

"Spare me the endurance of endless time"
– the Influence of Christian and Buddhist Ethics on the View of Immortality in
the TV Series *Doctor Who*

Leena Vuolteenaho
Pro Gradu Thesis
English Philology
University of Oulu
Spring 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. DATA, METHODOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY	5
2.1. <i>Data and methodology</i>	5
2.2. <i>Notes on terminology</i>	10
3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	12
3.1. Doctor Who	12
3.1.1. <i>About the series</i>	12
3.1.2. <i>Doctor Who and religion</i>	16
3.2. <i>The ethics of immortality</i>	20
3.3. <i>Christian ethics</i>	25
3.4. <i>Buddhist ethics</i>	29
4. ANALYSIS OF EPISODES	34
4.1. <i>Villains after immortality</i>	34
4.1.1. <i>“The Five Doctors”</i>	34
4.1.2. <i>“Mawdryn Undead”</i>	39
4.2. <i>Immoral immortals: “Enlightenment”</i>	44
4.3. <i>The Doctors’ allies and immortality</i>	49
4.3.1. <i>“Fathers’ Day”</i>	50
4.3.2. <i>“The Parting of the Ways”</i>	53
4.4. <i>The Doctor coping with (im)mortality</i>	55
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	62
5.1. <i>Summary of findings and discussion</i>	62
5.2. <i>Ideas for further studies and applications</i>	66
5.3. <i>Conclusion</i>	67

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of religion in what is often described as 'secularised' contemporary western society is a topic of continuing interest and debate. With the diminished significance of the church in decision-making and guiding public opinion, some see religion as a relic of the past and as of little to no importance for the average present-day inhabitant of a western country. However, it is possible to detect the influence of religion on cultural products of virtually any kind – from commercials to arguments employed in a debate, and from fashion statements to television series. Whether the inclusion of religious influences is deliberate or done unwittingly is at times quite difficult to establish. This in and of itself suggests that religion is in some way relevant in terms of understanding present-day popular culture in the western world, even if the instances in which it manifests itself were accidental rather than intentional.

The purpose of this thesis is to shed light on the influence of religion on contemporary entertainment, and more specifically, to examine the way in which religion influences the ethical stances taken by contemporary works of fiction. The work of fiction under observation, British science-fiction television series *Doctor Who*, is a veteran of British television entertainment, having premiered some 50 years ago. A long-running, well-loved series such as *Doctor Who* not only provides plenty of material for study, but may also serve as an indicator of how ethical arguments presented in works of fiction in general might be influenced by religion.

Although not explicitly religious in content, *Doctor Who* contains elements strongly reminiscent of those encountered in world religions, most prominently Christianity and Buddhism. The influences of religious thinking and teachings are especially discernible in the treatment of perennial ethical issues such as those revolving around life and death. This thesis focuses on the question of immortality as an ethical issue, more specifically on the ways in which the treatment of immortality in *Doctor Who* reflects the views of Christianity and

Buddhism on the issue. The topic is then explored by way of a selection of episodes focusing on the often-problematic question of eternal life in the context of a sci-fi television series.

2. DATA, METHODOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY

This section presents the material serving as the primary data for this study, and introduces the methodology employed to examine the data, with reference to research already available on topics close to that of this thesis. Some notes are also made on the use of terminology in cases demanding that a term be specifically defined in order to avoid confusion.

2.1. Data and methodology

This thesis examines the ways in which *Doctor Who's* approach towards immortality has been influenced by views upheld by Christianity and Buddhism, the hypothesis being that although the series has no explicit religious stance or agenda, its attitude regarding ethical issues and dilemmas is informed by what religions (namely, the two abovementioned world religions) teach regarding the issue. Furthermore, the fact that the series draws on both Christian and Buddhist influences in its mythology – and presumably in its ethical standpoints as well – allows for comparison between what the two religions teach, how the teachings both differ from and resemble each other, and how, if at all, the portrayal of Christian and Buddhist ideas differs in the series. A further presumption regarding the influence of Christianity and Buddhism is that given the prevalence of Christianity-based values in western society, the effects of Christian ethics are more prominently discernible.

As Bauman (2005) concludes from a study of fictitious depictions of the Holocaust, works of fiction often serve as conveyors of values and moral stances. Although arguably more removed from the audience's reality than many other genres of fiction in terms of setting and circumstances, science fiction has a tendency to address profound ethical and existential questions pertinent in the time of the work's creation. In fact, according to Turner and Upson (2010: 286), science fiction inherently offers a unique medium for

confronting and discussing ethical dilemmas familiar from everyday reality, but with the added possibility of stripping the core issue at hand of the various complicated implications and follow-up questions it entails in reality. In other words, Turner and Upson suggest that science fiction functions in a way similar to so-called thought experiments: both aim to isolate the issue or problem under inspection in order to better highlight it and address only the aspects that are relevant at the moment, without the need to take all possible real-life implications or related issues into consideration.

In thought experiments, isolating the problem is achieved by limiting the scenario to only include what is necessary to illustrate a certain point, as seen in classic thought experiments such as those devised by Einstein for the purposes of explaining the theory of general relativity. The thought experiments, involving making length measurements on the surface of a rotating spinning wheel, and pulling an enclosed room upward in outer space, concisely summarise and simplify a complex theory in creating a situation practically impossible to stage in reality. (Kennedy 2003: 144–145.) In science fiction, a real-life issue may likewise be placed in an environment and situation so far removed from the real world that the difference in circumstances allows for the examination of an ethical dilemma without requiring that all issues and complications related to it in reality be addressed as well. Yet as a genre of fiction, sci-fi allows for the inclusion of drama, suspense, humour, and human-interest elements alongside the ethical discussion to make the story effective, memorable, and enjoyable as a work of fiction, in a way that a standalone thought experiment, no matter how apt or enlightening, is unlikely to be viewed.

That *Doctor Who* is a science-fiction series means that in terms of narrative solutions and plot twists, the possibilities of the series to tell its stories are virtually endless; this freedom extends to addressing ethical problems that are in real life intertwined with complex societal, medical, and psychological considerations, or simply made impossible by the laws of physics – in other words, the *practical* constraints of reality normally hinder the free exploration of

the *theoretical* implications of said problems. *Doctor Who*, on the other hand, is largely free to create its own rules and examine a question such as immortality according to those rules, and also free to ignore all others. This freedom makes it a supremely useful thought experiment for the researcher interested in ethical considerations and justifications in principle, rather than their real-life applications.

Despite the Doctor's adventures possibly being escapist and fantastical, the writers and production crew base the ethical attitudes portrayed in the series on those upheld in reality as well. Although there are several examples of morally ambiguous antiheroes in recent television series such as *Dexter*, *Damages*, and *The Sopranos* (Bettridge 2010), the appeal of the antihero is usually based on the audience recognising his or her moral failings but supporting the character in spite of them; a series completely creating its own set of ethics, with no basis on or regard for what the viewers see as right or wrong, would in all likelihood be much more alienating than armies of Daleks or Time Lords in flying police boxes. Like any useful thought experiment, then, an episode of *Doctor Who* serves as an environment in which real-life problems may be examined isolated from factors that would disrupt the examination in reality.

The primary data for the study consists of televised episodes of *Doctor Who*, both from the so-called 'Classic' series from the first episode to the initial cancellation of the series (1963–1989), and the 'Revived' or 'New' series (2005–); since both exist in the same universe – the latter recognises the existence of the former and follows the same rules and mythology – there is in fact no need to differentiate between the two. The analysis is divided into four subsections, based on the type of character whose relationship with eternal life is being examined: the first one deals with villains pursuing immortality, and the second with ones established as immortal from the beginning; the third focuses on the Doctor's friends and allies facing the prospect of avoiding death; and finally, the fourth contemplates the (near-)immortality of the Doctor himself.

Science fiction is a fruitful and popular topic of academic research: theses produced between 2010 and 2012 by students of English Philology at the University of Oulu alone include studies on works of science fiction by Ursula K. Le Guin (Lehtiniemi 2010) and Douglas Adams (Iisakka 2011), as well as on the television series *Stargate SG-1* (Meriläinen 2012). Internationally, *Doctor Who* has been the subject of some academic research, such as Orthia's (2010) PhD thesis on the democratisation of science in the series. In addition, several books have been written on *Doctor Who*, including ones focusing on the philosophy of the series (for example, Lewis & Smithka (2010) and Layton (2012)). There is even an edited collection of articles aimed at a popular-academic audience planned on the topic of *Doctor Who* and religion (Crome & McGrath 2012). However, at present there is little material available concentrating on the religious aspects of *Doctor Who*. Finally, many works on the ethics of medicine appear to omit the question of life extension and/or immortality completely. All of the abovementioned observations regarding previously existing material on the topic, alongside considerable personal interest in *Doctor Who*, religion, and ethics, have led to the study at hand taking the approach it does.

The episodes under examination have been selected on the basis of their relevance to the topic. The aim of the study, then, is not to examine how prevalent the question of immortality, or the influence of Christian or Buddhist ethics, is in the series as a whole; since the data has been specifically selected to fit the purpose, it understandably contains more of these elements than a random sample from the series would, and the study does not therefore necessarily suggest that *Doctor Who* is an exceptionally Christian-or Buddhist-themed series compared to others. Furthermore, the selection of episodes has been subjective, meaning that the episodes chosen for analysis were deemed justifiably relevant by the author of the study. Another author might have excluded some of these episodes, or included some not discussed here. With some 800 televised episodes, plus audio adventures, novelisations, and many other formats, to choose from, there are plenty of possibilities.

The approach of the study is qualitative: the focus is on the content of the episodes in terms of how the question of immortality is treated (as opposed to quantifiable data such as the number of certain types of references), how Christian and/or Buddhist influences manifest themselves, and what appears to have influenced the ethical stance on the issue as presented in the series. The framework of Christian and Buddhist ethics by which the examples from the series are examined is based on literature concerning the two faiths respectively. It should be noted that describing the study as qualitative is by no means to suggest that it aims to be *prescriptive*, or to make value judgments regarding Christian or Buddhist ethics or the amount of influence they appear to have on the series; the purpose of the study is to observe and analyse, not make prescriptive statements. The only such statement made here is that the author of the study firmly believes the topic of religion in popular culture and the media to merit a great deal of research in the future.

It is necessary to keep in mind that both Christianity and Buddhism are world religions with millions (in the case of Christianity, billions) of adherents throughout the world; therefore, any statement made regarding either faith is inevitably a generalisation. The statements made in this thesis aim to represent views based on what might be considered the core teachings of the faith, not those of individual denominations or adherents; the starting point is in 'Christian' or 'Buddhist' ethics in general, however sweeping such a statement might at times appear to be. The focus is on examining the differences and similarities between what the faiths have to say about immortality, as well as the ways in which these views are represented in *Doctor Who*, and in order to enable this, the teachings of the faiths have to be condensed to their most fundamental elements. As a result, the reader should bear in mind that the views regarding immortality presented here do not necessarily represent those of individual Christians or Buddhists, and that there might be some variation between different Christian or Buddhist denominations as well. They do, however, aim to do justice to what the general stance of these two religions, respectively, is on the topic.

When I began the study, I was familiar with the primary data, having watched the series before. Knowing the episodes beforehand enabled me to choose relevant episodes on which to base my study prior to entering the analysis stage. On the one hand, this made it possible to concentrate solely on episodes with relevant content, with no need to go through the entire series in order to find suitable examples. On the other hand, being already familiar with the material may have guided my selections, and had I been watching the series for the first time, I may have found pertinent elements in episodes that did not make such an impression upon initial viewing with no study-related agenda. Whatever the case may be, the subjective nature of the data-selection process should be noted and taken into account.

2.2. Notes on terminology

There are some frequently used terms in this thesis whose specific meaning in this context requires clarification. The aim is to be consistent and to avoid confusion in the reader in cases allowing for several interpretations for a certain term.

When discussing the stories and their religious implications, I often refer to the characters featured in them as 'human' in order to address religious issues such as human nature or the relationship between God and humankind. Strictly speaking, most of the characters are of course not human, but Time Lords, Eternals, or other extraterrestrial beings. However, since they are featured in stories that address issues pertinent to the human experience, it is my opinion that they can be used as representatives of humans when discussing scenarios with religious implications. For the purposes of this thesis, then, the anthropomorphic aliens featured in the stories will largely be treated and referred to as human.

On use of the terms 'good' and 'evil': the definition of the terms would merit a philosophical debate in its own right, and is quite beyond the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of the study, the term 'good' (mostly in single quotation marks to avoid confusion with other meanings of the word) is used to refer to characters on the same side of the good/evil divide as the Doctor (some forays into the dark side notwithstanding, such as that seen in the story "The Invasion of Time" (1978)). Conversely, 'evil', 'villain', and similar terms are used to signify characters who oppose the Doctor and his allies, and whose actions often entail harm done to others in the interest of personal gain. Referring to a character as 'good', then, is not for example a statement regarding the relative quality of the character as an artistic creation (i.e. a well-realised character), but an indication of the character's position in the good/evil paradigm.

On use of the terms 'ethics' and 'morals': following the practice of Hallamaa (1994: 87), I mostly use the terms as interchangeable, although at times ethics is used to signify the theoretical study of issues regarding morality, and morals to discuss the real-life occurrence of these issues.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical framework established in this section serves as the backdrop against which specific examples from *Doctor Who* are then examined. Concepts such as *Doctor Who* the television series, immortality as an ethical issue, and Christian and Buddhist ethics, respectively, are introduced, with the focus on the relevance of these concepts to the thesis at hand.

3.1. *Doctor Who*

In order to concentrate on the finer points of *Doctor Who*, some general knowledge regarding the series is required. The following is a brief introduction to the world of *Doctor Who* that concludes with an overview of the series' relationship with religion.

3.1.1. *About the series*

For the British viewer, *Doctor Who* is a television staple and a part of the national consciousness. Since the first episode was first aired on November 23rd 1963, the series has become a favourite with science-fiction enthusiasts and the general public alike (Leach 2009: 1). Although *Doctor Who* was originally devised as an entertaining vehicle for history and science education aimed at children (Cook & Wright 2006: 8), it has gained a sizeable audience across age groups and, especially in recent years, national borders. Simultaneously, as Levy (1985: 76) notes, the protagonist, a "flamboyant, enigmatic figure", "has clearly joined that small pantheon of fantasy folk heroes who, like Tarzan, Flash Gordon, and Mr. Spock, have virtually taken on a life of their own". Because of its established position in the national cultural consciousness, in the form of characters and concepts that are today considered general cultural knowledge in Britain as well as, to a slightly lesser degree, in other Anglophone countries, the series is often regarded as an 'institution' of the BBC: as Tulloch & Jenkins (1995: 69) summarise the

experience of University of New South Wales students, "nearly everybody knows about it, knows something about its characters". That the Doctor is such a recognisable and well-loved character is particularly remarkable considering that both his appearance and his personality have undergone a total transformation almost a dozen times during the run of the series.

True to the tradition of science fiction, the premise of the series is both fairly straightforward and highly improbable: it follows the adventures of an eccentric humanoid alien known simply as the Doctor, who travels through time and space in a vessel (with the outward appearance of a blue 1960s British police box) called the TARDIS, short for "Time And Relative Dimension In Space" (Levy 1985: 77). Not much is revealed about him when he is introduced in the very first episode, "An Unearthly Child"; the episode title refers to the Doctor's granddaughter Susan (a series regular for the first season and a half), and the Doctor is rather a mysterious figure in the background than a true protagonist.

Gradually, more is learned about the Doctor as a character: he belongs to a race called the Time Lords (humanoid apart from a few distinctive characteristics, most notably having two hearts) from the planet Gallifrey (Levy 1985: 76), and has left his home because he disagrees with the Time Lords' policy of supervising the actions of other races across the universe with no permission to interfere in any way. As the Doctor says to his fellow Time Lords in the story "The War Games" (1969), "All these evils I have fought, while you have done nothing but observe! True, I am guilty of interference. Just as you are guilty of failing to use your great powers to help those in need!" Since leaving Gallifrey (which is later destroyed in the Time War against a ruthless alien race called the Daleks, leaving the Doctor and his archnemesis the Master the last known surviving Time Lords), the Doctor has mostly been a free agent with a penchant for finding himself in the unlikeliest of predicaments. Characters on the Doctor's side (as opposed to antagonists) joining the Doctor on his travels and adventures are generally referred to by the public simply as

companions; as Shaw (2011) points out, an all-encompassing definition of 'companion' is notoriously problematic in terms of individual cases, but the term is useful in referring generally to a large portion of the Doctor's allies.

The above quotation from "The War Games" is a telling example of the Doctor's moral character in general: altruism as well as the urge to help the oppressed and stand up against injustice are, alongside scientific curiosity, among his most consistent personality traits (Levy 1985: 76–77). As the Doctor himself tells companion Clara in the episode "The Rings of Akhaten" (2013): "There is one thing you need to know about travelling with me – well, one thing apart from the blue box and the two hearts – *we dont walk away.*" In addition to the Doctor's conscience and curiosity, the guiding force for much of the early years of the series was chance: when introduced to the public, the Doctor is initially unable to control where (and when) he lands his malfunctioning TARDIS. For the first few seasons, then, the Doctor and his companions have no say in where they are transported once the TARDIS is in motion; this element was later removed, giving the Doctor more control over his direction (Anders 2010), although even in recent years, he occasionally finds himself quite far from his intended destination.

It is suggested in the story "The Doctor's Wife" (2011) that it may in fact be the TARDIS, established as at heart a sentient being, that ultimately controls the Doctor's travels: temporarily in human form, the TARDIS tells the Doctor that although it has not always taken the Doctor where he wanted to go, it always took him where he "*needed to*" (Martin 2011). The Doctor's adventures across time and space are therefore propelled both by the Doctor himself and by higher powers beyond his control, as well as sheer chance. All of this in and of itself implies that responsibility for the events that unfold over the course of the series are neither completely out of the Doctor's control nor fully his own doing. In terms of considering the ethical stances promoted in the series, such an observation is significant, as it suggests that the protagonist is not totally

exempt from responsibility for the circumstances he finds himself in, but that there are higher powers at work that cannot be controlled as well.

One of the most unique qualities of the Doctor (and of the Time Lords in general) is the ability to regenerate – in other words, avoid death in an otherwise fatal situation by being, in effect, transformed into a whole new person. The new form (referred to as 'regeneration' in the series and by fans) is essentially the same person as the one it replaces, with the same memories and fundamental personality traits, such as the scientific curiosity and altruism pointed out by Levy (1985) above; however, each regeneration has its own idiosyncrasies, and consequently, each Doctor is virtually his (so far, each regeneration has been male) own character.

Originally introduced as an experimental way of continuing the series once the original actor portraying the Doctor, William Hartnell, was forced to retire for health reasons, regeneration proved a huge success among viewers (Levy 1985: 76), and the Doctor currently appearing in the series at the time of writing (2013) is the 11th overall. The concept of regeneration is an integral part of the mythology of the series, and of many plotlines, and in addition to forming a premise for imaginative adventures, poses a wealth of philosophical and ethical questions for the viewer's consideration. The significance of the Doctor's ability to regenerate from an ethical perspective is further discussed in section 4.4. Since the regenerations have no individual names, reference is usually made to them by number, e.g. *the Ninth Doctor*; this practice is adhered to in this thesis as well.

Over the course of the more than 30 televised seasons of the series, as well as countless tie-in novels, audio novels, comics, and other media, the Doctor has travelled back and forth in time, visited numerous countries on his favourite planet Earth as well as other planets, and even ventured outside our universe into Exo-Space and into parallel dimensions, been involved in various temporal paradoxes, and met, battled, and/or befriended a wide variety of both people

(including, but not limited to, historical figures such as Marco Polo, Charles Dickens, Queen Victoria, and Winston Churchill) and creatures from all corners of eternity. With the freedom allowed by the premise and genre of the series, *Doctor Who* has been able to explore a host of scenarios and issues both wildly imaginative and relevant to the viewer – in a manner typical of science fiction, often at the same time. On the one hand, the examination of ethical questions in the context of a sci-fi series enables viewers to participate in the ethical debate; on the other hand, it reflects the type of questions deemed worthy of discussion by the makers (and, by implication, the audience) of the series. *Doctor Who* fulfills both duties on a regular basis.

3.1.2. *Doctor Who and religion*

Although *Doctor Who* has had dozens of scriptwriters over the course of its remarkably long run, resulting in a wide array of viewpoints influenced by both the production staff and the time period, some general tendencies can be seen. Over the years, *Doctor Who's* overall attitude towards religion can be described as mostly favourable. Unlike, for instance, the original *Star Trek*, that often depicts religion as irrational, unnecessary, or even detrimental to the achievement of full human greatness (Pearson 1999: 14), *Doctor Who* does not portray religious faith or behaviour as inherently reprehensible or dangerous. While religious cults and corrupt religious leaders are often revealed to be villainous – as, for example, in the stories "The Aztecs" (1964) and "Meglos" (1980) – the implication is usually not that all religion is inevitably used for evil; rather, the series appears to make a distinction between *using* religion for one's own (evil) purposes and actually *being* religious, which is further supported in that both of the aforementioned stories also feature morally virtuous men or women of faith.

The series has featured explicitly religious characters of various faiths, such as Christian and Muslim – in "The Romans" (1965) and "The God

Complex" (2011), respectively – as well as characters with virtually religious faith in secular belief systems such as Communism, in "The Curse of Fenric" (1989). All of these characters are depicted as 'good', suggesting that the series neither vilifies faith per se or has a specific religious or ideological affiliation, but wishes to present genuine faith as an acceptable and possibly even admirable quality, provided that it is not used to harm others.

It could be argued that this inclusive approach regarding people of different faiths and world-views could be due to *Doctor Who* originally being aimed for children (unlike *Star Trek*, for example), which might make the producers more inclined to choose a 'feel-good' message such as "all religions are good" in order to not upset any of their young viewers. However, it should be taken into consideration that the pluralistic idea of differing faiths being equally valid simultaneously is far from uncontroversial – as discussed in great detail by Hutchison (2003: 219–220) in conjunction with religiously-based antipluralism in modern-day USA – and by no means a given for a children's series (the boundaries of which *Doctor Who* has indeed been pushing for decades in a multitude of ways). Furthermore, given the notoriety of the series for featuring content frightening enough to compel children, simultaneously terrified and captivated, to watch it "behind the sofa" for safety (Leach 2009: 11), providing children with wholesome viewing free of controversy does not appear to be *Doctor Who's* main concern. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that being religiously inclusive may not be motivated by the desire to not upset the children in the audience. As such, the decision could be considered a reflection of the overall world-view of the series, whether conscious or unconscious.

The two religions with the most influence on *Doctor Who* throughout the years are arguably Christianity and Buddhism. The former's prominence is most likely in large part due to the series being created, developed, and filmed in Great Britain, a country considered culturally Christian in terms of religious tradition – according to the 2001 census, over 71 per cent of Brits identified as Christian (CIA World Factbook 2013) – and even more so in the 1960s, when the series

began. A cultural product inevitably reflects the traditions, values, and conventions upheld by the society of the people behind the work, whether or not the intention of the creator, so instances of Christian values being represented in the series may not be intentional, but merely reflect the type of thinking the makers of the series are accustomed with; as a former *Doctor Who* producer, the late Barry Letts, is quoted as having said, "I think it's inevitable because of Britain's cultural heritage that a long-running programme about the fight between good and evil will have some Christian themes as a backdrop" (Wynne-Jones 2008).

Christianity may surface in conjunction with overt or implied reference to biblical stories or characters (for example, an episode named "The Lazarus Experiment" (2007) features a character named Professor Lazarus experimenting with eternal youth), but also in the discussion of ethical issues. In case of the latter, it is particularly easy to draw on arguments with religious background without being conscious of doing so: when debating an issue not directly religious in itself (such as the questions regarding immortality examined in this thesis), it might not even occur to the parties involved to consider that the arguments they use may originally have been religiously motivated. The way in which the surrounding culture is embedded and often rendered virtually subconscious in the thinking of those having been raised under the influence of said culture is one reason for why it is necessary to actively examine the influence of factors such as religion in works of fiction such as TV series. Reportedly, some have suggested that clergy in the Church of England use examples of Christian symbolism in *Doctor Who* in their sermons to better engage with young audiences (Wynne-Jones 2008), which is indicative of not only the enduring popularity of the series but also of the amount of material informed by, or at least reminiscent of, Christian teachings found within it.

The effects of Buddhism on *Doctor Who* are the result of a more conscious choice. In the early 1970s, aforementioned producer Barry Letts, who was himself a Buddhist (Gaughan 2009) and made his investment in the faith known

in his work on the series (Wolverson 2008), worked various references to Buddhism into the story "Planet of the Spiders" (1974), which also happens to be the first story to explore the concept of regeneration, quite essential to the series as a whole, in any considerable detail. The significance of this individual story in terms of the overarching plotline, and the mythology of the series in general, has made the concepts and ideas introduced in it fairly influential for the series ever since. Therefore, the Buddhist elements of the regeneration process established in the episode have become quite integral to the series, whether or not the larger audience recognises or contemplates these elements. The influence of Buddhism can best be seen in the series' view of life and death, which of course are recurring themes, meaning that the influence of Buddhist thinking is still visible in the series today.

In order to further examine how religions – for the purposes of this thesis, Christianity and Buddhism in particular – influence the ethics of *Doctor Who* with regard to specific scenarios inviting ethical discussion, an overview of what 'Christian ethics' or 'Buddhist ethics' entails is required. Although as previously stated, to define the aforementioned concepts in a conclusive manner would be a virtually impossible task, it is possible to delineate the beliefs and doctrines on which the two religions generally base and justify their stance on ethical issues. The following section features, first, an overview of ways to approach immortality as an ethical question in general, followed by a brief summary of the basis and characteristics of Christian and Buddhist ethics, respectively. The framework laid out in the subsections focusing on immortality and ethics will form the theoretical background based on which the primary data for this thesis (the episodes of *Doctor Who*) will then be analysed.

3.2. The ethics of immortality

The idea of delaying or entirely eradicating death is a complex question not merely as a practical challenge but as an ethical dilemma as well. The advances made in medicine and living conditions over the past few centuries have drastically prolonged the average lifespan of individuals, especially those living in first-world countries. Since the eighteenth century, the rise in average lifetime has been quite sharp, largely because of fewer deaths at an early age (Görman 2006: 145). There has been little change in the maximum human lifespan, which appears to remain quite firmly at about 120 years (Arking 2006: 515).

The interest in developing cures and preventive measures for diseases and other ailments is understandable: the instinct to survive and stay alive is universal in lifeforms both rudimentary and highly developed. What makes human efforts to live longer or indefinitely an ethical issue is precisely the human capacity to reflect on one's actions, of which there is no proof in any other animal. Striving to prevent and cure diseases through nanotechnology or genetic engineering, for example, is a conscious choice to take action, not an instinctive response to an immediate threat, and as such the ethical implications may be assessed in a way that those of an animal's behaviour cannot. In addition, the potential consequences of these efforts (such as genetic engineering) are considerably more far-reaching and serious than those of the actions of any other animal's attempts at delaying death.

Furthermore, the human interest in prolonging life is not limited to the elimination of disease and other health hazards affecting the body from without: some have deemed the ageing process itself an unnecessary inconvenience that can and should be prevented, which translates as striving to make drastic changes in the body itself. In light of these considerations, prolonged life and immortality as a human pursuit should elicit more interest from an ethical

standpoint than the relatively small amount of research available on the topic would suggest.

Interest in longevity is not a recent invention. Religions the world over feature stories involving immortality, albeit mostly for demi-gods, exceptional heroes, or otherwise atypical individuals (*The Hutchinson Dictionary of World Mythology* (2005) contains some 20 references to immortality from cultures all over the world); moreover, most religions promise their adherents eternal life in one form or another. However, the active pursuit of immortality differs from eternal life in the form offered by most religions in that the aim is to continue life in the same material body – or in an artificial substitute for the original body – and not to move on to a metaphysical afterlife. Even though there may be intersections between the religious idea of immortality (for example, heaven for Christians and nirvana for Buddhists) and the pursuit of immortality of the body, the two are distinctly separate issues and should be treated as such. In fact, both Christianity and Buddhism, each quite preoccupied with immortality in its own way, may find the idea of material immortality rather problematic in terms of doctrine and ethics, as will be argued in the following subsections in further detail.

In all likelihood, achieving immortality would profoundly affect not only individuals and demographics but human culture in general as well. As Bauman (1992: 12–14) argues, humans are unique among lifeforms in that they possess the awareness of being aware, and are therefore able to imagine virtually any experience they might face; death is an irrevocable paradox in that it is a certainty, yet cannot be imagined as a firsthand experience, and as such the awareness of mortality is deeply traumatic. On the basis of Bauman, Görman (2006: 143) summarises that the awareness of death and the finiteness of life defines the human condition and drives people to pursue immortality by proxy – through art, fame, or reproduction. Eliminating the motivation to create something to outlive oneself would, according to Bauman and Görman, eliminate most if not all art as well as the incentive to procreate. Whether or not

this would be the case is of course speculation, since there are no real-life precedents. However, the suggestion that the elimination of death would also, effectively, eliminate birth clearly presupposes that questions of mortality and immortality are intertwined with those regarding the human experience in general. This seems to further speak for the importance of examining the topic of immortality from a humanistic perspective.

Life extension or immortality is not a uniform project: not everyone interested in longevity has the same ideal outcome in mind. Görman (2006: 144) divides the different varieties of the pursuit of extended life into four categories by the degree to which human intervention is tolerated. The first type, *prevention of premature death*, is the most widely accepted, and focuses on pre-emptively keeping diseases and infirmity at bay. The second, *maintenance of good health until death*, goes slightly further and aims to not only prevent diseases but improve quality of life in old age as well, meaning efforts taken to counter the natural signs and effects of ageing. The first and second categories focus on enabling individuals to live out their 'natural' life with no premature deaths and possibly to remain healthier in the process, as opposed to extending the lifespan of humans as a race. The latter idea is developed further in the third type, *delaying of ageing and death*, which attempts to increase the maximum human lifespan. The fourth, *elimination of death*, represents the extreme of eradicating death entirely. Although the first two are both the most feasible and the least problematic in terms of ethics, all four have their supporters.

Although most would, and do, welcome advances in medicine that help prevent premature deaths, the question of whether longevity should remain an end unto itself is contested by many. Arguments against life extension *ad infinitum* include those of Daniel Callahan (1998: 133, in Görman 2006: 147), who argues that since everything needed for a "perfectly satisfactory" life can be achieved in a full-term human life as it is currently understood, extending life further would merely distort the meaning of old age as a stage of life and offer more time to people with no worthwhile pursuits left for which to use it. While

this view can be contested as well, it displays the type of arguments that can be made against maximum lifespan extension without rejecting the attempts to combat premature deaths. Callahan's views are echoed by Lennart Nordenfelt (1995: xi), who stresses that health should be defined as the ability to realise vital goals; in order to best benefit humans, attempts should focus on allowing people to live a life as healthy, not as long, as possible.

Further reasons for approaching life prolongation as a worthy ethical question is the lack of experience in the field. The long-term effects and consequences of genetic manipulation, for example, are pure speculation, given that the technology for such undertakings has been at humanity's disposal for a very short time. The risks involved in modifying living beings is one of the arguments for using science fiction to assess the ethical implications of life prolongation: science fiction, as other thought experiments, allows for the examination of the aspects of interest to the study at hand, without actually conducting scientific experiments with unforeseeable, potentially dangerous results.

Somewhat like genetic manipulation, the effects of drastically altered lifespans on a demographic level may be difficult to predict. In addition to these considerations regarding the consequences of life prolongation, Görman lists a host of ethical ones as well. For example, were it to become possible to live considerably longer or even forever, who would be given the chance to do so? How would the possibility affect the treatment of those unable (or unwilling) to take advantage of it? How would the extension of life affect interpersonal relationships? If mortality is indeed intrinsic to the human experience, would immortality make humanity lose interest in culture and progress? (Görman 2006: 152–154)

As the arguments above illustrate, the topic of immortality as an ethical question allows for examination for a variety of viewpoints. Since there are no real-life cases on which to base the examination of the question, examples involving eternal life are often drawn from fiction. A Görman (2006: 153) points out,

fictitious works involving immortality (including works by Goethe, Swift, Lagerkvist, Wordsworth, and many more) are remarkably often tragic or dystopian in nature. This is often the case in more recent depictions in books, films and television as well, even in those aimed at younger audiences (that are indeed quite similar to the presumed target audience of *Doctor Who*): *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Torchwood: Miracle Day*, and *Spellbinder 2: Land of the Dragon Lord* are just a few examples. The frequency with which immortality is depicted as a curse in fiction is indicative of the deeply ingrained apprehension regarding the issue; potential risks and ethical problems such as those mentioned above appear to outweigh the benefits of life extension.

It is worth bearing in mind that the idea of pursuing extended or eternal life presupposes in itself that death is intrinsically something to be avoided. Several arguments can be made to support this view, such as the often painful process of dying, loss of potential to gain new experiences, separation from loved ones, and possibility of punishment in an afterlife; nevertheless, the state of death may also be likened to the state of nonexistence prior to birth, and as such could be considered neither 'good' nor 'bad' on an evaluative scale, since being dead entails the complete lack of experience, positive or negative (Kamm 1993: 13–24). With these considerations in mind, the question of life extension becomes a value statement not only in the methods chosen to pursue prolonged life but also in the very presupposition that death should be delayed or avoided in the first place. The human survival instinct generally drives people to seek ways to avoid death; however, attitudes toward death vary greatly depending on living circumstances and stage of life as well as religious and philosophical beliefs. The next section focuses on the general attitudes of Christianity and Buddhism, respectively, regarding immortality.

3.3. *Christian ethics*

Each religion has its own approach towards ethical questions, and to fully understand the stance of a religion, knowledge of the religion's view of deity, humanity, the world, and life and death is required. In the case of Christian ethics, understanding the doctrines and ideas on which ethical considerations are based will, given Christianity's seminal role in the development of western society as it is known today, provide better understanding of how ethical questions are addressed in culturally Christian countries. The influence is seen in the values and attitudes of not only members of the clergy or devout churchgoers but in those of secular individuals and institutions as well.

At present the biggest of the world religions, Christianity has about 2.1 billion adherents worldwide, according to the BBC (2012). Originally a movement within Judaism in Middle Eastern Palestine, with Greek Hellenistic influences, the followers of a man they considered the long-awaited Messiah gradually formed a group with an autonomous identity that grew into a religion in its own right. The first holy scripture of Christianity – the Old Testament – were sacred Jewish literature, and being based on the ancient texts of an established religion, Christianity had the weight of historical longevity and credibility on its side to speak for its justifiability. (MacCulloch 2009: 73) The teachings of Christianity are based on both the Old and the New Testament, the latter a collection of accounts mostly regarding the earthly life and theological significance of aforementioned Messiah, Jesus Christ.

In the nearly two millennia that have passed since its emergence, Christianity has gained a wealth of tradition, interpretations and customs that have had a tremendous impact on what is meant by 'being Christian'. In order to form a comprehensive understanding of Christian ethics, extensive knowledge of the various influences that have helped shape Christianity is required; the following is a brief introductory overview with its focus on the doctrines and principles behind the kind of 'general' Christian ethics encountered today. With more than

2 billion followers, Christianity is naturally an immensely diverse phenomenon, and there are of course many varieties of Christian ethics in existence; this is merely an overview of the basics on which Christian ethics is generally based.

Much of Christian ethics may be traced back to what the religion teaches about the relationship between humanity and God. Christianity is a theistic religion, and God is therefore seen as an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent entity who created the universe and now sustains its existence. The God of Christianity is also fundamentally benevolent and good; nothing evil or wrong is thought to be of God. (Morley 2002.) Consequently, both humankind and the world in general, both of divine origin, are considered to be good in essence, despite the human freedom to choose whether or not to do as God would wish (Ahokallio *et al.* 2001: 44). Furthermore, the deity in Christianity is a personal one (as opposed to the impersonal cosmic force in Buddhism, for example), in that God has plans and wishes regarding the world, and is sometimes depicted in the Bible as communicating with people. As a result, expressions such as "God's will" and "act of God" abound; this reflects the idea that God is an entity with a will and with the capacity to act on this will. Christian references to God are often anthropomorphic in nature, given that God is non-corporeal (with the exception of the Word Made Flesh in Christ): for example, God is often referred to as a 'He' (presumably for largely historical reasons), although the deity of Christianity is actually considered sexless (Morley 2002).

Humankind's special place among creatures of the Earth is explained in Genesis 1:27 in the Old Testament, where humans are created "in God's image"; therefore, while all creatures are God's creations, only humans are made in God's own image and therefore have both the capability to resemble God more than other creatures and the responsibility to strive towards doing so. This relationship between God and humankind is one of the tenets of Christian ethics; as God's image, the human individual is capable of striving for the same kind of good as God represents, although the limited possibilities and fallibility of humans only allow for a distant approximation at best of God's infinite

goodness. However, the very idea that humankind bears the closest resemblance of any earthly creature to God is hugely influential in terms of Christian ethics, as it explains both why humans are capable of moral and ethical considerations and why they have the responsibility to use this capability to further God's will on Earth.

According to the theologically unique doctrine of Trinity, the Christian God is one, but with three distinct persons. These persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – are all aspects of the same Divine Nature, of which there is only one. (Brandt 2002) Christianity has an indisputable central figure in Jesus Christ, both the Son of God (the Son aspect of the Holy Trinity) and a moral and religious teacher. With this unique position, Christ is considered the primary source of authority for his church, and is often seen as a guide leading by example in ethical questions and moral dilemmas – what Jesus would presumably do in a situation is what a Christian should ideally do as well (Chryssides 2010: 16). As Ahokallio *et al* suggest (2001: 45–46), the significance of Christ as both God and man as well as the saviour of humankind, alongside the idea of humans as God's image, makes Christian ethics rather humanistic in nature – humanity is seen as an intrinsic value worthy of respect and protection.

In practical terms, Christianity has three main sources of authority: the Church, the Bible, and the individual's personal conscience. The relative weight of these sources of authority varies by denomination – while Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches consider the tradition of the Church highly significant, Protestants emphasise the Lutheran principle of *sola scriptura* ('by scripture alone') and view the Bible as the primary authority. (Chryssides 2010: 17) The view of conscience as an authority in ethical matters is based on the idea that conscience is a religious concept, a link of sorts between the individual and God (Schinkel 2007: 385); since the conscience is of divine origin or has a special connection with God (and might be considered what is referred to as "God's image" in humans, perhaps?), the theory goes that decisions based on

conscience are ultimately Christian in nature. However, as the personal conscience is just that – personal – and therefore difficult to use as a guiding light for large groups, most churches base their guidelines regarding how to respond to ethical issues on either the tradition of the Church or the authority of the Bible. The reliance on sources such as the Bible or tradition of the church as absolute authorities reflects the idea of ethics as a law dictated by God and, as such, wholly good and just (Ahokallio *et al.* 2001: 44); the Bible and the Church merely communicate God's will and are therefore party to God's authority 'by proxy'. Interpretation of the law and credence given to the authority of church leaders are, of course, a different issue, and individual Christians sometimes strongly disagree with the interpretations made of biblical passages by others without questioning the authority of God in the process.

There are surprisingly few academic works readily available on the ethics of the prolongation and extension of healthy life from a Christian perspective (healthy life as opposed to the issue of life prolongation versus euthanasia, which, while related, is a separate matter). Considering how advances in western medicine have expanded estimated lifespans by years and even decades, and how heated the debate around matters dealing with the ethics of medicine often becomes, the sparsity of public discussion is noteworthy. Why such a topical ethical issue is given so little attention in academic research and in debates is, in fact, a topic worthy of study in and of itself; however, this thesis focuses on what already exists on the subject and what could be said about it on the basis of Christian authorities such as the Bible and the tradition of the church.

Since Christianity views life as a unique gift from God, prolongation of life would seem justifiable from a Christian viewpoint. The view that free will gives humans the ability to make decisions independently also supports this argument. On the other hand, God is considered the ultimate authority on matters of life and death – a sentiment expressed in Psalm 139:16 in the Old Testament ("all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be") – and therefore the question of whether humans have the right to determine how

long to live is theological as well as philosophical-ethical. The debate over the right to control life and death generally tends to centre on cases in which the question is focused on death (namely abortion and euthanasia); in the case of life prolongation and immortality, the focus is on life, and as such, the discussion might not immediately attract as much controversy. In addition, actual immortality is at present not possible, so the question of its moral justification is mainly academic; life prolongation, for its part, is a continuum, and it is therefore hard to pinpoint where the line between acceptable medical procedures and reprehensible meddling with God's work is crossed. However, despite the lesser public interest in debating over the issue, the evidence of Christianity's general opinion of the roles of God and humanity would indicate that the pursuit of immortality is not encouraged in Christian ethics.

3.4. Buddhist ethics

Buddhism, one of the major Eastern world religions, is of Indian origin. It originated in the northeastern part of the country, and while estimations concerning its exact age vary, its birthdate is usually estimated somewhere between the sixth and fourth centuries BC. Buddhism therefore predates Christianity by centuries. Its founder and central teacher, Gautama Buddha (also known as Siddharta Gautama), attained the ideal spiritual state of enlightenment during his lifetime, and with this "insight into the structure and dynamics of reality" (Reynolds & Carbine 2000: 2–3), taught and preached about the nature of life and existence as well as about the principles on which to base a life considered good from the perspective of what became known as Buddhism. There are parallels between the birth of Buddhism and Christianity, respectively: both were formed around a charismatic teacher-figure who became the personified centre of the belief system based on his teachings, and from whose name the name of the entire religion was then derived. The ethical teachings of the two religions contain a great deal of similarities as well; however, as there are notable differences in what the two teach about humanity,

existence, and the afterlife, for example, so the two differ in their approaches towards some ethical questions as well, especially in terms of how said approaches are justified.

In Buddhism, ethics is seen as a reflection of the divine laws of nature, which in turn may be deduced by observing the natural world – unlike in Christianity, no special divine revelation is required – and since laws of ethics and morals resemble any law of nature, consequences of actions are determined by an objective system of cause and effect (Ahokallio *et al* 2001: 29), albeit with much more significance in terms of spiritual growth than other laws of nature such as gravity or inertia. As this idea of objectivity suggests, Buddhism does not consider God a conscious, personal entity like Christianity does. Because of this lack of a theistic god-figure, Buddhism is sometimes described as atheistic, although it can be also viewed as monotheistic or polytheistic, depending on approach (Faure 2009: 65). The idea of an all-encompassing cosmic force with an ethical/moral dimension is, however, central – simply not in the same form as in Abrahamic religions – and as such, describing Buddhism as atheistic is somewhat simplistic and misleading.

Much like how Christianity originally developed as an offshoot of Judaism, Buddhism's origins are in Hinduism. This relationship is manifest in the influence of Hindu thinking in both doctrine and practical ethical considerations. The Buddhist teaching or 'truth', known as *dharma*, is expressed in a formulation known as "the four noble truths", which present the fundamental principles of Buddhism in condensed form. The contents of the four noble truths can be summarised as follows: all existence is impermanent and a part of a constant cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*), and suffering (*dukkha*) is an intrinsic part of it – intrinsic enough for Jacobson (2010: 8) to call it "the central focus in Buddhism"; the driving force behind the repetition of *samsara* is desire, especially the desire to exist as an individual Self; it is possible to be released from *samsara* and the cycle of death and rebirth into a state of *nirvana*; and the way to achieve *nirvana* and leave *samsara* behind is to follow the eightfold path

of what Buddhism regards as 'right' activity (also known as "the middle way" between excessive indulgence and asceticism). (Reynolds & Carbine 2000: 4) However, there are significant differences between Hindu and Buddhist thinking: for example, while Hinduism teaches the idea of people as members of different societal classes (*castes*), Buddhism – generally more concerned with samsara than with matters pertaining to the material world – only makes a significant distinction between monks and nuns on the one hand and laypeople on the other hand, given that the chosen lifestyle of the former offers them more opportunities to further the progress towards nirvana than that of the latter (Ahokallio *et al.* 2001: 30).

In many ways, then, Buddhism seems more preoccupied with spiritual growth and future lives than practical matters regarding material life in the present day. However, the two are quite closely connected. This can be seen in the central concept of *karma*, the principle of deeds resulting in corresponding consequences – good deeds in good fortune, bad ones in misfortune (Reynolds & Carbine 2000: 4). In Buddhist texts, the consequences of karma are often depicted as reflective of the causative action: harm caused to another will eventually return to harm the original culprit in a similar manner (for example, stealing will result in losing one's wealth, and treachery in relationships to losing one's friends). The relationship between deed and consequence is not always this straightforward, and bad deeds do occasionally go seemingly unpunished. However, not seeing the fruits of actions (good or bad) does not mean that they have borne none. As karma is accumulative, actions affect not only the present life but ones yet to come as well: bad karma results in being reborn as a less-fortunate creature such as an insect with little possibilities to attain good karma for the next life, or even a hell-being whose entire existence is agony. (Harvey 2000: 12–15) In terms of ethics, the law of karma obviously encourages, similarly to Christianity, "doing unto others", since harming another ultimately amounts to harming oneself as well, particularly considering the rare opportunity one has, having been reborn as a human, to consciously and actively accumulate good karma and work towards achieving enlightenment.

The effect of samsara on Buddhist ethics is profound. According to Buddhist thought, rebirth is both undesirable and unavoidable: no one wants to be reborn over and over again, but everyone does, Buddhist or not. Furthermore, since all living beings are part of samsara, it is possible to be reborn not only as a human but also as an animal or a spirit such as ghost or heaven- or hell-being, or even as a god (Harvey 2000: 14–15). All living creatures are, then, equal in the face of samsara. Humans do have the advantage of being capable of consciously striving to gather good karma by doing virtuous deeds (and, unlike gods, are sufficiently motivated to do so), which makes being reborn as a human a desirable state of affairs, but there is no fundamental difference between humans and other creatures; humans are not superior to animals, simply more readily capable of making progress in attaining nirvana. Therefore, the relationship between humans and nature is not one of stewardship or dominance as in Christianity. (Harvey 2000: 150) This idea of equality and sameness among beings influences Buddhist ethics immensely: for example, since it is possible to be reborn as an animal, humans should treat animals with the same respect and consideration as they would other humans. (Harvey 2000: 151)

Another Buddhist principle with a major impact on ethics is the idea of the impermanence of material reality and of 'not-Self'. This concept is radically different from the view of humanity held by Christianity (and, in fact, western thinking in general). Whereas according to Christianity, human beings are individuals whose souls are permanent, eternal, and unique, for Buddhism there is no real individual Self. Although each person is a combination of one-of-a-kind physical and mental qualities (dictated by the karmic history accumulated over the course of samsara) and therefore unique, the present make-up and character of the person is not eternal or permanent. The process of rebirth will redistribute these characteristics, and there is nothing constant left of the previous life to identify the two as the same being. The lack of personal identity or sharp distinction between oneself and others negates destructive emotions

such as selfishness or anger, and therefore promotes harmony between humans and other beings. In addition, since there is no individuality as such, the experiences of what are perceived as individuals in the material world are basically the same. In other words, one being's suffering is in fact everyone's suffering; 'your' suffering is 'mine' as well. (Harvey 2000: 36) This idea of not-Self and impermanence affects Buddhism's views of many ethical dilemmas regarding treatment of others.

Not unlike Christianity, Buddhism has a multifaceted relationship with death. As a result, both Buddhist and Christian ethics consider questions such as life prolongation quite complex. Considering the significance of rebirth in the progress towards enlightenment, prolonging a single life indefinitely – even a prestigious human life – seems counterintuitive from a religious perspective. While Buddhism generally reveres life as intrinsically valuable, and both suicide and euthanasia are rejected (Harvey 2000: 287, 294), the idea of the natural progression of life is key to Buddhist thinking. Although premature death is considered a tragedy, the transience of life is a major element in samsara, and clinging to material life for much longer than its reasonable natural duration would be in conflict with the idea of the not-Self. Therefore, even though the general rule is that life is sacred and thus has intrinsic value, living forever or even longer than naturally possible is not particularly desirable from the viewpoint of Buddhist ethics.

4. ANALYSIS OF EPISODES

The following analysis of *Doctor Who* episodes, based on the theoretical background presented in the previous section, is divided into subsections according to the type of character facing immortality in the examples discussed. The aim is to illustrate tendencies in how the depiction of immortality varies under different circumstances in the stories in question, and to then draw conclusions regarding the significance of this variation based on the findings.

4.1. Villains after immortality: "The Five Doctors" and "Mawdryn Undead"

The first category of instances to be examined is characters classified as villains who pursue eternal life. The focus is on two stories that concentrate on the topic, "The Five Doctors" and "Mawdryn Undead".

4.1.1. "The Five Doctors"

That the *Doctor Who* stories most overtly preoccupied with immortality focus on characters whose designs on eternal life are revealed to be evil is a telling first indication of the attitude of the series towards the issue in general. One of the two stories with such a storyline examined here is "The Five Doctors" (1983). A special feature-length celebratory episode to mark *Doctor Who's* twentieth anniversary, "The Five Doctors" is the second story to feature multiple incarnations of the Doctor alongside each other (the first one being 1973's tenth-anniversary story "The Three Doctors"). The story takes place on the Doctor's home planet of Gallifrey and includes a multitude of references to past storylines and to the overall mythology of the series. The plot revolves around what is at heart a fairly traditional 'hero's quest', with the different Doctors (save the Fourth, the actor being unavailable) brought together to make their way through a number of obstacles to reach the tomb of the legendary Time Lord,

Rassilon. According to legend, the tomb holds the secret of immortality, and over the course of the story, it becomes evident that someone is after this secret.

With some assistance from various friends from the past, the Doctors eventually discover that the culprit is Lord President Borusa, the leader of Gallifrey and up until this point a friend and mentor figure to the Doctor – albeit morally a somewhat ambiguous one, as seen in the story "The Deadly Assassin" (1976). Borusa's ambition has become so overpowering that he sees immortality as a necessity in order to continue ruling Gallifrey indefinitely. However, once he reaches the tomb and claims immortality for himself, it is revealed that the promise of eternal life is merely a trap to lure in any individual who might find the prospect attractive, since anyone who would wish to become immortal is dangerous and must be stopped. As a result, Borusa does indeed become immortal – Rassilon turns him into a statue, making him join a row of petrified Time Lords who have all coveted eternal life and suffered the same fate. Once the debacle is over, things on Gallifrey can return to normal, and the Doctors are able to return to their own respective timelines (the Fifth Doctor once again escaping the duties of Lord President, imposed on his various incarnations time and again by the High Council of Gallifrey).

Although the concept of immortality is introduced quite late in the episode, it is ultimately central to the story, serving not only as a key plot device but also as an instrument for examining the moral character of those involved in the story, as well as the values promoted by the series itself. The episode's portrayal of the idea of living forever resembles what is seen again in "Mawdryn Undead" in the next subsection: the one striving for immortality is presented as morally corrupt, and when he finally achieves his goal, what ensues is not at all what he initially has in mind. The characters in both stories learn, as the First Doctor phrases the matter in "The Five Doctors", that "[i]mmortality was a curse, not a blessing". What could be considered the moral of the story – that no one should achieve immortality, and that those who pursue it generally do so for morally

reprehensible reasons – is further highlighted by the irony of how Borusa's wish of immortality is granted in that he is transformed into a statue, which is virtually immortal or will at least outlive any mere mortal. The fulfillment of his wish therefore becomes his punishment, further corroborating the story's stance on humans in pursuit of eternal life.

In addition to the ill-fated Borusa, the Doctor's archnemesis the Master, who initially appears to be on the Doctor's side but ultimately (and inevitably) betrays him, succumbs to the temptation of immortality. At the beginning of the story, he is persuaded by the High Council of Gallifrey (led by Borusa) to help the Doctor, and therefore violate his own (dubious) moral code, in exchange for a new life cycle of 13 extra regenerations. This indicates that in addition to being an adversary to the hero of the series to begin with, he is also ready to abandon his own set of values, however reprehensible, as long as he stands to benefit from such a move. Later on, learning about the apparent prospect of total immortality, he expresses the desire to claim it for himself; the Doctor and his friends thwart him, which ironically enough spares him the fate of Borusa. The Master, a character of most questionable morals at any given time, is also susceptible to the lure of prolonged or eternal life, further suggesting that lust for eternal life is a less-than-admirable trait.

"The Five Doctors" offers an approach towards immortality heavily informed by Christian ethics. The idea of the lust for eternal life as unreasonable and hubristic is in accordance with Christian teaching regarding mortality as a part of humankind's lot, and immortality as a divine property. Desire to change the rules for oneself and to acquire an unlimited lifespan may be interpreted as an attempt to replace God as the ultimate authority on matters of life and death. In the story, the role of God is filled by Rassilon, a godlike figure in Time Lord mythology – although it is initially stated that he is dead, it later becomes apparent that he has an active part in the events of the story, and at the very end he even makes an appearance of sorts when he turns Borusa into stone and reveals the true purpose of his supposed promise of immortality. Admittedly,

Rassilon is not God in the Christian sense: he is not the creator or maintainer of his world, nor is he all-powerful, all-knowing, or – as later stories such as "The End of Time" (2009) suggest – even categorically benevolent or good. In fact, he might more closely resemble a Greek god, presented as he is as a figure with both superhuman qualities and human weaknesses and vices. However, in "The Five Doctors" it is Rassilon's role as a Time Lord god, a supreme being from the viewpoint of the other characters, that lends the treatment of immortality a distinctly Christian overtone.

By having the deity figure of Rassilon administer the final verdict on whether or not Borusa's pursuit of immortality is justified, the story adopts an authoritative attitude towards this ethical dilemma reminiscent of how in Christianity, ethics is considered a matter ultimately dictated by God. Instead of, for example, having the Doctor(s) merely decide that immortality is wrong, "The Five Doctors" has an authoritative god-figure state this, and in so doing reinforces the idea that ethical questions are ultimately not matters of individual opinion but something with a definite answer known to a higher power. Although the message regarding immortality has in all likelihood reached the viewer prior to Rassilon's appearance, it is his involvement and explicit statement of the verdict that corroborate the issue for the characters as well as for the audience.

No one in the story questions Rassilon's authority, and although understandably none too happy regarding his fate, not even Borusa argues with or calls to question Rassilon's statement itself: he might wish to be spared the fate that befalls him, but he does not express disagreement with the principle of Rassilon's judgement, or insist that he himself has the moral upper hand in the situation. The god-figure of the story, then, appears to have the wisdom and authority to define morally justifiable actions in a manner that other characters agree to, or at least do not protest. This, again, is reminiscent of Christianity's view of ethics as of divine origin.

Despite Rassilon's final authority, the mortal characters of the story are more than powerless puppets that follow his will. Although Rassilon deems seekers of immortality dangerous, the fact that the promise of eternal life has been left for individuals to pursue it – albeit as a trap meant to catch the ones interested in it – means that the value of free will is also appreciated. Granted, the desire for immortality is used as an indicator of unsuitable moral character in general, but it is at least theoretically possible that some of those fascinated with eternal life might never have demonstrated signs of moral depravity, even in leading positions in the community, without being offered the chance to live forever. In such a case, the person in question might in fact make for an acceptable leader if not for the temptation of eternal life offered by Rassilon.

Even though the promise is not strictly speaking a legitimate one, then (the eternal life granted – existence as a statue – is most likely not what the candidates have in mind), offering the alternative to live forever is a way of offering the choice to exercise free will. Without the option, the Time Lords would be in no danger of being turned into stone by Rassilon, but they would not have the chance to prove their capability to resist the temptation of immortality, either. The situation is somewhat similar to the story of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis 3 in the Old Testament, and further supports the view that the ethical basis of the story is largely rooted in Christianity.

The treatment of immortality in "The Five Doctors" is, then, predominantly Christian in nature. The theme of human ambition gone wrong, and the desire to transgress the limitations of humanity and mortality, is prevalent in western fiction, and the manner in which these aspirations are thwarted by a higher power is reminiscent of the Christian approach towards the issue. Even though Christianity is not mentioned or referred to – nor is any other religion, for that matter – the values suggested by the characters' actions, as well as the final outcome of the story, are at least in accordance with what Christian ethics might have to say about the scenario presented. As becomes apparent later in this

study, the approach towards immortality in this particular story is largely indicative of that in the series in general, in that the underlying message regarding the morally objectionable aspects of pursuing eternal life tends to follow the same pattern as what is seen in "The Five Doctors". However, the stance and focal points of individual stories vary somewhat, and, as the next story to be examined reveals, influences are drawn from sources other than Christianity as well.

4.1.2. "Mawdryn Undead"

The second villain-in-pursuit-of-immortality story, and one of the *Doctor Who* stories most heavily focused on the question of immortality, is "Mawdryn Undead" (1983). The focus, similarly to "The Five Doctors", is on mortal beings fascinated with, and in pursuit of, immortality. The outcome of the story is likewise similar to "The Five Doctors" in some respects; however, there are some differences that are significant in terms of the view of immortality presented. "Mawdryn Undead" is a four-part Fifth-Doctor adventure featuring a group of eight alien scientists (including the titular Mawdryn) who, after having stolen a 'regenerator' machine from the Time Lords in order to achieve immortality, have been punished for their crime by being sentenced to travel across space for all eternity. Because of the regenerator, the punishment is indeed eternal: the aliens are now immortal, their bodies forever weakening and deteriorating but unable to die. Once the aliens learn that the Doctor is a Time Lord, they attempt to blackmail him into using his remaining regenerations to, in effect, kill them, which would also result in him losing the ability to regenerate, rendering him a mere mortal. The plan inevitably fails, but due to a complicated and unexpected chain of events, they have their wish granted with no harm to the Doctor and, at the end of the story, all eight scientists die.

Although "Mawdryn Undead", like "The Five Doctors", concludes with the attempts to achieve immortality thwarted and with the culprits paying for their

crime, there are some major differences in how the stories present the concept of immortality itself. In "Mawdryn Undead", the once-lucrative prospect of eternal life has turned into agony and suffering. In fact, the terms in which Mawdryn describes his existence – "*spare me the endurance of endless time*", "*the agony of perpetuity*" – echo the central teachings of the Buddha concerning life and death (Schmidt-Leukel 2006: 31). On one occasion, he pleads with the Doctor, "*For pity's sake, release me!*" This idea of death as release from the torment of physical life is very reminiscent of Buddhist views on life. Such a view is not presented in "The Five Doctors", in which there is never any indication that eternal life might be a disadvantage in any way except for its morally corruptive aspects.

The suggestion that eternal life in fact translates into eternal suffering, and that Mawdryn ultimately chooses to actively seek release from living forever, again resembles Buddhist teachings regarding samsara and the pursuit of nirvana. Since what the scientists initially ask of the Doctor is effectively euthanasia (active participation in their death), and as such generally either rejected in or highly problematic for both Christianity and Buddhism, neither faith would readily condone Mawdryn's plan (especially since it would entail considerable harm to the Doctor himself in the process, cutting his lifespan to a fraction of what it would naturally be); however, as the events ultimately unfold with no actively assisted suicide and no unreasonable harm to others, Mawdryn's decision to welcome death and set matters back to their natural state appears to be an example of the Buddhist ideal of letting go of the Self. He accomplishes this by accepting the inevitability of death and abandoning the dream-turned-nightmare of eternal life.

Another aspect worthy of note is the story's treatment of its antagonists. Despite being guilty of theft and attempting to deprive the Doctor of his regenerations, Mawdryn and the rest of the alien scientists are not presented as the villains of the story per se. They are not acting out of malice; even though it is greed of sorts (for longevity) that initially makes the scientists steal the regenerator from

the Time Lords, during the events that unfold over the course of the story, their actions are not propelled by greed. In the story, their motivation is to end the suffering they have brought upon themselves, and in the process, to return their material bodies to their natural state of mortality.

The motives of Mawdryn's group are in stark contrast to, for example, those of the Black Guardian, a returning villain appearing in a subplot of the story, who explicitly professes to be acting *"in the name of all that is evil"*. While 'evil' therefore seems to be a fact recognised as existing in the world of the story, and 'being evil' is accepted as a legitimate motivation for wreaking havoc, Mawdryn is at no time depicted as acting for the sake of being evil. Even when he is in clear opposition to the Doctor, the designated hero of the piece, his motives are never rooted in wanting to do evil deeds for their own sake; for example, harming the Doctor is an unfortunate but unavoidable side effect of Mawdryn's plan, not something done for amusement. Whereas in "The Five Doctors", the antagonists are depicted as morally corrupt individuals after personal gain, in "Mawdryn Undead" they are more victims of their past mistakes than villains in the true sense of the word.

Portraying the antagonist of the story as something other than evil per se has a profound impact on the tone and ultimate message of the story. Even though the pursuit of immortality is generally portrayed as morally objectionable (as evidenced in this story in Mawdryn stealing the regenerator, and again in his attempt to use the Doctor's remaining life cycles to reverse the effects of immortality), the implication is not automatically that the character in question is thoroughly corrupt; in such a case, it is possible to portray the character in a sympathetic light even after making clear that his or her ambitions were ill-judged. This is the case with the ending of "Mawdryn Undead", where although the Doctor's companion Tegan is shocked by the death of the scientists, the scene is presented as a happy ending of sorts; in fact, given that the aliens are able to achieve their target of dying, without even needing to harm the Doctor in

the process, the conclusion involving the death of eight characters could even be described as ideal from the viewpoint of these characters themselves.

Mawdryn appears happy and grateful to be freed from the eternal life that has revealed itself to be constant agony, and the scientists gladly accept and even welcome death as the proper state of affairs. Were Mawdryn presented as a 'traditional' villain motivated by greed and malice, such as the ones in some of the other stories examined here, a conclusion as 'happy' as this, with both the protagonists and the antagonists reasonably content with the outcome, would be most unlikely to occur.

From a religious perspective, in addition to explicitly expressing views very close to Buddhism, Mawdryn may be seen as representative of a Christian as well. From a Christian perspective, human fallibility presents itself in the pursuit of things both not meant for humans and ultimately detrimental to them, but the goodness inherent in humans – who are, for all their shortcomings, made in God's image – allows them to be redeemed in the end, at least morally (if not rescued physically). The path of Mawdryn and his associates follows this template quite closely. As discussed above, the culprits in the story are portrayed as not strictly evil, and ultimately even somewhat sympathetic; being able to sympathise with them facilitates drawing parallels between the characters and the real-life humans adhering to religions in reality.

In his depiction as flawed, but not evil – tempted to follow his misguided ambitions and resorting to morally reprehensible means to achieve them, but nevertheless in possession of the capability to do good – Mawdryn represents a sort of Everyman Christian. His final 'redemption' is not only reminiscent of the Buddhist ideal of relinquishing the Self, but also an example of (Christian) virtue prevailing despite moral shortcomings and failures – even major ones such as rendering oneself immortal through theft and wrongdoing – echoing the idea of the innate goodness of God's creations.

Although perhaps more overtly Buddhist in tone, then, "Mawdryn Undead" addresses immortality with an attitude reminiscent of both Christianity and Buddhism. In terms of Christianity, on the one hand, the presence of the Faustian 'misguided human ambition' trope, "a product of universal Christianity" (Steiner 1939: 404), as well as the arguable punishment facing the culprits in the end, seems to support the view that the proper place of humans (existentially speaking) is decreed by law established from above, any breach of which is met with punishment. On the other hand, the repentant sinner is portrayed as capable of doing good and is, in a manner, redeemed in the end; regarding the characters as representatives of humans, such development appears quite Christian in nature, and the representation of humanity in Mawdryn echoes the views of Christianity to a considerable extent. Meanwhile, as discussed above, Buddhist views are represented in the propositions that prolonged life brings prolonged suffering, and that natural death can be a welcome occurrence. Although the influence of either religion is, again, not explicitly stated in the story, the terms in which the "agony" of endless life is described bear a close resemblance to how Buddhism views life and death.

In "The Five Doctors", the underlying values and overall tone of the story appeared to be predominantly Christian; in the case of "Mawdryn Undead", while influences of Christianity abound and are readily discernible, it is the influence of Buddhism that shines through the brightest. The Buddhist overtones of Mawdryn's predicament, and of the ultimate resolution of the adventure, are particularly prominent and arguably set the tone for the entire story. In the case of villains pursuing immortality, then, the influence of both Christianity and Buddhism may be detected. Common to both is that immortality in human hands is depicted as harmful and dangerous, and that those with designs on eternal life should be stopped from achieving their goal, although their plans will in all likelihood fail regardless. Despite differences in how the view is justified, the opinions held by Christianity and Buddhism regarding immortality have a great deal in common, and the similarities may be seen in

the elements reminiscent of the two religions in the stories examined above as well.

4.2. Immoral immortals: "Enlightenment"

Whereas "Mawdryn Undead" and "The Five Doctors" both essentially deal with the pursuit of immortality, "Enlightenment" (1983) approaches the issue of eternal life from a somewhat different perspective. This time, eternal life is already an established fact for the race on which the story focuses, the aptly named Eternals. These beings are not only immensely powerful but also immortal by definition, and as a departure from the stories under examination so far, it is not eternal life that the characters seek. The plot involves the Eternals partaking in a spaceship race, competing for the grand prize of 'Enlightenment', which, as the Eternal Striker explains it, translates as "[t]he wisdom which knows all things and which will enable me to achieve what I desire most".

The crew of the Eternals' racing ships consists of humans, or 'Ephemerals', whom the Eternals regard as disposable workforce. ('Ephemeral' is used as an umbrella term for all mortal beings – in practical terms, all non-Eternals.) The prize of Enlightenment eventually goes to the Fifth Doctor's (humanoid alien) companion Turlough. He is given a choice between sparing the life of the Doctor, whom he has originally been sent to kill but has since come to regard as a friend, and receiving an enormous diamond with which he would be able to afford whatever he desires; he chooses the Doctor, and is then informed that the choice itself was the prize.

Before any observations are made regarding the attitude towards immortality presented in the story, it should be noted that the way in which the focus and approach of "Enlightenment" differ from those in the stories previously examined makes it an altogether different type of exploration of the issue. This time, as noted above, the question is not whether or not immortality should be

available to a sentient being, since on this occasion, it is already an uncontested fact for the Eternals; what the story explores is, instead, what might ensue if one indeed *were* immortal.

In a sense, the story may be viewed as a further thought experiment on the ethical problems linked to life extension contemplated in the two stories previously examined, with the Eternals serving as an example of what Mawdryn and his fellow scientists, or Lord President Borusa, might have become had their respective attempts at immortality been successful. As a result, it could be argued that while "The Five Doctors" and "Mawdryn Undead" might be considered prescriptive in their approach towards immortality, in that both conclude with those involved rendered mortal once more and the resulting state of affairs viewed as preferable to that preceding it, "Enlightenment" takes a more descriptive approach, observing the effects of immortality with no attempt to turn the Eternals into mortals.

The view presented of the effects of immortality through the depiction of the Eternals is hardly flattering: the most salient character traits of the representatives of the race – including greed, selfishness, disregard for others, and constant focus on being, as expressed by Eternal Wrack, "amused" – are certainly ones considered undesirable by both Christianity and Buddhism. In highlighting the morally corruptive effect of excessive power (including unlimited lifespan), "Enlightenment" is consistent with the view of Christian ethics that the desire to overstep the boundaries of what is deemed suitable and reasonable for mortals to attain is a mutiny of sorts against God, and therefore reprehensible.

Simultaneously, the portrayal of the Eternals as hedonistic, self-absorbed, and indifferent to the well-being or suffering of others suggests that their value system is in stark contrast with the ideals of Buddhism; in many ways, the Eternals are the antithesis of the not-Self, and as such, they represent undesirable characteristics and set a cautionary example from the perspective

of Buddhist ethics as well. Therefore, even though the premise of "Enlightenment" is different from that of "The Five Doctors", for example, the underlying message regarding immortality is largely the same from the viewpoint of both Christian and Buddhist ethics.

As noted above, unlike "Mawdryn Undead" and "The Five Doctors", "Enlightenment" does not end with the prospect of immortality reverting to a theoretical possibility; although once the spaceship race is over, the Eternals return to whatever is their usual domain, they remain immortal and, despite their encounter with the Doctor and his friends, have presumably learned no moral lessons regarding their immortality or their attitude towards transient beings (with the possible exception of Striker, whose fascination with the Doctor's companion Tegan appears to increase his respect for the Ephemerals; whether or not the effect is lasting is left open).

Prior to "Enlightenment", the idea of an immortal entity with no regard for life or other beings had already been explored in *Doctor Who* in the story "The Celestial Toymaker" (1966), in which the eponymous Toymaker – an immortal being who uses his considerable powers to force mortals into playing his deadly games for his own amusement – traps the First Doctor and his companions into his realm. Both the Toymaker and the Eternals are completely indifferent to human suffering and consider being amused more important than anything that might happen to their mortal victims. Indeed, before his new-found respect for Tegan, Striker states in Part 2 of "Enlightenment" that "[i]t is true that Ephemerals, dwellers in time, do have a certain entertainment value."

In the early stages of the story, the "entertainment value" referred to by Striker is all the value he or any other Eternal is willing to assign to any of the humans on board their ships, despite using them for labour (and, as it is later revealed, as fodder for plans and innovations, since Eternals themselves are incapable of imagination). However, the protagonists of the story – the Doctor and his friends – do not condone the Eternals' disregard for human life, and given that the

series usually portrays the Doctor as on the side of 'good' in a moral argument, this attitude is presumably encouraged in the viewer as well.

Even though the Eternals remain eternal at the conclusion of the story, the completion of the race for Enlightenment means that their exploitation of mortals is over for the time being. Therefore, although immortality itself remains a fact, the reprehensible deeds of the Eternals are at least brought to an end for the immediate future. Furthermore, Captain Wrack – the most morally corrupt and ruthless of the Eternals – is thwarted in her attempts at winning the race through resorting to sabotage, and while trying to eliminate the Doctor, she is ultimately cast out from her ship and into space, which returns her to wherever her natural abode might be.

While the immortal Wrack obviously does not die, being outsmarted and sent back to where she came from can be seen as punishment for her scheming and mistreatment of Ephemerals. The manner in which she is unceremoniously ejected from the ship resembles the punitive measures used on real-life maritime vessels, and although obviously not as harsh as a punishment as it would be for a mortal, the unglamorous ending to Wrack's scheming certainly sends a powerful symbolic message regarding the acceptability of her actions. Although her immortality remains uncompromised, she is unable to continue in her callous ways, and since the pursuit of Enlightenment matters enough for her to resort to foul play, being forced to relinquish the pursuit can be regarded as considerable punishment from her perspective. From the viewpoint of both Christian and Buddhist ethics, justice (or karma) is being served.

The spiritual shortcomings of the Eternals are further displayed in the way they perceive the prize of the race itself; what is ultimately revealed to be the choice that Turlough makes – which might more generally refer to the freedom and/or wisdom to make the morally right choice – only represents the fulfillment of whatever the winner desires to the Eternals. Enlightenment as a concept does not immediately call Christianity to mind, considering that the age of

Enlightenment in European history is often characterised as the era of "reason against religion" (a somewhat erroneous depiction, since the main conflict was actually between rational thought and the Church's exclusive claim to religion) (Barnett 2004: 2). However, the way in which Enlightenment is described in the story is not incompatible with or hostile towards Christianity (or religion in general).

By being associated with immaterial benefits associated (in Turlough's case) with virtues such as loyalty, selflessness, and strength of character, rather than tangible goods or direct fulfillment of the more superficial desires of the holder, the prize of the race may in fact be likened to the kind of divine wisdom revered in both Christianity and Buddhism. In the former, this form of wisdom is seen as coming from God, and in the latter, the ideal spiritual state amounting to nirvana is indeed referred to as 'enlightenment' (Southwold 1978: 363). The values of the story, then, are not in direct conflict with religion, in that the aspirations of the villains appear quite contrary to the teachings of either Christianity or Buddhism, while the prize (ultimately attained by the heroes) entails the type of freedom to choose the right course of action that appears virtuous from the viewpoint of both religions.

Although Christian and Buddhist ethics arrive at the conclusion through somewhat different routes, both generally suggest that immortality would have a profound effect on the individual, particularly on the way in which the individual regards others. The behaviour exhibited by the Eternals in "Enlightenment" reflects the idea that having virtually no limits imposed by nature or God leads to a loss of respect for the transience (and, from a Christian viewpoint, uniqueness) of life and, consequently, for beings with a limited lifespan as well. By portraying the immortal beings as the antagonists of the story, and by underscoring the indifference and occasional ruthlessness with which they treat mortals, "Enlightenment" supports the stance of Christian and Buddhist ethics that immortality is not a desirable, or perhaps even acceptable, state of being.

Simultaneously, while the title of the story refers to the historical era often connected with the reign of scientific rationality over religious faith and other beliefs viewed as superstitions, revealing the true prize of the race to be choice (for Turlough, between saving the Doctor and becoming rich) recalls the Christian idea of free will as an intrinsic human quality of considerable value. The view of humans as creative and imaginative, in possession of free will, and as valuable in themselves despite their perceived flaws and shortcomings compared to the much more powerful Eternals, strongly resembles the Christian conception of humanity. Overall, "Enlightenment" contains elements reminiscent of both Christian and Buddhist principles, and elements from both religions are used to emphasise the connection between immortality and questionable moral character.

4.3. The Doctor's allies and immortality

Although most of the characters facing the ethical and practical implications of immortality in *Doctor Who* are antagonists, this is not exclusively the case; in a number of stories, friends and allies of the Doctor are presented with the prospect of immortality (or, of avoiding death in other unusual ways) and subsequently have to form a stance towards the possibility. On some occasions, such a storyline may at first glance resemble the ones already discussed, particularly in terms of the ultimate fate of the character in question. However, when examined beyond the superficial similarities, the circumstances surrounding immortality or life extension typically differ from those faced by characters classified as villains in crucial ways, and consequently, from an ethical viewpoint, the subject of a story such as the ones presented in this subsection is viewed in a very different light from those in stories such as "The Five Doctors" or "Enlightenment".

Although 'good' characters in *Doctor Who* are usually portrayed as flawed and capable of error, what distinguishes them as 'good' is generally the decisions

they ultimately make, as well as the motivations behind their reaching said decisions in the first place. A character may initially make serious errors in judgement, and sometimes ultimately pays with his or her life for a mistake or a bad decision, but there is at least a redeeming element to be found in the character's motives, or in the circumstances surrounding the event, that makes the situation unquestionably different from the ones involving antagonists, whose intentions are, at heart, malicious. The difference between a 'good' character and a villain with regard to immortality, then, would be that whereas the latter has actively striven to achieve eternal life and most likely intends to use it for morally dubious purposes, the latter might not have desired it at all, or else ultimately realises the error of his or her ways in coveting immortality and voluntarily becomes mortal again. The latter scenario is in fact quite close to the conclusion of "Mawdryn Undead", which further suggests that although he is certainly the antagonist of the story, the depiction of Mawdryn does not portray him as a thoroughly evil villain.

4.3.1. "Father's Day"

An example of how a 'good' character's approach towards death differs from that of a villain may be seen in the story "Father's Day" (2005). Although the issue is not exactly *eternal* life, the central dilemma of the story is the question of whether the death of someone who is *supposed* to be dead can – or should – be prevented. In "Father's Day", the person in question is Peter Tyler, the Ninth Doctor's companion Rose's father, who died when Rose was an infant. On Rose's request, the Doctor takes the TARDIS back to the day of Peter's death; while there, Rose is unable to merely witness her father's death and, despite the Doctor's protests, saves Peter's life.

After the initial thrill of having back the father she has never known, Rose gradually realises the magnitude of the mistake she has made: by preventing her father's death, she has violated the "laws of Time", and as a result, the

timeline they are in has become damaged. To correct the situation by destroying the now-faulty timeline, dragon-like alien creatures called Reapers appear and begin to devour everyone in sight. Once Peter understands that he is responsible (albeit through no fault of his own) for the destruction around him, and that he should have been run over and killed by the car from which Rose has saved him, he volunteers to give his life to reverse the damage caused to the timeline. As soon as Peter allows himself to be hit by the car destined to kill him, the situation returns to normal, the mayhem caused by the Reapers is undone, and Rose has learned a lesson regarding the repercussions of attempting to cheat death – while still getting the opportunity to say goodbye to her father.

Over the course of the story, reference is made on numerous occasions to the "laws" governing both time travel and existence in general; as established in earlier sections, the idea is reminiscent of the Christian concept of the God of law, and of the authority of God over fundamental issues such as life and death. The idea that the laws are monitored by sentient beings (the Reapers) has echoes of Christianity as well, as opposed to the Buddhist conception of universal laws such as karma as impersonal forces. It is also worth noting that according to the story, there used to be no need for the work of the Reapers, since up until being annihilated in the Time War, the Time Lords had ensured that such breaches of the laws of Time did not occur. This would suggest that the Time Lords were responsible for God's law being observed. Given the Doctor's notably Christlike or otherwise divine attributes (Wynne-Jones 2008), bestowed upon him by the showrunners with some eagerness especially in his seventh and tenth incarnations, it would appear that there are quite a few parallels between terrestrial religions and the activities of the Doctor and his fellow Time Lords.

Adding a further Christian element to the ethics of "Father's Day", Peter's self-sacrificial act in giving his life to save all others in his timeline has a distinctly Christian quality to it. Finally, the conflict on which the story focuses – that of the

desire to bring back loved ones from the dead on the one hand, and the strength and understanding to accept death as inevitable and even right on the other hand – appears to be settled at the end of the story in favour of the latter approach. This is in accordance with how "The Five Doctors" and "Mawdryn Undead" settle the issue of immortality, the prospect rejected and things returning to their 'proper' state. Like in "Mawdryn Undead", influences of not only Christianity but of Buddhism as well may be seen in "Father's Day", namely in how the role of death as a necessary element of life is recognised, and in how Peter is able to let go of his life – from a Buddhist perspective, his Self – in order to free his timeline of the standstill to which it has been forced by Rose's desire to cling to her father when he is actually supposed to be moving on.

The message of respecting the laws of Time and letting go when the time comes is, then, much like the message in "Mawdryn Undead", both Christian and Buddhist in nature. In both stories, the character concerned (Peter and Mawdryn, respectively) die in the end; however, in "Mawdryn Undead", this is at least partially the consequence of Mawdryn's own actions, and can be seen as a punishment or atonement of sorts, whereas in "Father's Day", Peter dies first in an accident and then by willingly sacrificing himself, through no direct fault of his own.

The difference in how antagonistic characters like Mawdryn (even though not a full-fledged villain, as already stated) and those on the Doctor's side like Peter are treated reflects the series' view of morality: evil deeds generally result in a punishment or atonement of some kind, while heroic characters might suffer and even die but do not do so as a punishment. Indeed, to use the above comparison, Mawdryn actively pursues immortality, whereas Peter has no part in (or initially even knowledge of) his illicit avoidance of death. The difference in motive and intent separates the likes of Peter Tyler from those actively seeking to break the laws of Time (which parallel the laws of God), and as a result, the series places them on opposing sides of the line between good and evil.

4.3.2. "The Parting of the Ways"

Another case of a character on the Doctor's side of the good/evil divide being forced to address the issues of immortality and avoiding death is presented in the story "The Parting of the Ways" (2005). In the Ninth Doctor's final episode, recurring character Captain Jack Harkness – a humanoid alien con man from the 51st century – dies in battle against the Daleks by the Doctor's side, only to be brought back to life by Rose, momentarily equipped with superhuman powers courtesy of the TARDIS (which, despite usually serving as a mere inanimate vehicle, is at its core a living being).

It should be noted that in this instance, Rose is not in control of her actions; after getting hold of the powers of the TARDIS with the intention of coming to the Doctor's aid in a seemingly hopeless battle, she appears to be possessed by the forces unleashed (referred to in the story as "the Time Vortex"). In this form, Rose has the ability to control time and existence, including the power to both eradicate the heinous army of Daleks faced by the Doctor and resurrect Jack. While the outcome could be considered favourable for the Doctor on both accounts, he is horrified and pleads with Rose to relinquish the power of the Time Vortex, which would ultimately kill her. In the end, the Doctor sees no other alternative than to absorb the Time Vortex himself, which results in the death of his current body (and the subsequent regeneration to a new one).

Immortality, while definitely a welcome development for Jack himself as well as for his friends in the short term, eventually reveals itself to be a curse of sorts: after being resurrected, he finds himself unable to stay dead, always coming back to life moments after having been killed. As a result, gruesome death followed by immediate resurrection becomes a relatively common occurrence, and a source of extreme agony, for him, again calling to mind Mawdryn's predicament in being trapped in a body that deteriorates and falls apart but will not die. The problematic practical aspects of immortality are explored in further detail in the spin-off series *Torchwood*, which focuses on a Cardiff-based

paranormal investigation institute of the same name with Jack at its helm. (While a recognised part of the *Doctor Who* universe, and rife with musings on life, death, and immortality, the world-view of *Torchwood* is distinctly different from that of *Doctor Who*, and beyond the scope of this particular thesis.) In addition, much like in Peter Tyler's case, Jack's condition is not a result of his active pursuit of eternal life, but something imposed on him without his consent: again, Rose's actions (although this time not intentional on *her* part, either) have consequences that quickly turn from a blessing into a curse.

As suggested by the stories previously discussed, *Doctor Who* generally views immortality as morally dubious or reprehensible, and consciously striving to attain it frequently results in failure that may often be interpreted as some type of punishment. When the character presented with the opportunity to avoid death or to live forever is on the side of good, the attitude towards immortality itself as a human aspiration remains largely the same, typically with somewhat similar end results – the character in question may die, as is the case with Peter in "Father's Day", or be made to suffer through not being able to stay dead, as happens with Jack. However, the treatment of the characters involved differs greatly from that of villains seeking eternal life; most notably, immortality is not the result of the characters' conscious efforts, but rather something brought upon them from the outside. The view of becoming immortal as a transgression of law is distinctly Christian in principle, while the portrayal of the agony involved in eternal life is again quite reminiscent of Buddhist thinking.

Based on the examples discussed above, the crucial difference between the circumstances surrounding 'good' and 'evil' characters dealing with immortality appears to be that the former are not portrayed as greedy for immortality; recognising this difference is essential in understanding the significance of immortality in terms of ethics. A character who *desires* eternal life is seen as morally corrupt, whereas one who *accidentally or unwittingly* becomes immortal may not be allowed to remain as such, or may have to suffer as a result (given that immortality itself is still viewed as reprehensible for humans), but is not

regarded as a villain for becoming immortal. Eternal life might not be any more acceptable for heroes than for villains, but heroes do not turn into villains simply by being rendered immortal without consent. In other words, the series seems to differentiate between the *actions* of the characters (which may be objectionable) and the *characters themselves* (who may still be considered 'good'), which again becomes apparent in the next subsection, focusing on how the Doctor himself is viewed in terms of immortality.

4.4. *The Doctor coping with (im)mortality*

Given that the Doctor is virtually immortal from a human perspective, *Doctor Who* has the opportunity to explore the effects of being more or less immune to death through its protagonist. The issue has been addressed in a number of stories, and the Doctor's attitude varies depending on the story, the situation at hand, and the personality of the regeneration he is on at the moment. The significance of the latter in particular is remarkable: since each regeneration has a distinct personality, the views and attitudes exhibited by each one are in practical terms almost those of different people. Simultaneously, it has been established that despite the changes in everything from appearance to personality, the many regenerations of the Doctor are always in essence the same *person*, which would indicate that some fundamental element of the Doctor's identity (perhaps the soul in Christian terminology) remains throughout the transformations.

The added element of focusing on one character throughout several 'lives' (regenerations) allows the series to follow the development of the character's spiritual character, so to speak, not only in different stages of life but in altogether different lives separated by 'death' and rebirth through regeneration. It further enables the examination of how the series treats its protagonist who, by default, is mostly 'good', and yet is at least near-immortal, towards which the view of the series has not been at all favourable.

It may seem somewhat paradoxical for a series as constant as *Doctor Who* in its condemnation of the pursuit of eternal life to have as its central character a being with an immense-to-unlimited lifespan. At the very least, the Doctor is virtually immortal from a human perspective, with the theoretical possibility of living several full lifetimes and continuing in a new physical form once his old body is no longer viable. Depending on the interpretation, his lifespan could even be considered, for all intents and purposes, unlimited: the question of whether or not Time Lords are limited to 13 regenerations is currently under some contention, as offhand remarks have recently been made by the likes of then-showrunner Russell T Davies (Berriman 2010) (in all likelihood largely prompted by the introduction of the 13th Doctor looming ever closer, the current one being the 11th) that would suggest otherwise.

Of course, the fairly recent development of the Doctor possibly being virtually immortal does not negate the fact that the Time Lords were initially conceived as beings with a limited, albeit remarkably long, lifespan. Therefore, even if the series abandons or amends the rule of 13 regenerations in order to allow the Doctor's adventures to continue past his 13th incarnation, it initially intended its protagonist-hero to be mortal, which is in keeping with the general attitude of the series regarding immortality. To what extent changes in the Doctor's immortality status agree with how the series has viewed the issue so far depends on how the matter is handled. Turning the protagonist explicitly immortal would mean drastic changes in how the series views immortality, especially if the Doctor's immortality were presented as an unproblematic fact; from the viewpoint of the general stance of the series, whether granted extensive discussion or dismissed entirely, how the series approaches the issue will be quite significant. However, the direction that the series decides to take once the question becomes topical remains to be seen.

In addition, it bears noting that although the Time Lords are usually regarded as 'good', their actions and even their moral character are regularly called to

question: it is established early on that the Doctor has left Gallifrey because of his disapproval of the non-interference policy of the Time Lords which he regards as morally objectionable, and several Time Lords have been revealed to be considerably lacking in moral integrity, as the example of Borusa discussed in conjunction with "The Five Doctors" reveals. This could be interpreted as supportive of the view that immortality, or excessively long lifespan, has a detrimental effect on moral character.

With the Doctor's current immortality status perhaps best described as 'undecided', the attitude with which the issue is approached is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, the series is quite consistent in its portrayal of immortality as morally reprehensible and therefore unsuitable for a mostly-heroic character such as the Doctor; on the other hand, the hero's immortality allows him to survive from adventure to adventure and even over long stretches of time both diegetic (within the reality of the series, where the timespan covered is virtually impossible to tally) and non-diegetic (in 'our' reality, in which the series is produced; the series would in all likelihood not still be in production 50 years after premiering if not for the Doctor's ability to dodge death).

The conflict between the positives and negatives of longevity is reflected in the Doctor's intermittent struggle to cope with the inevitable loss of friends and allies he faces on a regular basis. This approach, which presents immortality or considerably prolonged life as something of a curse (being forced to say goodbye to loved ones again and again), is similar to the treatment of 'good' characters facing the prospect of eternal life or escaping death discussed in 4.3. The way in which the Doctor handles this dilemma, however, varies greatly from one case to another, and his actions and opinions reveal a wide array of attitudes regarding the finiteness of one's own life.

In situations in which the Doctor is forced to face the possibility of dying himself, the effect of the individual personality of his regeneration *du jour* becomes particularly salient. The two-part story "The End of Time" (2009) sees the Tenth

Doctor facing an event that has been professed to him over the previous season of the series – his death. This being the Doctor, it comes as no surprise to the viewer that what actually transpires is another regeneration. However, as he states in the first episode of the story, regeneration into a new body inevitably means the death of the previous one, and even though he as a being continues life in the new regeneration, the person that he was before essentially dies in the process.

The Tenth Doctor's reaction to his imminent death differs from that of many of his past incarnations, some of whom have rather stoically accepted regeneration as unavoidable, as the First Doctor in “The Tenth Planet” (1966), or as a necessary sacrifice, as the Third Doctor in “Planet of the Spiders” and the Fourth in “Logopolis” (1981); some have even willingly sacrificed themselves to save the life of another, as the Fifth Doctor in “The Caves of Androzani” (1984) and the Ninth in “The Parting of the Ways”. The Tenth Doctor is highly vocal about not wanting to give up his present form (despite being aware of his ability to regenerate), and even verbally attacks his friend Wilfred for unintentionally bringing about the circumstances that lead to the regeneration – a very different approach from that of, for example, the Third Doctor, who essentially uses his last breath before regenerating to comfort his friends and to tell them not to worry about him in “Planet of the Spiders”.

Since the concept of regeneration, as already established, resembles the Buddhist idea of rebirth in many ways, the Doctor's relationship with life and death is largely, though not exclusively, informed by Buddhist thinking. The Doctor's reluctance to let go of his body and personality in order to regenerate is noteworthy from a Buddhist perspective. Unwillingness to relinquish the material body, and essentially, the Self – while indeed aware that the loss of said body will not mean loss of life per se, and will not therefore amount to suicide – seems indicative of a spiritual immaturity of sorts; a soul this attached to the material is clearly not about to reach nirvana in the immediate future.

That earlier incarnations have faced the inevitable regeneration in a manner considerably more stoic than the Tenth Doctor is, in fact, quite compatible with the Buddhist idea of samsara: as Harvey (2000: 12–15) states, the law of karma is not actualised as a straightforward linear progression towards 'better' spirituality, but is rather a rocky path with ups and downs along the way. Each process of rebirth alters the spiritual circumstances of the soul concerned in some way, which also means that the capacity of each reincarnation to handle and approach the question of samsara is different.

According to Buddhist thinking, how far along a soul is in the process of enlightenment cannot be judged by the accomplishments of a specific incarnation – even one displaying great virtue may well have negative karma accumulated during past lives that needs to be reconciled before nirvana can be reached. By such reasoning, the Doctor's fluctuating attitude towards dying from one regeneration to another could be explained by each regeneration approaching the question from a different spiritual standpoint. For example, after his ninth incarnation, who was willing to sacrifice himself for Rose without hesitation, the Doctor's arguable spiritual regression in his next life as the Tenth Doctor could be indicative of leftover negative karma that the tenth incarnation must now contend with.

In the same vein as the example from "The End of Time", the Doctor's inability to accept the finite nature of life can be seen in the finale of season 6 of the new series, an episode titled "The Wedding of River Song" (2011): this time it is the Eleventh Doctor, likewise faced with the prospect of his own death, who initially rebels against the idea and dismisses death as a remote theoretical possibility that does not concern him. It is not until he learns of the death of his longtime ally and close friend, Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart, that he is forced to recognise mortality as a fact and accept letting go as a part of life. As this is not a regeneration episode, the Doctor is obviously not about to die over the course of the story; indeed, a highly complex scheme eventually enables him to escape death, and the question of dying again becomes academic for the time being.

Regardless, the shift in his attitude over the course of the episode is remarkable, and from a Buddhist perspective, indicates considerable spiritual growth, the like of which is absent from "The End of Time".

The Eleventh Doctor's recognition and acceptance of the prospect of death is paralleled by the Ninth Doctor in "The Parting of the Ways", in which the latter addresses the prospect, musing that after having lived for hundreds of years, "Maybe it's time" to die. Although once again, he lives to fight another day, the moment is indicative of the level of spiritual maturity displayed by the Ninth Doctor – which, after the regression of the Tenth Doctor, seems to somewhat resurface in the Eleventh in "The Wedding of River Song" as discussed above.

Again, whether or not the Eleventh Doctor's moment of epiphany will have far-reaching consequences remains to be seen; in fact, as already stated, the spiritual maturity of one incarnation does not necessarily provide any direct indication regarding the state of the next, which means that the as-yet-speculative 12th Doctor might not show any signs of the spiritual progress made by the preceding regeneration. However, the Eleventh Doctor's spiritual growth is highly likely to showcase itself in the actions of the Eleventh Doctor himself, and as such register as positive karma in the overall karmic 'score' of the Doctor's existence in his various incarnations.

Overall, the Doctor's attitude towards his own (im)mortality corresponds fairly well with the attitude of the series in general; despite occasional setbacks, he is generally portrayed as supportive of the view that life should be finite, and on most occasions, he extends this view to his own life as well, readily recognising the painful lot of one destined to outlive all friends and loved ones. The stance informed by Christianity, presented particularly clearly in stories focusing on villains such as "The Five Doctors" or "Mawdryn Undead", is usually supported by the Doctor as well: immortality corrupts, and fallible beings should not even covet eternal life. Simultaneously, the portrayal of regeneration is highly reminiscent of the Buddhist concept of reincarnation, and the depiction of

regeneration and continued existence contains so many parallels with samsara and the law of karma that it once again appears that Buddhism has a much more significant role in the values and philosophy presented in *Doctor Who* than may be apparent at first glance.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As the analysis of episodes suggests, the view of immortality presented on *Doctor Who* is both easily discernible and fairly consistent. The following, final section presents a summary of the observations made of the data with the theoretical background used as framework, suggesting some ideas for future studies that could be conducted on the basis of this one, and then concludes the study with some final remarks.

5.1. Summary of findings and discussion

The stories under examination in this thesis further indicate that *Doctor Who* is indeed a series with a fairly pronounced preoccupation with religious themes, whether deliberate or not. The storylines are frequently concerned with ethical and moral issues, and since religion and ethics are closely intertwined, the stance taken by the series consequently often reflects that of one religious tradition or another. Since the series is rarely explicitly preoccupied with religion, the parallels with religious ethics are often not immediately noticeable but implied, and present themselves in the form of the attitudes expressed by the heroes and villains respectively, the actions they take on the basis of these attitudes, and the consequences of their actions. This supports the hypothesis that the series on Christian and Buddhist thinking to form its ethical stances. All parallels between events in the series and the views of a certain school of ethics may not be entirely one-to-one, and it is of course possible to arrive at conclusions different from the ones presented here; however, the similarities between views depicted in the series and what the religion in question teaches regarding the subject are strong enough in the cases discussed to justify their inclusion.

In the stories focusing on villains – "The Five Doctors", "Mawdryn Undead", and "Enlightenment" – it would appear that even though the impact of Christianity

with regard to immortality may be more immediately noticeable, the perceived attitudes of the series display notable influences of both Christian and Buddhist thinking; in questions regarding immortality – a topic on which both religions have plenty to say – these influences are on several occasions remarkably pronounced. None of the abovementioned three stories addresses religion directly; the attitudes reflected in them are, then, not presented as explicitly Christian or Buddhist. When ethical issues are addressed, the characters express their opinions regarding the right thing to do as their own views on the matter or as self-evident, not as the teachings of a faith or an ideology. Since many religions have similar views on ethical issues (such as dishonesty, theft, killing, and so on), the views presented in the series may be representative of several religious traditions. However, the *Doctor Who* stories analysed here feature elements particularly reminiscent of one or the other, or both, of the religions under observation, and it is these elements that are relevant to this study.

What appears to be the general attitude of the series based on the aforementioned stories is reiterated in the ones focusing on characters on the side of good, the titular hero included. The major differences in how heroes and villains respectively are treated with regard to immortality are seen in the portrayal of the characters' motives regarding immortality: for the villains, they tend to be selfish or otherwise morally reprehensible, whereas the Doctor's allies usually come across immortality by accident or by having it imposed on them. Accordingly, the consequences of being involved with immortality are considerably less severe – even in cases where returning to mortal status means death, the fate is not portrayed as punishment nor the character as morally corrupt because of his or her brush with eternal life. However, although an ultimately 'good' character might not be vilified for somehow becoming immortal, the underlying message regarding the issue of immortality itself remains the same: eternal life is not condoned, regardless of the moral build-up of the character in question. Again, the message is compatible with both Christian and Buddhist ethics, and the influence of both appears notable.

In the case of the Doctor, the stance of the series appears to be amended somewhat, considering that the Doctor is virtually immortal by default. Nevertheless, even in his case extreme longevity is frequently portrayed as a less-than-ideal state of being, and the Doctor's existential crisis regarding the evils of being the lone (near-)immortal among his nearest and dearest is a recurring theme. Given that the series generally supports the view that excessively long life is not something to strive for, the Doctor's reservations regarding the immense lifespan of his race may be considered a redeeming quality of sorts. Even though he or his fellow Time Lords are not automatically relegated to the status of villain based on their longevity, the underlying attitude still appears to be that there are risks involved in living 'unnaturally' long, namely risks regarding the moral character of those affected.

The influence of Christianity is prominent in all the abovementioned stories – unsurprisingly, considering that the series is made in a country with a centuries-long history of Christianity, and that Christian influences may be detected in a vast array of western works of art in one form or another. It is, however, worthy of note that a series with little to no reference to religion (in the episodes analysed, and rarely in general) should present so many views that may with good reason be interpreted as Christian.

The most notable Christian themes raised include condemning the pursuit of immortality as hubristic and in violation with what is appropriate for humans ("The Five Doctors" and "Mawdryn Undead"); presenting those who are or wish to be immortal (in other words, those who go against the will of God) as ruthless and indifferent to human suffering, and therefore evil ("The Five Doctors" and "Enlightenment"); punishment administered to those who wrongfully pursue eternal life ("The Five Doctors"); and the possibility of redemption for those who succumb to the temptation of immortality, or otherwise become party to it ("Mawdryn Undead", "Father's Day", and "The Parting of the Ways"). Will of God as the basis for human law, sin as opposition to God's will, God's power to

punish wrongdoers, and the chance to be redeemed even after sinning are all ideas featured in Christianity, and although not presented as religious in the stories, they imply with their presence that the series' conception of ethics is at least partly informed by Christian thinking.

Buddhist influences in *Doctor Who* are perhaps less expected than Christian ones, except for the fact that Buddhist thinking had already been used to develop the concept of regeneration in the 1970s. Despite being less prevalent than Christianity in the culture within which *Doctor Who* was created, Buddhism and Buddhist ethics appears to have influenced the series' view on ethics in many significant ways. Buddhist thinking may be detected in the analysed stories in several instances, including the suggestion that eternal life means eternal suffering, and that death is a natural and necessary part of the human journey ("Mawdryn Undead"); and the harmful consequences of clinging to the perceived Self and disregarding the needs and value of others ("Enlightenment"). The influences are particularly strong in the way in which the Doctor's own relationship with (eternal) life is handled: the concepts of the Self and the not-Self, as well as the process of spiritual growth through rebirth, are vividly evoked. In addition, the Buddhist influences on the concept of regeneration strengthen the presence of Buddhist thinking in *Doctor Who*.

Even though the parallels between events in the series and Buddhist ethics are only implied – as is the case with Christian ethics as well – the similarities between Buddhist teachings and the attitudes presented in the stories are strong enough to suggest that Buddhist views on ethics are indeed represented in *Doctor Who*. Furthermore, given that the initial hypothesis was that Christianity has influenced the series more notably than Buddhism, the remarkable amount of instances in which the ethical landscape of the series has so often seemingly been shapen by Buddhist ethics was a somewhat surprising finding. This only further suggests that understanding of religion, or indeed *religions*, is required to fully understand the attitudes portrayed in *Doctor Who*, and in all likelihood in other television series as well.

5.2. Ideas for further studies and applications

The findings from this study may be used to examine the relationship between religion and entertainment in more general terms. Studying the influence of religious ethics on a television series offers insight into how religion affects the conception of ethics in secular settings and may therefore have an impact on how the unwitting audience member defines right and wrong. Using a television series as primary data – more specifically, a television series aimed at a young audience, and with wide-reaching appeal – means that the findings of the study may be considered illuminating in terms of either how the series *wants* its audience to feel regarding the ethical issues under consideration (prescriptive), or how the target demographic is *perceived* to feel about them (descriptive), depending on whether the stance of the series is taken to be the root or the consequence of that of the public.

A similar study on religious influences in television series or other cultural products could be conducted using another television series, film, work of literature, or nearly any work of fiction as primary data. Similarly, the religion or religions under observation could be chosen quite freely depending on relevance and interest: whereas the topic of the study at hand, as well as the history of the series under observation, have here made the choice of Christianity and Buddhism appropriate for the case, a work stemming from another religious tradition or preoccupied with themes more relevant to a different religion could benefit from a study using the applicable religion(s) as a point of reference.

Finally, the issue being observed – here, immortality – could naturally be any question with moral and ethical implications (leaving quite a wide spectrum of topics open for observation and analysis). Even *Doctor Who* might be examined in terms of the series' attitude towards justifiable war, the right to kill, genetical engineering and/or artificial intelligence, freedom to knowledge, responsibility of the media, environmental issues, treatment of women or minorities, distribution

of wealth, or personal versus common good, just to name a few possible topics; any of these or any number of other issues could be examined in either *Doctor Who* or in another work of fiction.

The findings of this study – or of a similar one with different primary data – could later be used as a basis for a study on audience response, consisting of a survey charting the views of audience members on topics addressed in the series. The responses could then be analysed in comparison with the findings of the original study to chart whether the views of the audience correspond with those presented in the series in any way. In the case of this particular study, such an approach would give an indication of whether the attitudes of the audience of *Doctor Who* correspond with the views (implicitly) promoted by stories such as the ones examined in this study. Should a correlation be detected, it could then be asked which is cause and which effect – does the attitude of the series affect that of the audience, or do the makers of the series wish to be seen promoting attitudes they expect their audience to already hold? Establishing the nature of causation is often extremely difficult; however, even in the absence of a conclusive answer, asking the question and examining the evidence might provide valuable insight.

5.3. Conclusion

The general tendency regarding the influence of religious ethics on the views presented on *Doctor Who* appears to be that the attitudes expressed are remarkably often in line with those held by both Christianity and Buddhism, although the influence of neither – nor of any other religious school of thought – is referred to. Any connection between religious ethics and what is perceived in *Doctor Who* as the morally proper approach towards immortality must therefore be inferred by determining to what degree the events depicted in a certain story correspond with the respective teachings of the religions in question. Moreover, even when a connection is detected, there is no way to determine based on

evidence from the televised story whether or not the influences are deliberately visible (in the case of older episodes in particular, consulting the production crew for an answer may no longer be even a theoretical possibility). This does not, however, diminish the significance of the observation that the attitudes of *Doctor Who* regarding the justification and ethically problematic nature of immortality are, by and large, in accordance with how Christianity and Buddhism respectively might be considered to feel regarding the issue.

Whether or not further studies on the topic are conducted, the results of this one may be used as indicative of the relevance of religion in a sphere as public and (supposedly) secular as popular entertainment. The findings may be taken as an argument for the importance of teaching about religion in schools, and for teachers of subjects not directly linked to religion to acknowledge its significance as well, since even the television series the students watch appear to require some familiarity with religions to fully appreciate the significance of the events depicted.

On the other hand, the findings may be seen as an incentive for teachers of religion, as well as for members of clergy, to recognise the significance of popular culture in terms of religion and ethics: popular entertainment should not be dismissed as frivolous or filled with vice, but the amount of ethical discussion – often rooted in, or in accordance with, religious teachings – taking place in works of fiction in media such as television and film should be acknowledged and addressed. Since entertainment of this kind is what the general public, especially younger audiences such as students, most likely follow in their free time, incorporating examples from television, films, literature and so on into teaching allows teachers to both justify the relevance of their subject by connecting it with the everyday reality of their students, and provide their students with better tools to recognise and critically assess the contents of what they watch, read, or listen to for entertainment – which might include a television series such as *Doctor Who*.

REFERENCES

- Ahokallio, T., Ollila, M.-R. & Salmenkylä, R. 2001. *Ihmisen hyvä ja paha*. Hämeenlinna, FI: Kirjapaja.
- Anders, C.J. 2010. "When Did Doctor Who's Time Machine Get So Easy to Control?" Published on io9.com. <<http://io9.com/5720207/when-did-doctor-whos-time-traveler-get-so-good-at-controlling-his-tardis>> Published Dec 29th, 2010; accessed 3rd Dec 2012.
- Arking, R. 2006. *Biology of Aging: Observations and Principles*. Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press. 3rd edition.
- Banner, M. 1999. *Christian Ethics & Contemporary Moral Problems*. Port Chester, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnett, S.J. 2004. *Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity*. Manchester, GBR: Manchester University Press.
- Bauman, J. 2005. "Holokaustin muisto – viestejä valkokankaalta." In J. Sumiala–Seppänen (ed.) *Pyhä media*. Jyväskylä, FI: Atena Kustannus Oy. pp. 89–99.
- Bauman, Z. 1992. *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*. Stanford, CA, USA: Standford University Press.
- BBC. 2012. "Religion: Christianity". <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/>> Accessed Nov 6th 2012.
- Berriman, I. 2010. "INTERVIEW Russell T Davies talks about THAT Sarah Jane Adventures line". Published on SFX.co.uk. <<http://www.sfx.co.uk/2010/10/26/interview-russell-t-davies-talks-about-that-sarah-jane-adventures-line/>> Published Oct 26th 2010; accessed Apr 26th 2013.
- Bettridge, D. 2010. "Dexter and the rise of the TV anti-hero." Published on Guardian.co.uk. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2010/aug/19/six-to-watch-tv-antiheroes>> Published Aug 19th 2010; accessed Apr 11th 2013.
- Brandt, S. 2002 (last updated). "The Trinity". At The Augustine Club's Archives, last updated Mar 6th 2002. <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/sbrandt/trinity.htm>> Accessed Nov 14th 2012.
- Callahan, D. 1998. *False Hopes: Why Americas Quest for Perfect Health is a Recipe for Failure*. New York, NY, USA: Simon & Schuster.

- Chryssides, G.D. 2010. *Christianity Today*. London, GBR: Continuum International Publishing.
- CIA World Factbook (author unknown). 2013. "United Kingdom". Published at the CIA World Factbook. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uk.html>> Last updated Apr 1st 2013; accessed Apr 11th 2013.
- Cook, J.R. & Wright, P. 2006. *British Science Fiction Television: A Hitchhiker's Guide*. London, GBR: I.B. Tauris.
- Crome, A. & McGrath, J. 2012. "CFP: Religion and Doctor Who: Time, Space and Faith (Edited Collection)". Published at *Calls for Papers*, maintained the University of Pennsylvania Department of English. <<http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/44680>> Published Jan 18th 2012; accessed Apr 23rd 2013.
- Doctor Who*. 1963. "An Unearthly Child". 4-part television serial. Directed by Waris Hussein.
- Doctor Who*. 1964. "The Aztecs". 4-part television serial. Directed by John Crockett.
- Doctor Who*. 1965. "The Romans". 4-part television serial. Directed by Christopher Barry.
- Doctor Who*. 1966. "The Celestial Toymaker". 4-part television serial. Directed by Bill Sellars.
- Doctor Who*. 1966. "The Tenth Planet". 4-part television serial. Directed by Derek Martinus.
- Doctor Who*. 1969. "The War Games". 10-part television serial. Directed by David Maloney.
- Doctor Who*. 1974. "Planet of the Spiders". 6-part television serial. Directed by Barry Letts.
- Doctor Who*. 1976. "The Deadly Assassin". 4-part television serial. Directed by David Maloney.
- Doctor Who*. 1978. "The Invasion of Time." 6-part television serial. Directed by Gerald Blake.
- Doctor Who*. 1980. "Meglos". 4-part television serial. Directed by Terence Dudley.

- Doctor Who*. 1980. "Logopolis". 4-part television serial. Directed by Peter Grimwade.
- Doctor Who*. 1983. "Mawdryn Undead". 4-part television serial. Directed by Peter Moffatt.
- Doctor Who*. 1983. "Enlightenment". 4-part television serial. Directed by Fiona Cumming.
- Doctor Who*. 1983. "The Five Doctors". Televised episode. Directed by Peter Moffatt.
- Doctor Who*. 1984. "The Caves of Androzani". 4-part television serial. Directed by Graeme Harper.
- Doctor Who*. 1989. "The Curse of Fenric". 4-part television serial. Directed by Nicholas Mallett.
- Doctor Who*. 2005. "The Parting of the Ways". Televised episode. Directed by Joe Ahearne.
- Doctor Who*. 2007. "The Lazarus Experiment". Televised episode. Directed by Richard Clark.
- Doctor Who*. 2009. "The End of Time". 2-part television serial. Directed by Euros Lyn.
- Doctor Who*. 2011. "The Doctor's Wife". Televised episode. Directed by Richard Clark.
- Doctor Who*. 2011. "The God Complex". Televised episode. Directed by Nick Hurran.
- Doctor Who*. 2011. "The Wedding of River Song". Televised episode. Directed by Jeremy Webb.
- Doctor Who*. 2013. "The Rings of Akhaten". Televised episode. Directed by Farren Blackburn.
- Faure, B. 2009. *Unmasking Buddhism*. Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Gaughan, G. 2009. "Barry Letts Obituary". Published on Guardian.co.uk. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2009/oct/12/barry-letts-obituary>> Published Oct 12th 2009; accessed Apr 6th 2013.
- Görman, U. 2006. "Never too late to live a little longer? The quest for extended life and immortality: some ethical considerations." In Deane-Drummond, C. & Manley Scott, P. (eds.) *Future Perfect? God, Medicine*

- and Human Identity*. London, GBR / New York, NY, USA: T & T Clark International. pp. 143–154.
- Hallamaa, J. 1994. "Kristillinen etiikka – jotain erityistä?" In P. Järveläinen (ed.), *Kristinuskko ja moraali*. Suomalaisen Teologisen kirjallisuusseuran julkaisuja 192. Helsinki, FI: Suomalainen teologinen kirjallisuusseura. pp. 87–99.
- Harvey, P. 2000. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutchinson Dictionary of World Mythology* (author unknown). 2005. Abingdon, Oxfordshire, GBR: Helicon Publishing.
- Hutchison, W.R. 2003. *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal*. New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press.
- Iisakka, J. 2011. *Sounds of trees falling - the translations of The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy and Under Milk Wood*. Pro gradu thesis. Oulu, FI: University of Oulu, English Philology.
- Jacobson, N.P. 2010. *Understanding Buddhism*. Carbondale, IL, USA: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Kamm, F.M. 1993. *Morality, Mortality: Death and Who to Save from It. Volume 1*. New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Kennedy, J.B. 2003. *Space, Time and Einstein*. Durham, GBR: Acumen.
- Layton, D. 2012. *Humanism of Doctor Who: A Critical Study in Science Fiction and Philosophy*. Jefferson, NC, USA: McFarland.
- Leach, J. 2009. *TV Milestones: Doctor Who*. Detroit, MI, USA: Wayne State University Press.
- Lehtiniemi, S. 2010. *A thematic reading of Ursula K. Le Guin's novel The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. Pro gradu thesis. Oulu, FI: University of Oulu, English Philology.
- Levy, M.M. 1985. "Who, What, and Why? Character Motivation in Doctor Who." In *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol 10, No 2, Summer 1985. pp. 76–79.
- Lewis, C. & Smithka, P. 2010. *Doctor Who and Philosophy*. New York, NY, USA: Open Court.
- MacCulloch, D. 2009. *A History of Christianity*. London, GBR: Penguin.

- Martin, D. 2011. "Doctor Who: The Doctor's Wife – Series 32, episode 4". Episode review published on Guardian.co.uk. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2011/may/14/doctor-who-doctors-wife-gaiman>> Published May 14th 2011; accessed Apr 6th 2013.
- Meriläinen, T. 2012. *We thought it was Ragnorok: Comparison of Amateur and Professional Subtitles of Stargate SG-1*. Pro gradu thesis. Oulu, FI: University of Oulu, English Philology.
- Morley, B. 2002. "God, Western Concepts of". In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last updated Jul 7th 2005. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/god-west/>>. Accessed Nov 14th 2012.
- Nordenfelt, L. 1995. *On the Nature of Health: An Action-theoretic Approach*. Dordrecht, NLD: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 2nd revised and enlarged edition.
- Orthia, L.A. 2010. *Enlightenment was the choice: Doctor Who and the Democratisation of Science*. Australian National University, published online. <<https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/49358>> Accessed Apr 23rd 2013.
- Pearson, A.M. 1999. "From Thwarted Gods to Reclaimed Mystery? An Overview of the Depiction of Religion in *Star Trek*". In J. Porter & D.L. McLaren (eds.), *Star Trek and Sacred Ground: Explorations of Star Trek, Religion, and American Culture*. Albany, NY, USA: State University of New York Press. pp. 13–32.
- Reynolds, F.E. & Carbine, J.A. 2000. *Life of Buddhism*. Ewing, NJ, USA: University of California Press.
- Schinkel, A. 2007. *Conscience and Conscientious Objections*. Amsterdam, NLD: Amsterdam University Press.
- Schmidt-Leukel, P. 2006. *Understanding Buddhism*. Edinburgh, GBR: Dunedin Academic Press.
- Shaw, A. 2011. "What Makes a Companion?" Published on kasterborous.com. <<http://www.kasterborous.com/2011/10/what-makes-a-companion/>> Published Oct 12th 2011; accessed Apr 11th 2013.
- Southwold, M. 1978. "Buddhism and the Definition of Religion." In *Man*, New Series, Vol 13, No 3 (Sep 1978). Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. pp. 362–379.

- Steiner, A. "The Faust Legend and the Christian Tradition." In *PMLA*, Vol 54, No 2, Jun 1939. Modern Language Association. pp. 391–404.
- Sumiala-Seppänen, J. 2005. "Pyhän median monet kasvot." In J. Sumiala-Seppänen (ed.), *Pyhä media*. Jyväskylä, FI: Atena Kustannus Oy. pp. 11–17.
- Tulloch, J. & Jenkins, H. 1995. *Science Fiction Audiences: Doctor Who, Star Trek, and Their Fans*. Florence, KY, USA: Routledge.
- Turner, T. & Upson, J.D. 2010. "Epistemic Freedom, Science Fiction, and Ethical Deliberation". In S.L. Borden & H. Good (eds.), *Ethics and Entertainment*. Jefferson, NC, USA: McFarland & Co. pp. 281–296.
- Wolverson, E.G. 2008. "Doctor Who – Planet of the Spiders". In *Doctor Who Reviews*. <<http://www.doctorwhoreviews.co.uk/ZZZ.htm>> Accessed Dec 3rd 2012.
- Wynne-Jones, J. 2008. "The church is ailing – send for Dr Who." Published on *TheTelegraph.co.uk*. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/howaboutthat/1925338/The-church-is-ailing-send-for-Dr-Who.html>> Published 4th May 2008; accessed Apr 9th 2013.