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Beside Good and Evil: Religious Satire and Moral Relativism in *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch*

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in English at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Fall 2020

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“Yes, but how can we make it funny?” This is the clarion call for many a show, book or movie that is dealing with a subject that is difficult to talk about or likely to start an argument. What better way to sugarcoat such a topic than with comedy? One of the thorniest subjects is religion, and the comedic genre of satire in particular seems up to the task for raising the subject without merely sugarcoating it. From these trappings and the topic of religion the genre of religious satire is born. Through the use of satire, key aspects of religion can be addressed in a manner that encourages discussion. The topics that religious satire addresses range from the influence of church in the secular government to the activities that members of the church must follow if they are to be rewarded with eternal bliss in Heaven. In short, religious satire directs the public eye to the vices and follies of religion such as hypocrisy and the corruption of power. By furnishing these topics with the trappings of comedy, religious satire also increases the chances that the subjects of the critiques and criticisms are more likely to laugh with as opposed to punish the author. When it works, religious satire allows an author’s quips and points to be dismissed as nothing more than a harmless jest. These same disarming furnishings can also ensure that the criticisms are spread as far as they can, the people who want to enjoy the jokes as jokes, while encouraging them and others to really think about what is being said.

A famous example of religious satire would be *Tartuffe* (1664) by Moliere, in which we see a man of piety hypocritically use that piety as a mask to gain favor with and control over a family. Through their favor, Tartuffe gains food, wine and riches, worldly goods counter to what one would normally expect from a man of the cloth. Throughout the play we are confronted with examples of absurdist devotion to the church and the supposed power that is behind it. The head of the house, Orgon, is blinded and taken in by Tartuffe, thinking that he is the end all be all and

becoming completely enamored with his every word and action. Only when he is explicitly confronted with Tartuffe's dubious actions does he begin to question and break free for himself. This is the kind of thinking that this form of religious satire hopes to provoke, that questioning something is not some inherently evil thing, it challenges the status quo, giving readers and the audience a choice beyond blind faith and to find that choice themselves. Throughout the play there is the binary choice of belief in the titular Tartuffe or knowing him for the fraud who undermines the faith he wields as a tool for his hypocritical ways. While the use of religious satire leads the readers and audience to come to their own choices, it still falls between a duality of right and wrong. You are either the fool who believes Tartuffe or the person who questions him. And that is where Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman's *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch* comes in, displaying a choice beyond the binary of blind faith or faithlessness.

Where *Tartuffe* satirizes religious hypocrisy and blind faith as seen through the lens of a family's fight against a domineering church representative, *Good Omens* satirizes moral absolutism and religious Manichaeism, the belief in pure good and evil, as seen by actual members of Heaven and Hell coming to grips with the ultimate, the last, conflict. Throughout *Good Omens*, we follow the comic misadventures of Aziraphale, an angel of the Heavenly Host, and his best friend, a demon from the depths of Hell named Crowley. The story assumes the basic premise of the oncoming Christian Apocalypse when the world will end with the Anti-Christ coming to power. The two characters that the novel follows deviate from the normal type, however, as they are not polar opposites who would normally be cheering for this Apocalypse to come about so that the final confrontation between their two hosts can occur and the ultimate supremacy of the universe can be determined. One would assume that these opposites would be

loath to work together, as the moral absolutism of Christianity would seem to decree that an angel and a demon would be the antithesis to the other. The demon would cause evil while the angel would encourage good, their respective actions canceling each other out in the name of their masters. This is not the case. Rather than being portrayed as beacons of incorruptible good and unmitigated evil, shining right and Stygian wrong, Aziraphale and Crowley are shown to have changed, to have grown beyond the binary concept of good vs evil.

Throughout the novel their tendencies, while colored by their beliefs, tend towards a more morally grey area, a result of their time spent amongst the more morally grey humanity. This is where the concept of moral relativism comes into play. The idea of moral relativism, to put it simply, is that morality itself is an idea whose perception is tied to whatever is occurring in the point in time in which it is questioned. According to the precepts of moral relativism, there can be no clear set definition of what is good and what is evil, for what may be good to one person is a wholly evil concept to another. However, moral relativism's own moral stance is often questioned with people more often than not seeing it as an evil. If one's moral compass can continually shift and adapt to whatever happens to suit the situation, then there is really no right or wrong, no good or evil, merely justifications.

I argue that Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman's *Good Omens* employs religious satire to defend moral relativism from detractors who argue that the position is unethical. To the contrary, *Good Omens* represents a theological universe in which moral relativism is the only truly ethical position to adopt. To make my case, I will first define what moral relativism's effect, as well as morality's, has on people. Second, I will highlight instances in the novel in which a morally relativistic nature is revealed, not in a manner which one could ascribe as evil but one that anyone can see as good even if it is in contrast with what is considered to be good by

Christianity as a whole. Third, by using these various examples I can then prove that morality is not some big grandiose ideal. Instead, morality is something that is intimate and personal, changing from person to person. This support of intimacy will help to strip down the ideals of good and evil and it will show that such decisions are not immutable universal laws, but societally, and in this case religiously, held belief systems imparted upon the masses. Viewing actions through the lens of moral relativism, it is possible to see evil as merely a deviation from societally accepted norms. I will also be compiling examples of religious satire, as well as support for the satire used throughout the novel. *Good Omens* continues to undercut the inherently grandiose nature of the Manichean ideal. It is a work of religious satire that reveals moral absolutism and Manichism to be the comedic and fanciful ideals that they are. I will argue that not only is moral relativism not an evil ideal but that it is the only truly ethical position that one may have in any given situation. With these plans laid out we will now begin our exploration that is the root of this argument, moral relativism.

To examine moral relativism first morality must be defined. In its most general sense, morality is defined as principles or rules that describe behavior, that allow human beings to decide what is right or wrong. Morality is a basic concept that is ingrained in people as they grow up and they are taught what is acceptable in their society, culture and the world at large. It is an inherent part of the human process to have the rights and wrongs of the world dictated to them. According to the Christian bible, humans must follow this layout of right and wrong or a swift punishment follows to correct any errors, be it from parents as they grow up or law enforcement as they become adults. If someone acts outside the socially acceptable rights and wrongs then, by definition they are committing a wrong according to what people have grown up and learned. When someone fits these criteria, relativism comes into play. A person living via a

relativistic view of morality operates outside of this binary ideal of pure good and pure evil, and is, therefore, considered in the wrong. I posit that relativism is, in fact, a natural process of growing up and becoming an individual in society. As people grow up, they add to their collective knowledge and will establish their own moral code, one that falls in line with the socially accepted standards.

However, if one were to look at knowledge and relativism in tandem, then it must be accepted that one will affect the other as what one knows affects how one will act. The inherent effect that knowledge has on decisions and reasoning is something that has existed throughout history. “Yet,” Egon G. Guba observes, “the entire history of inquiry teaches us that knowledge does not converge onto objective reality, but diverges as more and more is known” (19). The more that one knows, the more one is likely to create their own opinions and perceptions of how one must act. As people grow up, they question things that they are taught. In this way, they can learn why they must act in the manner that society dictates. This societally mandated set of moral behaviors is affected by the knowledge that the person will have. In essence, the binary choice becomes the basis for which a relativistic standpoint will emerge as people are shaped by their conceptions.

With morality and relativism defined, as well as their connection to knowledge, the societal elephant in the room must be addressed, the elephant being the idea that moral relativism is an inherently evil choice, one made by those that have disregarded the moral code of society and live by their own codes in disregard to the wellbeing of others in that same society. As has been discussed however, this growth of morality established by society is a natural occurrence as people acquire more knowledge and are able to make better decisions based on what they have learned. Rather than moral relativism being an aberrant growth it is the inevitable outcome.

With this new knowledge and an evolved sense of morality the way in which people will react to different situations becomes unique to each individual and their own moral code. People learn that their moral ideals can have different connotations with regards to different ideas and arguments. A leading scholar in the field of moral relativism, Gilbert Harman writes, “For I want to say that there is a way in which certain moral judgments are relative to an agreement but other moral judgments are not” (Harman 4). The idea of moral judgments being relevant to different agreements highlights why moral relativism is the next step in the evolution of an individual’s moral code. Moral relativism is an adaptive manner of thinking that is shaped and molded by the judgements that it encounters. Say two individuals have grown up the same, learned the same moral values as one another with one key difference. Person A is much more connected to their family than Person B. A disaster happens affecting both people and their families to the point where a member of each family requires immediate administration of medicine. Person B would opt to wait for medical help to arrive even though it would be quite some time due to the disaster seeing this as the obvious moral choice. Person B however has grown up with a more intimate attachment to their family and thus sees the socially acceptable moral right, waiting for help, as an impossibility. Instead they go out and steal the medicine that is needed for their family member. Person B would judge what they have done as morally wrong while Person A would see it as morally right. Harman’s point of this topic would be that to each person a different moral judgment was needed to correctly interpret the argument with its relation to each person.

Harman is not the only person to suggest that this idea of different perspectives of an incident would generate different moral judgements. It can be said that this difference in judgment is the central reasoning of moral relativism itself. J. David Velleman claims in his

essay “Foundations of Moral Relativism,” “that morality obligates its subjects by being rationally binding on them - more specifically, by generating complete and compelling reasons for them to act, or to hold practical attitudes such as desires or intentions” (79). Velleman is saying that morality itself is a rationally binding thing to the person involved with it as the bond that is created is based on the rationale that was used to create it. This implies that everyone will react differently to any given moral situation as they would have their own unique reasoning behind each thought. It is exceedingly rare for two people to grow up in the exact same manner, acquiring the exact same knowledge and therefore forming the exact same moral code. If Velleman’s stance on morality is to be considered true, then it would make sense that morality cannot be codified as exacting one or the other choice. Morality is not a simple binary choice of good or evil, but something with a myriad of shades of grey that exist in between the two extremes. One can conclude that people who exist in these shades of moral grey area are not inherently evil but react to each moral situation that they encounter based on their own personal knowledge and experiences. This interpretation proves that moral relativism is not an inherently evil stance but a commonality that exists side by side with the normal idea of morality. With all of this in place moral relativism can be best defined, as Chris Gowans puts it, as “an empirical thesis that there are deep and widespread moral disagreements and a metaethical thesis that the truth or justification of moral judgments is not absolute, but relative to the moral standard of some person or group of persons” (Gowans). With this definition in place moral relativism becomes a coin. Two halves of a single whole each one playing its particular role in society. As with its title moral relativism is itself relativistic. It will change its shape as needed to fit with whatever task or decision is required of it.

And so the purpose and support within the novel *Good Omens* becomes clear. As mentioned above, the novel primarily follows the two characters Aziraphale the angel and Crowley the demon. What is most interesting about them is that while they do both tend towards the supposed alignment of their homes, good in Heaven for Aziraphale and evil in Hell for Crowley, more often than not they balance within a morally grey area, something that they have come to acknowledge and practice as they spent time within the human realm. It is easy to see that Crowley is an inherently bad person doing good things for the right reasons. He fits nicely with the anti-hero trope and we see how he is juxtaposed against the near cartoonish levels of evil that his fellow demons extol. Of particular interest, however, is how Aziraphale interacts with the hosts of Heaven. When one thinks of Heaven they are called to mind of pure good, pure intentions, an incorruptible bastion of what is morally right. This is not the case in *Good Omens*. In a few sentences the idyllic good of heaven is transformed as Aziraphale shares with them that he has found the Antichrist and the Apocalypse can be averted: “The forces of darkness must be *beaten*. You seem to be under a misapprehension. The point is not to *avoid* the war, it is to *win* it. We have been waiting a long time, Aziraphale” (Pratchett and Gaiman 222). Heaven does not do what most would consider to be the morally good thing to do, ending the war and making sure there is no loss of life, but rather they desire the war to prove that they are the right choice. Heaven and Hell, as well as Aziraphale and Crowley, act in the opposite manner that one would expect and with this Pratchett and Gaiman take the binary of good and evil and turn it on its head. By doing this they are putting Heaven on the same side as Hell as a villain in the story. Both Heaven and Hell want the war to occur; they crave the violence and the proof that may come from it, that one extreme of the moral scale is superior to the other and that the outcome of this decision can only be borne out in battle. Most would find this kind of dogmatic zealotry

abhorrent and something to be avoided by any means. That is where the moral grey area in which Aziraphale and Crowley reside comes to the forefront.

These two agents of pure good and evil are supposed to represent the moral binary, each committed to their half and only their half. After all, they were born of the absolutes and 'raised' by the absolutes in a manner of speaking. In a typical fantasy setting it would be safe to assume that Aziraphale and Crowley would stick to their respective corners, ensuring some form of satire through ridiculous acts of absolutism. However, the authors take these two characters in a different direction. As mentioned previously both of the characters serve in a moral grey area, Crowley committing acts of good on occasion. For instance, his insistence on taking care of plants in his own twisted way, by putting the fear of God into them so that they grow bright and green. On the other hand, Aziraphale will indulge in some minor sin, becoming a covetous collector of books of all types. Both of them have acquired these habits through their long lives interacting with people who don't exist on the extremes of morality and humanity. If these two agents of the extreme ends of the moral spectrum can come to inhabit, and enjoy, being in a morally grey area then it stands to reason that moral relativism quickly becomes the only truly ethical position to take. Not only is it the only truly ethical position to take, Aziraphale and Crowley even talk about the pointlessness of pure good and evil: "'Potentially evil. Potentially good, too, I suppose. Just this huge powerful *potentiality*, waiting to be shaped,' said Crowley. He shrugged. 'Anyway, why're we talking about this *good* and *evil*? They're just names for sides. *We* know that'" (Pratchett and Gaiman 52). The two sides are nothing more than that, sides. At least in the eyes of our two characters. If they hold no real meaning, then the inherent ideal that is given to good and evil is null. Furthermore, by implying that both he and Aziraphale know that the good and evil are really nothing more than names, Crowley is setting them apart.

These characters who are acting in the interest of the planet, they are the heroes of the story and through this they are showing that being separate from pure good and evil is the way in which normalcy is attained. Aziraphale and Crowley don't want some big end game in which one side wins out over the other. They just want to maintain that normalcy that they've come to know and love.

To further drive home the fact that good and evil are just names without any real meaning Aziraphale comes to the horrific understanding that the forces of 'good' do not want to act in the way that would save the most lives. Heaven would much rather take the course that lets it prove itself to be the superior choice. This calls to mind a salient point that Crowley makes in the novel when he says, "well, what I'm trying to say is who has time to go round picking up people out and popping them up in the air to sneer at people dying of radiation sickness [...] And as for that stuff about Heaven inevitably winning... Well, to be honest, if it were that cut and dried, there wouldn't be a Celestial War in the first place, would there? It's propaganda. Pure and simple" (Pratchett and Gaiman 255). The two forces of good and evil want only to promote their own side and they do it in the manner that they deem fitting. Each side wants to ensure that their side wins in the end no matter the cost. This same passage also uses religious satire to point out the absolute comedy that comes from the Manichean idea of a pure good versus a pure evil. Both sides want only to make sure that they are heard the clearest and are the most persuasive, hence Crowley's sentiment that all the good and bad things that happen when one dies is naught but propaganda. The text likens this to propaganda as a means to make religion seem nothing more than an enormous ad campaign.

When the moral battle between good and evil is carefully pulled apart and dissected one can come to find out that it is nothing but the world's longest running ad campaign, with both

sides attempting to sling more mud on the other. The proponents of either end of the spectrum will only support their way of thinking and put down any alternate thought that comes to mind. It is as though there are two children arguing over which superhero would win in a fight, each one stubbornly refusing to give in to the other. That is why we follow two characters from either side that began by supporting their respective sides but came to learn that that is not the way they wanted to live. Over the course of their time spent amongst humanity, Crowley and Aziraphale learned that they are happy living between the extremes of reality, creating their own destiny and living their lives how they would wish to live them rather than having their actions strictly monitored and either supported or rejected by their own cultures. If two creatures formed from moral absolutism can find that their absolutes do not hold the purported perfection and peace that both claimed then the middle ground, the morally grey area, becomes the best alternative. One can live by both good and evil morals, adapting to the situation at hand based on what they have learned rather than what they are told they must believe.

The adaptive nature of morality plays into the idea that belief is only what people want of it. They are more likely to take what they want out of what they are taught, siding with whatever it is that pleases them or eases their stress the most. That is partially the point of religion itself, to explain that which is unexplainable and to provide a soothing balm to the people who worry about what happens to them when they pass on. These people want to believe in things like absolute good and absolute evil so that they can have a reason for all the events that happen in their lives, good or bad. It brings to mind the story of Job, who suffers at the hands of God and does not let it rattle his faith, believing that there is a reason for it to happen to him and that whatever the reason is it falls within God's divine plan. This idea of picking and choosing for comfort is addressed in the novel: "Dabbling, she'd realized, was exactly what her customers

wanted. They didn't want to be shoved in it up to their necks. They didn't want the multi-planular mysteries of Time and Space, they just wanted to be reassured that Mother was getting along fine now she was dead. They wanted just enough Occult to season the simple fare of their lives..." (Pratchett and Gaiman 240). Through this inclusion of how Madame Tracy, a psychic in the novel, treats her clientele, Pratchett and Gaiman support the idea that people don't really *believe* in that ideal of moral absolutism, they simply want to take comfort from what they can, when they can. The authors appear to believe that the average person may hold this idea that something must be good or evil but they don't let it be all consuming. By following the thoughts of Madame Tracy, we see that people wish only to be a part of the great beyond to a degree that gives them that mentioned comfort. They don't want anything more to do with it than that. This is exemplified throughout the novel when people who are confronted with the strange and absurd simply brush it off, seeing it as nothing more than a bump on the road that is their existence.

With these characters hanging off the every word of Madame Tracy and finding comfort in her psychic visions, Pratchett and Gaiman draw attention to the fact that people are getting the same amount of comfort from a psychic as they would from a religious organization, something to help soothe their day to day lives. This forces those who follow the ways of moral absolutism to consider ideals other than their own which provide the same services. However, this would most likely not be the case as psychics involve the use of spirits and seances, things that moral absolutists would consider to be evil and therefore unworthy of their time as well as beneath them entirely. From a stereotypical reaction such as this, a comical juxtaposition comes to light. The followers of moral absolutism would deny the comfort that people seek in psychics while the institutions that they work within, such as religious organizations, provide the exact same kind of comfort. In effect, the moral absolutists appear to be naught but ostriches with their

heads buried in the sand, ignorant to any opinion that is not their own and stubborn to consider one at all.

The near comical stubbornness that Pratchett and Gaiman employ in their novel allows them to defuse the situation surrounding difficult conversations about good and evil. Comedy often serves as a means to diffuse a tense situation between parties that normally do not see eye to eye with one another. While the subject matter that they discuss, the importance of moral relativism and the comedic pointlessness of moral absolutism, is quite a grave matter, the humor allows for it to be taken in a less confrontational manner. The situation no longer becomes a long and drawn out philosophical debate about the merits of good and evil. Instead it becomes an entertaining story that enraptures the reading audience while addressing the philosophical quandaries. “Writing in a comedic style,” Erla Filipia Haraldsdóttir says, “gives the authors the freedom to go further and doubt the benevolence of Heaven as well as the intrinsic evilness of Hell” (37). In doing so, Haraldsdóttir draws attention to the disarming quality of comedic writing. While there are such things as high and low comedy it can be agreed that comedy itself can be a unifying factor to all people. Pratchett and Gaiman’s use of the comedic style takes the overblown nature inherent in the discussion about absolutist views of good and evil by bringing it down to earth. They make morality a concept that is not some grandiose ideal unapproached by anyone but the most learned scholars and transform it into a topic that anyone that wants to is free to discuss. With the use of religious satire they also take the concept of religion down to a more human level. People need not feel ashamed to discuss religion or share their beliefs if they differ from the norm. That is the key importance shown by Aziraphale’s vices and Crowley’s minor virtues displayed prominently in the novel.

One would think that these two agents of such universal forces would be above it all, but they're shown to act in the manner that allows them to continue to indulge in their most human activities. Angels are associated with all that is good and pure, yet Aziraphale displays the vice of greed with his passion for books. He is infatuated with the necessity of keeping his store running for possible customers while at the same time collecting the books of prophets for his own amusements. The angel even fears the loss of good music and good food that would occur if the world were to end. Then we have Crowley and his virtuous act of taking care of houseplants. One does not often associate a devil with the green thumb, even if he does go about it in a more threatening way than most gardeners. By applying these humanizing elements to divine and damned beings, the authors are allowing the readers to come to better sympathize with them. This allows the readers to come around and see the point of having a balanced moral greyness that most of humanity already has. It is the universal constant rather than the idea of pure good or pure evil.

To expand upon the humanization of morality further we must examine another prominent character of the novel, Adam, the Antichrist. He is by all means a normal child and to most everyone else that is exactly what he is. There are only a few characters in the novel that are in the know as to his true parentage. One would assume that the Antichrist would be the embodiment of all things evil and wrong, that everything that he does would be pure evil in some way and done to benefit the devil. They would be wrong. Adam is by all means a normal child, barring his infernal powers, and wants to live as such. At the climax of the book he uses his powers not for good and evil but rather: "The apocalypse is averted not for higher reasons but for selfish ones -- because Adam changes reality to maintain Tadfield and his friends" (Meyer 255). This ultimate evil is not some ineffable horrid entity. He's just a child who wants the normalcy

of his life to continue and so instead of winning the war for one side or the other he puts an end to it, leaving the Earth and the people on it intact. Adam acts to remove the warring parties so that he can continue to live his normal life with his normal friends as a normal boy. Just as was the case with Crowley and Aziraphale getting humanized so too is the Antichrist humanized so that readers see the actual person within. All he wants in life is to have a normal life with his friends and his dog. This goes to the extent that before he is even aware of his powers they are affecting the world around him, making Tadfield an idyllic childhood place to be, a comforting place to build memories and have fun. However, though all of these great supernatural beings are undergoing humanization it would serve little purpose if there was not a human element in the novel to compare them to. Enter Witchfinder Sergeant Shadwell, a man who staunchly believes in his cause of hunting down and burning witches. Throughout the book, he is something of a comic relief character, given dialogue and actions showcasing extreme and humorous examples of zealotry to a cause. However, he serves an interesting purpose beyond comic relief, as Amy Lea Clemons points out:

Witchfinder Shadwell, an everyman character who comes from a long line of witch hunters, believes in an unseen world but seems to not understand much about that world; his only real sense of the supernatural is from signs and portents-like someone having too many nipples-based in old superstitions. Still, this inclusion of a key genre identifier allows the audience to recognize the novel's intended generic position, and yet the presentation of this factor through an absurd character like Shadwell signals readers to take a disbelieving attitude. (Clemons)

Due to his very nature, Shadwell is used as a call out by Pratchett and Gaiman to illustrate their point about the inherently absurdist and comedic nature of absolutism. Shadwell

sees witches as entities of pure evil who will mean nothing but trouble for the world at large. He believes the witch burnings of previous times were something that only benefited humanity. Shadwell constantly berates Madame Tracy as a “whore,” insisting she is evil despite her consistent kindness to him. His convictions and beliefs would normally be seen as unsettling and something that one would want to distance themselves from. However, due to his inherent comedic nature those convictions and beliefs are undercut, allowing readers to recognize Shadwell’s convictions as wrong. These people who preach of absolute good and evil only do it out of their decision to believe in moral absolutism in the first place. They are not the heralds of a new voice, of some unapproachable ideal that only the elite can accurately discuss. Instead, these kinds of people are just that, people. They are a product of their choices and free will, following whatever it is that calls to them. The devout and the morally absolute were not put there for a divine purpose but made their way there by their own beliefs and convictions. This self-created nature continues the ideal of popularization of morality that Pratchett and Gaiman’s use of religious satire strives to achieve.

Through the use of all these humanizing elements a central theme begins to emerge: free will. Aziraphale and Crowley choose to indulge in these human niceties and in their own vices and virtues. At the end of the novel Adam chooses to side with the maintaining of the normal so that he can continue to enjoy his life. These choices seem to fly in the face of established ideals already within the book, set in its very title. Agnes Nutter’s prophecies are always accurate and they always come true. The world ends and it’s game over for everyone involved. But if that were the case the ending of the book would have been something wholly different and significantly less heartwarming. It is because of this free will that the characters defy the ideals of moral absolutism.

With regards to free will and ethics, Erla Filipia Haraldsdóttir says, “Arguably, free will is the basis of ethics, because without the capability to intend something to happen, a being cannot be held accountable for the consequences. Angels and demons are only able to influence people either way. But these influences come second to the benevolence and malevolence inherent in humanity itself” (30). It is up to the choices of those involved to figure out where in the spectrum of morality that they live. It is not up to some big plan created by an ineffable entity in the sky. It is not a simple choice of doing good and doing evil. Rather it is about striving to find a balance between the two. Within this balance one can find a kind of peace, where the weights of a moral binary are no longer there, replaced instead by the nebulous comfort of moral relativism. The amorphous resolution of moral relativism allows it to be shaped and changed, fitting to whoever needs it in whatever manner. It allows them to make the decisions they can based on what they know and what they believe. There is one character who especially seems to exemplify this kind of striking balance and the influence that free will has upon it.

Agnes Nutter, the woman who can see all and seems to know all, one sees an interesting dissonance. With all of her knowledge she could help to avoid the Apocalypse in its entirety. However, because of the time in which she was born she was unable to, her strange practices condemning her to death for being a witch. By passing on her book to her relatives and having it handed down through the generations, she makes a morally neutral decision. She can’t do anything about what is going to happen in her present time, so she leaves it up to the generations to come to create a solution. Some would argue that she took the easy way out. In reality, though, she exemplifies the morally grey, letting an evil come because she knows she can do nothing about it. She also serves as a warning when she says, ““...Gather ye rye close, I saye,

and *marke well the fate of alle whoe meddle with suche as theye do notte understande.*' And, apparently, she smiled and looked up at the sky over the village and added, 'That goes for you as welle, yowe daft olde foole"', while up on the stake and ready to be burned (Pratchett and Gaiman 185). Agnes acts as a warning to all those that condemn her to death, as well as the Almighty who sees it as part of their great and ineffable plan. As she burns, she reveals the trap she had set for the villagers who kill her when she causes a massive explosion and kills them all. It is a simple and clear thought that those who would strive to impose their ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, on a world run by free will are sure to meet a most unpleasant fate. If one upholds one moral absolute while others uphold the absolute at the other end, then conflict is sure to ensue from the resulting moral binary. If you have conflict then things will be changed and unstable. However, if you accept the existence of a moral grey area there could be a kind of stasis, where things can be and exist, where peace can be found. It is from this peaceful place that the best decisions can be made, and free will can be most thoroughly expressed as morality becomes a personal decision what to do rather than one made by an outside and unknowable force.

The power of free will allows for humans to act in an adaptable nature similar to moral relativism. The decisions that people make will define how they react to any moral situation. It is by their choices that they are brought to any given situation and through those same choices they will react and adapt to the situation that they have encountered. The characters Aziraphale and Crowley act in this same adaptive manner, going outside the norm and interfering directly with the events on Earth. However, their situation is the exception rather than the rule. Before their vested interests, the two are seen acting as minor influences, treating history as a painting that needs straightening. These ultimate agents of the extremes of mortality can only nudge the

scales, so to speak. It is up to humanity and their own decisions that shape how they will behave and in what lights they will view moral dilemmas. Rather than being the source of the moral extremes, the angels and devils act as little more than guides. This implies that they are in essence, weights to try and drag the morally relativistic humans to one extreme of the moral binary or the other.

This importance of decision making and its relation to morality is also touched upon in the novel. Crowley has made the guns in a paintball contest into real guns and says, “Well, that’s just it, isn’t it? They’re doing it themselves. It’s what they really want to do. I just assisted them. Think of it as a microcosm of the universe. Free will for everyone. Ineffable, right?” (Pratchett and Gaiman 97). The fact that Crowley likens his actions to God’s “ineffable” plan means that even he doesn’t know what the outcomes and results of his actions are going to be. It is not his decision. It is the decision of the people in the paintball contest to react from their new knowledge, their guns are now being real. From this acquisition of new knowledge they can make their next moral judgement. This furthers the idea that morality is not some big grandiose idea, with everything set out in advance for everyone. Rather, it is formless and unknowable; a simple idea shaped by the simple actions of ordinary people. Free will and the moral relativism connected to it are all aspects of the everyday lives and decisions that fill up that life.

Through all these examples and the intent of the author morality has become popularized, making it a free and open discussion for anyone to join in, rather than being the province of the elite few. This means that people get to make their decisions and build their morals themselves based off of their own knowledge, instead of having these important decisions made for them. However, this popularization of morality does not stop with just the novel *Good Omens*. The

medium itself has become popularized and more readily available to the people who would consume it. In 2019, *Good Omens* saw a revival to the popular media, not as a novel but as a television show available on the Amazon Prime streaming service. Telling the story of *Good Omens* in a visual medium allows it to speak more readily to the modern audience, as people are far more likely to spend six hours binge watching the entirety of a television show than they are to spend six days settled down with a book. Through this change in medium the ideals of Pratchett and Gaiman's work can be passed on far more readily than before. With exciting action played out on screen people are able to more easily dive in and enjoy the message of the story washing over them. Through the modern investment in the characters morality and moral relativism loses its glitter and mystique. It becomes a topic of discussion as the members of the audience come together and share in the laughs that they got from a new show and the meanings behind it. Moral relativism becomes a comedically taught lesson, as with the ease of a joke everyone can better absorb the ideals, watching the adventures of two characters and learning that there are many options besides good and evil.

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