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“Look What Free Will Has Gotten You”

Isolation, Individuality, and Choice in *Angel*

Susanne E. Foster and James B. South

The “Jasmine arc” comprises six episodes at the end of season four of *Angel*.¹ These episodes detail, through a series of seemingly improbable events, the birth, rise, and death of a being called Jasmine (Gina Torres), a godlike creature brought into the world by Cordelia (Charisma Carpenter) and Angel’s son, Connor (Vincent Kartheiser). Once born, Jasmine exerts a near magical force over humans, causing them to worship her and follow her commands. In this enthralled state, her followers experience peace within themselves and with others. But as Angel (David Boreanaz) and his team realize, as one by one they are freed from Jasmine’s spell through contact with her blood, the peace and sense of fulfillment comes at a very high price. Among the significant philosophical issues raised by this sequence are three themes related to the human predicament. First, and fundamentally, is the way in which the subjective nature of the human perspective, the fact that the individual’s unique set of experiences influences the way the world appears to her, makes problematic the nature of an individual’s conception of the good life. Relatedly, the episodes dramatize the ways in which human subjectivity causes difficulties for the nature and possibility of community and love. Finally, in the portrayal of humans willing to give over to another being their own conception of the good, these episodes force us to confront the efficacy of human choice in the case of our most important commitments.

The Guiding Passage

Near the end of the arc, in an episode titled “Peace Out,” Connor talks with Cordelia, who is in a coma. Connor has protected Cordelia and Jasmine, but at the expense of his ties to his father and the rest of Angel’s group. This

one-sided conversation represents what we will call the "guiding passage." Connor's words:

You know—what this was all about? Protecting our baby—Jasmine—so she can be, and make this world the kind of place you wanted. And it is better. Not harsh and cruel—the way that Angel likes it so he has a reason to fight. 'Cause you know that's what he's about, him and the others. Finding reasons to fight. Like that's what gives their lives any meaning. The only damn thing! I'm not like them. I just—I want to stop. Stop fighting. I just want to rest. God, I want to rest. But I can't. It's not working, Cordy. I tried. I tried to believe. I wanted it. Went along with the—the flow. Jasmine, she's—she's bringing peace to everyone, purging all of their hate and anger. But not me. Not me! I know she's a lie. Jasmine. My whole life's been built on them. I just—I guess I thought this one was better.

Connor's words are moving. They move us because they evoke the pain and uncertainty of human life. We find ourselves thrust into the world, into a particular place and time, with a conception of the good, a set of values and goals, already given. From this necessarily limited perspective, we must act and give meaning to our lives by finding a position from which we can make choices and take responsibility for our actions. Yet the perspectival nature of human knowledge and the sense we have in retrospect that the choices we have made were made for reasons external to the choice—that is, who I am with all its local contingencies compels me to act based on my character and past experiences—undermine our sense of agency and threaten us with nihilism.

Even to the extent that we may be free to choose, our choice of actions is fraught with tensions. On the one hand, we must embrace our selves and the conception of the good that seems commensurate with our subjective perspective; that is, we must embrace our individuality. On the other hand, though, we also need to be recognized by others, to join a community, to love and be loved. One central aspect of a vision of the good is, then, the nature of love and concern and how we might connect to the other, whether that "other" is a group (humanity) or an individual. Such commitments, however, are possible only where a shared conception of the good is present. Thus, even under the best of circumstances, the individual is torn between the demands of individuality and the demands of conformity. In the Jasminic arc, the resolution of this tension takes one of three forms. One, which we

shall call the *Jasminic conception*, privileges communal membership over the individual. The second, which we shall call the *Connoric conception*, privileges the individual over communal membership. Finally, the *Angelic conception* insists on maintaining the creative tension between the individual and communal membership and learning to live with the competing demands of each.

A Philosophical Problem

The guiding passage exemplifies a philosophical problem that emerges from human experience: the need to find a vision of the good life to call one's own, a vision that shapes one's life and can provide meaning to that life. As Aristotle teaches, whenever we act, we aim at an end or goal, and those goals are given to us by our conception of the good.² But how much direct influence on our conception of the good can we have? Given our limited perspective and social embeddedness, a vision of the good is always present to us, often outside of our control. Being born in a particular place and time, individuals are raised with a set of cultural assumptions, and if they find themselves in a culture with strong authoritarian tendencies like a cult, their ability to question the assumptions is reduced further. Consider Jasmine's followers. Once under her influence, they have a vision of the good that has usurped their own prior conception. People whose lives were following another direction, or, perhaps, were directionless, suddenly find a new meaning to their lives: they live to serve Jasmine. So, too, they find a meaningful death in being sacrificed to and for Jasmine. This sacrifice makes their previously solitary lives rich in meaning, subsumable into a grand plan for the betterment of humanity and the glorification of Jasmine. Though they say their former lives lacked meaning, they seem incapable of genuinely comparing the two conceptions.

Wherever Jasmine goes, the humans who come into contact with her are immediately enraptured. She is beautiful and kind, but the power of her seduction is based on a far stronger human motive: the need to belong and be loved. Jasmine is able to see the most intimate thoughts and needs of her followers. She knows their names, and she offers the right words of comfort and praise.³ She relieves them of their individual burdens and troubles. Once her followers become a part of the "body Jasmine," their everyday cares slip away.⁴ In short, she offers them purpose, and their apparently empty lives take on a new meaning. They live to serve her and the vision of the good that she provides. As her influence spreads, she also provides tremendous social benefits. Those who serve Jasmine live in harmony with the rest of her

followers. Violence and crime disappear. So, too, will war, once her influence spreads. Government becomes unnecessary. Even those who, the viewer knows, most clearly belonged to a community with shared projects—the members of Team Angel—remark on the new level of meaning and purpose Jasmine gives to their lives. This is all the more startling to the viewer since, prior to Jasmine’s birth, they had been making the world better by fighting demons and other dark forces. Now, though, from what the viewer can gather, all they do is hang around Angel’s hotel, the Hyperion, waiting for Jasmine to call them to perform some task.

There is an even more puzzling feature of everyone’s acquiescence to Jasmine’s will. Her own articulation of the good for humanity seems both self-serving and trite: “You don’t have to do anything except love one another, although a temple would be nice. Something massive and awe-inspiring, yet warm and nurturing, celebrating the gentle pleasures of a peaceful, precious coexistence” (“Peace Out”). Jasmine does little to merit the worship she receives. Her activity extends as far as appearing to those who have not seen her—in order to bring them into her community; gorging herself on the adoration, and occasionally the lives, of her followers; and giving direction for the quashing of insurrection against herself. But how can she command the devotion of so many? Her message is rhetorically bland and philosophically thin: “I want to thank you for allowing me to speak with you. I come to you not as a leader or divinity, but as your partner in a venture to make this the best of all possible worlds, without borders, without hunger, war, or misery. A world built on love, respect, understanding, and, well, just enjoying one another” (“Peace Out”). Even before the veil of Jasmine’s beauty is lifted for the viewer, we are suspicious of her powers.

Seeing the Real Jasmine

Early in the arc, on one outing to eliminate vampires and other evildoers—soulless creatures who seem immune to Jasmine’s charms—Jasmine takes Fred (Amy Acker) aside for a personal conversation. Later, Fred recalls Jasmine’s invitation to name her: “I remember the first time she took me aside at that fight at the bowling alley. Me, pale, frail Winifred Burkle, sitting with a goddess, and she was asking me what her name should be” (“Sacrifice”). Fred, who had been fighting beside Angel for a season and a half, now finds her life’s meaning in this simple interaction with Jasmine. As Fred and Jasmine sit in the bowling alley, a vampire injures Jasmine. Fred, feeling distraught that Jasmine has been injured while in her care, offers to wash the blood out of Jasmine’s clothes. Back at the hotel, Fred scrubs and

scrubs, but the more she scrubs the more distraught and frantic she becomes. Her exposure to Jasmine's blood breaks the spell. The next time she sees Jasmine, the goddess has been transformed. In place of the beautiful and benevolent creature, Fred sees a maggot-riddled monster. No longer part of the "body Jasmine," Fred is no longer part of the community. Since Fred is now an outsider, Jasmine directs that she be hunted down. Wes (Alexis Denisof) and Gunn (J. August Richards) want to bring her back alive so she can be made to see what she has rejected. From their perspective, it is inconceivable that Fred could have run away because she saw Jasmine for what she really is. If they can just get her back in Jasmine's presence, she will be able to be part of the community again. But for Fred, the thrall has been broken. The conception of the good provided by Jasmine is seen to be rootless. In returning to her previous conception of the good, Fred now finds herself outside the community of her friends. She can relate only to those outside Jasmine's influence. But, and this is crucial, she does return to her previous vision of the good, the one that had provided her life with meaning and purpose and shaped her choices and actions: the mission to make the world better by destroying one monster at a time.

What makes Connor's situation as evidenced in the "guiding passage" so extreme, then, is that he admits that he does not have a particular vision of the good and cannot make himself believe in any particular vision of the good. Having been raised in a demon dimension by an enemy of Angel, Connor was never given love and acceptance. His upbringing taught him that no one was to be trusted—no one would work unselfishly to meet his needs. As a result, Connor seems intrinsically situated outside any community, and he knows such visions for what they are—lies. And because he does not and cannot embrace a vision of the good, he is bereft of community and paralyzed into inactivity. What does it mean to say that any vision of a good life is a lie? There are two relevant features of human experience that underwrite the kind of claim that Connor makes in the "guiding passage."

First, there's the fact that any person's vision of the good arises from and is situated in her particular perspective, and thus no one can have a "God's-eye" view of the good. That is, the individual sees only that part of the good visible from her epistemological perspective, and what she sees is distorted—those parts of the good closest to her experience seeming larger, those farther seeming smaller than they might otherwise, and none of the elements connected to other goods the way they might objectively be. Connectedly, there's the fact that any individual's vision of the good is tied up with contingent features of that individual's history, both those within her control (e.g., results of personal choices) and those outside of

her control (e.g., place of birth, sex, etc.). Hence, any particular vision of the good is largely determined by means that are not conducive to generating an objective truth.

Second, sharing a conception of the good, becoming part of a community that embraces a specific, but not particularized, vision of the good, means giving up the details of one's own vision generated by the particular circumstances of one's agency and experience. The process of entering a community, then, necessarily involves a measure of what Sartre, for example, would call "bad faith." According to Sartre, humans are beings whose existence precedes their essence. They have no given nature; hence there are, for them, no objective values. Through choosing to act, to value some particular set of goods, they create their own model of humanity. The person who accedes to a communal vision of the good with its corresponding set of values and goals, then, abandons the task of creating a particular model of the human. Further, people who act from communal visions abdicate responsibility for their actions.⁵ This is true not only for those who have given themselves over to a cult but for those whose choices are dictated by affiliation or commitment to an ideal. Gunn and Wes do not choose to hunt Fred; Jasmine tells them to do it.

The most extreme manifestation of this abandonment of one's responsibility to create values and choose actions takes place when Jasmine confronts Angel in a bookstore. Fred fires a bullet through Jasmine into Angel. Contact with Jasmine's blood causes Angel to see the real Jasmine. Angel flees with an apologetic Fred, who knows the devastating psychological impact of being ripped from the body Jasmine. Meanwhile, Jasmine, seeing her blood on the floor of the bookstore, realizes the danger to her plans if the blood is not cleaned. She directs the owner of the store, a conspiracy theorist who has named his store the "Magic Bullet," to burn it down. He happily complies, asking Jasmine if he should stay in the store while it burns. She does not bother to answer him, and so he stands in the flames until he is consumed. Here, even the subjective drive for self-preservation has been surrendered to Jasmine's good. The later scenes in which Jasmine speaks and acts directly through her followers are merely physical manifestations of the psychological surrender present in the Jasminic model.

The Human Need for Love

A central component of any vision of the good is participation in community, which is only possible through some mode of love. This need for community is characterized well by Plato in his *Symposium*.⁶ There Aristophanes

relates a myth about the origin of love. According to him, the first humans were double our current state, having four feet, four arms, and the like. In this powerful state, humans challenged the gods, and, to put down the insurrection and prevent future rebellions, Zeus split each human in half, rearranging most of their parts into the current form of human beings. The lesson extracted by Aristophanes from this myth is that humans are partial creatures, forever separated from what could make them whole. The possibility of happiness, then, is limited by and dependent on finding the other self whether the other is conceived of as an individual or a community. Like the creatures in the myth, we go through life suffering in isolation, desperate to find another self or other selves. In the Aristophanic myth, the wretched half-humans began to die of loneliness. In pity for their suffering and to preserve the race, Zeus rearranged human genitalia so that some unity between split humans became possible. But no form of human love seems to heal completely the wounds of our isolation.

One conception of love and community present in this arc is the Jasminic one. As a demon from another world that had worshiped Jasmine eons ago characterizes her: "She is the devourer . . . the song . . . the peace . . . the whole . . . and you try to name her." And he continues, "We loved her first." When Wesley asks him to define love, the demon is blunt in his response: "Same as all bodies. Same as everywhere. Love is sacrifice" ("Sacrifice"). The demon's equation of love and devouring can be construed literally. Jasmine is the devourer, maintaining her energy by eating a certain number of her followers each day. Even those who are not literally devoured, though, are incorporated into the overarching vision of Jasmine. Toward the beginning of the arc, Jasmine replaces her followers' conception of the good with her own and redirects their activities to serve her own ends. As her power grows, her followers become little more than automata through which she senses and speaks and moves. The isolation endemic to our limited perspective is one that makes us susceptible to the seduction by an ersatz whole, one in which we give up our particular conception of the good for the sake of connectedness and community. This model is a portrayal of love as bad faith. The individual does not truly act, but Jasmine acts through the individual. There is no genuine community, only the submersion of one individual into another. And sacrifice on this account is not an individual's choice to give up some part of her own good to preserve another individual, but rather the taking away of her good by another for some communal and, therefore, impersonal image of the good.

Another conception of love and sacrifice present in the arc is the one dramatized by Connor's actions and choices. At this conception's root is the

denial of the possibility of love as something given and able to be accepted by another. No matter how much Connor acts as if he is part of Jasmine's group, kneeling when Angel kneels before her and even allowing her to speak to him in his own mind, he is never able to find unity with the group—that is, to adopt Jasmine's conception of the good. No amount of wanting to love and work for Jasmine can bring him the connection he so craves, or the rest that he seeks. Though he asserts again and again that he is now part of something—that it is Angel and his team who are now outside ("Sacrifice")—the "guiding passage" shows his claim to be false. He cannot submerge himself within her vision and thus remains outside the body Jasmine. Connor's situation is extreme, but we all spend significant amounts of time feeling these moments of isolation. Connor's plight mirrors the Aristophanic myth in that in his experience of isolation, he knows that something is missing from his life. He has no genuine bond with other human beings. Connor's suffering and isolation are not redeemed, but remain meaningless.

The third form of love explored in the arc is more promising. At the end of the arc, Angel gives up his relationship to Connor in order that the boy be given a new past, free of the memories of the horrors of the Hell dimension in which he once lived and that have made him incapable of accepting and giving love. Where the Jasminic model of love involved the subsumption of the individual vision of the good under a communal vision, on the Angelic model, love is formed intersubjectively, each person giving and taking various elements to form a shared conception of the good. Although the members of Angel's Team—Fred, Wes, Gunn, Lorne—each have their own projects and concerns, which often cause tensions within the group, they are nonetheless able to work together and flourish as a kind of extended family based on some shared conception of the importance of the work they do.

On this third model, then, the uniqueness of the other is acknowledged. Projects and a conception of the good are shared. Like the demon mentioned above who espouses the Jasminic model, Angel can say that love is or can require sacrifice. Here, though, the sacrifice is not a matter of devouring another or of submerging an individual's good into a common vision, which would make choice meaningless. Angel's sacrifice is for the sake of a particular person, Connor, and is consistent with his own previous conception of the good and based on his genuine insight and knowledge of Connor's needs. On this model, the other is seen as individual and the good sought is particular. Its goal is both union with the beloved and the flourishing of the beloved. Sacrifice here risks failure because the other is not in our control and may choose either not to return the love or may fail to flourish from our sacrifice. In this case, what Angel sacrifices is precisely

the possibility of a loving relationship with Connor or the possibility that Connor will know he has made this sacrifice. Though Angel's sacrifice fails to achieve a community of love with Connor, it succeeds to the extent that it provides Connor with the capacity to love and to choose a conception of the good and a meaningful path for his life, which he had previously lacked.

Freedom and Choice

Paralleling these three conceptions of love are three different conceptions of the reality and importance of human freedom and choice. From the Jasminic perspective, human freedom is an illusion. Choice, or at least significant choice, is controlled and determined by powers outside the agent. Skip (David Denman), a demon, articulates this view well in a conversation with Angel and his team: "You really think it stops with her, amigo? You have any concept of how many lines have to intersect in order for a thing like this to play out? How many events have to be nudged in just the right direction? Leaving Pylea. Your sister. Opening the wrong book. Sleeping with the enemy. Gosh, I love a story with scope." Indeed, in the case of Cordelia, Connor, and Jasmine, as Skip explains, the real powers running the show provided various misdirections and disinformation to provide the illusion of human choice. The possibility of genuine human choice—one not controlled by forces outside the agent—is called into question repeatedly.

Furthermore, this illusion of freedom is tied to elements destructive of the human good. At the beginning of the arc, Connor is torn between his mother's plea that he follow his own heart and let the innocent go and Cordelia's need for an innocent to be sacrificed in order to bring forth Jasmine's birth. Cordelia, fighting to bend Connor to her own will—or that of the powers working through her—argues that Darla (Julie Benz), Connor's mother, represents more of Angel's lies, lies designed to isolate Connor and take him away from the community of Cordelia and their child. The viewer knows that in fact Darla had sacrificed her own life to let Connor live and thus represents the efficacy of choice. Yet Cordelia explains Darla's appearance to Connor now by reference to magic, as if Connor's possibility for choice is being taken away by Angel. She adds the claim that it is by submitting to the powers, that is, by surrendering one's own choice and conception of the good, that life can become meaningful. The death of the innocent girl will raise the girl's life above the meaninglessness of ordinary life as she becomes part of the grand purpose of bringing Jasmine into the world. In other words, on this view, freedom, even if possible, is destructive of meaning and community since real meaning comes from submission to

a higher plan. This stark juxtaposition of possibilities for meaning within human freedom is where all the issues we've discussed come into clearest focus. The most powerful statement of this contrast comes from Jasmine after her defeat: "No. No, Angel. There are no absolutes. No right and wrong. Haven't you learned anything working for the Powers? There are only choices. I offered paradise. You chose this! . . . And look what free will has gotten you" ("Peace Out").

Throughout the arc, we are presented with apparent choices. Various characters believe they have it within their power to choose one of two paths. But even if our choices, or our important choices at least, are not predetermined by a fate or the powers, humans may not be free. Connor's situation and his nihilism make it clear that genuine choice must rest on more than choosing under conditions that are underdetermined. Because he cannot find reasons to embrace a conception of the good or to enter a community, his choices are reduced ultimately to chance; that is, they are random. In the choice between completing Cordelia's wishes or recognizing the meaning of sacrifice as Darla describes it, Connor's choice to sacrifice the innocent does not seem to be the result of thought but rather simply an impulsive decision. He chooses and acts, and his reaction to the death of the girl makes it clear that he has not fully embraced the consequence of his choice. The "guiding passage" shows that he has no conception of the good guiding his choices. He keeps searching in vain for something to believe in, something to give his choices and his life meaning. As Nietzsche says: "Apart from the ascetic ideal, man, the human animal, had no meaning so far. His existence on earth contained no goal; 'why man at all?'—was the question without answer; the will for man and earth was lacking; behind every great human destiny there sounded as a refrain a yet greater 'in vain!' This is precisely what the ascetic ideal means: that something was lacking, that man was surrounded by a fearful void—he did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he suffered from the problem of his meaning."⁷ At the end of the arc, Connor's actions have not helped him achieve a vision of the good, and his choices remain arbitrary. Faced with the struggle between his father, Angel, and his daughter, Jasmine, he "chooses" Angel and crushes Jasmine's skull with a single blow. But, as Angel remarks: "Jasmine's dead. I brought back her name and her powers were destroyed. Connor killed her. I've never seen him like this. He wasn't hurt or angry, he just killed her. And his face, it—it was just blank, like he had nothing left" ("Peace Out"). In his choice of Angel over Jasmine, Connor has no reason for choosing one over the other—no vision of the good shaping his view of the world, and no illusions to comfort him. Like the suffering humanity discussed by Nietzsche,

Connor is on the edge of suicidal nihilism, and like that humanity, Connor simply wills. But this arbitrary choice is no choice at all, as is evident if we contrast it with Angel's choice at the end of the arc.

The third conception of choice present in this arc is articulated by Angel in response to Jasmine's taunt that he rejected her offer of paradise and that, as a result of his "free" choice, he has doomed humans to a life of war, strife, and competition. Angel explains that he's chosen to rid the world of Jasmine's power "because I could. Because that's what you took away from us. Choice." He continues: "Hey, I didn't say we were smart. I said it's our right. It's what makes us human." Angel as much as admits here that freedom may be at the root of isolation, suffering, and conflict since true freedom stems from a necessarily unique subjective perspective and its corresponding conception of the good. Embracing one's own conception of the good leaves open the possibility and probability of deep disagreements with others whose perspectives differ. Our choices will be at odds with one another. We will end up at war. But, meaningful choices, choices between things we value based on our subjective perspective, are fundamental to being human.

The Whedonverse never allows clear and easy answers. There is, of course, a standard philosophical objection to free will: namely, the determinist objection. On that view, our perspective is not of our own making but rather results from our having been born into a particular place and time; it is thrust upon us, as it were. And in being thrust into this place and time with its history of causes, all our thoughts, actions, and effects, down to the molecular level, are simply the result of all previous causal interactions. Like our perspective, our vision of the good is the result of external forces. But, if we are not responsible for our beliefs or vision of the good, then the difference between the Jasminic model and the Angelic model is whether the agent is controlled by a predetermined group vision or a predetermined individual vision of the good. It is significant that this is a concern not raised in the arc. It is as though Whedon and his colleagues simply do not care about this objection. Instead, their concern is with a second challenge to the Angelic conception of free choice: namely, the threat of other, more powerful "agents," whether those agents are "gods," as they often are in the Whedonverse, or, in our reality, social structures that threaten to annihilate individuality. For example, on many forms individuals are asked to identify their ethnicity by checking one box. This practice effectively denies the possibility of biracial parentage. It is a genuine question whether there can be real freedom under such situations. As we saw above, the demon Skip asserts that the lives of Angel's team have been controlled to bring about the birth of Jasmine. Is freedom of choice an illusion? Gunn asserts that it is not: "Then

we'll kick it over and start a new game. Look, monochrome can yap all he wants about no-name's cosmic plan, but here's a little something I picked up rubbing mojos these past couple of years. The final score can't be rigged. I don't care how many players you grease, that last shot always comes up a question mark. But here's the thing—you never know when you're taking it. It could be when you're duking it out with the Legion of Doom, or just crossing the street deciding where to have brunch. So you just treat it all like it was up to you—the world in the balance—'cause you never know when it is" ("Inside Out"). It is, at the end of the day, unclear whether humans choose freely, but nonetheless we must act as if we do, both because our fate may be within our own power in spite of the Jasmine-like threat of social constraints and because embracing a conception of the good and acting on it is the only remedy to the paralysis of the nihilism that overcomes Connor.

The Price of Choice

Though our world is not one in which a goddess walks among us stripping us of our free will and particular conception of the good, we are nonetheless subject to the type of isolation and loneliness experienced by Connor, and in trying to come to terms with that from our necessarily limited perspectives, we find ourselves negotiating the challenge of connection with others with varying degrees of success. One way we find ourselves losing our individual identity is falling in with various forms of conformity. In the arc, the proprietor of the occult bookstore the Magic Bullet is an extreme example of our tendency to lose our self in a story that seems bigger than the lonely self and can provide our life with a larger meaning. While we might not all obsess over the Kennedy assassination, there remains a susceptibility in human nature to find ourselves lost by means of Sartrean "bad faith." John Stuart Mill, in *On Liberty*, shows us the stakes that the arc has dramatized:

In our times, . . . every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. . . . [Instead of asking] what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character and disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive? They ask themselves, what is suitable to my position? what is usually done by persons of my station and pecuniary circumstances? or (worse still) what is usually done by persons of a station and circumstances superior to mine? . . . It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do

for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; they like in crowds; they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes: until by dint of not following their own nature, they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own.⁸

Under these sorts of social conditions, it is not surprising that we are prone to developing a Jasminic conception of community, with its deformed requirements for love and its suppression of freedom. Nor should it be surprising that those who cannot conform feel forever trapped in isolation and separated from the human community, as Connor does. The challenge thrown down by this arc is to develop a conception of community that acknowledges the freedom and uniqueness of each of us. At the end of the arc, Angel chooses to make a new future for Connor without Connor's input or permission. He chooses for Connor the "ordinary" life of a teenager in a two-parent family, and Connor's memory of his hellish past is erased. It may be that Connor's brokenness, shown throughout the arc, makes this a good choice for Connor, and Connor's brokenness may preclude the possibility of his own participation in the choice through consent. But it dramatizes how fragile is an individual's connection to a community and meaningful projects. At the same time, Angel's choice provides us with an image of what genuine choice and love can look like in the Whedonverse. Angel's decision to withdraw connection from a person who is an essential part of his life and to do it for the good of that person, presents us with an example of free choice, but it inflects that example with the notion of loving sacrifice. Meaningful choice may be possible, but its price is dear.

Notes

1. These episodes are: "Inside Out," "Shiny Happy People," "Magic Bullet," "Sacrifice," "Peace Out," and "Home." As the title "Inside Out" would suggest, these episodes reorient the plot of the season in a complex way. Revealing that the Cordelia present throughout season four was not really Cordelia, but some other creature inside her making her direct things, forces the viewer to reinterpret Cordelia's prior actions.

2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a1–22 and 1112b11–13a2.

3. This feature of Jasmine's power is most evident in "Magic Bullet," where Angel asks her, "No, I mean, how is it that you always know exactly what each person needs to hear?" and Jasmine replies: "Just look into their hearts. And sometimes, it's right on their face."

4. The phrase "body Jasmine" will be used throughout the chapter to refer to the fact that she requires the submersion of an individual's will and action into her own.

5. Sartre's most helpful discussion of the notion of these issues appears in "Existentialism Is a Humanism," which can be found in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: New American Library, 1975), 345–69. Sartre's extended discussion of bad faith occurs in *Being and Nothingness*, pt. 1, chap. 2.

6. Aristophanes' story in the *Symposium* appears at 189d–192e.

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1969), 162, emphasis in the original.

8. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Elizabeth Rapaport (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), 58–59.