

Visions of the Soul: Looking Back on *Buffy* and *Angel*

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The soul is at the core of vampire lore in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Angel* (1999-2004), and it is at the core of Angel's very being. However, the exact nature of the soul and the function it serves in each series is not always clear. Initially, it is supposed to distinguish the irredeemable monsters from the innocent humans, but some ensouled characters act just as monstrous as the soulless vampires. It allegedly marks a substantive metaphysical change in Angel's existence, but the same account becomes problematic when applied to Spike's more prolonged (and voluntary) transformation from soulless monster to ensouled champion. This essay commemorates the twentieth anniversary of *Buffy* by revisiting this elusive but philosophically interesting topic.

Whedon scholars Gregory Stevenson, Stacey Abbott, Scott McLaren, and J. Michael Richardson and J. Douglas Rabb have each offered influential discussions of the soul in *Buffy* and *Angel*. This essay aspires to revive and engage that conversation. It proceeds by re-examining the two prevailing interpretations of the soul in the series: the ontological and the existential. It next explores McLaren's contributions, and notes his reasons for proffering a third interpretation. It then argues for a novel synthesis of the three competing views that result, and one that overcomes the conceptual and thematic shortcomings of each without sacrificing their respective interpretative strengths. The essay

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concludes by contending that the motivations driving this hybrid interpretation—to offer a more coherent interpretative across both series—brings to the foreground philosophical challenges for Whedon scholarship in terms of author intent and cinematic auteurism. This essay thus looks back at one Whedonverse controversy to bring future Whedon scholarship into clearer focus.

Setting the Interpretive Landscape

Initial interpretations of the soul were informed by Giles's and Angel's season one explanations of the concept. Giles informs Buffy that a vampire possesses a human body as a result of being infected by the demon's soul ("The Harvest" 1.2). Giles's subsequently instructs her, "A vampire isn't a person at all. It may have the movements, the memories, even the personality of the person it takes over, but it is a demon at the core" ("Angel" 1.7, 00:17:19-25). Angel adds, "When you become a vampire, the demon takes your body. But it doesn't get the soul. That's gone. No conscience, no remorse—it's an easy way to live" (00:34:37-46). Buffy's harsh rebuke of her friend Ford reflects her tutelage. Ford believes that becoming a vampire is his last chance to survive his late-stage brain cancer, but Buffy objects: "I got a newsflash, braintrust. That's not how it works. You die. And a demon sets up shop in your old house. It walks and talks and remembers your life, but it's not you" ("Lie to Me" 2.7, 00:35:55-00:36:05). Thus, the early seasons of *Buffy* strongly suggest that when a human person is turned into a vampire, the human soul departs entirely, and the demon infecting the body animates the corpse. Furthermore, the soul's expulsion also results in the loss of human moral sensibilities; the resulting creature is more monster than human, and, in fact, he or she is no longer properly a "person" at all.

Gregory Stevenson offers a *Buffy*-centric account of the soul. He asserts: "With both Angel and Spike, their reception of a soul is said to have made them different or somehow new" (Stevenson 85). Furthermore, being ensouled harbors ethically significant changes: "Goodness on *Buffy* is not defined as the mere absence of evil. Rather it is intrinsically tied to the presence of a soul" (87).¹ Stevenson elaborates:

“On *Buffy* the soul functions as a moral compass, allowing one to discern the difference between right and wrong,” and, regarding Angel or Spike, it facilitates “the ability to overcome the evil [nature] within him,” with the result that “redemption is now possible” (88).

Yet Stevenson is clear that, although a soulless creature is an irredeemable monster, possessing a soul does not guarantee one will behave in morally appropriate ways. He reminds the reader that Dark Willow’s reprehensible behaviors cannot be explained by her lacking a soul. Stevenson expounds: “Spike and Angel do not become good simply because they possess a soul. With that soul comes free will and it is their subsequent choice to use their power for good that marks their redemption” (128). As Spike’s journey from soulless monster to something new began to unfold, and as Angel’s character was developed apart from Buffy in Los Angeles, some commentators began stressing the importance of choosing to be (or become) “soul-full” over merely “possessing” a soul.

Stacey Abbott was among the first Whedon scholars to broach an existentialist interpretation of the soul. She contends: “It was not the curse and 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” (Abbott 17). Abbott supports her reading by noting that the series conveys existentialist-friendly cinematic motifs, and that it thematically portrays the Powers that Be as a poor source of providence and transcendent moral value. Furthermore, she argues that her interpretation is bolstered by the way the series enriches Angel’s character. The extensive use of flashbacks provides the viewer informative glimpses into Angel/Angelus’s largely uncharted history, and these become crucial to understanding his present. Abbott writes, “The flashbacks... serve to 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” (14). Some flashbacks express Angelus’s mythic viciousness and cruelty, but Abbott cites examples of Angel acting in Angelus-type ways after the curse: His choice to seek reconciliation with Darla during the Boxer Rebellion

(“Darla” 2.7), and his forsaking the Hyperion residents in the 1950s (“Are You Now or Have You Ever Been” 2.2).

“Redefinition” probably provides the best evidence for Abbott’s interpretation (2.11). This episode is filmed in high contrast lighting, and often with half of Angel’s face in shadow. He is becoming Angel *and* Angelus, or perhaps a hybrid of the two; this character transition seems to be the thematic point of the episode, and it culminates with his grimly but calmly setting fire to Darla and Dru in the warehouse. As Abbott explains:

The brutality of his actions, along with the iconic image of his smoking (for Angel only smokes when he’s Angelus) suggests the presence of the ‘über-vampire,’ and yet his brooding and silence suggests Angel. He is in fact neither and he is both. Darla immediately recognizes... [this], when she says, ‘That wasn’t Angel, that wasn’t Angelus either . . . who was that?’ He is a new being of his own creation. (24)

Despite being re-ensouled, he has chosen to revisit the darkness within him, and become something new. According to Abbott, the Angel and Angelus personas have become fused as a result of an intentional change in Angel’s ethically significant orientation, consonant with existentialist tenets.²

Furthermore, Spike’s behaviors post inhibitor-chip but pre-re-ensoulment also seem to support an existentialist reading of the soul. Despite lacking a human soul, Spike strives to become something new. Stevenson’s account has difficulty accommodating this change. He interprets seemingly benevolent acts by soulless creatures as motivated by pragmatic concerns for self-interest and preservation (89-90). However, Stevenson’s rejoinder seems open to counterexample.³ Although Whistler is an immortal demon, he is neither a bad guy, nor dedicated to destroying all life (“Becoming, Part I” 2.21). But Spike’s morally commendable behaviors are particularly vivid. Having decided to murder Buffy, and with shotgun in hand, he reconsiders and comforts Buffy as she struggles to cope with her mother’s terminal illness (“Fool for Love” 5.07); he sincerely attempts to pay his respects (anonymously)

upon Joyce's death ("Forever" 5.17); and he refuses to divulge that Dawn is the Key Glory seeks, despite the fact that Glory tortures him for the information ("Intervention" 5.18). A soulless Spike multiply chooses to do the right thing, and seemingly does so apart from pragmatic concerns or self-interest. Thus Angel's and Spike's examples emphasize the importance of choice in ways that run counter to early depictions of the soul on *Buffy* (and interpretive accounts based on them).

McLaren's Mediation

Scott McLaren acknowledges that "soul-talk" on *Buffy* and *Angel* can be interpreted metaphorically. He writes, "The soul can also be defined existentially: Angel resists temptation not simply because he 'has' a soul... but rather because, existentially, he makes a deliberate moral choice" (McLaren 13). McLaren further claims that "soul-talk" is also "an existential metaphor for a particular moral orientation" (13). Thus, the soul as metaphor can apply to any one ethically significant choice or a concerted effort to continue making similar choices. Due to the emphasis upon altering one's own existence via the choices one makes, let us call this the existentialist interpretation of the soul.

McLaren argues that an existentialist account of the soul sheds helpful interpretative light on Darla. She implores Angel: "For a hundred years you've not had a moment's peace 'cause you will not accept who you are. That's all you have to do" ("Angel" 1.7, 00:31:25-32). Darla suggests that Angel's curse is of his own making. Being ensouled is not the source of his torment; he suffers because he so chooses. Consequently, Angel can undo the curse by merely choosing to become a predator again. Darla continues this approach upon being resurrected on *Angel*. She asserts: "But I'm still me. And I remember everything, Angel. Everything we did.... My boy is still in there and he wants out" ("Dear Boy" 2.5, 00:36:18-24 and 00:39:03-05). Although resurrected as human, Darla chooses to see herself as the uninhibited predator who sired Angel, and she correspondingly entreats Angel to choose to become the mythic vampire he was before the Gypsy curse. It is little

wonder, then, that Angel has difficulty explaining who Darla is to the pseudo-swami in the subsequent episode (“Guise Will Be Guise” 2.6). Darla’s interactions with Angel are evidence that the presence or absence of the so-called separate soul makes little interpretative difference. Whether one is a soulless monster, an uninhibited predator, or lives by a “boy scout code,” is merely descriptive of who one chooses to be. Moreover, Angel resists Darla’s wiles not because he possesses a soul, but because he chooses to continue with his adopted moral orientation for goodness and redemption.

An existentialist account of the soul also alleviates a troubling conceptual difficulty regarding re-ensouled vampires. If a vampire infecting a human body is metaphysically distinct from the person whose soul has been expelled by the demon now inhabiting it, then why does Angel *purposefully* seek redemption for Angelus’s heinous crimes? McLaren queries, “How is it possible for one to hold the ensouled Angel (and later the ensouled Spike) reasonably accountable for their crimes as vampires when *prima facie* such creatures... are beings without souls, without consciences, possessed by demons, and who moreover retain no connection with the absent soul of the host body’s former identity?” (1). There are multiple instances where Angel denies being the demon, and thus Angelus, for example, “Amends” (3.10), “Guise Will Be Guise” (2.6), and “Orpheus” (4.15). But because Angel affirms the existence of the soul, and repeatedly contends that his soul is the reason he is not an evil monster, it seems incoherent of him to actively seek redemption for crimes he believes were committed by someone else. However, if “soul-talk” actually refers to a concerted effort to change one’s moral orientation, then Angel—now operating under his “soul-full” mission to “help the helpless”—appropriately seeks atonement for his past crimes as a “soul-less” monster.

Yet McLaren remains unsatisfied with a thoroughgoing existentialist interpretation of the soul. In part, this is because Whedon and his staff never allowed the existential account to eclipse the very early depictions of the soul as a thing onto itself. McLaren suggests that Whedon refused to jettison the reified soul for pragmatic reasons: “A soul that is purely a metaphor for choice results in the unsavory image of a teenage girl killing what in the end are not monsters in a metaphysical

sense, but criminals, albeit recalcitrant ones, who remain as human as the Slayer herself” (11). In support of his hypothesis, McLaren quotes Whedon himself: “Vampires explode into dust because... it shows that they’re monsters. I didn’t really want to have a high school girl killing people every week” (11).⁴ In any event, McLaren correctly points out that the early depictions of the soul on *Buffy* are re-emphasized in the final seasons of *Buffy* and *Angel*.

Recall the premiere episode of *Buffy* Season Seven. The First, in the guise of Mayor Wilkins, appears to a newly re-ensouled Spike and asserts, “What’d you think, you’d get your soul back and everything would be Jim Dandy? A soul’s slipperier than a greased weasel—why do you think I sold mine? Well, you probably thought you’d be your own man and I respect that. But you never will” (“Lessons” 7.1, 00:39:05-13). McLaren asserts, “The soul must be understood as a thing: something reified that can be possessed, owned, and even sold.... It is also connected to one’s identity... or else there would be no way to understand the phrase ‘you’d be your own man’” (9). Following McLaren, let’s call this the ontological interpretation of the soul. On it, “soul-talk” in *Buffy* and *Angel* refers literally (unless context clearly dictates otherwise). The soul is a non-physical entity, which can subsist apart from the body, and also serves as the (metaphysical) locus of personal identity.

Regarding the last season of *Angel*, McLaren contends that the Fred-Illyria arc solidifies a dramatic turn toward the ontological soul. Fred becomes infected with the essence of the ancient goddess Illyria. The infection quickly works itself through Fred’s body in preparation for Illyria’s emergence. In the process, it is killing Fred, and she soon dies in Wesley’s arms (“A Hole in the World” 5.15). Pained, Wes claims that the infection that is Illyria consumed Fred; he subsequently reports: “I watched it gut her from the inside out. Everything she was is gone. There is nothing left but a shell.” To which Angel replies, “Then we’ll figure out a way to fill it back up.... It’s the soul that matters,” and Spike concurs, “The thing only took over her body. Just a tip of the theological.... Trust us. We’re kind of experts” (“Shells” 5.16, 00:09:42-57). Thus Team Angel conceives of Illyria’s emergence analogous to how a vampire infects a human body. Just as Willow was able to locate

and restore Angel's soul to Liam's body (twice), Angel and Spike will locate Fred's soul and (with Willow's help) restore it to her body. This explains Angel's charge: "Fred's soul is out there somewhere. We'll find it, and we'll put it back where it belongs" ("Shells" 5.16, 00:10:08-13). Unfortunately, their quest is soon ended when a Wolfram & Hart employee and Illyria acolyte informs them "there's nothing left to bring back. Miss Burkle's soul was consumed by the fires of resurrection. Everything she was is gone" (5.16, 00:22:18-28). Because her soul is gone, Fred has ceased to be, even if her body (or what is left of it) remains intact.

Yet McLaren intriguingly contends that the soul admits of a third interpretation: as serving a function, namely "as a reified moral organ that allows, or at the very least facilitates, certain types of choices" (27). The exact nature of the soul as "moral organ" remains vague; however, McLaren maintains that whether a character possesses a soul accounts for the ethically significant choices he or she makes, or seems (psychologically) incapable of making. McLaren thus countenances the volitional, metaphysical, and ethical significance of the soul in *Buffy* and *Angel*.

McLaren employs three examples in support of his third reading of the soul. First, he perceptively notes that although a newly cursed and re-ensouled Angel wishes to be reunited with Darla, it is clear that his ensoulment makes it psychologically impossible for him to feed on the innocent child Darla presents as a test of his resolve ("Darla"). Second, a vampire from Angel's past, Lawson, returns looking for answers, or at least revenge. When Angel admits that Lawson is the only vampire he sired after the Gypsy curse, and Lawson asks whether this means he, too, has a soul, Angel gravely replies, "I don't think it works that way, son." To which Lawson wistfully replies, "Didn't think so" ("Why We Fight" 5.13, 00:39:26-32). McLaren asserts that this exchange is doubly informative: "Angel is clear that the soul is no metaphor and that Lawson simply does not have one.... Lawson wishes to return to a simpler life constructed around the wholesome abstractions of family and patriotism, [but] that door is irretrievably closed because as a vampire, he has no soul" (25).⁵ Third, McLaren revisits Harmony's admission: "I made some bad choices. I mean, it's not like I have a soul.

I have to try a lot harder” (“Harm’s Way” 5.9, 00:39:35-41). McLaren expounds, “It is harder for Harmony to make moral choices that are morally good because she lacks the ontological equipment: a reified soul” (24). But no matter how hard she tries, she succumbs to her vampiric essence—just as she did in “Disharmony” (2.17)—and betrays Angel and the Team at the end of Season Five. McLaren sums up, “Her will, in the end (and perhaps unlike Spike’s will), isn’t sufficient on its own to effect any major change in her basic moral orientation.... Spike, instead, becomes the single exception that proves the rule” (24).

In the end, McLaren contends that the three interpretations, or modes, of the soul are each emphasized at different times throughout *Buffy* and *Angel*, but none of them alone offers a definitive account of how it is portrayed. So, although the ontological soul does not fully account for who a character is—one is not good merely because she has a (human) soul—possessing a reified soul, and not morally significant choice alone, accounts for what characters are able to accomplish. Thus the paradoxes of the soul remain. Nevertheless, McLaren affirms that the lingering paradoxes need not have a deleterious effect on assessments of Whedon’s work. He suggests that the seemingly inconsistent portrayals of the soul can be explained via the artistic choice(s) to allow the viewer to ponder the existence and nature of the soul for herself. McLaren asserts, “Far from detracting from the verisimilitude of the [two] series, [it] contributes to the much vaunted and provocative ambiguity that has been one of the Whedonverse’s most commented upon and defining features” (2). Thus the ambiguities of the soul—including, it seems, Angel’s quest for redemption and Spike’s miraculous moral transformation—are (intentionally) left unresolved to facilitate further philosophical contemplation.

Richardson and Rabb’s Rejoinder

J. Michael Richardson and J. Douglas Rabb take issue with McLaren’s analysis of the soul. Their critique relies heavily upon the conceptual link between existentialism and phenomenology, especially as it pertains to memory. They contend, “[Existentialism] relies upon our

subjective experience as individual agents. Just as the demon soul inherits and exploits the memories of the human it possesses, so the returning human soul must... also endure... the memories of the demon possessor.... Angel, for example, remembers doing the monstrous things Angelus did.... From a phenomenological or experiential perspective, he actually remembers doing them, and so must own them himself” (Richardson and Rabb 118). It is true that Angel occasionally identifies with the vile actions attributable to Angelus. Recall his admission to Lorne: “I remember everything Angelus did, I did. Every family butchered, every child slaughtered, every throat ripped out. I remember every detail of all of it” (“Awakening” 4.10, 00:02:31-41). Also recall the textual source that references Angelus as a “dark soul”; to which Angel responds, “Well that’s not fair. I didn’t even have a soul when I did that” (“Hell Bound” 5.4, 00:28:58-59). They further argue that because Angel remembers Angelus’s past deeds “from the inside,” using the name “Angelus” to refer to the soulless vampire sired by Darla and the name “Angel” to refer to the re-ensouled vampire unnecessarily clouds the issue of identity. Moreover, the alleged problem is not prevalent in Spike’s case, exactly because there is no additional name he takes post re-ensoulment.

Accordingly, Richardson and Rabb remain resolute that “soul-talk” in *Buffy* and *Angel* amounts to nothing more than a metaphorical way of dealing with ethical issues—metaphors made literal for which Whedon is renowned. Moreover, thematic elements that seem to require the existence of the ontological soul are nothing more than dramatizations of metaphors made literal. They, for example, assert, “When the shaman places Angel’s human soul in a magical vessel... this is, of course, a metaphorical way of accessing *Angel’s* inner demon.... Whatever it does, Angel remembers doing and is morally responsible for” (120, emphasis original). Finally, in a case of art imitating life, they remind us of how we typically make sense of ourselves: “How often have we said ‘I’m not myself today’ when having a bad day? Yet we are still morally responsible for whatever this self did. We don’t take such expressions literally, nor should we take soul-talk in the Buffyverse literally” (120).

Richardson and Rabb bolster their existential account by re-examining the ambiguous way Whedon and his production staff portrayed Spike's personal quest for re-ensoulment. The audience is initially led to believe that Spike seeks demonic assistance to remove his brain chip. After he successfully completes the onerous trials a faceless demon requires, Spike demands, "So, give me what I want. Make me what I was... so Buffy can get what she deserves" ("Grave" 6.22, 00:41:14-19). And, rather surprisingly, the faceless demon restores Spike's soul. Richardson and Rabb acknowledge that Whedon has been asked whether Spike was indeed attempting to have his chip removed. Whedon (idiosyncratically) answers, "Noo—but you were meant to believe that he was. This is just a thing that I personally have devised called a 'plot twist.' I think it's going to catch on with the young people" (Richardson and Rabb 112). However, they believe Whedon was actually allowing for a key tenet of Sartrean existential freedom. In their words, "We contend that the reason for the deliberate ambiguity of Spike's quest for a soul (or chipectomy) is not simply as Whedon says.... Rather, the so-called plot twist allows Spike's interpretative memory of his quest to confirm that he has undergone a radical transformation of self by choosing to become a champion" (115). The fact that Spike radically altered his moral orientation to become a force of good in *Buffy* season seven—a champion—explains why Whedon filmed Spike's Season Six trials in the ambiguous way that he did. Even if Spike originally underwent the trials for a "chipectomy," he remains able to remember the past differently. Thus, as Richardson and Rabb see it, Whedon ambiguously portrayed Spike's intentions as to make unambiguous how his radical transformation of choosing to become "soul-full" is an instance of (Sartrean) existential philosophy put to film, and is thereby further reason to believe that the soul in *Buffy* and *Angel* is best interpreted through an existential lens.

In further support of their existential interpretation, Richardson and Rabb rehearse venerable philosophical objections to the existence of the separate soul. For example, referencing Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of the "illusion of immanence," they argue that there is no literal sense in which a non-corporeal soul is in a body. Because one's phenomenological perspective does not detect or require the existence

of a non-physical and separate soul, it exists in the body only as a knot is in a piece of rope. Just as there is no literal sense in which the knot exists apart from the rope, there is no literal sense in which the soul exists apart from the body.

Accordingly, Richardson and Rabb interpret Angel and the ensouled Spike as two characters who, rather unexpectedly (especially in Angel's case), altered their moral goals in life. On an existentialist account, memories are interpretations of one's experiences. With changing one's present goals, one changes the way one remembers the past, which, in turn, changes the way the past influences one now. Angel and Spike, they claim, "now want to do what is right and good... [and] it is not difficult to imagine how horrified and guilty they must feel remembering what they had done" (118). But the source of their respective remorse—Angel's protestation to Buffy notwithstanding—is *not* that each now possesses a (non-physical) reified soul. Furthermore, Richardson and Rabb contend that only the existentialist interpretation can plausibly account for why Angel (or Spike) appropriately seeks redemption for crimes committed prior to re-ensoulment—or the interim between becoming "soul-less" and later becoming "soul-full"—as each has changed his goals by reorienting his moral perspective. As Richardson and Rabb sum up, "Sartre's notion of interpretive memory would have helped McLaren solve the problem of moral responsibility that he rightly raises in his paper.... He might take solace in the fact that the subtitle of Sartre's major existentialist study, *Being and Nothingness*, is *A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*" (116, 121).

Richardson and Rabb's thoroughgoing existential interpretation of the soul benefits by its elegance—it attempts an explanatory account without positing the existence of a reified mystical entity. Furthermore, they are correct that "soul-talk" as metaphor for the moral orientation one adopts neatly explains why a "soul-full" Angel appropriately seeks redemption for Angelus's "soul-less" crimes. However, their interpretation does not account for all the thematic data from *Buffy* and *Angel*. They all but ignore some pertinent examples carefully discussed by McLaren, including the Fred/Illyria arc in *Angel*, which is exceedingly difficult to interpret apart from an ontological reading of the soul. Moreover, they omit McLaren's assessment of Harmony and Lawson as

examples of characters who are incapable of sustaining a morally significant change in their life goals, despite being portrayed as wishing to accomplish this; their inability to accomplish their respective goals is clearly tied to their lacking a reified soul. Furthermore, Richardson and Rabb overlook the multiple times a *Buffy* or *Angel* character is not held (fully) responsible for what he or she does while under the sway of demonic influence, despite the fact that he or she later remembers doing it, for example Xander in “The Pack” (1.6), Wes in “Billy” (3.6), and Cordelia in “You’re Welcome” (5.12). Finally, they are silent about the deep psychological and ethical disparities between Angel and Angelus, especially insofar as each is portrayed as two distinct centers of consciousness, for example, in “Orpheus” (4.15).

Richardson and Rabb are correct that the existence of the soul as a reified entity is a contentious matter among philosophers. The view is not as popular as it once was, and philosophers who still affirm it are not in full agreement with each other about all the details. However, to argue that the reified soul does not exist in *Buffy* or *Angel* due to objections of professionally trained philosophers is dangerously close to analogously arguing that magic and witchcraft do not exist in *Buffy* and *Angel* because professionally trained physicists (and perhaps psychologists) discount the existence of such things. Whedon scholars proposing interpretive theories should take care to let the thematic data speak for itself, rather than imposing previously held professional views onto it; otherwise Whedon’s message, should there be one, is bound to be garbled. Furthermore, existentialism is also not nearly as popular among philosophers as it once was, and this is due (in part) to the inherent limitations of phenomenology for discerning metaphysical truths: just because something seems a certain way “from the inside,” it does not follow that it is that way.⁶ Thus, Richardson and Rabb’s application of existentialism to the Whedonverse falls prey to the same sort of critique they offer against applying substance dualism to it. It is far from clear that a thoroughgoing existentialist interpretation of the soul is as persuasive as Richardson and Rabb believe.

The Soul as Theoretical Entity

Even if McLaren cannot be faulted for demurring from a thoroughgoing existentialist interpretation of the soul, he may not have fully explored or realized the prospects and ramifications of synthesizing his three modes of the soul into one entity. At times, he seems to grasp the significance of a potential synthesis. He writes: “The presence of a soul, then, is not alone enough to guarantee remorse. Both the presence of a soul and the existential movement of the will are necessary for remorse” (14).⁷ However, the prospects of combining the modes of the soul remain underdeveloped in McLaren’s analysis.

A carefully crafted synthesis of McLaren’s three modes of the soul provides an alternative to Abbott’s existentialist reading of Angel and Angelus. Abbott is correct that Angel makes some controversial choices that bring him closer to Angelus’s darkness. Nevertheless, it remains the case that there are things that Angel simply could not do that the soulless Angelus would, and vice versa. It is Angel who loves Buffy and Connor; he is incapable of intentionally harming them for his own pleasure. Angelus is incapable of love; he revels in intentionally harming those Angel loves, and especially Buffy. Angel, with some encouragement from Lorne, came back from the darkness and reestablished his friendships on his own accord, but Angelus cannot leave it, and he is incapable of (genuine) friendship. These deep ethically significant differences are not merely goals each freely chooses to adopt; some goals are simply beyond the one, but not the other. Rather, the stark differences can be explained by Angel’s possessing a reified soul, and Angelus’s lacking one. So, even if Abbot is correct that Angel’s ensoulment does not serve as a *sufficient* condition for adopting Buffy’s mission in Sunnydale and his subsequent “help the helpless” mission in Los Angeles on his way to becoming a champion, it nevertheless may be a *necessary* one.

Accordingly, McLaren is correct that, in addition to examples of personal identity tracking one’s separate soul, there are some ethically significant choices or dispositions that require the ontological interpretation. The most notable examples are those that involve selflessly acting on behalf of another (or others), for example, Gunn’s

volunteering to take Lindsey's place in the Wolfram & Hart purgatorial dimension ("Underneath" 5.17). It clearly includes those that involve extreme self-sacrifice, particularly instances where one gives up his or her life for another: Buffy's sacrifice for Dawn ("The Gift" 5.22); Darla's lovingly giving up her life for Connor ("Lullaby" 3.9); Spike's efforts to close the Hellmouth ("Chosen" 7.22); and Cordy's dying last wish to get Angel back on mission ("You're Welcome" 5.12). In *Buffy* and *Angel*, there are no soulless champions, and only the ensouled can be redeemed. However, the ontological interpretation leaves open whether one chooses to act on the moral sensibilities or dispositions ensouled persons inherently possess. Ensouled characters do not always act in commendable ways; for example, Darla's post-resurrection conniving ploys regarding Angel, Angel's coldly leaving the Hyperion residents to suffer the paranoia demon, or Lindsey's decision to pose as Doyle to seek revenge on Angel ("Soul Purpose" 5.10). Moreover, it remains possible for ensouled characters to resist or ignore their inherent moral sensibilities to the point of performing reprehensibly horrific acts, for example, Faith, Warren, or Willow.

Although a reified soul is required for selfless or self-sacrificing behaviors, the fact that some ensouled characters act in ethically unfortunate ways facilitates the possibility that soulless characters knowingly act in (at least) some morally commendable ways. As Whedon himself has commented, "Soulless creatures can do good and souled creatures can do evil, but that the soulfree are instinctually drawn toward doing evil while those with souls tend to instinctually want to do good" (Hercules 4). Consequently, Stevenson's view of the ontological soul indeed requires revision. The issue is not that soulless characters lack a moral compass, if by that he means they can neither discern right from wrong, nor choose to act on that knowledge in some morally commendable ways. Whistler possesses sufficient ethically significant understanding of Angelus's attempt to facilitate the Acatla apocalypse, and laudably advises Buffy in her attempt to prevent it ("Becoming, Part II" 2.22). Lorne willingly adopts Angel's mission to "help the helpless" and is praiseworthy for correcting Angel when he (temporarily) loses his way ("Happy Anniversary" 2.13). Clem knowingly acts properly by keeping Dawn safe from danger, and can be commended for such

behavior (“Villains” 6.20). However, neither Whistler, Lorne, nor Clem is depicted as acting in any way that requires significant self-sacrifice or is otherwise supererogatory. Whistler provides helpful information, but refrains from taking action to stop Angelus (to Buffy’s chagrin). Lorne is more willing to get his hands dirty, but only if a freshly squeezed sea breeze is not too far away. Clem chooses to leave town rather than join Buffy in her dire quest to combat the First (“Empty Places” 7.19). Consequently, some characters take full advantage of their reified soul and achieve redemption (Darla, Gunn, and arguably Faith), and others become heroes (Buffy) or champions (Angel or Spike) by selflessly acting on the behalf of others at great personal sacrifice, even if some ensouled characters squander their potential (Warren and Lindsey); however, soulless characters are barred from redemption or becoming heroes, despite their predilections to do no harm (Clem or Whistler).

The soul, then, in *Buffy* and *Angel* can be understood as a theoretical entity.

A theoretical entity, although not observed to exist via typical empirical methods, is posited insofar as its existence adequately explains what is directly observed. These sorts of argument to the best explanation are common.⁸ A classic example is Gregor Mendel’s attempts to understand his observations when crossbreeding pea pod plants. Because crossbreeding resulted in offspring that possessed traits of each parent-plant in specific and repeatable ways, Mendel hypothesized the existence of “elements” (later called genes) that were transferred from parent to offspring. Sometimes the posited entity is not merely unobserved, but is (arguably) unobservable, for example, God or the soul.⁹ Some philosophers posit God’s existence to account for the fine-tuning observed in nature, including the initial conditions of the Big Bang.¹⁰ Some philosophers posit the soul’s existence to account for phenomena distinctive of the human condition: self-consciousness and our ability to make free choices (among others).¹¹ The exact nature of a theoretical entity and its ontological origins or genesis are invariably left unspecified. Mendel was attempting to explain what he observed; he did not aspire to articulate the exact nature of his “elements,” and he did not explain how they came to be. Similar considerations apply to God or the soul.¹² The soul as theoretical entity is proposed here to account for what is

observed about characters in *Buffy* and *Angel*: the soul is that thing, whatever it exactly is and regardless of its origins, that serves as the metaphysical locus of personal identity and allows characters to engage in morally commendable behaviors of a selfless nature, or those involving significant self-sacrifice.¹³

The soul as a theoretical entity so conceived provides a novel account of Darla's character arc throughout *Buffy* and *Angel*. Darla begins on *Buffy* as one of the Master's lieutenants. After an unsuccessful attempt to sway Angel, he stakes her ("Angel"). Wolfram & Hart resurrects her at the end of *Angel* Season One, but she returns human, and she is reensouled. Initially, she identifies with her 400-year old vampire-persona. In fact, she cannot remember the last time she was human; she doesn't even remember that woman's name ("Darla"). Failing to identify with her humanness, she suppresses (or ignores), for a while, the ethical dispositions associated with being ensouled. This is not unlike Willow, who loses touch with her former self via her grief over losing Tara. Darla thus willingly serves Wolfram & Hart's plan to confound Angel, and hopefully manipulate him into being a player for their side in the coming Apocalypse. Soon, however, she experiences the guilt and remorse that come with the soul. She breaks all the mirrors in her apartment: she cannot bear the sight of the face looking back at her—the one that caused centuries of terror and destruction ("Darla" 2.7). Furthermore, she is dying of the same incurable illness that threatened to take her life 400 years ago. She seeks out Angel to make her a vampire again. He refuses, but he endures three onerous and deadly trials to regain her life—not for his sake, but for hers ("The Trial" 2.9). When this fails (she has already been given a second chance), she begins to accept her fate, and becomes at peace. Wolfram & Hart intervenes, and with Dru's intervention, Darla again becomes a vampire. Upon rising, she is confused and upset at Dru, but her vampire essence soon begins to take hold again ("Reunion" 2.10).

Darla returns in season three of *Angel* surprisingly pregnant with Angel's child. In the early weeks of her pregnancy, she multiply attempts to abort it. She is unsuccessful; the child seems to be (mystically) protected. With Angel's help, she learns that her unborn child has a soul. As the child grows inside of her, her behavior changes. Just as human

mothers do, Darla becomes more connected to her unborn son. She comes to *love* him. Darla soon realizes that her love for her unborn child is as fleeting as it is precious. Consider her stirring dialogue: “Angel, I don’t have a soul. It does. And right now that soul is inside of me, but soon, it won’t be and then... I won’t be able to love it. I won’t even be able to remember that I loved it. [*crying*] I want to remember” (“Lullaby” 3.9, 00:22:26-44). She has but one gift for her son. In the most vivid demonstration of loving self-sacrifice, Darla stakes herself, allowing Connor to be brought forth into the world.¹⁴

As previously noted, Darla’s character is often viewed through an existentialist lens, and is thereby taken as evidence of the existentialist interpretation of the soul. However, upon further review, it is clear that becoming re-ensouled, again losing her soul, and her subsequent proximity to Connor’s soul (each) significantly influences her behavior and choices, and in ways that the existentialist account has difficulty accommodating. True, the behavioral changes are not immediate; time is required for the soul’s inherent moral dispositions to take hold. Nevertheless, Darla suffers remorse only when ensouled. She experiences genuine love only when ensouled. When soulless, she returns to her predatory ways. Her redemptive act of extreme self-sacrifice was only possible because she shared her son’s soul. The soul as theoretical entity hypothesis satisfyingly explains these developments in ways the thoroughgoing existentialist interpretation cannot.

Admittedly, this novel reading of Darla and the interpretation of the soul it evinces re-raise the problematic issue of personhood and moral responsibility invariably associated with Angel and Angelus. Angel remembers—“from the inside”—the heinous deeds technically attributable to the soulless Angelus; these are memories he can neither escape, nor those toward which he can turn a blind eye. This, in turn, suggests two further interrelated interpretative insights. First, anyone in Angel’s position would *feel* responsible even if, strictly speaking, he were not, or could not imagine himself *now* doing those sorts of things or being party to their occurrence; attestations of what Angel did during “his” soulless periods of existence must be understood from that phenomenological perspective. However, contra Richardson and Rabb, this does not entail that Angel is strictly speaking morally responsible for

them. Still, this metaphysical technicality cannot save an ensouled Angel from the guilt and remorse he experiences due to his proximity to the suffering of others. Second, an ensouled Angel can be interpreted as a moral exemplar that everyone should try to emulate. How many times do persons, real or fictional, conveniently turn a blind eye to the injustices of the world for which they can claim no responsibility? On this account, Angel's quest for redemption and his mission to "help the helpless" begin to merge, and the emphasis shifts away from righting past wrongs to living as though the world is as it should be, to show it what it can be ("Deep Down" 4.1). That is, Angel acts as if he is somehow responsible even if technically he is not because that is what a champion does.¹⁵ The redemption he seeks is more like atonement to make the world a better place where rights, desert, and justice are superseded by mutual care and concern. This is an ethical perspective only the ensouled can enact. Perhaps each of us should work harder to follow his (albeit fictive) lead. Thus, the soul as theoretical entity interpretation circumvents the textual and conceptual difficulties associated with Angel's quest by stressing not who the ensouled are, but who they ought to be—especially given full knowledge of how the world is.

Spike's moral transformation is perhaps more difficult to discern in the soul as theoretical entity model because there seem to be instances involving him acting on another's behalf at significant personal sacrifice prior to re-ensoulment.¹⁶ Stevenson was aware of the anomaly Spike represents, as he writes: "By the end of season five, the man in Spike appears to be winning the battle against the monster as a result of his increasing capacity to love.... As Spike's relationship with Buffy progresses, the line separating the monster and the man becomes harder to discern" (252-253). But *how* can a soulless monster, devoid of a "moral compass" as Stevenson believes, achieve such ethically significant progress at all? Alternatively, McLaren asserts that "Spike is the exception that proves the rule" that soulless creatures lack the ontological equipment necessary to seek redemption, but it remains mysterious how Spike achieves his singular Whedonverse status.

It might be argued that all of Spike's morally significant behaviors are fundamentally tinged with selfishness prior to re-ensoulment,

including his professed love for Buffy (or Dru, for that matter).¹⁷ Indeed, much of Spike's behavior can be interpreted this way, as Lindsey (posing as Doyle) confirms in "Soul Purpose" (5.10). He chooses to aid Buffy and the Scoobies in "Triangle" only to gain Buffy's favor; before she arrives, Spike does not accept Xander's charge to help the injured Bronze patrons because he simply does not care to do so (5.11). Moreover, Spike does not adequately grasp the significance of trust in a deeply loving relationship. He bemoans, "Trust is for old marrieds, Buffy. Great love is wild and passionate and dangerous" ("Seeing Red" 6.19, 00:23:48-57). These instances show that Spike first and foremost wishes to possess Buffy or garner her affection for his sake. Furthermore, the clearest examples of Spike acting on the behalf of others, including Buffy, occur in season seven. Recall Spike's soliloquy about love (excerpted): "I'm not asking you for anything. When I say 'I love you,' it's not because I want you, or because I can't have you—it has nothing to do with me" ("Touched" 7.20, 00:22:42-53). He subsequently proves his words by tenderly holding Buffy as she sleeps throughout the night. And, of course, recall Spike's selfless and self-sacrificing redemptive act to close the Hellmouth. Poignantly, he informs Buffy that his soul is "really in there" and it "kind of stings" as he allows for her escape ("Chosen" 7.22, 00:35:07-12).¹⁸

On this account, Spike's apparent self-sacrifice in not divulging the Key to Glory must be reinterpreted. Although it seemed selfless, it was actually a concerted but covert attempt to curry Buffy's favor (unlike the clumsy one at the Bronze in "Triangle"). Similar analyses apply to Spike's decision to comfort Buffy when her mother was terminally ill, and his efforts to pay his respects upon her death. However, and admittedly, this reinterpretation seems problematic because it is not at all obvious that Spike is acting selfishly in keeping Dawn's identity a secret. Buffy herself admits, "What you did for me and Dawn, that was real. I won't forget it" ("Intervention" 5.18, 00:41:54-42:05). Perhaps Spike's (alleged) duplicity was so subtle that he convinced Buffy, and by extension, the audience. Alternatively, Spike's moral development in seasons five and six of *Buffy* may convey Whedon's ambivalence about the character. Whedon states, "The truth is sometimes someone without [a soul] seems more interesting than someone with one.... 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” (Whedon Q5). Whedon’s words cohere with the soul as theoretical entity model. Even so, Spike (arguably) remains something of an anomaly due to Whedon’s artistic interests in a “soulful soulless” character, and what it might mean for this character to meaningfully evolve in his personal relationships.

Epilogue: When Whedon Speaks ...

This essay commemorates *Buffy*’s twentieth anniversary by revisiting a perennially tantalizing philosophical topic, the soul, and argues for a novel interpretation of it as it applies to *Buffy* and *Angel*. It has been argued that interpreting the soul as a theoretical entity to account for the identity and ethical behaviors of characters in *Buffy* and *Angel* provides a more fruitful and explanatorily powerful account than does any of McLaren’s three modes taken individually. Furthermore, the theoretical entity model coheres with Whedon’s comment that his concept of the soul is “ephemeral as anybody’s” and on *Buffy* and *Angel* the soul is “something that exists to meet the needs of convenience” (Whedon Q5). Nevertheless, the theoretical entity model identifies and accounts for how the soul is typically portrayed in terms of character and plot development. Thus the flexibility of amorphous application does not result in explanatory deficiency, which affords this novel interpretation additional evidential force.

Yet the essay harbors a deeper point, namely to reconsider a popular trend in Whedon scholarship. As the essay demonstrates, Whedon scholars almost invariably appeal to Whedon’s personal remarks in interviews or on DVD commentary in the hopes of shoring up an argument or interpretive thesis. And he has taken note: “I think it’s great that the academic community has taken an interest... We think very carefully about what we’re trying to say emotionally, politically, and even philosophically while we’re writing... 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” (Whedon Q1). On the one hand, Whedon’s words here are encouraging. If Whedon and his staff are careful about the messages they wish to artistically convey, then attempts by Whedon scholars to discern them are not in vain. On the other hand, Whedon’s comments remind us of the thorny issues of author intention regarding artistic interpretation, and cinematic authorship.

The philosophical literature on author intent is wide and deep. For the purposes here, and although it barely scratches the surface, Whedon scholars often assume some form of auteur theory such that Whedon provides the primary source of meaning for his artistry. However, some film theorists object that no one—not even the author—can permanently fix a text’s meaning. Moreover, plausibly, it may be that the meaning of any (cinematic) text exceeds the conscious intentions of the auteur responsible for it.¹⁹ Still, if Whedon is indeed concerned about the message being conveyed, then surely his intentions possess *prima facie* relevance to interpreting his work. So, when ought Whedon scholars to take Whedon’s comments about his work at face value? When ought we to reinterpret them, or argue that they are not fully informative? Should we ever disregard them in favor of an alternative interpretation? And, looking toward the future, what are the prospects of articulating principled strategies for determining which course is preferable?

Regarding cinematic authorship, Whedon scholars tend to explore issues woven throughout an entire series—and indeed across different series, films, and graphic novels—in the hope of discerning some coherent message. However, Whedon has written or directed a minority of the hundreds of artifacts collectively known as the Whedonverse or Whedonverses. If Whedon was not directly involved in the creation of a particular episode, is it plausible to contend that it participates in one of his (alleged) overarching messages? Does Whedon subtly remain as some sort of universe-building architect or mastermind, ensuring that each episode conforms to only his conception(s) of the human condition?²⁰ Furthermore, even within single works Whedon wrote or directed, it can be argued that cinematic authorship is a misnomer due to the collaborative nature of filmmaking or television productions. Even if

novels have authors, and the author's intentions are relevant to discerning the meaning of the work, filmmaking involves the creative input of too many distinct individuals to plausibly contend that the meaning of a film (or television episode) can be correlated with one so-called auteur.²¹ Either objection has grave ramifications for Whedon scholarship.

The collective nature of filmmaking can be granted, but it is unclear whether it this entails that cinematic authorship never obtains. After all, there are co-authors of journal articles, and often journal editors will require revisions to a manuscript submission. But to thereby claim that such journal articles lack authors is implausible. Thus, the mere fact that a text is produced via collaboration is not sufficient to claim it is authorless, or it lacks a distinctive meaning that was informed by the intentions of those involved in its production. Furthermore, just as an author may have multiple intentional messages, it is plausible to claim that multiple authors may intentionally express the same message (for example the Coen or Russo brothers). Thus, it is far from clear that the collective nature of filmmaking entails that cinematic authorship is impossible.

Furthermore, sole authorship in studio or network settings remains viable. Paisley Livingston contends that Ingmar Bergman is plausibly considered the author of *Winter Light* (1962) (Livingston 306). Livingston argues that Bergman's extensive involvement with the film's production—he was the director, screenwriter, assisted with casting, supervised the editing, and worked closely with the cinematographer—makes him the author of the film despite the fact that he was not personally responsible for every aspect of it. The basic point is that making a film is sufficiently distinct from the assembly-line manufacture of a replica of any single prototype, for example, an automobile. Even rather derivative films are unique artifacts. In addition to extensive involvement, cinematic authorship also requires that the auteur have sufficient control over which personal achievements are incorporated in the final work. Of course, there may be external constraints on some of the cinematic author's decisions, but this is true of any professional endeavor. In any event, all of this sounds strikingly similar to a so-called "showrunner," especially one who serves as executive producer with

casting input and retains final script approval. Indeed, someone who is very much like Joss Whedon (and even if he must occasionally answer to network executives). So, perhaps there are degrees of cinematic authorship, but the concept remains viable.²²

Yet none of this entails that Whedon is a mastermind universe-builder with all of the Whedonverse's messages fully worked out prior to production. Livingston claims that cinematic authors ought to have "a plan," but this, he explains, "should not be misconstrued as requiring authors to have a perfect mental image of the final [message] in mind prior to the beginning of the production process... An author [should] have at least a schematic idea of some of the attitudes he or she intends to make manifest... as well as an idea of the processes by means of which [it] is to be realized" (305). This requirement is clearly applicable to authors of novels or journal articles; initial drafts are invariably quite different from the final copy, despite being expressive of the same basic themes or ideas. Film is no different. So, perhaps Whedon's messages about strong female characters, chosen family-like units, heroes struggling against faceless authoritarian regimes, or even the soul, were not fully worked out when he was writing "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1.1). But it does not follow that none of these admit of a coherent intentional message worthy of scholarly investigation.²³

Of course, and as Whedon acknowledges, the Whedonverse has many voices, which may diminish the prospects of single cinematic authorship. However, Tim Minear—himself one of those voices—helpfully recounts the chaos of working on *Buffy*, *Angel*, and *Firefly* simultaneously: "Out of such... chaos, universes are born... Universes in which one might find coherent strains of philosophical thought. The hidden hand of the Creator. The Creator's voice.... In television as in other collaborative art forms there may be multiple voices. But in really good television there's a single voice... The voice of the Whedonverse is distinctly Joss's voice. The ideas that run through its various incarnations are reflections of his conscious and unconscious mind" (Minear viii-ix). Although Minear's comments (taken at face value) stave off worries about single authorship, they also raise the possibility that Whedon's voice waxes and wanes throughout his artistic creations, especially given that there are degrees of authorship. Are there times when Whedon's

voice is all but eclipsed by other Whedonverse voices? It seems plausible to contend that Whedon exercised extensive control over *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008), but what of his involvement in *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013 -) after its premier season? Furthermore, might it be that some Whedonverse voices enjoy more affinity to Whedon's than others? Intuitively, it seems that Minear's voice echoes Whedon's in a way that Dana Reston's or Diego Gutierrez's does not, but how does it compare to Marti Noxon, David Greenwalt or Drew Goddard? Moreover, can an "inner circle" of Whedon contributors plausibly be established so that their voices more likely conform to Whedon's messages? Future attempts at articulating some sort of relevant hermeneutic may (further) alleviate potential concerns about multiple Whedonverse voices as it pertains to cinematic authorship.

These sorts of interpretive questions are not completely novel, but they also cannot be ignored as Whedon scholarship moves forward. Even the terse treatment provided here has impacted (potential) objections against arguing for interpretations that span various Whedonverse installations. Further scrutiny can only bring the future of Whedon scholarship into clearer focus.

Notes

¹ Rhonda Wilcox seems to countenance (albeit in passing) a similar position.

² Abbott cites Sartre's "Existentialism and Humanism," in Jean-Paul Sartre: *Basic Writings*, ed.

² Abbott cites Sartre's "Existentialism and Humanism," in Jean-Paul Sartre: *Basic Writings*, ed. Stephen Prince (London & New York: Routledge, 2001) 27-38.

³ See, for example, J. Renée Cox.

⁴ McLaren cites "Joss Whedon on 'Angel' and 'Puppet Show'" (*Buffy* season one DVD special features) as his source.

⁵ This episode also suggests that Lawson is unique due to being sired by an ensouled vampire. He is trapped between who he was and who he should be (as a vampire). If so, this is further evidence that the episode supports an ontological interpretation.

⁶ For a helpful introduction to phenomenology, see Manuel Velasquez, pp. 264-77.

⁷ See also paragraph 28, especially his analysis of Whedon's ideas (per the DVD commentary on the *Firefly* episode "Objects in Space") about how objects can be understood intrinsically and functionally.

⁸ For a helpful introduction to theoretical entities and abductive arguments, see Elliot Sober, pp. 20-34.

⁹ For more on the ontological distinction(s) between unobserved and unobservable entities, see Holger Andreas.

¹⁰ See, for example, Robin Collins.

¹¹ For an accessible discussion, see Shelly Kagen, pp. 25-56.

¹² See Sober, p. 74.

¹³ Alternatively, the soul in *Buffy* and *Angel* arguably admits of a Platonic account, at least one carefully articulated. McLaren recognizes the connections to Plato's views (see paragraphs 5 and 9); however, his analysis of the ethical ramifications of the Platonic soul go underdeveloped. For Plato's ideas about the soul and personal identity, see (at their respective standard numbers) *Apology*, 40a-41c, *Meno*, 82b-86b, *Phaedrus*, 245c-e, and *Phaedo*, 67c-d. For Plato's views on the ethical ramifications of possessing a soul, see *Gorgias* 460b and 524b-525a, *Meno* 88b-c and *Apology* 25a-26a.

¹⁴ Darla's love for Connor is confirmed in "Inside Out" (4.17). A deceased Darla explains to Connor, "You shared your soul with me once when you were growing inside of me when I'd lost my own. You brought light to my shadow, filled my heart with joy and love" (00:24:27-42).

¹⁵ McLaren comes close to offering this sort of analysis in paragraph 14. However, it must be stressed that a necessary condition of Angel's choice is possessing a reified (human) soul.

¹⁶ For more on Spike's transformation, see Jason Grinnell.

¹⁷ Stevenson develops an account of Spike's "selfish love" (250-254), but its application to the metaphysical nature of the soul goes underdeveloped.

¹⁸ Accordingly, Spike's decision to earn re-ensoulment was not first and foremost to become a better man; it was primarily motivated by his selfish desire to gain Buffy's favor. True, re-ensoulment entails a fundamental shift in his ethical orientation, and perhaps Spike is dimly aware of this, but it was the cost or by-product of doing the only thing that would facilitate what he wants most: a relationship with Buffy.

¹⁹ See, for example, Peter Wollen.

²⁰ An anonymous reviewer offers this sort of objection to any attempt at delineating a coherent theory of the soul across *Buffy* and *Angel*. Presumably, this objection is applicable to any scholarly endeavor that attempts to mine the wide Whedonverse. Furthermore, the relevant conceptual difficulty (arguably) transcends obvious irreconcilable thematic inconsistencies. Note that the *After the Fall* comic strongly suggests that Fred was *not* destroyed upon Illyria's emergence after all.

²¹ The classic source for such concerns is Pauline Kael.

²² Editor's note: See Wilcox, Abbott, and Howard (forthcoming) on the late David Lavery's views on television authorship.

²³ For an argument that Whedon offers a coherent philosophical message about religion across *Buffy*, *Angel*, and *Firefly*, see Dean A. Kowalski, pp. 75-76 and 85-94.

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