On the Meaningfulness of Helping the Helpless: Revisiting Angel's Mission

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Viewing the Whedonverses through an existentialist lens is no longer novel. Stacey Abbott was among the first commentators to broach such interpretations, claiming, "The series *Angel* undermines the distinction between Angel and Angelus and presents the hybrid Angel/Angelus as a self-defining existentialist protagonist struggling within himself to make the right choices…within an increasingly complicated world in which it is often impossible to distinguish right from wrong" (Abbott 4). After Abbott's seminal exploration, and (arguably) further fueled by Whedon's DVD commentary on the *Firefly* (2002-2003) episode "Objects in Space," (1.14), commentators soon brought existentialist readings to various regions of the Whedonverses.[1]

For this special edition of *Slayage* commemorating the 20th anniversary of *Angel* (1999-2004), I wish to reexamine existentialist readings of the series and its eponymous character. The essay begins by reviewing Abbott's account of "Redefinition" (2.11) and Cynthea Masson's assessment of "The Girl in Question" (5.20), each of which has become an influential staple for (Sartrean) existentialist interpretations of *Angel*. Subsequently, and in support of Abbott's and Masson's readings, it will argue that "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" (5.6) also serves as a microcosm for existential readings of the series, especially when paired with Albert Camus's perspectives on the myth of Sisyphus. The first primary objective of this essay, then, is to show that commentators such as Abbott and Masson are correct that interpreting *Angel* via existentialism

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deepens the viewer's understanding and appreciation of the show, including those episodes that are often underappreciated or overlooked.

Yet it will also be shown that an existentialist reading of Angel does not adequately capture the poignancy of his famed Season Two epiphany or his portrayal as a champion throughout the series. It will be argued that the moral realist perspectives of such philosophers as Immanual Kant (about the right) and Aristotle (about the good) cements the gravitas of Angel's epiphany and of his being a champion in ways existentialism cannot. This thesis will be bolstered via a careful reconsideration of "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" as it pertains to Angel's mission and his corresponding heroism; it will be shown how this episode importantly conveys both existentialist and non-existentialist themes. Thus, the second primary objective of this essay is to show that existentialist intrepretations of *Angel* have their limitations and must be tempered with ethical perspectives all but irreconcilable with existentialism.

The third and final objective of this essay proffers a novel reading of *Angel* and Angel that accommodates many of the existentialist and non-existentialist elements of each. It will be argued that moral realism, with its commitment to intrinsic goods and values, can be paired with Susan Wolf's ideas about the meaningfulness of leading certain types of lives over others. Wolf's atypical synthesis, in turn, intriguingly solidifies the thematic poignancy of Angel's epiphany and bolsters the meaningfulness of his mission to tirelessly help the helpless in an ultimately absurd and meaningless world devoid of God.

Accordingly, this essay celebrates the 20th anniversary of *Angel* by being both retrospective and prospective. On the one hand, it reaffirms that the series interestingly conveys various existential motifs and concurs that recognizing them benefits the viewer's appreciation of the show. On the other, it argues that Angel's portrayal as a champion all but requires non-existentialist ethical ideas about the right and the good; it subsequently offers a novel synthesis of *Angel's* existential and non-existential themes that strives to not only impact future Whedon scholarship,[2] but also facilitate further thought about our world outside of the Whedonverses.

Rewalking Abbott's Fine Line

Abbott begins her seminal existentialist reading of *Angel* by pointing out that the series conveys existentialist-friendly cinematic and literary themes. For example, its blending of the detective genre with film noir in the backdrop of Los Angeles. This synthesis sets the stage for how the show complicates Angel's heroism. He is the hero, but his circumstances—including the moral ambiguity and the (cosmic) absurdity of the world in which he lives—leads Abbott to claim, "The series' expression of the motifs of the non-heroic hero, choice, meaninglessness, purposelessness and the absurd…explores more fully the complexity of the vampire with a soul and places Angel on the path to an existential realization" (Abbott 9). These facets of Angel's character were all but missing in Sunnydale.

Abbott finds additional support for her existentialist reading in how the series thematically portrays the Powers that Be. Initially, she grants that their introduction undermines an existentialist reading. The Powers that Be are a sort of divine presence that provide Angel insights into how the battle between good and evil ought to be waged, quite literally via Doyle's and Cordelia's prescient visions. Of course, a staple of Sartrean existentialism is God's non-existence. Without God, there is neither a human essence entailing what humans ought to be, nor any transcendent source of moral value entailing what we ought to do. Sartre summarizes, "We have neither behind us, nor before us a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone, without excuse" (Sartre 295). Abbott goes on to argue that, on a closer look, the Powers that Be are not all that divine, insofar as they are portrayed as fallible and a poor source of providence. Moreover, Abbott contends that the Powers are conspicuously absent during Angel's darkest times. They fail to warn Angel about Darla's pregnancy or Holtz's unexpected arrival, and they do not directly intervene in Angel's vendetta against Wolfram & Hart. Thus, to all intents and purposes, Team Angel lacks a divinely-anchored realm of values and are left alone, without excuse, as each member attempts to discern his or her path in the world.

Abbott furthers her existentialist interpretation by examining the way *Angel* enriches Angel's character, and especially his backstory. The

extensive use of flashbacks provides the viewer informative glimpses into Angel's (and Angelus's) largely uncharted history, and these become crucial to understanding his present. Abbott writes, "The flashbacks … flesh out Angel's character before and after the curse, highlighting the similarities rather than simply the differences between the two sides of his identity" (Abbott 14). She cites examples of Angel acting in Angelus-type ways after the curse: his choice to seek reconciliation with Darla during the Boxer Rebellion (in "Darla" [2.7]), and his cold-hearted decision to abandon the Hyperion residents in the 1950s (in "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been" [2.2]). She sums up, "These flashbacks demonstrate that it was not the curse and the return of his soul that set Angel onto the path of goodness, but rather it was Buffy …. Without her, he is alone on a path struggling to walk a fine line between Angel and Angelus and to make the right choices in a world where nothing is clear …. And as a result the series challenges the distinction between good and evil in a godless world where there is only choice" (Abbott 17, 27).

Abbott argues that many of these thematic and conceptual elements drive the episode "Redefinition," which serves as a microcosm of her reading of *Angel* and Angel. After callously leaving the Wolfram & Hart lawyers to meet a gruesome end in Holland Manner's wine cellar, Angel abruptly fires his team. He purposely alienates himself from everyone and everything. The Powers also sequester themselves (and, in fact, Gunn decries the recent lack of visions). Furthermore, Angel is filmed in high contrast lighting, with half of his face in shadow. This symbolizes his becoming Angel *and* Angelus, or perhaps a hybrid of the two; this character transition seems to be the thematic point of the episode. As Abbott explains: "He is in fact neither and he is both. Darla immediately recognizes that his crisis has transformed Angel into a new being, when she says, 'That wasn't Angel, that wasn't Angelus either . . . who was that?' He is a new being of his own creation and no longer predetermined by our expectations of Angel or Angelus" (Abbott 24). Abbott cites Sartre's ideas about radical existential freedom to understand Angel's transformation. According to Sartre, "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself…what he purposes…. He is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions" (Sartre 291, 300). Because we are always free to reinvent ourselves in a world without God, so has Angel in the aptly

entitled "Redefinition." For these reasons, Abbott concludes that Angel/Angelus is effectively interpreted via (Sartrean) existentialism; doing so facilitates a deeper aesthetic appreciation of *Angel* and particularly how the series portrays its epynomous hero apart from his Sunnydale moorings.

Remaining for Godot

To Abbott's credit, her analysis of *Angel* was rather prophetic. The sorts of existentialist themes she identified in Season Two persisted throughout the series. Indeed, Cynthea Masson argues that the third to last episode of the series, "The Girl in Question," is best appreciated through an existentialist reading, and, in turn, serves as a reminder of how prevalent existentialist themes are in *Angel*.

When "The Girl in Question" originally aired, many fans were confounded. Masson quotes a sampling of relevant Internet posts: "'Lamest. Episode. Ever….What's the point of an episode where the subject character isn't even there?'…'This is the 3rd last episode and nothing happened. Nothing'…'It was fluff. It was filler….I would have preferred Illyria just killed them all and then burst into flames'" (Masson 135, 134). However, Masson contends that if the episode is interpreted via existentialism it "becomes a powerful, well-placed reassertion of the dilemma of immortality—that is, the potential for stasis—and the necessity to choose, eternally, to change" (Masson 136).

Masson begins her analysis of "The Girl in Question" by identifying allusions to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1954) and Sartre's *No Exit* (1947). Masson notes that just as Beckett's play is dominated by a character that never appears, this episode features a largely absent Buffy (and a completely absent Immortal). Equally, just as *Waiting for Godot* ends with its main characters asserting that they will go and no longer wait, but do not, this episode ends with Angel and Spike agreeing to "move on" (from Buffy), but each remains motionless as the screen fades to black. But unlike Vladamir and Estragon, who will eventually die, Angel and Spike run the risk of remaining in their paralyzing stasis permanently. This, in turn, signals an obvious connection to Garcin,

Estelle, and Inez in *No Exit*; despite the opportunity to leave once the door flies open, they will forever play the interconnected roles of tortured and torturer. Just so, Angel and Spike fail to take control of their lives by choosing a new path, despite various opportunities to do so.[3] As Masson explains, "Immortality without forward movement or change is the hell represented in 'The Girl in Question'" (Masson 137).

Masson further argues that "The Girl in Question" conveys the existential dangers of immortality insofar as they are exacerbated by Sartrean "bad faith." One lives in bad faith by failing to take responsibility for one's station in life, despite the fact that one always remains free to change it; furthermore, on some level, one is aware of the failure to freely choose one's own path. Thus, to live in bad faith is to deceive oneself about who (and what) one is. It seems to Masson, and plausibly so, that both Angel and Spike live in bad faith regarding the Immortal. They blame him, a character never glimpsed in the episode, for their difficulties in reconnecting with Buffy. This is analogous to flashback scenes with Darla and Drusilla. The Immortal has sexual liaisons with each female vampire, and neither Angel nor Spike can accept that either did so willingly. Now that the Immortal is wooing Buffy, Angel and Spike are reliving their past(s). Their self-affirmed "arch-nemesis" is *again* ruining their lives. But the true hell, including its perpetuity, is one of their own making. As Masson explains, "Angel and Spike repeatedly exercise bad faith by casting blame outward toward an Other….[They] fail to recognize that they have a choice to repeat (eternally) or to end (finally) the attempts at vengeance on The Immortal" (Masson 141, 142). She sums up her analysis of the episode by echoing Abbott's assessment of the series: "'The Girl in Question,' with its nonheroic heroes, its meaningless plot, and its absurdity, emphasizes the importance of choice as a means of transforming the self, of escaping one's personal, oft-repeated hell" (Masson 145).

Masson contends that her reading of "The Girl in Question" facilitates a deeper appreciation of the subsequent episodes "Power Play" (5.21) and "Not Fade Away" (5.22). Indeed, she claims that the two-part series finale is dramatically poignant (in part) due to its contradistinction with the plot of "The Girl in Question." In her words, "The contrast in Angel's attitude is emphasized through effective episode placement—the

seemingly pointless antepenultimate episode is readily juxtaposed with the purposeful final two" (Masson 145). In "The Girl in Question," Angel is portrayed as inert, blames others for his predicament(s), and fails to take responsibility for his lot. In the final two episodes, he is portrayed as taking purposeful action; he chooses to dictate his own destiny, regardless of what the Powers that Be, the Senior Partners, or the Circle of the Black Thorn has "fated" for him. Angel leaves his "bad faith" persona in Italy, and takes on an authentic existence in waging an epic (and, if necessary, final) battle with the ubiquitous and (invariably) irresistible dark forces that drive the machine of his world. Thus, Masson, following Abbott, convincingly shows how applying existentialism to *Angel* enhances the aesthetic value of the show, including episodes that otherwise are difficult to appreciate.

Resolving with Sisyphus

"Redefinition" and "The Girl in Question" are not the only *Angel* episodes with affinities to existentialism. Indeed, it seems that "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco"—another often overlooked episode from season five—comes into clearer focus under an existentialist lens. This episode, although far from a fan-favorite, is distinctive in that it features an aged Wolfram & Hart mailroom worker who surprisingly performs his duties in a Mexican wrestling mask. He is referred to simply as "Number 5." Through a series of flashbacks, we learn that Number 5 was the youngest member of the masked Number Brothers wrestling team. These luchadores were champions in and out of the ring. They protected the weak and helped the helpless, especially among their fellow Mexican-Americans. In the process, they defeated the vaunted El Diablo Robotico, and vanquished the legendary Aztec warrior-demon Tezcatcatl. But Number 5's four brothers lost their lives battling Tezcatcatl. Fifty years later, the warrior-demon has somehow returned from the grave. Angel seeks out Number 5 in the hopes of learning how to defeat it.

Number 5 has become disgruntled and sullen. The memory of the undefeatable Number Brothers wrestling team has been defamed through modern-day wrestling parodies. He prepares an altar every year on the Day

of the Dead, but his brothers do not visit him. He believes he is not worthy. This is, in part, because he accepted a job at Wolfram & Hart not long after they died. He laments, "I knew that Wolfram & Hart was everything my brothers despised. But what did I care? Nothing mattered after I buried them." ("The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" 00:24:11-18). Angel surmises that Number 5 has simply given up. He chides, "You got stuck with the hard part, the carrying-on. No wonder your brothers' spirits never come to visit….You've quit. Tell me: Why'd you stop caring?" (00:24:42-55),. But with his brothers gone, and their memory besmirched, Number 5 retorts, "My brothers are dead, and Tezcatcatl is back to kill again. Why did we bother? What difference did we make?" (00:25:28-44).

Gunn learns that Tezcatcatl returns every fifty years seeking a mystical talisman. Consequently, the talisman is handed down to great heroes throughout the generations for safe keeping. As he did 50 years ago, Number 5 still possesses it, although he is no longer feeling particularly heroic. Angel gains possession of the talisman at the end of the episode, and, potentially, he could do battle with Tezcatcatl for perpetuity. Number 5's plight is cautionary because Angel is beginning to feel disconnected from his mission of helping the helpless. This is primarily a result of accepting his current position at Wolfram & Hart. Number 5 provides an example of what can become of any hero, once one is struck with personal tragedy and begins to compromise his (or her) ideals. Angel has lost Doyle, Cordelia, and Connor; they would not readily accept Angel's working for Wolfram & Hart (and this is confirmed by Cordy's reappearance a few episodes later in "You're Welcome" (5.12). A crucial difference between Number 5 and Angel, however, is that Angel's dour demeanor, if unchecked, will not cease in one human lifetime. He will go on battling Tezcatcatl every half century, among a myriad of other demons and dark forces, for as long as his supernaturally long unlife allows. There will always be monsters to defeat and helpless humans to rescue. Will Angel, too, be(come) swallowed up by regret, remorse, and despair?

With this, the connection to existentialism manifests, as Angel's plight is suggestive of the myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus's zest for life became a nuisance to the Greek gods and consequently, Sisyphus was punished to

forever push a heavy boulder up a hillside. Once he brought the boulder to the summit, and regardless of how careful he was, it would roll back down to the base of the hill. Albert Camus famously uses this myth to convey the fundamental existentialist tenets of absurdity, tragedy, and authenticity. Camus contends, "If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious" (Camus 314). For existentialists, the absurdity of life lies in the juxtaposition of two ill-fitting ideas. On the one hand, human beings tend to require that events and circumstances are reasonable or make sense; "everything happens for a reason," as the old adage goes. On the other hand, however, the world remains obstinately silent about such reasons, and, indeed, in and of itself, is incapable of providing them. At the very least, humans invariably demand that there be meaningful answers to our deepest questions, but the world as we live it fails to provide them. Perhaps if we knew that God exists and we were privy to God's intentions, this knowledge might secure meaning for human existence; however, God and God's intentions (if God exists at all), remain hidden. Moreover, on some level, we acknowledge our ignorance, but we are resolute in seeking answers that remain unforthcoming. This is the absurdity of the human condition. Furthermore, the human condition is tinged with tragedy insofar as we are conscious of our absurd predicament; we stubbornly persist in our mundane daily activities as if there were some obvious meaningful point to them (or our lives as a whole), despite the elusiveness of such meaning. That death awaits all of us only exacerbates life's tragedy. Why should Number 5, Angel, or any of us persist in our goals when they—and life itself—seem meaningless and only the grave awaits?

Number 5 seems to represent one response to the tragedy of the human condition: suicide. If nothing ultimately matters and one's life is replete with disappointment and pain, there is no reason to continue living it. When Number 5 encounters Tezcatcatl near his brothers' grave, it is not to prove himself worthy, but to be slain by the Aztec warrior-demon. This, of course, would only prove Number 5 to be *unworthy* of their company, and thereby demonstrates the irrational depths of his tragic

predicament. Although Camus was philosophically preoccupied with suicide, it was not his answer to an absurd world and the tragedy of the human condition. Rather, he advises scorn, motivated by joyful rebellion. Regarding Sisyphus, Camus explains, "It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me….At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks…he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock….All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing" (Camus 314, 315). Camus subsequently applies his analysis to the human condition: "Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment…says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny. He knows himself to be master of his days" (Camus 315). Regardless of what one's "thing" is, Camus advises that we persevere and make that thing our own. In this way, one takes charge of one's life, and thereby lives authentically. As Camus concludes, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus 315). If we, despite the tragic absurdity of the human condition, reach for personal heights regardless of one's "thing," we, too, can blot out despair and be contented with our authentic lives such as they are.

Although "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" has not suffered the fandom vitrol heaped upon "The Girl in Question," it is easy to write it off as an odd-ball *Angel* episode. One Internet reviewer quips, "To call the episode odd would be an understatement. It's the kind of pitch that would get most television writers demoted to doing sock puppet theater" (Miscellaneopolan). Moreover, this is the only episode that features luchadores culture, which exacerbates the episode's oddity. However, by making its connections to existentialism more explicit, the episode takes on deeper significance. Throughout four full seasons, Angel, like Sisyphus, has paused, sighed, and repeatedly retrieved his "rock"—his mission to "help the helpless" is his "thing." As Angel navigates one helpless person to safety, another endangered person comes into view. Now that Angel has become the CEO of the Los Angeles branch of Wolfram & Hart, he has become disconnected from his mission. For the first half of season five, we (often) see Angel pause just a bit more and his sighs are palpably heavier. His mission no longer provides him the "silent

joy" it once did. His resolve wavers. Camus helps us better understand Angel's tragic lament in an absurd world, and the missteps any hero can make under the weight of his (or her) "thing."[4] Indeed, applying Camus to the episode facilitates the novel interpretation that Tezcatcal eschews Angel's heart for its lack of meat *and* the metaphorical message that Angel (like Number 5) is a faltering hero (contrary to Wes's and Angel's interpretation of the demon's actions). Thus, it seems we can add "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" to "Redefinition" and "The Girl in Question" as persuasive microcosms for reading *Angel* existentially.

Reconceiving Angel's Epiphany

Perhaps the Season Two episode "Epiphany" (2.16) conveys the most obvious prima facie evidence for an existentialist reading of *Angel* (and Angel). After a harrowing lesson from Holland Manners and a painfully hollow tryst with Darla, Angel commiserates with a grateful Kate Lockley. They both feel foolish for their recent ill-advised behaviors. She shares, "If I'm not part of the force, it's like nothing I do means anything" ("Epiphany" 00:39:01-04). Angel perfunctorily agrees: nothing matters. In the greater scheme of things, there is no grand plan and no big win.[5] Angel thus confirms an absurd world. But he also affirms (in one of the most quoted excerpts of the show), "If there is no great, glorious end to all of this and nothing we do matters, then all that matters is what we do. Because that's all there is—what we do, now, today" ("Epiphany" 00:39:22-32). J. Michael Richardson and J. Douglas Rabb contend, "This insight is perfectly consistent with a Sartrean atheistic existentialism; in fact, it is a fairly good encapsualization of Satrean existentialism" (21).[6] On its face, *Angel* asserts the importance of authenticity via purposeful choices in an absurd world. Anything else is (invariably) to live in bad faith, including cursing an evil law firm that constantly attempts to thwart your efforts at redemption (an end goal that would probably go unfulfilled regardless). Thus the existential trappings of Angel's epiphany are undeniable; however, upon careful analysis, and taken in fuller context, Angel's words also convey themes difficult to reconcile with existentialism, and especially its austere ethical perspective. This point has

not been properly appreciated in the literature, and it is deserving of further exploration.

The thesis that Angel's epiphany conveys both existentialist and non-existentialist themes is made clearer by reconsidering its second half: "…I don't think people should suffer as they do. Because if there is no bigger meaning, then the smallest act of kindness is the greatest thing in the world" ("Epiphany" 00:39:49-40:00).[7] Kate surmises, "Yikes, it sounds like you've had an epiphany," and Angel quickly adds, "I keep saying that. But nobody's listening" (00:40:01-06). Angel, by his own admission, has come to an important realization upon his trials and tribulations of the Season Two Darla arc. Apart from grand divine purpose or everlasting reward, he advises that we ought never to forego an opportunity to help others. Nothing is more important than offering aid to those in need when they need it. Were we to forego an opportunity to help another, something of incalculable value would be lost forever.

It is important to note that Angel's assertion does not seem to be merely from a personal or subjective perspective. In fact, he seems to have inferred, at least implicitly, that kindness is the greatest thing in the world from his premise that he lives in an absurd world devoid of God. He is making a conclusion about how things ought to be—even if they do not always turn out that way. Consequently, Angel affirms that kindness is a universal value that exists unto itself. It is constitutive of the greatest good that a moral agent—any moral agent—can achieve. This is to read Angel as intimating moral realism, which is consonant with the view that moral values are objective (albeit abstract) features of the world.

That the second half of Angel's epiphany suggests the existence of objective moral values undermines the straight-forward existentialist reading often attributed to it. Moral realism is contrary to Sartre's view that luminous (ethically significant) values are non-existent. Sartre contends, "It is nowhere written that 'the good' exists, that one must be honest or not lie, since we are now on a plane where there are only men [without God]….We cannot decide *a priori* what it is that should be done" (Sartre 294, 306). The contentious issue, then, is whether Sartrean interpretations of Angel's epiphany can bear the weight that Angel puts on the moral importance of kindness as "the greatest thing in the world." Indeed, with its unabashed denial of a priori values, it can be argued that

Sartrean existentialism lacks the resources to bear *any* weighty moral judgments. To his credit, Sartre anticipates the objection that no binding moral judgements are possible on his view. He contends, "I can form judgments upon those who seek to hide from themselves the wholly voluntary nature of their existence and its complete freedom. Those who hide from this total freedom, in a guise of solemnity or with deterministic excuses, I shall call cowards" (Sartre 308). However, this rejoinder hardly clarifies matters. In fact, it seems much clearer that Sartre embraces the a priori ethically significant value of authentic choice, as demonstrated by his *condemning* those who live in "bad faith" (calling them "cowards"), while simultaneously denying the existence of such values. Put another way, if there are no objective moral values, then it cannot be bad or wrong to live in "bad faith"—but that is exactly what Sartre claims.

The textual support for reading Angel's epiphany as expressing a moral realist perspective, even if often draped in existentialist motifs, is striking. For example, recall Angel's conscientious rebuke of Connor's misguided outlook: "Nothing in the world is the way it ought to be. It's harsh and cruel. But that's why there is us. Champions. It doesn't matter where we come from, what we've done or suffered. Or even if we make a difference. We live as though the world were the way it should be. To show it what it can be" ("Deep Down" 4.1, 00:40:39-41:01). Here, Angel clearly asserts that—ethically speaking—there is a specific way that the world ought to be, and that ideal transcends Sartre's (problematic) admonishment to not live in bad faith. Furthermore, Angel's words are a testament to doing the right thing, regardless of personal cost or benefit; it is the noble message that, with only a few notable exceptions (involving Darla or the Shanshu prophecy), informs all that Angel does. True, without God, there may be no glorious end for Creation, and in that sense our existence may be tinged with existentialist angst insofar as good persons may not be rewarded for their meritorious deeds; however, our ethical obligations remain and they can infuse goodness into the world upon our choosing accordingly. Yes, doing the right (good) thing requires a choice; existentialists are correct about the importance of choice, and how our choices impact our lives and the lives of those around us. However, contrary to existentialist thought, some choices are intrinsically better than others. Furthermore, regularly doing the right thing or enacting

morally good choices makes one a champion—a unique force of good in a troubled world (to paraphrase Lorne in "Happy Anniversary" [2.13]). Even if not each of us can be a champion, we can do our part by benefitting others via acts of kindness, simply for its own sake. Our selfless kindness—helping the helpless when we can—makes the world less harsh and cruel, and shows it what it can be.

When reading Angel's epiphany in "Epiphany" through his words to Connor in "Deep Down," the position Angel (implicitly) conveys harkens back to the moral realism of Kant or Aristotle (or an intriguing synthesis of both).[8] Although differing in some details, both Kant and Aristotle hold that there are true ethically significant moral judgments; these are in some sense universally binding upon all moral agents, independent of what individuals may happen to believe. That is, some choices or behaviors are intrinsically right or good analogous to how the number seven is prime. Furthermore, both Kant and Aristotle contend that ethically significant behavior, to be fully morally commendable, must be (knowingly) performed for its own sake. Acting for the sake of a reward is not as morally commendable as doing it because it is right (or good). In fact, Kant claims that acting for reward is not morally commendable at all. He staunchly maintains, "If any action is to be morally good, it is not enough that it should *conform* to the moral law—it must also be done *for the sake of the moral law*" (Kant 57-58, emphasis original). Aristotle similarly claims that virtuous (or virtuoso) behavior must be performed by an agent "in a certain condition when he does them;…he must have knowledge…he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and…must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character" (Aristotle 1105a31-34). Moreover, both believe that moral behavior is intrinsically valuable, such that it is sufficiently motivating in itself; morally commendable behavior is its own unique reward. Kant's articulation of this idea is particularly vivid. He believes, apart from any positive consequences it might bring about, acting for the sake of duty "would still shine like a jewel for its own sake as something which has its full value in itself" (Kant 62). Thus, Angel is a champion not merely because he regularly makes authentic choices as Sartre (or Camus) might claim, but due to the kinds of choices he regularly makes, the sorts of reasons that drive those choices, and the ways he typically enacts them. They have an

ethical quality to them that is all but impossible to reconcile with an (atheistic) existentialist-based ethics (and Sartre's in particular).

Reassessing the Heroes of "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco"

The thesis that *Angel's* existential motifs must be tempered by moral realist themes is bolstered by carefully reexaming "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco." There are two initial considerations supporting this thesis. First, Angel's response to Number 5's despair in an absurd world is different from Camus's analysis of Sisyphus. Second, it is a stretch to confidently assert that Angel is ever happy in this episode or any other. This remains true even as he prepares to do battle against the dragon in the moments before the final credits roll (and his mood certainly does not improve in *Angel: After the Fall* [2011]).[9]

Rather than imparting rebellion via joyful scorn (or some such), Angel's response to Number 5 emphasizes the importance of doing the right thing. Although he appreciates Number 5's regrets, Angel asserts, "You made a difference in the lives you saved. And you did it because...it was the right thing to do. Nobody asks us to go out and fight, put our lives on the line….We do it whether people remember us or not, in spite of the fact that there's no shiny reward at the end of the day...other than the work itself. I think some part of you still knows that, still believes in being a hero" ("The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" 00:25:45-26:17). This speech is reminscient of his words to Kate in "Epiphany," especially once read through his words to Connor in "Deep Down." The emphasis is upon doing the right thing because it is right in itself. One keeps his (or her) moral obligations apart from any (additional) reward for doing so. Thus Angel reaffirms the importance of being a champion—regularly doing the right (good) thing simply because it is right (good), which is a staple of moral realism.[10]

Similar to "Epiphany," "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" conveys moral realism draped in existential motifs. Consider that by the time Angel finishes his hero speech, Number 5, who doesn't feel particularly heroic anymore, has disappeared. Angel's speech thus

becomes a soliloquy. Consciously or not, Angel is perhaps attempting to reconvince himself about his Season Two epiphany and the importance of doing the right thing. Similar to Number 5, he is feeling disconnected from his mission of helping the helpless; both heroes are facing something of an existential crisis, and suffering the angst of staying on the hero's path. This only heightens the drama of their last meeting in the graveyard. Number 5, despite himself, heroically saves Angel from Tezcatcatl and suffers a mortal stomach wound in the process. This heroic act brings Number 5's brothers back from the dead. They emerge from the grave to help Angel defeat Tezcatcatl. Angel then turns toward the ailing Number 5, who murmurs, "Mis hermanos, they came back," to which, Angel replies, "Because you're worthy. You proved it" ("The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" 00:39:24-30). Number 5 seems less than convinced due to the existential angst of life without his brothers; however, he does not protest as his brothers carry him away with them in confirmation of Number 5's heroism. Number 5 leaves this world doing the right (good) thing because it is right (good); Angel remains, emboldened by Number 5's example, and takes charge of the talisman.

Again similar to Angel's epiphany in "Epiphany," reinterpreting "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" via moral realism raises larger philosophical issues. First, the existence of universally binding moral truths per moral realism entails only that there are things we ought to do and that we can be blamed for not doing them, but it does not entail that everyone—even the best of us—unfailingly upholds his or her obligations. Perhaps Angel is properly chastised by his team for allowing Darla and Dru to feast on the Wolfram & Hart lawyers in Holland Manners's wine cellar. Perhaps he is to be condemned for turning his back on the Hyperion residents in the 1950s. Unfortunately, champions do not *always* do the right or good thing. Nevertheless, the moral realist argues that true moral principles are not falsified or rendered non-existent merely because sometimes people—even good people—choose not to follow them. Second, it is true that sometimes it is difficult to discern what one is obligated to do (recalling Sartre's famous example of the young man torn between joining the French resistance or staying behind to care for his ailing mother).[11] However, the moral realist maintains that any prima facie moral dilemma does not entail that there are no objective moral truths,

that it can never be known what one ought to do, or that ethical truths are merely a matter of personal choice. Sometimes the truth is difficult to find, but that does not mean it is not out there.

These fundamental ethical issues about the nature of moral truth, especially as it pertains to the incongruous existentialist and moral realist perspectives conveyed in *Angel*, are intriguingly on display in "Power Play" and "Not Fade Away." Recall Masson's position that Angel leaves his bad faith persona in Italy and embraces his authentic existence in the two-part series finale. He takes charge of his life and owns the choices he makes as he prepares to do battle with the Circle of the Black Thorn. However, it is also the case that Angel's decision to sacrifice Drogyn for his cause is ethically dubious, as attested by Lorne's derisive quip about offering tips on how to be a hero in "Not Fade Away." Perhaps Angel can be blamed for taking Drogyn's life, especially if there were other ways of getting the Circle's attention. Perhaps Angel believed he faced a moral dilemma. Nevertheless, given Lorne's objection, Angel's choice to execute Drogyn, if not blameworthy, cries out for some additional moral justification, and this remains so despite Angel's (existentially) owning this choice. Thus, living in good faith—leading an authentic existence—is not sufficient for being a champion. The (inherent) moral worth of the choices Angel makes remains relevant; that they possess this feature remains problematic for reading *Angel* via (Sartrean) existentialism alone.[12]

Accordingly, "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" serves as an important microcosm or "prism episode"[13] for multiple reasons. Not only does the episode convey existentialist tenets traditionally ascribed to Camus, which reinforces established existentialist readings of *Angel*, but it also works to show how existentialist interpretations of *Angel* and Angel must be tempered with moral realist perspectives. It accomplishes this with its robust portrayal of heroism, and, in this way, bolsters more nuanced interpretations of Angel's epiphany in "Epiphany" and his choices in "Not Fade Away" (and, as we will see, those in "Reunion" [2.10] and "Redefinition").

Reviving Meaningfulness in a Meaningless World

With the existentialist and moral realist themes of *Angel* clearly established, art imitates life in that many find it difficult to reconcile these two opposing philosophical perspectives. So, what ultimately is the point of Angel's dedicated mission to help the helpless, if there is no bright shiny reward at the end of the day or if he never is rewarded with becoming a real boy (to paraphrase Spike in "Not Fade Away")? Why do any of us strive to do the right thing, if, in the end, the grave is all that awaits? Susan Wolf attempts to answer such questions and thereby reconcile the two incongruous perspectives that drive them (inasmuch as they can be reconciled). In turn, her ideas also facilitate a novel interpretation of *Angel*.

Wolf contends that some lives possess meaningfulness even if there are no obvious answers to perennial questions about the meaning of life. That is, one's life can be meaningful even if there is no ultimate meaning to human existence as a whole. For her, the fundamental issue is which activities fill one's life and not whether God exists to infuse meaning into them. She explains, "If one activity is worthwhile and another is a waste, then one has reason to prefer the former, even if there is no God to look down on us and approve. More generally, we seem to have reasons to engage ourselves with projects of value regardless of whether God exists and gives life a purpose" (Wolf 129).

Whether a life possesses meaningfulness, according to Wolf, depends on the kinds of projects one (regularly) pursues. She supports this claim by first examining three kinds of lives that plausibly *lack* meaningfulness, which she descriptively labels "Blob," "Useless," and "Bankrupt." Blob's life is one that consists of someone living in a hazy passivity, unconnected to anyone or anything; Blob is going nowhere and achieves nothing. Wolf doesn't disparage an occasional glass of wine or a long, solitary walk on the beach. Rather, Blob's life unfailingly *persists* in a lack of activity or connections to others. She labels her second example "Useless." Useless's life is not meaningless due to its passivity. Rather, Useless's life lacks meaningfulness because it is wholly occupied with silly or decadent—useless—activity. A third kind of life, which she admits is perhaps a bit more controversial, is Bankrupt. The worry here is not that Bankrupt's activity is shallow or misguided; rather the chosen project

abjectly fails or never comes to fruition. Wolf suggests a person who dedicates her life to a medical breakthrough only to have someone else's research make her life's work obsolete.[14] From these three kinds of meaningless lives, she defines a meaningful life: "One's life is meaningful, then, is…that one's life is actively, and at least somewhat successfully, engaged in projects (understanding this term broadly) that do not just seem to have positive value but really do have it" (Wolf 120).

Wolf acknowledges that her account of meaningfulness hinges on the plausibility of some projects having positive value, not merely from a personal or subjective perspective, but impartially or objectively so. She admits that it is difficult to prove this directly, but she also reminds us that when asked about some paradigmatic examples of those who have led meaningful lives, a familiar list is readily suggested: Ghandi, Mother Teresa, and Albert Schweitzer (among others). The fact that there is roughly universal assent to the meaningfulness of these sorts of lives is best explained by an implicit objective account of positive projects. Furthermore, she reminds us of some very common value judgements. In her words, "Some things, it seems to me, are better than others: people for example, are better than rocks or mosquitoes, and a Vermeer painting is better than the scraps on my compost heap" (Wolf 124). Because these sorts of judgments do not depend on her personal perspective—it is plausible that people are better than rocks even if Wolf does not exist—this is some reason for thinking that such judgments have some sort of impartial or objective basis.

Intriguingly, especially for the purposes here, Wolf further supports her thesis that some projects have impartial or objective positive worth by citing the phenomena of value or meaning epiphanies. These sorts of experiences occur when, as she explains:

> One wakes up—literally or figuratively—to the recognition that one's life to date has been meaningless. Such an experience would be nearly unintelligible if a lack of meaning were to be understood as a lack of a certain kind of subjective impression….To the contrary, it may be precisely because one did not realize the emptiness of one's projects or the shallowness of one's values until

> that moment that the experience I am imagining has the poignancy it does (120).

For Wolf, and plausibly so, the relevant sorts of experiences are a kind of realization. For them to have any real significance, possessing positive value cannot be merely subjective. If they were merely subjective, then one's "realization" is not much of a revelation or epiphany, as the new goal/project is not any better (or worse) than the prior project.

Angel has had (at least) two such epiphanies. The first occurred on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). In a flashback scene from "Becoming, Part I" (2.21) Whistler abruptly visits Angel in 1996 and gruffly spurs him to take stock of his ninety ensouled years. Whistler believes Angel is wasting his ensouled unlife, and he subsequently challenges him: "I want to know who you are" (29:16-29:17). Angel is initially confused, but Whistler continues, "I mean that you can become an even more useless rodent than you already are, or you can become someone. A person. Someone to be counted" (00:29:46-53). With Whistler's help, which includes a brief tour of Los Angeles to witness the newly-called Slayer Buffy Summers, Angel *realizes* that he has been wasting his life. As Wolf might say, the "scales fell off his eyes," and he is thereby impelled "to do something about it" (Wolf 120). He now wants to help Buffy stand against the forces of darkness. This project has positive value, and clearly much more than shunning everyone by hiding in alleys and feeding on rats.

The second epiphany, of course, occurs in the second season of *Angel*.[15] Angel suddenly—although Lorne may have used the word "finally"—realizes that the projects he adopts during the Darla arc of Season Two were shallow and beneath him. Mired in his obsessions with Darla and Wolfram & Hart, Angel had become lost. As Lorne chides him, "You pushed your friends away. You went from helping the helpless to hunting down the guilty. Blood vengeance is a luxury of the lesser beings. You're a champion, Angel. I mean—you were, at least" ("Happy Anniversary" 00:29:04-16).[16] Interpreting Angel's epiphanies as Wolf recommends reinforces the dramatic gravitas of his deciding to adopt Buffy's mission in *Buffy*, and his return to being his own champion apart from her, complete with his own mission in *Angel*. Indeed, if all value judgments are merely subjective, then Angel's turn toward—and return

to—helping the helpless is no better or worse than his hiding in alleys or hunting down the guilty in blood vengeance.

Wolf cautions against building a theory of ethical value into her account of meaningfulness. She maintains that artists, athletes, musicians, and scholars (just to name a few) can lead meaningful lives apart from their ethical accomplishments or character.[17] Nevertheless, it remains true, recalling Kant and Aristotle, that moral rightness or goodness is among the most plausible candidates for projects possessing objective positive value. So, recalling Wolf's affirmations about Gandhi and Mother Theresa, we might hazard a hierarchy of meaningfulness and claim that to be a "Champion" is to lead a kind of life that possesses particularly commendable meaningfulness. Other sorts of lives can be meaningful, but champions are exemplary for the sorts of lives they lead.

Accordingly, because Angel's project of being a champion by regularly helping the helpless is obviously ethically significant, and because he is consistently (although not perfectly) successful in that project, it follows on a Wolf-inspired account that Angel's mission possesses distinctive meaningfulness, despite the fact that Angel pursues it in an absurd world. That his project of being a champion possesses *intrinsic* worth is sufficient to ground its being a worthy pursuit; it requires no external source of validation. True, there will always be more people to help and monsters to defeat. But he is a champion because he persists regardless, and, in this persistence, selflessly shows the world what it can be. His example provides a way in which life can imitate art. It remains up to each of us to emulate his example. So, just as Wolf offers something instructive about Angel (and *Angel*), Angel offers us something instructive about life.

Reviewing Angel and *Angel*

Commentators such as Abbott and Masson are clearly correct that *Angel* conveys existentialist themes; however, those themes are often accompanied by non-existentialist ethical perspectives.[18] Abbott is correct that Angel's world tends toward existentialist absurdity, and the Powers that Be are not convincingly proper sources of providence or moral value.

However, as argued here, Angel's world also seems to contain objective (albeit abstract) sources of moral truth that do not depend on God in the way that Sartre (among others) believe. Still, Abbott is also correct that *Angel* often explores some murky ethical terrain, and sometimes its characters struggle with discerning what ought to be done in specific circumstances. It is far from clear that Wes does the right thing in kidnapping the infant Connor in "Sleep Tight" (3.16); neither is it clear that Angel's response in "Forgiving" (3.17)—smothering Wes with a pillow in the hospital—is morally appropriate. Nevertheless, Abbott overstates the case in claiming that nothing, ethically speaking, is clear. Billy Blim, in "Billy" (3.6), is evil. Cordelia, in "Birthday" (3.11) and "You're Welcome", is noble. Moreover, some choices are clearly better than others. Billy's decision to cause harm for his selfish pleasure is blameworthy; Cordy's selfless decision to get Angel back on track is commendable. Even so, Abbott is correct that Angel, through his own volition, (more or less) reinvents himself in "Redefinition," and his doing so has obvious affinities with Sartre's views about radical existential freedom. However, it is also true that, along the way, he wronged his team (and arguably *some* Wolfram & Hart lawyers). That he wronged Wes, Cordy, and Gunn is made clear by Lorne in "Happy Anniversary"; Angel himself admits this when he seeks reconciliation with the trio by offering to work for *them* at the end of "Epiphany." He is contrite in his wish to help them and the attempt to re-earn their trust. Angel's amends are most plausibly explained via moral realism.

This essay confirms Masson's view that existentialist motifs extend into Season Five, and noting these affinities can enhance one's appreciation of the series. "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" strongly suggests Angel must guard against falling into despair due to his Sisyphus-like predicament of perpetually helping the helpless and standing against the forces of darkness. However, it cannot be overlooked that Angel is not merely rolling a rock up a hill. He is helping people who need help, and, to paraphrase Doyle, he is not merely saving lives, but connecting with others and saving souls. Thus, Angel's "thing" possesses an ethical dimension that Sisyphus's does not; Angel's project is *intrinsically* morally valuable, and thus meaningful in its own right (and, as argued, leading the life of a champion possesses particularly commendable

meaningfulness).[19] Furthermore, Masson is correct that "The Girl in Question" is difficult to properly understand without an existentialist analysis. Moreover, it is clear that Angel wallows in something like Sartrean bad faith in the "The Girl in Question" but not in "Power Play" and "Not Fade Away." Nevertheless, it is also true that the kinds of choices, and how Angel decides to enact them, remain significant; there are better and worse ways for Angel to escape Sartrean bad faith. His plan for taking action in the final two episodes is markedly different than it was in "Reunion" and "Redefinition." Rather than shun his team (or "leave them in the cold" ["Happy Anniversary" 00:40:26-28]), Angel confers with them as equals and will not move forward unless they are all agreed (despite his controversial decision to sacrifice Drogyn). Angel's actions cannot be plausibly interpreted apart from moral realism.

The tenuous co-existence of existentialist and moral realist precepts is also operative outside of the Whedonverses. Each of us, especially in our more philosophical moments, attempt to come to grips with the ideas and ideals they represent. Most people are concerned about determining what is right or good. The fact that the world is religiously ambiguous only exacerbates this concern. Can any actions be right or good apart from God's commands? What reason is there to act morally apart from divine approbation or punishment? These existentialist-friendly questions possess obvious rhetorical force, but they run contrary to other commonly held ideas about ethical behavior. Parents strive to have their children do the right thing not for reward or threat of losing screen time if they don't, but because it is the right thing to do. That is, doing the right thing because it is right seems to be ethically superior to, or more morally mature than, doing the right thing for reward or avoiding punishment. If so, what is the source of such ethical truths? Do abstractly existing moral truths sufficiently motivatate us to act accordingly? These moral realist-friendly questions exist alongside existentialist ideas about the importance of choice and leading one's own life. We are often caught in the middle.

Yet perhaps returning to Angel's example within the Whedonverse facilitates insights into how we ought to live in the actual world. Angel is commendable for adopting the mission to help the helpless, not for his sake, but for the sake of others—that is, for its own sake. There are other sorts of meaningful lives, but those who lead them are not champions.

Angel's example is particularly exemplary. He is also commendable for owning his decision to adopt this mission—for continually choosing it, despite the personal hardships it occasions. In a religiously ambiguous world, Angel cannot risk eschewing his responsibilities to help the helpless; he can only rely on himself to ensure that the world includes the greatest of all things—instances of kindness. True, his example inspires others—Cordy, Wes, Gunn (and eventually Connor per *After the Fall*)—to adopt his mission; as a result, Angel can turn to others for help in bringing kindness to the world (even if he doesn't turn to them as much as he could). Perhaps his example should motivate us in the real world as well. In this way, Angel himself arguably serves (or can serve) as a catalyst for a value epiphany for *Angel* viewers.

In the end, *Angel* presents us a five-year thought experiment that poses various questions, including: Does Angel convey a worthy—a meaningful—way to live? How might each of us become a champion? Reviewing *Angel* allows us to ponder these important questions and, in turn, affords us many opportunities for making our future more meaningful. Each of us, in our own distinctive way, can show the world what it can be. Thus, reviewing *Angel* has prospective ramifications for all of us.

Notes

[1] Existentialist themes are woven throughout Whedon's commentary, but he specifically asserts, "Friend of mine…when I got back to school…gave me the most important book I ever read, which was Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*….This book spoke to what I believe more accurately and totally than anything I had ever read" ("Objects in Space" 1.14, 00:08:46-09:20). Zynda's existential analysis relies heavily on "Objects in Space." Richardson and Rabb argue that existentialism pervades Whedon's early corpus. See also Bardi and Hamby and (more recently) Rogers.

[2] Editor's note: For a related discussion of a synthesis of existential and non-existential views, see Kowalski's essay "Visions of the Soul: Looking Back on *Buffy* and *Angel*" in the *Slayage* special issue on the twentieth anniversary of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

[3] Masson does not discuss how Andrew is arguably portrayed as accomplishing what neither Angel nor Spike do: taking an active role in his life to make himself into something new. He is no longer the dweeb he once was, and he leaves the two vampires behind sporting a suave tuxedo, speaking Italian, and escorted by two beautiful women.

[4] Alternatively, or in conjunction, it might be argued that Angel's role as CEO leads him to live in "bad faith" about his mission. However, Wes offers a third view of Angel's lament: The mission has lost its meaning because Angel has given up hope about the future as a result of repudiating the Shanshu prophecy. But Wes (uncharacteristically) does not recognize the potential step backward this represents. Angel's existential plight in "Destiny" (5.8) and "Soul Purpose" (5.10) that occurs as a result of pursuing the Shanshu prophecy is reminiscent of his earlier missteps in "Judgment" (2.1).

[5] For more on these ideas as they relate to *Angel* (and *Buffy*), see Sakal.

[6] Korsmeyer, especially pp. 33-36, is sympathetic to this claim; see also Abbott, paragraph 25.

[7] The importance of these words and the ethical perspective they embody are reaffirmed in the graphic publication *Angel: After the Fall* (2007-2011), as Connor uses them to re-energize a failing Angel. This occurs in Issue 13, which is reprinted in Whedon, Lynch, Armstrong, Mooney, Urro, Ross, and Martino. For more on how ethical ideals pertinent to *Angel* play out in *After the Fall*, see Kowalski, *Joss Whedon* pp. 58-59 and 226.

[8] For an account of how such a synthesis applies to *Angel* (and other parts of the Whedonverse), see Kowalski, *Joss Whedon* pp. 61-65.

[9] Camus's view might accurately describe Annie in "Not Fade Away." Given her exchange with Gunn, it seems that running the homeless shelter has become her "thing," and she is thriving in that there are now two locations. She chooses to scorn her fate via joyful rebellion against any hidden forces conspiring against her. Our last glimpse of Annie in the series finale makes it easy for us to imagine her happy.

[10] Annie is "helping the helpless" in her own way at the shelter, and infuses the world with acts of kindness in the process. She does this not for personal reward, but because it is right or good and simply for its own sake. Thus, although her situation may be more amenable to Camus's solution than is Angel's, it does not obviously serve as a counterexample to the interpretation of Angel being argued for here. In fact, it is another example of existentialist themes tempered by moral realism.

[11] See Sartre, pp. 295-297.

[12] Furthermore, Angel's stunning decision to sign away his claim to the Shanshu prophecy can be interpreted along moral realist lines. Rather than acting for the reward of taking down the Circle, or at least the hope of becoming human if successful (as Wes intimates in "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco"), Angel acts because it is the right thing to do regardless of reward.

[13] Mary Alice Money defines a "prism episode" as one that "reflects elements of earlier shows and foreshadows those to come" (114).

[14] See Wolf, pp. 116-117.

[15] Arguably, Doyle may facilitate an additional epiphany in between the two discussed here via his interactions with Angel in "City of…" (1.1).

[16] Just as Whistler and Lorne (and perhaps Doyle) facilitated Angel's epiphanies, Buffy was instrumental in occasioning Lily's epiphany in the *Buffy* episode "Anne" (3.1). That Buffy Anne

Anne Summers played a crucial role in Lily's new quest for meaningfulness is evidenced by Lily's taking the name "Anne" at the end of the episode, becoming "Anne Steele" in *Angel*, and running a *proper* homeless shelter for runaway teens—for all the right reasons.

[17] See Wolf, p. 120.

[18] This point also pertains to "Objects in Space." It also carries a moral message not easily reconciled with existentialism. Whedon (in the DVD commentary) claims, "She [River] devises her entire plan so that nobody gets hurt. There's no shooting, even though it doesn't work that way, so there is a kind of morality inherent in what she's doing" ("Objects in Space" 00:35:42-52). It seems that resolving the crew's predicament without guns is *inherently* better than resolving it with them, despite the various allusions to existentialist thinking the episode otherwise conveys.

[19] Of course, this point also pertains to Annie in "Not Fade Away."

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