So you three have what? Banded together to be pains in my ass?” (39:50). She allows the young men to escape and does not put any effort into chasing them. Buffy believes them to be harmless and, based on her comment above, mostly just annoying. This makes sense at this point in the season as they have yet to hurt someone. This episode shows that Warren becomes eviler when he acts alone. When he rejects the community of *The Trio*, he loses the humanity he had left and he becomes corrupted by evil. Willow, Anya and Xander discuss *The Trio* the next episode, but they too do not believe them to be harmful. They make jokes and mock *The Trio*. Willow explains that Buffy did try to “Bust them” but they had already left their hideout (6.12 1:50).

The Trio’s plans escalate in S6E13. This episode marks both the start of a new fracturing happening within *The Trio* and the escalation of what they are capable of in pursuit of their plans. Andrew, Warren, and Jonathan have created a “Cerebral dampener,” which will give them the power to “make any woman we desire our willing sex slave” (4:30). The men send Warren into a restaurant to find a woman. However, without informing the others, Warren takes control and finds his ex-girlfriend, Katrina. His ex is clearly uninterested in speaking to him. However, Warren uses the dampener on her, and she is put under a trance. She is brought back to their basement lair and wakes

up before Warren or the others can do anything. Once she does, she points out that what the men are doing is “not some fantasy! It’s not some game, you freaks! It’s rape” (15:45). Warren is unfazed by this statement, but Andrew and Jonathan are shaken by it. They had not thought their plan through from Katrina’s perspective and the accusation of rape comes as a shock to them. Katrina tries to leave so she can inform the police about their actions, but Warren tries to stop her. In their struggle, Warren hits Katrina with a glass bottle to stop her from running. This blow is enough to kill her. Both Andrew and Jonathan panic, while Warren plans how to avoid the consequences of the murder. Warren decides they can make Buffy believe she accidentally killed Katrina. They succeed in doing so with the use of Jonathan’s magic.

As The Trio sees their plan succeed, Andrew becomes more comfortable with what happened, almost sounding proud about his actions: “We really got away with murder. That is kinda cool” (39:30). Jonathan, by contrast, is becoming increasingly uncomfortable about the deed. This causes a fracture in their dynamic, with Andrew and Warren becoming more confident in their ability to avoid the consequences of murder and more willing to kill for their cause. While Jonathan becomes less comfortable with the situation and detaches himself slowly from the other men. Warren also sets himself further apart from both Jonathan and Andrew and shows what he is capable of. Warren claims he loves Katrina and misses her, which is why he did this “I wanted us to be together” (15:30). Both Andrew and Jonathan are not only surprised at the revelation that Katrina is Warren’s ex. They are also disgusted and claim it is “messed up” (15:45). When Katrina accuses the men of attempted rape, Warren seems unfazed. He tells the other men to charge the dampener so they can put Katrina under another trance. It is unclear what he would have done if they had succeeded as Warren kills Katrina soon after. He does not express guilt over killing Katrina. Instead, he becomes more confident in his plans.

When Buffy thinks she has accidentally killed Katrina she reacts strongly; she is shocked and confused, as seen in figure 2.



Figure 2. Buffy realising Katrina is dead. Source: Whedon, Joss, “Dead Things”. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, season 6, episode 13, 00:26:55. Accessed 22 December 2021.

Spike manages to calm her down and bring her home. However, Buffy is plagued by what happened in a nightmare and decides to turn herself into the police. She abandons this plan when she finds out that it is Katrina, having not recognised her when it happened. As Buffy knows about her being Warren’s ex, she suspects that The Trio is involved somehow. However, when Buffy was willing to turn herself in this reinforced a belief that she has had since the beginning of the show. Buffy has always believed that hurting humans was a morally corrupt action. When the second Slayer, Faith, accidentally kills a human and tells Buffy “We’re built to kill”, Buffy tells her “To kill demons. But it does not mean that we get to pass judgement on people” (3.15 14:00).

Another example of Buffy’s belief is portrayed at the end of season five. The gang finds out that the evil god Glory cannot be killed. However, by killing the innocent human Ben, Glory will also die, as they share a body⁵. When Buffy comes face to face with Ben, she decides not to kill him. Instead, she tells Ben to keep Glory away from her and her family. However, right after Buffy leaves Ben on the floor, Giles shows up. Ben tells Giles: “She could’ve killed me,” to which Giles responds:

⁵ When Glory is in control of the body she becomes nearly invincible. In this state, she is too strong to be killed by Buffy and the gang. However, Ben is a human and when he is in control of the body it is no longer invincible. Because of the shared body, if one of them dies the other dies too. Thus, killing Ben was the only way for the gang to kill Glory.

“No, She couldn’t. Never. And sooner or later, Glory will re-emerge and make Buffy pay for that mercy. And the world with her. Buffy even knows that and still she couldn’t take a human life. She’s a hero, you see. She is not like us” (5.22 37:00). After this Giles does kill Ben and thus with that Glory. In *Reading Joss Whedon*, Rabb and Richardson also comment on this moral decision:

Giles finds it necessary to kill the character Ben ... Giles is not happy about being forced into the position of choosing the lesser of two evils. In this case, Buffy had refused to do so. But what is important here is Giles’s comment on his having to take a human life: “I’ve sworn to protect this sorry world and sometimes that means saying and doing what other people can’t. What they shouldn’t have to” (“The Gift” 5.22). Giles’s moral judgment here, that we should not have to kill innocent people, is a rational judgment, though it is not based on principles, consequentialist or otherwise. Still, it is obvious from the story, the context, that it is a true statement, an objective judgment. (314)

During this scene, the moral decision is based upon a sacrifice. Sacrificing Ben means saving the world from the potential evil that Glory could conflict if she was allowed to live. Buffy seems to be following a rule utilitarian approach here. Rule utilitarianism states that for the most part decisions are still based upon their consequences, as in act utilitarianism. However, there are a few set rules that everyone has to follow (Graham 135). For Buffy one of these rules seems to be that killing humans is not allowed. It is a rule that she is unwilling to break. Even though she is aware of the risks of letting Ben live. Giles on the other hand does not follow this same approach and is probably more leaning towards a standard act utilitarianism. He believes that the consequences of killing Ben are better than the consequences of letting Ben live. Even if Giles normally does not accept murder of humans either, he believes this is an exception. And although Giles is not happy about having to kill Ben either, he also does not blame Buffy for not being able to. Instead, he calls her a hero. This refusal to harm humans is still part of Buffy’s moral beliefs when it comes to The Trio later in season six.

4.2: Redeemable Crimes Caused by Grief

Willow is a protagonist throughout the series. She is Buffy's best friend and loyal sidekick. In season three, she experiments with magic. By season five, she has become a talented and powerful Wicca. At the start of season six, it is Willow who performs a resurrection spell and brings Buffy back alive, with the help of the rest of the gang. However, her use of magic is soon recognised by Giles as excessive and dangerous. As Rob Cover explains:

By the fifth season [Willow] is using magic frequently and powerfully, and from the beginning of the sixth her spell-casting is habitual, compelling and seemingly an addiction. Subsequently, Willow's behaviour, relationship with magic and compulsive abuse of power in the sixth season of Buffy have been described in the terms of drug dependence by a number of scholars and critics. (90)

This addiction is soon discovered by the rest of the gang. At the start of season six, Willow's addiction storyline is highlighted. Willow does not realise how serious it is until she accidentally hurts Dawn. After that incident, she stops using magic completely.

In S6E19, The Trio obtains magical orbs that make them stronger and more resilient. Warren uses these to fight Buffy. Warren has the upper hand for much of the fight and is open about trying to kill Buffy. However, as The Trio has been fracturing for a few episodes, Jonathan reveals to Buffy secretly that the orbs are what are making Warren strong. As The Trio loses the fight against Buffy, Warren manages to flee. Buffy hands the other two men over to the police. A few scenes later Warren appears in Buffy's backyard with a gun. He shoots Buffy and while running away a stray bullet hits Tara inside the house. Tara does not survive this, and Willow witnesses her death. This causes Willow to lose control and return to using magic. However, this is not the same kind of magic as Willow used before her addiction. Instead, Willow turns to dark magic. As Bruce A. McClelland explains: "Willow, for example, in the aftermath of the accidental murder of another character, Tara, allows herself to become possessed by both vengeful rage and the will to power, without attenuating her response with any awareness of her own participation in the event, and this almost leads to utter

disaster. Such are always the lessons of individuation” (182). Willow’s revenge starts off specifically targeted at Warren. However, she soon shifts her focus to Andrew and Jonathan, who were already at the police station when Warren shot Tara. Once Willow gives up on them, she continues to try and end the world all together.

These actions of Willow come as a big shock, both to the rest of the gang and to the audience. Willow has been a protagonist since season one and she has always been a loving and kind-hearted person. This shift in behaviour is scarring but in the context of grief it is also understandable. As was explained by Stephen Asma in chapter one, the actions of certain criminals are in principle understandable as their actions can be rationalised. In principle, Willow’s actions are understandable, if not morally justifiable, as they are caused by grief and pain. Willow herself explains her actions in the context of Tara’s death multiple times. When she is going after Warren, she tells Buffy and Xander “[Tara’s] dead. Now he’s dead too” (6.20 20:00). Willow’s murder of Warren comes from a place of grief and wanting revenge. Afterwards Buffy shifts the blame from grief to the dark magic that is inside Willow “The forces inside you are incredibly powerful. They’re strong, but you’re stronger. You have to remember you’re still Willow” (6.21 31:00). Willow was addicted to magic before Tara’s death. The grief caused her to use magic again, specifically dark magic.

Even as “Dark Willow,” her grief for Tara is still on the forefront. After Buffy tells Willow to remember who she is, Willow replies: “The only thing Willow was ever good for, the only thing I had going for me ... Were the moments, just moments, when Tara would look at me, and I was wonderful. And that will never happen again” (31:30). Willow’s addiction and subsequent behaviour is explained by Giles as follows: “A dark force fueled by grief” (6.22 5:50). She soon gives up on trying to kill Jonathan and Andrew and instead tries to end the world. This behaviour is also explained in the context of pain. Willow takes magic from Giles; however, instead of her own magic, which “came from a place of rage and power,” this is “the true essence of magic,” which “tapped into the spark of humanity she had left. Helped her to feel again” (6.22 37:00). This causes Willow to feel “everyone” and their “emotion and pain” (19:00). This overwhelms Willow and she says: “It’s too much. It’s just too much ... I have to stop this. I’ll make it go away ... Oh you poor bastards. Your suffering has to

end” (19:30). All of “Dark Willow’s” plans and actions were conceived from a place of pain and suffering, which she wanted to end. Thus, making her a villain who could be understood. This does not excuse her actions or stop her from being accountable for them, but it gives her a chance at redemption. Xander stops Willow by appealing to her humanity and reminding her that she is loved. Afterwards, the group does not punish her, kill her, or hand her over to the police. Instead, Willow goes to England with Giles for magic rehabilitation. When she returns to Sunnydale things start out awkward, but she is still accepted and loved by the rest of the group.

Although Willow’s actions can be understood, this does not mean that they are accepted by Buffy or the rest. When Buffy and Xander are only aware of Warren having shot Buffy, they tell Willow: “We will catch [Warren] and he will go to jail” (6.20 17:00). Once they are made aware by Willow about Tara dying, they stick to their morals “We don't kill humans, it's not the way” (20:00). Buffy and Xander do waiver in their belief that all humans deserve to live for a moment after Warren is killed. They watch Willow kill Warren, unable to help him. Xander expresses that he does not mind Warren being dead: “Warren was a cold-blooded killer of women just warming up. If you ask me, the bastard had it coming to him” (6.21 3:00). Buffy does not disagree with him; instead she shifts the focus to protecting Andrew and Jonathan: “Maybe. Andrew and Jonathan don’t” (3:20). Although they understand why Willow killed Warren, they draw a harsher line at anyone else being hurt. When Andrew and Jonathan are protected by the group, Buffy tells them: “I’m not protecting you, Jonathan. None of us are. We’re doing this for Willow. The only reason it happens to be your lucky day is because Willow kills you, she crosses a line, I lose a friend” (6.21 19:30). This reveals that having killed Warren was not enough for Buffy to consider it “crossing a line.” However, killing Jonathan and Andrew would be, as they were not actively involved in Tara’s murder. Although Buffy still finds killing a human being morally reprehensible, as shown above, she is willing to make exceptions as to what kind of murder is redeemable.

Stephen Asma explains that what makes a human a monster is a lack of motive for their evil actions. This lack of a motive fits with Warren. He is willing to kill Buffy from the first episode The Trio is introduced. Even though the one time he has met Buffy before season six she helps him and lets him leave without consequences. Warren has no moral scruples with possibly raping his ex-

girlfriend. He is never shown to mourn her death or feel regret over killing her. He shoots Buffy as he is annoyed about her being in the way of his plans of taking over Sunnydale. When Willow confronts him after he killed Tara she says, “You never felt you had the power with [Katrina], not until you killed her” Warren denies this “Women. You’re just like the rest of them. Mind games.” to which Willow says: “You get off on it. That’s why you had a mad-on for the Slayer. She was your big ‘O’ wasn’t she, Warren?”. To which Warren responds, “are you done yet, or can we talk some more about our feelings” (6.20 37:30). Willow explains that Warren killed Katrina and tried to kill Buffy because he likes it. This enjoyment is also seen when Warren is trying to kill Buffy while he is super strong. Warren also reveals his misogynist outlook in the language he uses when he talks about women. He accuses Willow of “mind games” and wanting to talk about her “feelings,” while also generalising that all women are the same. This reprehensible behaviour and the enjoyment he receives from killing Katrina and trying to kill Buffy, makes Warren a monstrous human being, even though he is just a “normal” human with a human soul and not a demonic creature out of the Hellmouth. The existence of Warren’s soul, unlike that of Angel and Spike, is never doubted by any of the gang, including Buffy. His morally reprehensible actions are what make him a monster.

With Warren and Willow both dominated by their evil side, the gang is repeatedly reminded that everyone, human or demon, can become evil if the circumstances facilitate their moral corruption. Before season six, the gang’s notion of good and evil was already challenged. By Angel as explained in chapter one, and by Spike as explained in chapter two. Spike’s character arc, specifically, showed the group that having a soul is not the only way to be a good person. However, through both of these monsters, the capacity of evil within humans with a soul was not explored. Buffy believed that humans always deserved to live. Warren challenged this notion and proved that humans too could be evil. Willow then proved that monstrosity could be hidden within anyone, even friends. Although the fundamentals of Buffy’s ethics are not changed through these two characters, she does allow an exception to her personal rule that humans are not to be killed. She did not approve of the murder of Warren and Willow has to face the consequences after. However, she was also forgiven. Buffy made it clear that if Jonathan and Andrew were killed, she would be unable to continue being friends with

Willow. However, as the murder of Warren came from grief, it became understandable and thus Willow was redeemable.

Conclusion

This thesis critically explored the function of the concept of the soul within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and how the human soul is related to ethical questions concerning good and evil. Through the ethical frameworks of deontology, utilitarianism, and ethical egoism introduced in chapter one, this thesis analysed the character arcs of three of the show's main adversaries: Angel, Spike and The Trio. Chapter two showed that through their confrontation with Angel, and through Angel's development from soulless Angelus to a vampire with a human soul, Buffy and the gang set their first steps towards rejecting the deontological framework that the Watchers council followed and taught and instead developed a flexible utilitarian ethical approach. Angel's character arc showed them that not all monsters are inherently evil and thus not all monsters can be judged the same way. Chapter three explored how confronting Spike caused the gang to develop a more complete utilitarian approach. In turn, Spike's character arc introduced a new ethical framework to the audience to which the gang's could be contrasted: ethical egoism. This chapter also explored the ethical implications of Spike's chip and how he became an ally to the gang despite not having a human soul. Spike's struggles with the chip and his eventual desire to gain a soul taught the gang that even without a soul, certain monsters deserved to live. The last chapter explored the monstrosity of humans through the characters Warren and Willow. It showed that sometimes humans are the real monsters and how certain crimes are morally justifiable as they are a reaction to big emotions such as grief. Warren and Willow taught the gang that even with a human soul, anyone can be susceptible to moral corruption.

Through this analysis this thesis shows that by watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the audience is introduced to a wide range of different ethical frameworks. This is important as the show's main audience consists of teenagers and young adults, who along with the teenagers and young adults within the world of the series are still developing their own notions about right and wrong, good and evil within their society. Through their absorbed engagement with the protagonists' moral struggles in the course of *Buffy's* seasons the audience can learn along with the vampire Slayer and her friends how complicated and seemingly contradictory notions of human ethics can become when the circumstances in which decisions are made and actions are performed becomes increasingly

complicated. Through Buffy and the gang, they can learn that good and evil is not as straightforward as it might seem in many of the traditional supernatural monster shows aimed at young audiences. The audience is taught about ethical challenges, and has the potential to develop their own complex ethical frameworks while watching television. As such, Buffy is evidence of Gay Hawkins claim “that television has taken an ethical turn” and “that ethics have become entertainment” (412).

Further research could be conducted into the ethics of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. This thesis did not have the space to touch upon the characters of Oz, a werewolf who was part of the gang; Anya, an ex-vengeance demon who is engaged to Xander; or Cordelia, a human girl with often questionable morals. It also did not manage to extend further research into Andrew, who returns after season six. This thesis did not include the spin-off show *Angel*, which could be used for further research into the ethics used within the series and the further development of the character Angel. This thesis also did not include the comic series that continues the story of Buffy. These comics could also be involved in a further study into the ethics and how they develop as Buffy and the gang grow older and face new foes.

Still this thesis has explored the relevance of the soul within the universe of the show. It showed that different ethical frameworks exist and are relevant, even within a teen show. Through a close analysis of multiple characters this thesis has shown that there is no monster that is inherently evil. Similarly, this thesis showed that humans are not inherently good. Instead it explored how everyone deserves to be judged by their actions rather than their identity.

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