



TIME AND RELATIVE DIMENSIONS IN FAITH

RELIGION & DOCTOR WHO

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Pushing the Protest Button: *Doctor Who's* Anti-Authoritarian Ethic

Gabriel McKee

In the 2010 *Doctor Who* episode 'The Beast Below', the Doctor and Amy find themselves in London, but not the London we know - thousands of years in our future, the city has been removed from Earth to space in order to protect its populace from certain destruction due to massive solar flares. The Doctor detects something strange about Starship UK, which he suspects is a well-disguised police state. And little is stranger here than the spaceship-nation's 'voting booths', which show the ship's citizens a video explaining something awful about the nature of their world. They are then given a choice of two large, red buttons to press: one, labelled 'Forget', will erase their memory of the video's contents and allow the status quo to go on unchanged. The other, labelled 'Protest', records their objection to the state of affairs revealed in the mysterious video, with unspecified consequences for the voter. The voting booth won't show the Doctor the video - it can tell he's not human, and thus not entitled to vote - but he chooses the 'Protest' button, sight unseen. 'This is what I do', he explains, 'every time, every day, every second.' This sums up the Doctor brilliantly - a being who will always, always push the 'Protest' button. And by the episode's end, this instinct to protest has freed the people of Starship UK from their self-imposed amnesia. The Doctor is a revolutionary messiah, capable of transforming simple protest into outright liberation.

Since its inception, *Doctor Who* has displayed a strong opposition to violence and tyranny. The Doctor's greatest enemies - the Daleks, the Cybermen, the Sontarans - represent militarism, oppression, and the suppression of the individual to the collective. Moreover,

he has consistently, and successfully, opposed these highly symbolic villains through non-violence, using instead his wits and ingenuity to turn the villains' destructive impulses loose upon themselves. The Doctor is anti-authoritarian, and occasionally even an anarchist, and his adventures put the ethical application of his anti-authoritarian ideals at the forefront. His very character represents the disruption of dehumanising, violent, and tyrannical systems.

For the Doctor, individual liberty is the greatest - perhaps even the only - good. In the Second Doctor story 'The Macra Terror' (1967), he and his companions travel to a space colony whose populace is hypnotised into blind obedience of their rulers. When they sleep, they are programmed by eerie recordings: 'Everything in the colony is good and beautiful. You must accept without question. You must obey orders. The leaders of the colony know what is best. In the morning when you wake up, you will be given some work. You will be glad to obey. You will question nothing in the colony.' When he finds the hypnosis machine that has been indoctrinating his companion Ben, he disables it. When Ben complains that it's 'against the law' to interfere with the equipment, this prompts the Doctor to smash the machine even more furiously. The Doctor encourages his companion Polly to outright rebellion against her hypnotic programming: 'Now, Polly, I want you to forget everything that you've been dreaming ... It's just possible that you've been given a series of orders while you've been asleep. You know, do this, do that, do the other thing. My advice to you is don't do anything of the sort! Don't just be obedient! Always make up your own mind!'

This rebellious spirit is particularly pronounced in Patrick Troughton's tenure as the Doctor. In his first story, 'The Power of the Daleks' (1966), this incarnation of the Doctor travels to a space colony called Vulcan where a crashed Dalek vessel has been recovered. The colony is in the midst of a power struggle between its hidebound administrators and a group of violent rebels, who wish to use the Daleks to overthrow their government. The Doctor does not choose sides in this conflict, but rather plays both sides against each other. By the serial's final episode, the Doctor has defeated the

Daleks, but only after they have murdered most of the colony and left both the reigning governor and the rebels powerless (literally and figuratively - their power system is destroyed and will take months to rebuild). The Doctor is rather flippant about the shambles he has left the colony in: 'I did a lot of damage, didn't I?', he asks, then adds with a chuckle, 'I think we'd better get out of here before they send us the bill'. There is a playfulness about this appetite for chaos, but it is not without its purpose: there is a strong implication in these concluding lines that the Doctor deliberately destroyed their infrastructure, not just to defeat the Daleks, but to give the two factions a clean slate and force them to cooperate.

A similar situation unfolds in the Tom Baker-era story 'The Sun Makers' (1977). In this serial, the Doctor finds himself on the planet Pluto in the far future, where the entire planet is ruled by a heartless corporation with a byzantine system of bureaucracy. The citizenry is subject to crippling taxes, paid by a populace that is kept docile with mind-controlling drugs. The planet also contains a large band of outlaws that has dropped out of society entirely, living a vagabond existence in the Undercity. But at the outset, these outlaws are not much better than the Company - the leader of the band, Mandrel, is a thief and kidnapper who, at one point, threatens to torture the Doctor with a branding iron. But the Doctor awakens what can only be described as a sense of class consciousness in the outlaws, prompting them to question the nature of the Company and its control over their world. The thieves' selfish greed turns into a thirst for freedom, and thus transformed they overthrow the Company (the surface radicalism of 'The Sun Makers' earned it some criticism: fan writer Jeremy Bentham wrote that the story was 'laced with left-wing propaganda').³⁰ Without the Doctor's guidance, the state of affairs on Pluto would likely have remained unchanged. He brings liberation, but his salvation does not free the people of Pluto from their responsibility for their future. Rather, he is a catalyst whose presence turns the potential for change into actuality.

[30] Quoted in John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p.149.

The Doctor's rebellious impulses were muted in the earliest episodes featuring William Hartnell as the Doctor, who defined himself in 'The Daleks' Master Plan' (1965-66) as 'a citizen of the universe, and a gentleman to boot'. Compared to later incarnations, the First Doctor seems downright conservative, even assisting the people of the planet Marinus in rebooting the Conscience of Marinus, an all-powerful computer that they have allowed to control their minds to combat crime and war. 'They no longer had to decide what was wrong or right', the machine's caretaker explains, 'the machine decided for them' - and the Doctor does not protest. Nevertheless, *Doctor Who's* first producer, Verity Lambert, intended Hartnell's Doctor to represent a voice outside of accepted political divisions. In their book *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text*, John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado conclude that Lambert had cast William Hartnell instead of a more conventional, square-jawed hero 'to represent ambiguity and contradiction' rather than 'uncontradictory patriarch and law-giver'.³¹

Nevertheless, the Jon Pertwee era offers a powerful challenge to the idea that the Doctor is an anti-authoritarian pacifist. It was in this period of *Doctor Who* that the Doctor served as a full-time advisor to UNIT, which was, essentially, a paramilitary organisation. Tulloch and Alvarado quote Lambert as criticising Pertwee's Doctor for being 'very moral, very upright, very dependable. always ringing up heads of state'.³² *Doctor Who* stories would occasionally include references to, say, class inequalities, 'but generally *Doctor Who* stepped back from this and displaced stratification through the Doctor's wit and action into a cool "establishment" superiority'.³³ The Doctor, this suggests, cannot be a true rebel; his easy association with figures of power, and his general detachment from societal strife once the alien invasions are quashed, would seem to cast him as a defender of the status quo.

[31] Tulloch and Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text*, p.31.

[32] Tulloch and Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text*, p.31.

[33] Tulloch and Alvarado, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text*, p.100.

But it is important to note that even the 'upright and dependable' Third Doctor in fact had quite tense relations with UNIT commander Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart, and opposed his decisions as often as he supported them. The Doctor frequently used his advisory role to guide UNIT *away* from the use of force. In the story 'Doctor Who and the Silurians' (1970), for instance, the Doctor dissuades a species of subterranean reptiles from invading the planet. Following his negotiations, however, Lethbridge-Stewart destroys their underground base, and the Doctor is furious. (The Silurians' aquatic cousins become embroiled in a similar situation in the loose sequel to this story, 'The Sea Devils' (1972)).

He sees this practical use of violence as the veritable undoing of his exhausting efforts at preventing war between the two species: after all his promises of peace, the humans have insisted on solving the problem with a one-sided war. In working with UNIT, the Doctor is working from within the system to change it, to replace the humans' knee-jerk resort to violence with a more diplomatic approach in conflicts with extraterrestrials, monsters and villains. His position with UNIT is almost a kind of camouflage similar to that of the TARDIS itself. The Doctor's time machine has the exterior form of a metropolitan police box, a symbol of law and order; but inside is something alien, bizarre, and constantly changing - chaos masquerading as order.

Underlying the Doctor's advocacy of rebellion is a powerful ethic of nonviolence (or, at the very least, an abhorrence of any potentially fatal violence). In 'Genesis of the Daleks' (1975), Tom Baker's Fourth Doctor finds himself on the planet Skaro, at the time of his greatest enemy's creation. He has been ordered by the Time Lords to either find the Daleks' weakness, alter their makeup so that they are less evil, or destroy them outright in their infancy. Placing explosive charges outside the incubator room containing the mutated beings that are to become the most evil creatures in the universe, he is faced with a concrete example of a common hypothetical dilemma. The Doctor wonders aloud: 'Do I have the right? Simply touch one wire against the other and that's it. The Daleks cease to exist. Hundreds

of millions of people, thousands of generations can live without fear, in peace, and never even know the word "Dalek".' Sarah Jane Smith argues in favour of destroying the Daleks, comparing them to a plague - something the Doctor would not hesitate to eradicate. 'But if I kill,' the Doctor continues, 'wipe out a whole intelligent life form - then I become like them. I'd be no better than the Daleks.' Ultimately, the Doctor has the choice taken out of his hands. But the mere act of questioning the decision implies its conclusion. For the Doctor, no act of murder can ever be truly justified, no matter how beneficial its result might be.

Recent series have seen a darkening of the Doctor's character, resulting in an apparent shift in this nonviolent ethic. For instance, the Matt Smith episode 'Dinosaurs on a Spaceship' (2012) is, on the surface, a light-hearted episode, full of wise-cracking robots, amusing banter and the eponymous dinosaurs. But at the episode's conclusion, the Doctor essentially executes an enemy, placing a missile-attracting homing beacon on the spaceship of the pirate Solomon. It would seem that the Doctor may not be so pacifistic after all - until the very next episode, 'A Town Called Mercy'. Here the Doctor finds an alien living in the Old West - a doctor named Kahler-Jex who has provided the struggling frontier town of Mercy, Nevada with electricity. But Jex is no simple altruist - the Doctor learns that he is a war criminal who has committed countless atrocities, and is hiding in the town to avoid the vengeance of one of his victims, a botched cyborg named Kahler-Tek. The Doctor attempts to turn Jex over to his pursuer, bringing him to the edge of town at gunpoint. It appears he is going to allow Jex to be killed, just as with Solomon, until companion Amy Pond stops him. 'What's happened to you, Doctor?' she asks. 'When did killing someone become an option?' The Doctor argues that Jex has to answer for his crimes, prompting Amy to ask where that logic ends: 'And what then? Are you gonna hunt down everyone that's made a gun or a bullet or a bomb?' The Doctor's response indicates remorse for not taking a harder line in the past - for instance, in 'Genesis of the Daleks'. 'Every time I negotiate, I try to understand.

Well, not today. No. Today I honour the victims first - His, the Master's, the Daleks', all the people who died because of my mercy!' But Amy's response reminds the Doctor of the reason for his past leniency: 'See, this is what happens when you travel alone for too long. Well, listen to me, Doctor. We can't be like him. We have to be better than him.' In 'Genesis of the Daleks', the Doctor raises the dilemma, while a human encourages him to solve a problem with violence. Here, it is the Doctor that is threatening violence, and a human who calls him back to his moral centre. Later, the Doctor states unequivocally: 'Violence doesn't end violence. It extends it.' It would be better to let a criminal like Jex live as a fugitive than to submit him to a justice that would have him killed, and so the Doctor attempts to help Jex escape Tek - until Jex's own sense of guilt leads him to provide his own ultimate punishment, detonating his ship rather than using it to escape. Justice that is brought by violence, this episode argues, is no justice at all. Redemption cannot be brought about by punishment, but must emerge from within. The similarities between the cases of Solomon and Jex are striking, and it's notable that Amy and Rory were not present to witness the Doctor's decision to let Solomon die; it seems unlikely that they would have allowed him to act as he did had they been there. Rather than a simple example of the Doctor committing violence, then, an action like the killing of Solomon is part of a larger moral arc that underscores the Doctor's commitment to nonviolence, albeit showing that he needs close contact with humans to keep him humanistic.

Melissa Beattie makes a case that the Doctor's character arc in the Russell T. Davies era shows his struggle to return from a 'wartime morality' that he adopted during the Time War - a morality that led to his decision to destroy both the Time Lords and the Daleks. In this context, the darkness of the Doctor's character in this period reflects the difficulty of shifting from a temporary moral code that justifies violence back to a peacetime, nonviolent ethic: 'Series 1 through 4 represent a healing process, complete with backsliding and missteps, such as the regression into solitude to protect others suggesting a

re-entry into a state of emotional lockdown much as was seen in Series 1 of the revival'.³⁴ And the signs for a more calculating ethic are seen earlier, as well, particularly in the Sylvester McCoy era and the *New Adventures* novels. Vincent O'Brien discusses the Daleks' mythologising of the Doctor as the Ka Faraq Gatri - the Destroyer of Worlds.³⁵ This term (hinted at in Davros' reference to the Doctor as 'the destroyer of worlds' in the 2008 episode 'Journey's End') first appeared in the *New Adventures* novels, but it likely has its root in the serial 'Remembrance of the Daleks', when the Doctor tricks the Daleks into destroying their home planet Skaro. The facts of these instances of rather extreme, even genocidal, violence in the Doctor's history make difficult any argument for his nonviolence. However, shifts in character - even rather extreme ones - are inherent in the Doctor's character and the concept of regeneration.

But even in these cases, contingent factors - the presence of human beings to question the Doctor's actions; the grander arc of the character - leave room for the possibility of the audience being led to different ethical conclusions than those the Doctor himself reaches. It could even be argued that actions like the destruction of Skaro or the scorched-earth conclusion of the Time War are indicative of the Doctor's shift toward a place of true moral darkness suggested by the introduction of the Valeyard, an evil future incarnation of the Doctor, in 'Trial of a Time Lord' (1986). Further evidence of this progression appears in the episode 'The Name of the Doctor' (2013), in which the Great Intelligence - referring specifically to the case of the pirate Solomon, among others - states that 'the Doctor lives his life in darker hues day upon day, and he will have other names before the end: the Storm, the Beast, the Valeyard.' The darkening hues of

[34] Melissa Beattie. 'Life During Wartime: An Analysis of Wartime Morality in Doctor Who' in Anthony S. Burdge, Jessica Burke, and Kristine Larsen (eds), *The Mythological Dimensions of Doctor Who* (Crawfordville, FL: Kitsune Books, 2010), p.101.

[35] See Vincent O'Brien, 'The Doctor or the (Post) Modern Prometheus' in Anthony S. Burdge, Jessica Burke, and Kristine Larsen (eds), *The Mythological Dimensions of Doctor Who* (Crawfordville, FL: Kitsune Books, 2010), pp.185-188.

recent seasons of *Doctor Who* have served to undermine the Doctor's role as a moral authority, but this merely gives the programme a richer and more complex moral fabric. Una McCormack argues that '*Doctor Who*, in [its] most recent incarnation, is sceptical of all those who claim the ability to perfect or deliver us - prophets or doctors, religious visionaries or scientific utopians, anyone who promises escape from the here-and-now into eternal life, anyone offering consolation in place of action - including, occasionally, the Doctor himself.'³⁶ The Doctor's actions are no longer held up as singularly heroic and ethical; the audience is led to question his choices rather than simply accepting that he, as the hero, will do the right thing. This injection of moral ambiguity complicates the Doctor's personal role as hero or saviour, but it only enriches the moral tapestry of the grander canon of *Doctor Who*. We can now look at actions like the destruction of Skaro or the conclusion of the Time War as dark moments in the Doctor's past from which he is struggling to recover, moral traumas that occasionally lead him to regress. But, as in 'A Town Called Mercy', we the audience are led to cheer the Doctor's return to nonviolence, understanding, and mercy. Even if the Doctor's traditional heroic and/or messianic role has become more ambiguous, this does not mean he can no longer be a salvific figure - rather, it leads us to question our understanding of what to expect of a saviour.

The Doctor's insistence on new ways of thinking and a search for nonviolent solutions puts him in the territory of Leo Tolstoy, whose book *The Kingdom of God is Within You* identifies 'the non-resistance to evil by force' as the central, albeit generally neglected, tenet of Christianity. Christ's doctrine, Tolstoy states, 'consisted not only of the prohibition of resistance to evil by force, but gave a new conception of life and a means of putting an end to conflict between all men, not by making it the duty of one section only of mankind to submit without conflict to what is prescribed to them by certain

[36] Una McCormack. 'He's Not the Messiah: Undermining Political and Religious Authority in New Doctor Who' in Simon Bradshaw, Antony Keen and Graham Sleight (eds), *The Unsilent Library: Essays on the Russell T. Davies Era of the New Doctor Who* (London: The Science Fiction Foundation, 2011), pp.61-62.

authorities, but by making it the duty of all - and consequently of those in authority - not to resort to force against anyone in any circumstances'.³⁷ For Tolstoy, this was the true essence of the Sermon on the Mount. It is essentially a philosophy of anti-authoritarianism and rebellion, for the machinery by which the entire state functions is based on either violence or the tacit support of violence: 'All state obligations are against the conscience of a Christian - the oath of allegiance, taxes, law proceedings, and military service. And the whole power of government rests on these very obligations.'³⁸ The state depends on the participation of its subjects, and it is this refusal to participate, rather than any revolutionary sentiment, that is destructive to government. Thus 'Christianity in its true sense puts an end to government'.³⁹

Other Christian pacifists have also linked nonviolence directly to anarchism. Jacques Ellul even makes pacifism, rather than simple rejection of the state, the defining feature of anarchy.⁴⁰ William Lloyd Garrison, best known today as a central figure in the American anti-slavery movement, was a strong advocate of non-resistance, and in 1838 drafted a statement decreeing not only war to be unchristian, but also participation at any level in the entire machinery of state that leads to violence - including the manufacture and ownership of weapons, holding any political office connected to war or imprisonment, seeking the protection of the law in criminal or civil matters, and voting in public elections.⁴¹ For Garrison and others, pacifism is by necessity connected to the outright rejection of any government that uses violence as a tool.

[37] Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), p.167.

[38] Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God*, pp.203-204.

[39] Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God*, p.208.

[40] Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p.11.

[41] William Lloyd Garrison, 'Declaration of Sentiments (1838)', *Internet Archive*, [<http://archive.org/details/DeclarationOfSentiments>]. Last modified March 10th 2001.

In the *New Adventures* novel *No Future*, an anarchist rebel in 1976 Britain describes the Doctor as 'the purest sort of anarchist', which prompts a smirking dismissal from Lethbridge-Stewart, who proposes instead 'that the Doctor symbolises the best values of British life. Eccentricity, the creative amateur, and civilisation'.⁴² The Doctor himself does not take a side in their argument. But despite his anti-authoritarian leanings, it would be difficult to class the Doctor as an outright anarchist.⁴³ The Doctor's attitudes and actions are closer to the territory of one of the most influential Christian rebels in history: Martin Luther King, Jr. Tolstoy's philosophy had a strong influence on Mahatma Gandhi, who in turn influenced King, who turned nonviolent resistance into a major transformative force in American society. In the essay 'My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence', King rejects the term 'non-resistance', which both Garrison and Tolstoy used:

My study of Gandhi convinced me that true pacifism is not nonresistance to evil, but nonviolent resistance to evil ... Gandhi resisted evil with as much vigor and power as the violent resister, but he resisted with love instead of hate. True pacifism is not unrealistic submission to evil power, as [Reinhold] Niebuhr contends. It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient of violence than the inflicter of it, since the latter only multiplies the existence of violence and bitterness in the universe, while the former may develop a sense of shame in the

[42] Paul Cornell, *No Future* (London: Virgin Publishing, 1994), p.142.

[43] A strong case could be made, however, for an anarchist interpretation of *Blake's 7*, the science-fiction programme created by Terry Nation, the creator of the Daleks, in 1978. This programme followed a revolutionary group led by escaped criminal Roj Blake as it attempted to overthrow an oppressive galactic government. Incidentally, a major character on *Blake's 7* was played by Michael Keating, who had previously appeared as a member of the band of outlaws in the *Doctor Who* serial 'The Sun Makers'.

opponent, and thereby bring about a transformation and change of heart.⁴⁴

This is, essentially, the doctrine of the Doctor as well, for though he eschews violence, he is always an active resister of evil. As he says in 'Genesis of the Daleks', to use his enemies' tools against them cannot bring victory, for it is precisely those tools that make them evil. The Doctor's struggles against fictional monsters extrapolate from the very real struggles of his earthly predecessors, embodying the philosophy of nonviolence in a form more easily comprehensible to a young audience. Though the Doctor's fight against the Daleks and the Cybermen pales in comparison to the fight against real-world discrimination, injustice and war, this sort of fiction can nevertheless be a tool in those struggles as well.

Much pacifist thought - and particularly that of Gandhi and King - depends on an inversion of commonplace logic where defeat becomes victory. This kind of reversal has scriptural roots, for instance in Paul's insistence in 1 Cor. 1:27 that 'God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise'. This is reflected, too, in the Doctor's choice of companions and his attitude to the powerful figures he encounters on his journeys. Rather than choosing to travel with political leaders, military commanders, or brilliant scientists, the Doctor tends to choose far more humble companions: a rookie investigative reporter (Sarah Jane Smith), a bright teenager (Adric), a shop assistant (Rose Tyler), a temp (Donna Noble). His companions, generally speaking, are unremarkable on the surface. Moreover, in his encounters with the powerful people of the universe, the Doctor is frequently cool, even dismissive. Witness his irritation with billionaire technocrat Henry van Statten, who 'owns the Internet' ('Dalek' (2005)); his lack of deference to the similarly-wealthy Kazran Sardick, the richest man in Sardicktown ('A Christmas Carol' (2010)), his snubbing of the Time Lords on

[44] Martin Luther King, Jr., 'My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence', *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project*, [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol4/1-Sept-1958_MyPilgrimageToNonviolence.pdf], p.479.

Gallifrey when they attempt to make him their President ('The Five Doctors' (1983)). The Doctor much prefers to hear the insights of those whom societal hierarchies, prejudices, and assumptions leave out. In this, he echoes George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers. Fox considered a refusal to honour society's ideas about respecting high and low station as part of his religious mission. In his autobiography he writes, 'when the Lord sent me forth into the world, He forbade me to put off my hat to any, high or low; and I was required to Thee and Thou all men and women, without any respect to rich or poor, great or small . neither might I bow or scrape with my leg to any one; and this made the sects and professions to rage'.⁴⁵ These signs of radical egalitarianism led to great scandal and persecution in the early days of the Quakers.⁴⁶

Other radical religious figures of the period surrounding the English Civil War similarly embraced the idea of radical equality -cutting down the haughty and raising up the low. This is one of the possible origins of the term 'Leveller', which described one of the more radical politico-religious groups of mid-seventeenth-century England. A typical figure of the era is George Foster, an unaffiliated mystic whose 1650 pamphlet *The Sounding of the Last Trumpet* describes a vision of a figure on white horse 'cutting down all men and women that he met with that were higher than the middle sort, and raised up those that were lower than the middle sort, and made them all equal; and cried out, "Equality, equality, equality" ... I will . make the low and poor equal with the rich'.⁴⁷ The Doctor's approach lacks the eschatological angle of Foster's vision, but he too treats all

[45] George Fox, *George Fox: An Autobiography*, 'Christian Classics Ethereal Library', [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/fox_g/autobio.html], p.47. Last modified June 1st 2005.

[46] A stranger similarity between George Fox and the Doctor is the fact that, on several occasions in his life, Fox fell seriously ill, and underwent drastic physical and emotional changes connected to his recovery, undergoing what could fancifully be termed 'regenerations'. (Fox, 38n).

[47] Quoted in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1991), p.223.

those he encounters on their own merits, frequently finding those who appear most ordinary to in fact be the most remarkable. Thus is the wisdom of the world proved foolishness, and vice versa.

This logic, too, upends the meanings of 'defeat' and 'victory'. In the David Tennant episode 'The Last of the Time Lords' (2007), we see a successful nonviolent revolution that makes this reversal manifest. The Master has conquered the Earth, with the help of the British electorate and an army of deadly alien creatures called the Toclafane. For a year, he has held the Doctor prisoner - artificially aged hundreds of years until he is a withered homunculus trapped inside a birdcage. His companion Martha has spent the year travelling the world in secret to organise a resistance force against the Master. But, when the moment for that resistance to act finally comes, we learn that she has not been organising an army, but rather something more akin to a worldwide prayer circle. 'I told a story', Martha says, 'That's all. No weapons, just words. I did just what the Doctor said. I went across the continents all on my own. And everywhere I went I found the people and I told them my story. I told them about the Doctor, and I told them to pass it on. To spread the word so that everyone would know about the Doctor.' At an appointed hour, the people of the world chant the Doctor's name, imbuing him with power and restoring his body and mind. And at the culmination of this moment of reversal, where the Doctor's utter defeat at the hands of the Master becomes the triumph of the people of the Earth, the Doctor grants his greatest enemy forgiveness. Here it is weakness that has prevailed - the Doctor's weakness as a wretched prisoner, Martha's weakness as a revolutionary who eschews violence, the weakness of the human race in the face of a foe too powerful to ever defeat by force.

The events at the conclusion of 'The Last of the Time Lords' embody an on-going theme in *Doctor Who: the Third Option*. On the surface, we see two possibilities in Martha's situation prior to the Doctor's revival: either her victory over the Master (through what we have been led to believe is her organisation of a worldwide uprising) or the final defeat of humanity at the hands of his Toclafane minions.

Instead, we are surprised by the introduction of a third option: that the Master can be defeated through the nonviolent action of the human race as a whole. 'The Beast Below' presents a similar disruption of an apparent binary: the secret at the heart of Starship UK is that their city is built on the back of an enormous star whale, the last of its kind, and that they have been torturing this creature to keep it moving. The Doctor sees only two options: he can either free the star whale from its bondage, thereby destroying the city; or he can lobotomise the creature, allowing the city to survive but committing an unredeemable crime against a spectacular creature. Companion Amy Pond introduces a third option: free the whale from its bondage, but seek its consent in the survival of the city (a proposition which the star whale happily accepts). From the Jon Pertwee era on, *Doctor Who* frequently featured stories directly inspired by political conflicts of the day, but the Doctor rarely if ever 'took sides'. Instead, appearing in the midst of a conflict divided into a binary opposition, the Doctor generally represents a third way - often moderate, but sometimes simply outside that left-right opposition. This advocacy of new solutions to old problems is inherently anti-establishment, viewing the entire concept of binary oppositions as a sign of an ossification that prevents real growth.

This rejection of both sides of a black-and-white division is a disruption of programming, the programming that encourages (or even allows) us to view any subject from only two angles. The Doctor's history is rife with programming rewritten, hypnotism defeated, and controls smashed. The Fifth Doctor's companion Turlough, when first introduced, was a saboteur trained by the Black Guardian to destroy the Doctor, until the Time Lord's kindness changed his outlook. In 'Victory of the Daleks' (2010), the humanoid bomb Edwin Bracewell, who was created by the Daleks but believes himself human, is convinced by the Doctor that he is more human than machine and thus averts his detonation. 'Asylum of the Daleks' (2012) introduces Oswin Oswald, a human mind trapped in a Dalek body who believes, like Bracewell, that she is human. The Doctor, in this case, believes she is beyond redemption,

that her Dalek form will ultimately win out over her human mind; she too asserts her humanity and defeats the Daleks, allowing the Doctor to escape their asylum planet.

But it is the Eleventh Doctor's companion Rory Williams who offers the most powerful example of disrupted programming. Rory dies in the episode 'Cold Blood' (2010), shot by a Silurian and then sucked through a crack in reality that erases every trace of his existence from history. We watch as Amy's memories of him slip away, her grief being replaced in mere moments by forgetfulness and then fear about the crisis at hand. Rory mysteriously returns in 'The Pandorica Opens' (2010) an event that the Doctor is at a loss to explain - he describes it as 'a miracle', which is saying something on a show where the impossible occurs every week. Rory - or a being bearing an uncanny resemblance to him - is stationed with the Roman legion at Stonehenge in the year 102CE, and has full memories of two lives - that of a bumbling twenty-first-century nurse, and that of a first-century Roman centurion. As the episode progresses, we learn that this isn't really Rory, but an Auton - a plastic alien android programmed with Rory's memories. He was also programmed, it turns out, to kill his twenty-first-century self's fiancée Amy Pond, which he does despite his conscious, human mind's protests.

At the opening of next episode 'The Big Bang', the universe has been all but destroyed, rewritten out of existence just as Rory was in 'Cold Blood'. Rory, now revealed as a machine, is cradling Amy's lifeless form, his human grief having overtaken his android heartlessness. When the Doctor finds him, the Time Lord downplays that grief in light of the destruction of the universe: 'Do you know how many lives now never happened, all the people who never lived?' the Doctor asks. 'Your girlfriend isn't more important than the whole universe.' Whereupon android-Rory rises up and punches the Doctor in the jaw, shouting, 'She is to me!' Rory thereby passes the Time Lord's test: in the Doctor's eyes, he has now proven that he's the real Rory Williams. For the Doctor, there is no qualitative difference between the real Rory and an android programmed to

believe he's Rory, provided that the android displays appropriate, human emotions. This, indeed, is the very definition of humanity: the ability to overcome programming, to make a choice outside of those prepared for us, to exceed our operational parameters. In the face of mechanical determinism, *Doctor Who* loudly proclaims that machines, even those designed only to kill, can will themselves into humanity with the right amount of *caritas*.

The Doctor's disruption of dangerous programming extends to the core of our system of ethics: whether the ends can ever justify the means. In our society, we frequently hear about survival, about 'existential threats' justifying the suspension of otherwise ironclad restrictions on our behaviour as individuals, nations, and a species. In the audio drama 'Spare Parts' (2002), which recounts one version of the origin of the Cybermen, we see *Doctor Who's* response to teleological ethics. The Cybermen originate on the planet Mondas, an exact twin of Earth hidden from us by its position on the opposite side of the sun. Mondas is slowly drifting out of this orbit, however, and as its surface has grown colder, its people have retreated underground. A mission has been undertaken to create a planetary propulsion system to return the planet to a warmer orbit, but conditions on the surface are extreme. Subterranean life has taken its toll on the inhabitants of Mondas - disease is endemic, leading to a booming trade in organ transplants and replacements. Medical technology has allowed the creation of an artificial replacement for virtually every organ - and, for those brave explorers who seek to return to the surface of the planet, 'full conversion' is available. The results of this process are what come later to be known as the Cybermen. Mondas is beset with entropy - its surface freezing, its people slowly dying. And in the face of this entropy, they have made survival their highest ideal. The Doctor confronts Doctorman Allen, a scientist in charge of the conversion of the people of Mondas into cyborgs, demanding to know how she could put her own people through this horrifying transformation. Allen offers a pragmatic response: 'Because we're dying! ... We've been trapped down here so long, we daren't even step out on our own planet's surface. Just

the thought of the vast, empty sky drives us insane. Only Cybermen can go out there and save us...: No Cybermen, no life. Unless you have a better solution.' Allen sees transformation into Cyberman as the only hope for survival. But if survival is the only measure of the good, then all other considerations fall away. What remains is no longer human, but something less. Doctorman Allen's refusal to consider any other factors beyond mere survival doom the people of Mondas to 'full conversion' into the cold, heartless Cybermen, which exist for no other purpose than to extend their lives and to create more creatures exactly like themselves. Survival is not enough: we must survive as moral beings as well as mortal ones.

This privileging of the perseverance of our moral ideals over the survival of our bodies is perhaps the farthest-reaching reprogramming of all, for it asks us to overcome the imperatives of our very biology. Our bodies and minds are both wholly devoted to survival, to continuing our existence, both as individuals and as a species. An ethic that asks us to suspend this imperative, to risk or even sacrifice ourselves for something abstract and intangible, represents a complete rewriting of the laws by which everyday life is lived. And yet this is what the Doctor does every week: risking himself, and on ten occasions to date actually sacrificing himself, not just for his friends, not even for mere strangers, but for *aliens*. And in this radical upending of the laws of everyday life, the Doctor embodies the Christian ideal as well. As Tolstoy stated, Jesus' message was not simply a new or revised ethical code, but 'a new conception of life' - a completely new understanding of the relationship between individual human beings, societies, nations, and worlds. And it is an inherently rebellious understanding, for it calls into question the entire basis of our politics, our international affairs, our interactions as individuals. To truly and fundamentally replace self-interest with other-interest requires a shift in every level of human life. Jesus' message is therefore a new definition, or perhaps the first true assertion of the definition, of humanity. If the Doctor is a fictional messiah, this is the form that his salvation takes:

he liberates us from our assumptions, our intellectual and ethical dead-ends, and our dualities.

The episode 'Cold Blood' remains one of *Doctor Who's* strongest statements on the ethical basis of what it means to be human. Ambrose Northover, a woman whose husband and son have been kidnapped and father poisoned by the Silurians, threatens to torture a reptilian prisoner unless she provides an antidote. When the Silurian doesn't answer, Ambrose shoots her with a taser, and the wound soon proves fatal. In the moral calculus of most TV and movies, the Silurian 'deserves' it - shows like *24* build much of their suspense around precisely this kind of ticking-bomb torture scenario. But when Ambrose's father, Tony Mack, enters the room to find his daughter standing over the writhing form of the tortured reptile-woman, he is furious, even though it is his life she was trying to save. Through gritted teeth he admonishes her: 'We have to be better than this!' Tony's message is clear: he will not support the torture of anyone in his name, no matter the reason.

The Doctor later echoes Tony's moral message, telling Ambrose: 'In future, when you talk about this, you tell people there was a chance, but you were *so much less* than the best of humanity'. The Doctor phrases this sentiment a bit more eloquently than does Tony, and the Time Lord expresses it even more succinctly in his later order to his human friends to 'Be extraordinary'. But it is important - and a sign of *Doctor Who's* all-around moral optimism - that this message comes from a human being first. Dee Amy-Chinn uses a similar cases to argue that 'perhaps the real lesson. is not that the Doctor is a metaphor for Jesus, but that mercy and compassion are most fully embodied in the very human companions that accompany the Doctor on his travels'.⁴⁸ Surely the Doctor is not simply a 'metaphor for Jesus', but the moral role of the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount is to awaken this kind of merciful behaviour in human beings. The

[48] Dee Amy-Chinn, 'Davies, Dawkins and Deus ex TARDIS: Who Finds God in the Doctor?' In Christopher J. Hansen (ed.), *Ruminations, Peregrinations, and Regenerations: A Critical Approach to Doctor Who* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), p.28.

mercy that truly matters is not that which God shows to human beings, but that which human beings show to each other. The same applies to *Doctor Who*. The alien Doctor may be this show's *de facto* messiah, but the ethical message he brings originates in and finds its ultimate expression in human action. If we simply hear the Doctor telling us to 'be better', we have the opportunity to write off that call to moral improvement as an impossible bit of science-fantasy. But if it comes from an earthbound elder like Tony Mack in 'Cold Blood', then maybe we do have a chance.

Despite his best efforts, however, Tony is unable to salvage the agreement between the humans and the Silurians over sharing the surface of the earth. The process is derailed by the violence of extremists - that of the human Ambrose, who has killed her prisoner, and of Restac, the Silurian military commander who refuses to forgive that death. Emotions override reason, neither side backs down, and the peace deal is scuttled. As the episode concludes, the Silurians are returning to hibernation, but the Doctor still struggles to create the peace that has been deferred. 'This planet is to be shared', he states, and urges the humans to encode this message in a form that will last: 'legend, or prophecy, or religion'. Humanity may not be ready now, but through proper preparation, they may be able to shape a future where peace is a possibility.

And this, ultimately, is the role that *Doctor Who* itself plays. The legends of our era - television programmes - are rightly connected to popular religion, as 'Cold Blood' suggests. Legend and religion are both things of the imagination, and imagination is where our experience of reality takes shape. It is in the imagination that we create a better future. *Doctor Who* encodes a message of a nonviolent, individualistic, anti-authoritarian ethic in one of our popular culture's most enduring legends, and thereby rewrites *our* programming, turning us into beings that can better approximate the impossible ease with which the Doctor solves the insoluble and turns ordinary rebellion into revolution. The rewiring of the imagination is no small thing: indeed, that is precisely what was done when Dr King shared his dream with the world. Imagining

a universe in which our apparently-impossible dilemmas can be solved brings us closer to making that universe real. There is still a lot of work to be done to realise it, but nothing is possible unless it is first imagined.