



MISES: Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy Law and Economics

ISSN: 2318-0811

ISSN: 2594-9187

Instituto Ludwig von Mises - Brasil

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MISES: Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy Law and Economics, vol. 8, e202081317, 2020

Instituto Ludwig von Mises - Brasil

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30800/mises.2020.v8.1317>

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Libertarianism in Pop Culture: Applying libertarian principles to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* Season 4

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Abstract: Television drama is an important tool to present hypothetical scenarios and imagine various ways to deal with them, while testing the viability of ethical theories that could guide moral judgements and practical decisions made in real life. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) left an important legacy in Popular Culture, captivating viewers worldwide and still being relevant 20 years later. The aim of this article is to revisit *Buffy's* Season 4 and analyze it through a libertarian perspective. Over this season, a great number of relevant subjects are discussed, such as the form and function of the state, its relationship with society, the subversion of public authorities, and the morality of law and punishment. It is expected that the successful adoption of libertarian ethics and principles to understand this TV show might bring out Libertarianism as a valuable philosophical alternative to be taken into account when looking for solutions to current issues.

Keywords: Pop Culture, Libertarianism, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Buffy Studies*, TV Drama.

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Libertarismo en la cultura pop: Aplicando principios libertarios a la 4ª temporada de *Buffy, la Cazavampiros*

Resumen: El drama televisivo es un importante instrumento para presentar escenarios hipotéticos e imaginar diferentes formas de lidiar con ellos, mientras es comprobada la viabilidad de teorías éticas para conducir juicios morales y decisiones prácticas que se pueden tomar en la vida real. *Buffy, la Cazavampiros* (1997-2003) dejó un importante legado en la cultura popular, cautivando a telespectadores en todo el mundo y se mantiene relevante 20 años después de su exhibición. El propósito de este artículo es visitar la 4ª temporada de *Buffy* y analizarla desde una perspectiva libertaria. A lo largo de esta temporada, se discute una infinidad de temas relevantes, como la forma y el funcionamiento del estado, su relación con la sociedad, la subversión de autoridades gubernamentales y la moralidad de la ley y de las sanciones penales. Se espera que la adopción exitosa de la ética y de los principios libertarios que comprenden esta serie de televisión pueda resaltar el Libertarismo como una alternativa filosófica válida, a tenerse en cuenta frente a la resolución de problemas actuales.

Palabras clave: Cultura Popular, Libertarismo, *Buffy, la Cazavampiros*, Buffy Studies, Drama televisivo.

Libertarianismo na cultura pop: aplicando princípios libertários à 4ª temporada de *Buffy, a Caça-Vampiros*

Resumo: O drama televisivo é um instrumento importante para apresentar cenários hipotéticos e imaginar diferentes formas para lidar com eles, enquanto é comprovada a viabilidade de teorias éticas que poderiam guiar juízos morais e decisões práticas que podem ser tomadas na vida real. *Buffy, a Caça-Vampiros* (1997-2003) deixou um importante legado na cultura popular, cativando milhões de telespectadores, e se mantém relevante 20 anos depois. O propósito deste artigo é revisitar a 4ª temporada de *Buffy* e analisá-la desde uma perspectiva libertária. Ao longo dessa temporada, discute-se uma infinidade de temas relevantes, como a forma e o funcionamento do Estado, sua relação com a sociedade, a subversão das autoridades governamentais e a moralidade da lei e das sanções penais. Espera-se que a adoção exitosa da ética e dos princípios libertários para compreender essa série de televisão possa destacar o Libertarianismo como uma alternativa filosófica válida a ser levada em conta na busca por soluções para os problemas atuais.

Palavras-chave: Cultura Popular, Libertarianismo, *Buffy, a caça-vampiros*, Drama de televisão.

Introduction

On March 10th, 1997, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s pilot episode, created by Joss Whedon, first aired in American television. The audience got to know Buffy¹ Summers (Sarah Michelle Gellar), a blonde high school girl who, apart from her obligations and constraints as a teenage girl, must deal with the fact that she is the Chosen One, destined to fight vampires, demons and the forces of darkness by herself.

We start off with Buffy having just moved to Sunnydale, a suburban town in Southern California, where her new High School is located on a hot spot for demonic activity that attracts all kinds of supernatural creatures - a so-called "Hellmouth". On her first day of school, Buffy meets her new best friends, Xander (Nicholas Brendon) and Willow (Alyson Hannigan), and also the school librarian Rupert Giles (Anthony Stewart Head), who turns out to be her Watcher - the one designated to take care of her, train her and make sure that she will not deviate from her duties as the Vampire Slayer. Contrary to the prophecies, Buffy will, throughout the series, get some help from Giles and her friends in the fight against evil.

The series lasted for seven seasons (1997-2003) and left an important legacy in Popular Culture, culminating in the development of a specific academic field. *Buffy Studies*, as it is commonly referred to by academics who write about issues related to the *Buffyverse*², includes a vast bibliography, in which it is common to find discussions on philosophy, sociology, gender studies, psychology, and so forth.

Television drama is an important tool to present hypothetical scenarios and the possibility of imagining various ways to deal with them. The display of situations with exaggerated moral ambiguity forces the viewer to think carefully about how they could and would settle those dilemmas. This exercise establishes the use of drama as a useful – whilst being entertaining - way for testing the viability of ethical theories that guide moral judgements and practical decisions made in real life (RABB; RICHARDSON, 2009).

Regarding *Buffy Studies*, political and social sciences are a recurring subject featured in its literature. There is a wide range of examples, that vary from exploring fascist (KING, 2003) and feminist (MILLER, 2003) elements in the *Buffyverse*, to Post-Structuralist (PERDIGAO, 2011) and Post-Anarchist interpretations (CALL, 2011), just to name a few. Up to now, no libertarian author has ever been used³ as the main source of research.

Entertainment pieces such as *Dexter* (HOURIGAN, 2011) and *The Prisoner* (TAME, 1983) have already been examined through a libertarian lens⁴. *Buffy*, like the shows previously

¹ In this article, Buffy will be used to refer to the character herself and *Buffy* (in italic) as a reduction of the name of the show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

² Fictional universe where the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* are set.

³ To my knowledge, Robert Nozick was briefly mentioned once in Held (2003).

⁴ An interesting fact is that Joss Whedon and the writer and producer Douglas Petrie are big fans of *The Prisoner*. The Initiative arc on Season 4 was highly influenced by the show (PETRIE, 1999).

mentioned, has many aspects that manage to elucidate and experiment concepts explored by libertarian scholars.

The aim of this article, therefore, is to revisit *Buffy's* Season 4 and analyze it through a libertarian perspective. Over this season, a great number of relevant subjects are discussed, such as the form and function of the state, its relationship with society, the subversion of public authorities, and the morality of law and punishment. On the whole, it provides a sufficient amount of material to establish this study.

The first part of this article consists on a quick introduction on Libertarianism and the definition of some important concepts there are going to be explored further on. Secondly, an endeavor is made on justifying the use of the TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as the research subject of this study, introducing the series itself and some topics that have been explored in the first three seasons and can be associated with the Fourth Season. Finally, the last part is dedicated to a full examination of the *Buffy's* Season 4 narrative, using libertarian ideas as guiding principles. At the end of this article, it is expected that the successful adoption of libertarian ethics to understand the *Buffyverse* might ignite a dialogue in respect to its applicability in real life.

1. What is Libertarianism?

In one sentence, Libertarianism can be summed up as a political philosophy based on the defense of individual liberties and private property. On his book "*The Ethics of Liberty*", Murray Rothbard, considered by many the father of the libertarian movement, elucidates some points that constitute the libertarian ethics – or the Theory of Liberty. Embracing libertarian ethics turns out to be an essential process to achieve a society based on individual liberties (ROTHBARD, 2002).

According to Rothbard, the whole Theory of Liberty resides on the full establishment of private property within society. Any attack from one individual to another's property - including his own body - should be considered an unethical violation of a natural right, and liable for punishment. This mindset summarizes an axiom that guides a truly libertarian society: The Non-Aggression Principle (NAP).

1.1. The state problem

Throughout the course of history, it is possible to perceive one prevailing aggressor, that plays a pivotal role on the subtraction of individual liberties: the state. As defined by Rothbard (1978), the state is a criminal organization that exercises the absolute power on decision making processes in a determined territorial extension and is financed by physical coercion, meaning tax revenue obtained by the compulsory monopoly on the use of force.

This monopoly is expressed by the control of all law enforcement institutions, from the police and armed forces to the courts of justice. Controlling them is fundamental to ensure other functions that the state might perform, since its revenue is a result of a coercion process,

known as taxation (ROTHBARD, 2002). After plundering an individual's property, the members of the government can decide to do whatever they want with the people's money.

Moreover, there are other attempts perpetrated by the state against individual liberties. Considering that each individual has a natural right to his life and body - self-ownership – he also has a natural right to everything that he transforms using his body, through his work, conceiving his private property (ROTHBARD, 1978). Thus, any attack from a third person to anyone's property, including his own body, is illegitimate. That would condemn government's actions, such as the prohibition of trade and consumption of certain goods, construction laws, and the obligation of having a formal education, as disrespectful to property rights.

The state uses an illegitimate source of financing and ruling; therefore, all its actions are illegitimate as well. If any kind of attempt against a third persons' property may be considered unethical and illegal, the existence of the state is inevitably problematic.

For anarchist libertarians like Murray Rothbard and Hans-Hermann Hoppe, it is impossible to conceive a society in which all individuals have their natural rights respected, if an organization as the state continues to exist. Private property production and voluntary exchanges are the ultimate sources of human civilization (HOPPE, 2001); therefore, individuals can only prosper, develop all their skills and abilities and achieve happiness in a social system free of taxation and monopoly, a Natural Order - or Anarcho-capitalism - where "(...) every scarce resource is owned privately, where every enterprise is funded by voluntarily paying customers or private donors, and where entry into every line of production, including that of justice, police, and defense services, is free" (HOPPE, 2001, p. 21).

1.2. Non-Aggression Principle (NAP) and argumentation ethics

So far it has already been determined that every human being has a natural right to his own body - self-ownership - and to everything that he transforms/produces with his body – private property. Hence, any attack perpetrated by one man against another man's property is considered an illegal action (ROTHBARD, 2002). This corollary is the foundation of Rothbard's libertarian ethics, and is resumed in what he calls The Non-Aggression Principle (NAP).

The NAP states that no man should attack another man's property. Both the initiation of physical force against persons and the initiation of physical force against property can be properly considered an attack. Nevertheless, any use of violence in order to defend yourself or your property from any sort of aggression is undoubtedly justified (ROTHBARD, 2002).

Hans-Hermann Hoppe (1988) provides a praxeological explanation for Rothbard's assumptions, expanding the comprehension of libertarian ethics. According to Hoppe, the action of establishing a dialectic relation – a conversation - is itself a way of recognizing your own and another person's property. All in all, if a man, for example, claims that he does not have a natural right to his own body, he uses his vocal cords to express his opinion, that is, he is unquestionably choosing what to do with his own body, getting stuck in a performative contradiction.

1.3. Police monopoly

Addressing police protection granted by the state raises the question of how exactly the decision makers can determine where they should allocate limited resources. Nowadays, there is no such thing as an economic calculation on security; in other words, people in the government cannot rationally stipulate at what places there is a higher or lower demand for security forces. That calculation would only be possible by considering market forces.

In a free market society, the allocation of resources would be based on a supply and demand basis: one or more security companies would change their costs according to the place their services are going to be carried out (ROTHBARD, 1978). As an example, in areas where there is high occurrence of criminal offences, the population is more willing to bear the costs of wide security structures than in areas where their occurrence is lower. In a state system, both areas pay the same amount for security services but are not provided with the same amount of it, since one of those areas possibly requires less of the service that it is funding

A security system in a free market society would respect, inherently, the principle of free competition. Private security companies would compete with each other, which would result in natural price stability, avoiding pricing control - inherent to monopolies - and would allow a sustained pursue of service improvement (MOLINARI, 2009).

2. Establishing *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as the research subject

While Culture is the works and practices of intellectual and artistic activity, including texts, whose main purpose is to signify and to produce meaning, Popular Culture is a widely favored, well-liked upshot of Culture (STOREY, 2009), which has an important role on shaping contemporary general culture. Entertainment, evidently, is one of its categories, featuring Television as an important player.

Even though the word Popular can imply a connotation of inferiority, Popular Culture should be analyzed as an art form, as the art critic Lawrence Alloway points out:

We felt none of the dislike of commercial culture standard among most intellectuals, but accepted it as a fact, discussed it in detail, and consumed it enthusiastically. One result of our discussions was to take Pop culture out of the realm of 'escapism', 'sheer entertainment', 'relaxation', and to treat it with the seriousness of art (STOREY, 2009, p. 183).

In the postmodern world, media, including Television, affects and produces the reality it mediates. Thus, the intertextual and radical eclectic characteristics manifested in texts, entail the process of "passing the test of time", meaning, they are sufficiently polysemic in order to sustain multiple and continuous readings (STOREY, 2009).

There are several ways in which viewers can read a TV show, i.e., articulate their own interpretations of the text and have different reactions to it (COHEN, 2002). The rhetorical mechanisms used by viewers to discuss TV shows can vary according to their culture, social environment, individual characteristics etc., involving or distancing themselves from the story

shown (LIEBES; KATZ, 1986). All these elements of the viewer's life and background relate to one another in a very complex manner.

Audience interpretations of texts are distinct and unique, often reflecting each individual's social and cultural position and personal identity. Mostly, the variation in interpretations can reside on the interaction built between three spheres of influence: 1. Social and cultural background of the audiences, 2. Their general attitudes and psychological dispositions and 3. Their reactions to a specific text (COHEN, 2002).

The *social and cultural background of audiences* is related to the influence of their social knowledge, frames of reference, attitudes, social comparisons, ideology, and desires to their interpretations of texts. Viewers focus on textual elements that are relevant to them and understand the text by emphasizing these elements. On the other hand, *general attitudes and psychological dispositions* imply people's proclivity to interpret messages in accordance with their prior beliefs and avoid challenging information. At last, *audience's reactions to the text* emphasize the importance of viewers' identification with the central characters and the recognition of the realism surrounding the show (COHEN, 2002).

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a great example of Popular Culture text that has passed the test of time. Since 1997, a great amount of *Buffy* related academic works have been produced, making it one of the most studied Popular Culture subjects in history (SCHWAB, 2015). TV shows can be seen as works of art that demonstrate a meaningful view of the world in a skillful, and sometimes masterful, manner (CANTOR, 2012). Studying *Buffy* is an important effort, as *Buffy* Scholar Rhonda V. Wilcox affirms: "The depth of the characters, the truth of the stories, the profundity of the themes, and their precise incarnation in language, sound, and image—all of these matters. Last and first of all, *Buffy* matters for the same reason that all art matters—because it shows us the best of what it means to be human" (WILCOX, 2005, p. 13).

As a polysemic text, it permits a wide range of different readings. The type of interpretation selected for the development of this article is the "Negotiated Reading"⁵. In order to bypass the difficulty to articulate what was the creators' intended message, the text of the episodes will be considered primarily as guidance, assisted, sometimes, by DVD commentaries and statements given by the writers, directors and producers.

Presumably, it will be possible to find all three spheres of influence apportioned throughout the article. Ultimately, the aim of this work is to elaborate a libertarian approach on *Buffy*, justifying the focus on arcs that provide discussions on state issues and the adoption of a libertarian perspective *a priori*. On the third sphere, sympathy for characters like *Buffy* might be displayed in accordance with the author's continuous criticism of governmental institutions and their representatives. Nevertheless, it should not be taken as the only way of reading the show, but as one of many possible personal interpretations.

⁵ According to the Ideological Model from Birmingham School, there are three types of audience interpretation: 1. Dominant Readings – acceptance of the interpretation of the text as intended by its creators; 2. Resistant Readings – rejection of the ideological assumptions that underlie the text, opposing its intended message; 3. Negotiated Readings – acceptance of ideological premises of the text but negotiating somewhat different meanings from the Dominant Reading, based on the viewers' personal identity and experiences (COHEN, 2002).

2.1. Allegories, metaphors and real-life

Buffy the Vampire Slayer first launches its unconventional and innovative nature in its title. The funny component, expressed by the juxtaposition of a silly and girly name and her duty as the savior of the world, hides the irony intended by its creator Joss Whedon, which can be clearly comprehended after watching the series.

From the beginning, Whedon's intention with *Buffy* was to subvert horror movies clichés. He created a story in which the blonde cheerleader girl, who commonly dies in the first few minutes, would, unexpectedly, be the bravest and most powerful person, who ends up saving the world. In order to do so, Joss Whedon and Co. managed to create a whole fictional universe where the symbolism of monsters, vampires and demons is used to represent social problems (WILCOX, 2005).

In the *Buffyverse*, the language is used in a creative way that forces the viewer to not only appreciate its aesthetical elements, but to think about important topics and dilemmas that are presented through the use of metaphors (FIELD, 2017). Multiple interpretations of metaphors and allegories are used, enabling the audience to take individual life-lessons and construct different approaches to the themes shown. One of *Buffy*'s writers and producers, Jane Espenson, explains the importance of the use of metaphors on TV dramas: "Sci-fi tends to work through metaphor. Some Other-World is intended to represent our own world through some sort of mapping. The details of the correspondences are not stated explicitly; that work is left to the viewers. [It] fosters debate: points of view, passionately contested (...)" (RABB; RICHARDSON, 2009, p. 2).

In order to reach a fruitful interpretation of its polysemic text, Kellner (2004) proposes an interesting method on reading *Buffy* based on the observation of what he calls the "three levels". The Realist Level consists on elements from the show that are plausible to exist in real life, such as social relationships, social anxieties, complexities of families, school, work, love, construction of identity, existential crisis, and a range of other issues that concern young people and adults. For instance, this analysis will focus on themes associated to governmental authorities and discussions on political science and philosophy.

The second level is the Mythology Level. This one refers to the particular mythical universe and narrative of the series (KELLNER, 2004). In short, the relations between the story arcs/narrative sequences and the supernatural powers that the characters possess.

Lastly, and most importantly, the Allegorical Level takes elements from both previous levels and looks for the production of a system of meaning that connects the show with traditional religion, philosophy, mythology, literature and popular culture (KELLNER, 2004). The allegories and metaphors⁶ in the show are responsible for providing the structure and levels of meaning for the series as a whole.

⁶ Even though there are endless meaningful differences between the use of the terms Allegory and Metaphor, in this article, Allegory will be employed as an extended and elaborated metaphor.

2.2. The representation of governmental authorities in Sunnydale

On *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, authority is majorly viewed through the eyes of the teen – later, young adult – protagonists. Buffy and the Scoobies⁷ recognize the threat of authority coupled with power, while it is possible to observe signs of collusion between governmental authority and the Forces of Darkness as an allegory (CLARK; MILLER, 2001). In *Out of Mind, Out of Sight* (1x12)⁸, for example, FBI agents show up in Sunnydale in order to find a girl who became invisible. In the beginning, the audience is driven to believe that they are going to help her, but the end of the episode implies, instead, that the government is engaged in insidious activities and are recruiting invisible people for an unknown purpose. The episode leaves an open ending, never revealing what this purpose is.

Usually, authority figures on *Buffy* are already corrupt from the beginning, or eventually corrupted by the seduction of power (CLARK; MILLER, 2001). Seasons 2, 3, and 4 provide solid examples on how state images are portrayed on the show. Whilst Season 2 presents some insights on police forces, Season 3 and 4 are dominated by national and civic authority figures.

On Season 2 (*School Hard*, 2x03), it is revealed that Sunnydale police are aware of the Hellmouth and all the supernatural incidents taking place in its surrounding area. However, they never participate in the fight against evil, and instead of investigating and truly protecting their citizens, they sustain that vampires and demons are actually “PCP users” (*School Hard*, 2x03). This conduct leads to the conclusion that the police are either extremely incompetent – and try to disguise it – or that they operate in alliance with the Forces of Darkness.

In fact, on two specific occasions on Season 2 – *Ted* (2x12) and *Becoming part. One/part. Two* (2x21/2x22) – in which the police actually got involved in a situation, they act in order to arrest Buffy and try to prevent her from performing her duty. First, when Buffy accidentally kills her mother’s new boyfriend – who turns out to be an evil robot – and second, when the vampire Drusilla (Juliet Landau) kills Kendra⁹ (Bianca Lawson) and the High School principal makes the police believe that Buffy did it. In both circumstances, the police, in addition to not being able to protect the population from these evil figures, tried to thwart the only person who was effectively doing it.

In the end, besides lying to the people – the ones who actually finance their operations –, the police fail the only job they were hired¹⁰ to do. This ineffectiveness leaves room to alternative authority and law enforcement figures, outside of the state sphere. In this scenario, Buffy arises

⁷ The Scooby Gang, or just The Scoobies, is the nickname created by Xander in *What’s My Line part. One* (2x09) to refer to Buffy’s group of friends and sidekicks. The original gang is composed by Xander, Willow and Giles. Other members are added and dismissed throughout the seasons.

⁸ The episodes of the show will be mentioned in one of the following formats: (*Name of the episode*, season x episode) or *Name of the episode* (season x episode).

⁹ Vampire slayer activated after Buffy’s brief death on *Prophecy Girl* (1x12). Buffy passed away for some minutes after drowning and was resurrected by Xander’s CPR performance. Since she was theoretically dead for a couple of minutes, it created a distortion on the Slayer Line, enabling the existence of two Chosen Ones at the same time.

¹⁰ The term “hired” here is intentionally abstract, since the taxpayers have no options besides compulsorily financing law enforcement forces.

as the one responsible for patrolling the streets and protecting the people. Basically, she does the police work, and does it better.

This situation can introduce a discussion in real life regarding the efficiency of private mechanisms for protection. Libertarian author Bruce L. Benson (1986) indicates that the frustration with public sector inefficiency leads many individuals to opt for private security techniques, in order to improve the effectiveness of society's criminal justice process. In an illustrative way, in the fictional town of Sunnydale, local law enforcement powers are not able to protect its citizens, and this matter of government failure is what leads Buffy to act as a "private mechanism", placing herself as the main protection force in the area.

In addition to that, Buffy primarily employs one of Benson's (1986) ascertained tools for crime control - watches and patrols - in order to protect the residents. According to Benson (1986), this strategy helps reduce crime because it produces a deterrent effect, and encourages patrollers to call the police when they see something suspicious. Buffy proves the efficiency of these tools, at least in the fictional realm, by discouraging demonic activities in Sunnydale and also fighting crime by herself, instead of calling public police.

Meanwhile, during Season 3, Buffy faces another governmental obstacle to perform her job. This time, it resides in the figure of Sunnydale's mayor Richard Wilkins III. The power held by Mayor Wilkins is both real (socially constructed through a democratic process) and supernatural (demonic) (CLARK; MILLER, 2001). Thirsty for more power, Wilkins has the objective of devouring all school students on graduation day as a means of achieving full "demonhood".

Essentially, Mayor Wilkins uses his power, granted by the people, for self-serving interests. Every decision he makes as head of the local government is motivated by his master plan of ascending as a pure demon. For instance, he does not care about how the town and its citizens are going to be by the time his term is over. In Wilkins' plan, the whole town would be – literally - destroyed during his ascension on graduation day, and he is not concerned about who would be held responsible for fixing it later (*Graduation Day part. One/part. Two*, 3x21/3x22).

Allegorically speaking, Wilkins acts as what Hoppe (2001) calls a "temporary caretaker". According to Hans-Hermann Hoppe (2001), a publicly owned government will intrinsically lead to high degrees of exploitation. With that in mind, Wilkins' actions are highly predictable. Either in real life or inside the *Buffyverse*, the head of government, who has a limited time in office, will always use as many available resources as he can while he is in charge, not considering posterior implications that will be left in the hands of the next head of government.

Along with these two examples, another one is worth reflecting upon. Season 4 provides the best illustration of the state's power, organization, acts, and motivations in the show. It will be extensively analyzed in this next section.

3. Buffy goes to college – Discussing Season 4

Buffy's Season 4 premiered on October 5th, 1999 with the promise of being quite different from the previous seasons: Buffy has to face the difficult transition from high school to college.

Besides the expectations and concerns about fitting in a completely different environment, Buffy has to deal with all the new challenges concerning her own personal life, including the recent departure of Angel¹¹ (David Boreanaz), leaving her house to move into a dorm and being unsure and frightened about her future academic life.

In the first episodes of the season, the audience is not yet introduced to the main themes that are going to be explored. Until *The Initiative* (4x07), the previous episodes mostly address the personal changes Buffy and The Scooby Gang will have to deal with. Overall, Buffy's insecurity about college has left her unsure about her identity as a Slayer and about becoming an adult (FIELD, 2017). In this long journey of construction - or recovery - of self-confidence, Buffy prepares to confront new monsters and personal struggles that might appear in the season.

3.1 The Initiative

The Initiative (4x07) introduces the season's Big Bad. The Initiative is a confidential project, run by the U.S. Armed Forces, designed to capture and study supernatural beings. Their facility is located in tunnels underneath the local university, UC-Sunnydale. Maggie Walsh (Lindsey Crouse) is a high-ranking project leader who is disguised as a psychology professor, while some commandos – who have already appeared several times, but the audience had no idea who they were up until this episode - are disguised as students, including Buffy's new love interest Riley Finn (Marc Blucas). Just like the FBI in Season 1, the initial impression of this national authority is that it should not be trusted (CLARK; MILLER, 2001).

In *Doomed* (4x11), the Initiative's and Professor Walsh's real intentions are finally revealed: To capture HSTs¹², motivated by the opportunity to learn about the source of their power, through scientific research, and to facilitate the creation of a super soldier using a human body and mechanical and demonic parts (*The I in Team*, 4x13).

The scientific research carried out at the Initiative's facility leads to the imprisonment of demonic creatures in solitary cells in order to scrutinize their behavior. Spike (James Marsters), catalogued as Hostile 17, is an example of an HST that experienced the Initiative's attempts on studying demonic demeanors. The Initiative implanted a chip on his brain that would prevent him from harming any human without experiencing intense neurological pain. As a vampire, Spike does not have a soul¹³; hence, he is driven by his demonic natural instincts. He is fundamentally evil.

This mechanism works as a "xenomorphic behavior modification experiment" (*The I in Team*, 4x13). Basically, Spike's chip corresponds as an internal panopticon, that monitors his actions and prevents him from misbehaving (FIELD, 2017). Spike manages to escape from

¹¹ Buffy's ex-boyfriend, Angel, left Sunnydale on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* Season 3' Finale (*Graduation Day part. Two*, 3x22) and got his own Spinoff show named *Angel*, set in Los Angeles.

¹² Hostile Sub-Terrestrials (HST) is the term used by the Initiative to designate vampires, demons and all sort of monsters.

¹³ In the *Buffyverse*, the soul works as a moral compass. Vampires do not have a soul - except for Angel, at this point -, therefore they cannot develop morally or act in opposition to their demonic evil nature.

the Initiative's facility (*Pangs*, 4x08), ending the experiment; but the chip remains in his head, suppressing his ability of hurting and feeding on human beings forever¹⁴.

The Initiative's premise of harming a small group of people – namely, demons - in order to provide fulfillment to the population as a whole can be viewed as a utilitarian act. The capture of Oz (Seth Green) expresses a criticism on the Initiative's utilitarian approach. Oz is one of Buffy's friends and Willow's former boyfriend, who had to take a break from college in order to travel around the world looking for a way to control his werewolf powers (*Wild at Heart*, 4x06), a task he successfully achieves. As soon as Oz comes back to Sunnydale and discovers that Willow has a new love interest (*A New Moon Rising*, 4x19), his werewolf form resurfaces during a jealousy fit, and is contained by the Initiative's commandos, who drug him and take him to their facility.

Oz is one of the good guys: a usually normal college student who, in some days of the month, has to lock himself up in a cage to prevent harming humans while in werewolf form. For the Initiative, in contrast, he is just another HST that should be imprisoned and studied. The *Buffyverse* is characterized by displaying this fine line between good and evil, allowing the characters to travel between both sides. The distinction is based on the characters' actions, meaning that it is not who they are that matters, but what they do.

A passage between Buffy and Riley from *A New Moon Rising* (4x19) elucidates this nuance presented in the show. In the dialogue below, Riley questions Buffy about Willow previously dating Oz even though he is a werewolf and she tries to explain that he is not a bad person, despite his demonic side:

BUFFY: You sounded like Mr. Initiative. Demons bad, people good.

RILEY: Something wrong with that theorem?

BUFFY: There's different degrees of-

RILEY: Evil?

BUFFY: It's just... different with different demons. There are creatures - vampires, for example -- that aren't evil at all.

(*A New Moon Rising*, 4x19)

Writer and producer Marti Noxon explains Riley's distress, arguing that "living in the gray area is really uncomfortable" (WHEDON et al., 2003). For Noxon, people tend to make life simplistic – black and white -, in order to determine more easily what is right and wrong (WHEDON et al., 2003). In the passage above, Riley exemplifies this binary thinking.

On *Buffy*, Spike is an evil creature, which gives the Initiative a justification to apprehend him. On the other hand, Oz, as Buffy notes, "is not dangerous. Something happened to him [becoming a werewolf] that wasn't his fault" (*A New Moon Rising*, 4x19) and he should not be treated the same way as Spike. In this passage, Buffy moves towards embracing libertarian ideas, so to speak.

¹⁴Spike eventually gets a soul by the end of Season 6 and finally gets his chip removed on Season 7.

In opposition to utilitarian ethics, libertarian ethics invalidate the proposition of measuring alternatives and decisions related to policies, based on the measurement of good or bad possible implications. According to Rothbard (1978), this postulate is unethical, because the use of force will be sometimes unjustified when employed against people – in this case demons – who did not initiate any sort of aggression.

Adhering to libertarian ethics, it is possible to classify the capture of Oz as an unethical act. Considering that there are more evil supernatural creatures than good ones, the social cost might be negligible, and the benefit to society on capturing all kinds of supernatural creatures without discretion, high; however, the creatures that represent no harm to the population will recklessly suffer the consequences of a preemptive act.

This situation can be observed as an allegorical representation of governmental policies, in real life, that claim to protect the population at the expense of individual liberties. Throughout history, a number of examples of policies that follow the Initiative's premises can be raised, such as involuntary confinements of non-violent mental health patients, and the incarceration, in concentration camps, of people based on their race or ethnicity. The discussion that emerged in both cases, fictional and real, would be whether the government should suppress some individual liberties in order to guarantee safety for its citizens, and what would be the limit the government is willing to surpass in the name of national/local security.

3.2. Army of super-soldiers

At first, Buffy joins forces with the Initiative. She believes that it could be fruitful, because they both, theoretically, have the same objective: fight the Forces of Darkness. During her time working with them, Buffy notices that there is a room in the facility reserved for what is called Project 314. Labelled as classified, just a selected group of high-profile scientists know about the project, including the team leader Maggie Walsh. Buffy starts to investigate it, contrary to Walsh's orders, and becomes a threat for challenging the Initiative's *status quo*, putting the dynamics of mechanical objectivity and blind trust between the commandos and their superiors at stake.

Professor Walsh, afraid of Buffy's influence on her boyfriend, Agent Riley Finn, and other commandos, devises a plan to kill her "for the greater good" (*The I in Team*, 4x13). The plan does not succeed and Buffy, finally, declares the Initiative as an enemy.

In *Goodbye Iowa* (4x14), Maggie Walsh's Project 314 is revealed to be the construction of a demon-cyborg: Adam (George Hertzberg). As soon as he awakes, his first move is to kill his creator - or "mommy", as he calls her (*The I in Team*, 4x13) - and then he starts a quest of self-discovery, trying to understand who - or what - he is. For that purpose, he kills and dissects humans (*Goodbye Iowa*, 4x14) and demons (*This Year's Girl*, 4x15), in order to comprehend how their bodies - thus his body - operate.

Adam represents an allegory for the use of science to comprehend reality and to try to improve it (DASPIT, 2003). The Initiative not only manipulates corpse parts in order to compensate human vulnerabilities, but also uses a behavioral modification circuit on Agent Finn and manipulates him and other commandos with drugs to improve their field performance.

The ultimate achievement of the Initiative in the long run would be the formation of an army of Super Soldiers led by Adam.

Riley was intended to become the next super hybrid-being, if he was ever killed in action (FURY, 2000). In *Primeval* (4x21) it is revealed that he has a chip in his chest that was activated by Adam, placing him under his control. Riley's recognition of his individuality is what gives him strength to not succumb to this attempt of full control over his mind and body. He finally puts into practice his epiphany from *Goodbye Iowa* (4x14): "I cannot be programmed! I'm a man!"

It can be noted that The Initiative relies on rationalist principles – belief in logic, experts and authority - that guide its structures and goals. *Buffy's* Season 4 accurately addresses a critique on the efficacy of this Military Way of Thinking, exploring the complications of using traditional stereotypes through binary thinking and the militarization of reason and scientific knowledge (RABB; RICHARDSON, 2009). Adam is a product of the system, being equally driven by a will to seek knowledge devoid of conscience (BRETON; MCMASTER, 2001), which is exemplified by his attempt on generating supervised combat between soldiers and HSTs at the Initiative's facility, in order to provide corpse parts for the formation of more hybrid beings (*Primeval*, 4x21).

Incorporated to this environment, Finn and other commandos were instructed to follow orders and never stop to think about who they are and what they are expected to do. In real life, since the First World War, an extensive discussion exists on soldiers' psychology during combat. One of the first issues raised was related to finding approaches to transform urban youth recruits, who were considered weak in advance, into a "sharp fighting machine" (JONES, 2006).

Nowadays, there is an amount of training methods the military use for this purpose. Special attention shall be given to "desensitization". According to Dave Grossman (1998), a specialist in the study of the psychology of killing, the desensitization method's main objective is the loss of "(...) all vestiges of individuality. This brutalization is designed to break down your existing mores and norms, and to force you to accept a new set of values which embrace destruction, violence, and death as a way of life" (GROSSMAN, 1998, p. 6).

Similarly, all the activities taken place at the Initiative tried, somehow, to create "sharp fighting machines" in order to get around human vulnerabilities that could hamper its efficient and successful functioning. Those vulnerabilities appear as physical limitations, demanding solutions such as the replacement of human parts for demonic and technological parts or the use of performance-enhancing drugs, and as psychological weaknesses, eliminated by the destruction of a sense of humanity and empathy. The commandos' desensitization is translated in the rationalist mentality of immutable concepts of good and bad, and the discouragement of critical thinking, leading to Buffy's maladjustment to its environment.

It is impossible to anticipate human action and try to control it by scientific methods (MISES, 2016). This will only result in the destruction of the right to self-ownership, making the individual incapable of thinking and acting by himself. *Buffy's* Season 4 could flawlessly approach the replacement of the individual for the collective. Adam displays an allegory of this collectivization of the individual through an attempt to destroy any trace of individuality,

using scientific knowledge to create hybrid humans that will function following orders without questioning nor thinking, suppressing human action.

On the whole, there are significant differences between how *Buffy* and the Scoobies handle supernatural threats as opposed to the Initiative's approach. The former focus on book researches to ascertain motivations and patterns of actions, delimiting the scope of their work. The Initiative, on the other hand, is not concerned with understanding its enemy. They use gadgets to look for the causative agent and automatically try to kill it, not considering further implications.

In *Primeval* (4x21), *Buffy* and the Scooby Gang defeat Adam using a spell, after much researching and deliberating, with none of the military gadgets the Initiative had access to. This shows, metaphorically, that the Military Way of Thinking might be considered faulty.

3.3. On Voluntary Servitude, Anarchism and Riley Finn

Étienne de la Boétie coined the term Voluntary Servitude in his *magnum opus* "*The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*", first published in 1563. The French philosopher innovatively perceived that power in every authoritarian regime is concentrated in the hands of a small group of people, and depends on the legitimacy assured by the majority of the population (DE LA BOÉTIE, 1975). Even though De la Boétie cannot be considered a libertarian in the strict sense of the term - because his analysis is focused on tyrant governments of his time -, Rothbard (1975) claims that his conclusions are inherent and can be applied to any form of government in history. People, for any reason whatsoever, always have to agree to be subjugated by who is in charge, in order to sustain the state's authority.

De la Boétie presents some instruments used by the government to induce mass consent. The use of "opiates", such as "plays, farces, spectacles, gladiators, strange beasts, medals, pictures" (DE LA BOÉTIE, 1975, p. 24) is essential to please the population, preventing them from feeling dissatisfaction towards the government. Another example would be the use of an ideological discourse to deceive the masses, making them believe blindly in the wisdom, kindness and righteousness of the ruler (DE LA BOÉTIE, 1975).

On *Buffy*, the Initiative, as a representation of the armed forces, represents the government itself (*Primeval*, 4x21), upholding De la Boétie's elements for the pursuit of consent. For instance, the Initiative uses drugs, disguised as vitamins - which fit perfectly in the "opiates" concept - and the spread of a rationalist mentality to control its commandos and maintain their blind consent.

Critical Thinking¹⁵ is proposed on *Buffy* as a viable way to confront the Initiative's rationalist mentality. *Buffy* and the Scooby Gang are presented as something close to "the ones with clear minds and far-sighted spirit" (DE LA BOÉTIE, 1975, p. 60), who refuse to see only what is in front of them, without questioning. Through the process of education,

¹⁵ Critical Thinking is an intentional and reflexive judgement, shaped after meticulous observation and consideration of facts. It takes into account elements beyond logical analysis, including the application of concepts and rigorous principles, to evaluate possible actions and reactions to a situation (HITCHCOCK, 2018).

they attempt to enlighten each other and the people around them in order to break the blind consent mechanism.

Buffy's brief period at the Initiative elucidates that the individual has a choice to, if he wishes, not accept being submitted to another individual's or organization's wills. It is the second time Buffy's strong and questioning personality drives her into rejecting authoritarian organizations she has worked with. The first occasion happens during Season 3, when she severed all ties with the Watchers' Council¹⁶ (*Graduation Day, Part. One*, 3x21).

Her rupture with the Initiative proves the danger of trying to break the blind consent between its members, which will lead to an attempt of maintaining the government's power, or the Initiative's power, as De la Boétie explains in: "[I ask] that you support him [the government] no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces" (DE LA BOÉTIE, 1975, p. 49). Buffy could not change the structure of power, but at least, her critical way of thinking helped with Riley's mentality transformation.

A conversation between Riley and another commando, Forrest Gates (Leonard Roberts), exemplifies the preconceived notion the Initiative's members have about Buffy. The dialogue emphasizes the clash between Buffy's critical thinking, which had already influenced Riley, and the Initiative's rationalist mentality, represented here by Forrest:

RILEY: Professor Walsh tried to have Buffy killed.

FORREST: What? Did Buffy tell you that? I mean, do you have any proof?

RILEY: I saw enough to know it's true.

FORREST: I don't get it. Why?

RILEY: I don't know. Buffy thinks that she's getting too close to something. That Professor Walsh has some secret.

FORREST: I wouldn't put it past Buffy to get on Professor Walsh's bad side. She tends to put her nose where it doesn't belong.

RILEY: What?

FORREST: She's a pain. Always wanting to know "why this?" and "why that?"
(*Goodbye Iowa*, 4x14)

Now that Riley knows about Walsh's attempted murder, he gets confused about his role in the Initiative and whether he is fighting on the right side of this battle (*Goodbye Iowa*, 4x14). Forrest's preposterous reaction saying that: "[If Walsh] tried to kill Buffy, maybe Buffy needed killing" (*Goodbye Iowa*, 4x14), caused Riley to question his beliefs. For writer Douglas Petrie (1999), Riley was "this big highfalutin American metaphor, where he realizes that the government that he works for is dirty and he has to question his own team".

The apotheosis of his transformation takes place when the Initiative captures Oz and he tries to help him escape (*A New Moon Rising*, 4x19). This was the first time Riley decided to act and contradict superior orders. He finally starts his process of rejecting – at first instance

¹⁶ The Watchers' Council is an institution, composed of Watchers, dedicated to finding, training, giving orders and supervising potential slayers and the Slayer.

– the corruptive Initiative and its power structures that once ruled him, whilst recognizing that life is not necessarily “black and white”.

When confronted by his commanding officer, Colonel McNamara (Conor O’Farrell), about trying to rescue Oz, Buffy’s influence upon Riley’s change of behavior is evident. McNamara claims that Buffy and the Scooby Gang are bad influences, and that Riley should not be affiliated with them nor spend time with the group because “They’re anarchists” (*A New Moon Rising*, 4x19); thus, a threat to the Initiative.

Colonel McNamara appears to use a misconception of Anarchism, considering it as a synonym for disorder. In the dictionary, Anarchism can be found as “the political belief that there should be little or no formal or official organization to society, but that people should work freely together” (CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2020). Embracing a libertarian perspective, Rothbard defines an anarchist – or anarcho-capitalist - society as “one where there is no legal possibility for coercive aggression against the person or property of any individual” (FULLER, 2018, p. 35). Both Anarchism, in the broad sense, and Anarcho-capitalism, would mean the end of the state monopoly of force. However, there are no indications of the defense of this political belief throughout the show.

Buffy and the Scoobies succeeded on invading the Initiative’s facilities in multiple occasions (*Goodbye Iowa*, 4x14; *A New Moon Rising*, 4x19). All of these events exhibit attempts to destabilize the order imposed hitherto, which justifies the choice for misusing the term anarchists to identify them. At the end of *A New Moon Rising* (4x19), agreeing with all the actions led by Buffy and the Scooby Gang so far, Riley accepts the Colonel’s improper definition and mistakenly starts to consider himself an anarchist.

3.4. *Restless* (4x22) – Buffy’s impression on the government

Restless (4x22) is considered a masterpiece. One of Whedon’s experimental episodes¹⁷, it portrays surreal dreamscapes, as a way to express the four main characters’ - Buffy, Willow, Xander and Giles - insecurities and how they see themselves and each other. Differently from previous seasons, that ended with a battle climax between Buffy and the Big Bad of each respective season, *Restless* (4x22) presents a coda for the show as whole, recalling events from the past and foreshadowing events that will happen later on in the series (WHEDON, 2000). The episode relies almost entirely on allusion and symbolic resonance, as Joss Whedon explains: “It’s about combining the totally surreal with the totally mundane” (WHEDON et al., 2003).

In the previous episode, *Primeval* (4x21), Willow performs a magical joining spell that would combine each one of the Scooby Gang’s original members’ individual skills to invoke the spirit of the First Slayer, crafting a *Combo-Buffy* to defeat Adam. In *Restless* (4x22) the emotional effort necessary to invoke such primeval forces, has proved to lead to unfortunate

¹⁷Four episodes of *Buffy*, written and directed by Joss Whedon, are considered experimental episodes due to their innovative and *avant-garde* elements. The ‘Big Four’ include a music-free episode (*The Body*, 5x16); a silent episode (*Hush*, 4x10); a musical episode (*Once More, With Feeling*, 6x07); and a surrealistic dream-like episode (*Restless*, 4x22).

consequences. The spirit of the First Slayer starts to chase the four characters and tries to kill them in the dream realm.

Focusing on Buffy's dream sequence, the fear of abandonment, recurrent in her story arc, is the main insecurity portrayed in it (FIELD, 2017). In general, Buffy is afraid that fulfilling her duties and obligations as the Slayer will drive people she loves and cares about away from her, leaving her alone. One particular scene draws our attention for developing this fear in a way that unlocks a different one: Buffy's reservations regarding the government.

The scene in question refers to Buffy walking into a room, that resembles a military headquarter, where Riley and Adam - in his human form, before becoming a hybrid being - are talking and drawing up a plan for world domination. Interestingly, when Buffy questions if plotting world domination is a good thing, Riley answers: "Baby, we're the government. It's what we do" (*Restless*, 4x22). Then, when an alarm sounds, with a computer voice saying that some demons have escaped, Riley and Adam do not turn to Buffy for help and elaborate a plan by themselves, that consists on the construction of a fort made out of pillows.

These "two all American guys" (WHEDON, 2000) are a representation of the Initiative itself. Its inability to comprehend the Slayer powers, displayed in their choice to fight with their own weapons, even though they are clearly useless, and ignoring hers, explains why the Initiative failed (WHEDON, 2000). Also, when Buffy questions Adam about who he was before joining the Initiative, he answers: "Not a man among us can remember" (*Restless*, 4x22). This passage reinforces the idea of loss of human identity and individuality intrinsic to the Initiative. Essentially, that scene enhances Buffy's awareness of the drawbacks of rational mentality, which have been already discussed.

Additionally, one might say that Buffy creates an unconscious image of Riley in her dream. She expresses her concern about him not having fully severed ties with the Initiative she despises. This apparent clash of views elucidates the existence of a gulf between them that justifies, somehow, her fear of being abandoned again by another significant other: "[Riley is] playing Buffy's fear of what he could be, the government incarnate, the businessman, the suit, evil corporate CIA guy. This shows that the relationship is not entirely stable, and even though she loves him, in her dream he is someone who doesn't get her and who doesn't belong in her world." (WHEDON, 2000).

Further on, her subconscious suspicions are confirmed when Riley leaves Sunnydale to rejoin the armed forces (*Into the Woods*, 5x10), showing that he is not really an anarchist, as he claimed before.

After watching *Restless* (4x22), and analyzing this particular scene, a reading is proposed in which Buffy subconsciously idealizes the Initiative - thus the state -, personified in Riley and Adam, as an evil organization that has only one goal: dominating the world.

Conclusion

Surely, it is possible to analyze a few isolated anarchist and libertarian elements featured on the show, specifically during Season 4, as this article has already proved so far. Yet, it

would be imprudent to claim that the main characters in *Buffy* represent anarchist figures *per se*. Buffy, for example, fights the Initiative not because of what it represents – namely, the state – but because of specific actions they perpetrate, which she wholeheartedly disagrees and considers wrong. Without discoursing on the merit of it, she, and all other characters, do not discuss nor display traces of any specific political ideology, making it nearly impracticable to determine how they identify themselves under this aspect.

On the other hand, one particular episode (*Restless*, 4x22) allows the audience to get into the characters' minds and somehow understand their thoughts on a variety of subjects. Buffy's dream sequence, while exploring her deepest insecurities and fears, reveals her reservations in regard to the government. It does not provide, nonetheless, any conclusive evidence to affirm that she is a libertarian or an anarcho-capitalist figure. It can represent, at best, that she might embrace some libertarian principles, even without knowing it, by questioning government authority and breaking the mechanisms of voluntary servitude.

Buffy and the Scoobies' critical thinking, as opposed to the Initiative's rationalist mentality, illustrates a necessary step towards human emancipation from the state. Throughout history, several events have proved this element crucial in the pursuit of freedom and defense of individual liberties. Once, slavery was considered legal and socially accepted. The actions of a few men who decided to question the *status quo* resulted in the liberation of hundreds. Alongside with civil and women's rights movements in the 1950'-1970', and hundreds of other examples, these events evidence the difference that the lack of fear (that comes from constantly questioning authority and its dominant discourse) can make, as portrayed in *Buffy*.

Furthermore, Buffy's rise as an alternative law enforcement figure not only proves the inefficiency of Sunnydale's government, but represents the inefficiency of the state apparatus in general, on providing security to its citizens in real life. The spread of private security companies and neighborhood watch groups, as already discussed, substantiates this assumption. In fact, recent research indicates that in most countries worldwide, private security outnumbers the police (MCCARTHY, 2017).

The commendable rejection of Utilitarianism presented in *Buffy* also advocates for the importance of consistent moral and ethical personal principles to elaborate judgements. Buffy has a clear notion, constructed by herself, of what she considers right or wrong, and that guides her actions on gray panoramas. Buffy's abhorrence for the actions perpetrated by the Initiative can be compared to moments in history when vicious actions were carried out by the government against racial, ethnic, and religious groups, affecting innocent people in the name of a greater good. While Buffy had the discernment and the power to instantly evaluate the situation through her own lens and act, it has taken several years for persecuted minorities to organize and challenge governmental orders.

In conclusion, *Buffy* proves that there is no need for libertarian art in the same model of Nazi art (e.g., Nazi cinema), or socialist art (e.g., Socialist Realism). If a philosophical and political movement is consistent enough, its principles can be applied to any circumstance, without the need to hide in perfectly controlled scenarios. Hans-Hermann Hoppe (2013), for that matter, comprehends that it is not the political substance present in a work, or its absence,

that qualifies its value, even though art can, indeed, be used as a vehicle for political and philosophical propaganda:

[A] philosophical agenda is neither necessary to make for art — one can also tell a story for its own sake. Nor is a philosophical purpose sufficient to make for art. To make for art, a narrative must above all be characterized by truthfulness (in the widest sense of the term), by intelligibility, logical coherence, a mastery of language, expression and style, and a sense of humanity and of human justice: of agency and the intentional and the non-intentional in life, of right and wrong, and good and bad (HOPPE, 2013).

Joss Whedon and Co. made an outstanding job of not subjugating the ability of the audience to construct their own interpretations of the show, rejecting the display of direct political propaganda. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has already passed the test of time, considering that the issues discussed are still relevant 20 years later. The possibility of establishing a libertarian approach on the series, with the feasibility of further research being carried out on seasons other than Season 4, proves its flexibility to attract and captivate viewers from different ages, genders and political segments.

The reading proposed on this article for these allegories on *Buffy* makes it undeniable that the show leaves room for an approach that respects libertarian ethics in order to resolve hypothetical dilemmas. Despite proving to be optimally capable to guide moral judgements and decisions in a fictitious scenario, it does not mean that the same theoretical libertarian ideas would work perfectly in real life. However, it definitely brings out Libertarianism as a valuable philosophical alternative to be taken into account when looking for solutions to current issues.

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RECEIVED: JUNE 17 2020

APPROVED: JULY 19 2020