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# SUPERNATURAL AND PHILOSOPHY

Metaphysics and Monsters...for Idjits



**BLACKWELL PHILOSOPHY AND POP CULTURE SERIES**

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# **SUPERNATURAL AND PHILOSOPHY**

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# **SUPERNATURAL AND PHILOSOPHY**

**METAPHYSICS  
AND MONSTERS ...  
FOR IDJITS**

**Edited By Galen A. Foresman**

**WILEY Blackwell**

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*Editorial Offices*

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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# Introduction

## Codename: GhostPhacers

[From a drive adjacent the myriad of external drives of Ed Zeddmore and Harry Spengler ...]

When Alan J. Corbett died courageously seeking truth, we knew our quest was only just beginning. Spurred by the loss of our brave intern and cook, we GhostFacers have rededicated our lives to fulfilling the mission Corbett was slain so admirably pursuing, opening “people’s eyes to the truth: that ghosts do, in fact, exist,” along with many other things that do, in fact, also exist along with ghosts.

Now surely you’re wondering why the GhostFacers are working under the auspices of *Supernatural and Philosophy*, and no doubt you’re rightfully concerned about the degree of douch-nozzelian chicanery that has coerced our hand in adopting such a title for our manifesto of truth, as opposed to the very razor *GhostFacer Manifesto*. As we have said secretly elsewhere at our website:

The GhostFacers are poised to take a number of different industries by storm. These industries include: science, math, philosophy, religion, agriculture, government and entertainment with the potential of affecting some major public works projects as well. In fact, it is safe to say that there is no aspect of human civilization that will not be impacted to some degree by GhostFacers.

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So fear not, for we're simply taking our first steps in the larger plan to subvert these many different industries. All of this requires working covertly and duplicitously to bring you what those two wanted criminals—the Wine-chesters—won't: insight into the greatest mysteries humankind has ever known. To that end, we have begun here by subverting the very foundations of all the industries mentioned previously and some that went unmentioned. We do this through the mystery that is philosophy.

Recent extensive research utilizing the power of the interwebs through the "Search the Web" web-based search engine reveals that the first ten results of the word, "philosophy," are all websites. From this we've deduced that philosophy is more popular than we first expected, and infiltrating it won't be the cake-walk in the park that we originally believed it to be. After consulting a research librarian from the special reference section of a non-descript college in Wilkes-Barre, PA, we have confirmed that the word "philosophy" has ancient roots in the Greek word *philosophia* (φιλοσοφία), which means something like "loving wisdom" or "loving knowledge." Regardless of the exact meaning, we're confident that this was an important and powerful secret, although it left unexplained why the ten websites we looked at had nothing to do with loving anything, even despite our disabling "safe-search."

Armed now with knowledge, we used secret contacts to recruit experts in this industry of philosophy, all bona fide, card-carrying wisdom lovers. And just to be clear, I should say that by "we" I have so far meant, me, alone, like a wolf with no pack that was trying to organize a pack of wolves together via email and other means. I was a wolf howling in search of other wolves, and after the howl of my call went out, there was a chorus of howling replies. Amidst that choir of howling, philosophers the world over taught me many secrets about what we truly know and don't know. Philosophers who readily admitted that they knew nothing, but continued nevertheless to love and pursue this fictional thing they claimed not to know. When I inquired as to whether knowledge was some sort of tulpa, I was rebuked for speaking blasphemy.

After meticulously transcribing these dialogues onto ancient papyrus scrolls, I made a sandwich and a ring of salt. Placing the

scrolls securely within a duffle bag, I climbed safely inside—the ring of salt, not the duffle bag. Equipped now with time, sustenance, and the safety that only a ring of salt and a duffle bag can provide, I began to read. And the more I read, the more my eyes were opened to a world I did not fully understand. From my original call on philosophers, my recruits were legion, but only the strongest and finest were permitted to remain in this elite ghost-facing wolf pack of wisdom lovers, and so a multitude of scrolls were committed to the flames.

Finally, I should point out that although I'm not an original member of the GhostFacers, I suppose you could technically consider me an honorary co-founder who's not, yet, officially recognized as having any founding role or leadership role or other role, with the core team. But my recent contributions to the Mission are, without a doubt, somewhat noteworthy, hence my strong hunch that I'll hear an update regarding my membership to the team soon. Having said that, I can confirm for you, dear reader, that I have heard from a good source that says my resume may have been received by the visionary leader Ed Zeddmore himself and/or co-founder and tactical expert, Harry Spangler. In either case, it is certain to probably mean that my unofficial and unrecognized honorary co-founder status is soon to convert to at least either "officially unrecognized" or "unofficially recognized." Therefore, I speak with some authority when I say that this collection of essays is comprised of the most mind-blowing, eye-popping, soul-exploding revelations—nay, revolutions!—in truth and wisdom loving.

So tether your brain, don safety-tested safety goggles, and prepare for the imminent detonation of your soul, because in reading these pages you have unofficially joined the yet-to-be-recognized movement in the philosophy of ghost-facing, henceforth codenamed, "GhostPhacing." (The "Ph" is for Philosophy!)



**Part One**  
**OF MONSTERS AND**  
**MORALS**



# Chapter 1

## Are Monsters Members of the Moral Community?

*Nathan Stout*

- SAM: How do you do it? How does Dad do it?  
DEAN: Well for one, them. I figure our family's so screwed to Hell maybe we can help some others. Makes things a little bit more bearable. I'll tell you what else helps. *Killing as many evil sons of bitches as I possibly can.*

In this exchange between Sam and Dean from the Season 1 episode “Wendigo,” Dean establishes the attitude that the brothers will take toward the things they hunt. Monsters are evil and harmful to others, so the brothers are completely justified in eliminating the various creatures they encounter. The viewer finds herself pulling for Sam and Dean to succeed, to safely avert the Apocalypse, to put the vengeful spirit to rest, to exorcise the demon, and, in many cases, to kill the monster, but monsters often present a formidable challenge for our view of the brothers’ moral character. Not only do we care about the safety and well-being of the protagonists, but we also care about the morality of their actions. We want the good guys to win, but we also want them to be *good* guys.

In this sense, *Supernatural* presents us with a difficult puzzle. We find ourselves holding contradictory attitudes about Sam and Dean. We want them to save those who are in danger, but we have a difficult time squaring this desire with our concern that they act morally. What if that monster doesn’t deserve to be killed? What if

the monster is not responsible for his or her actions? What if the monster's actions are justified, or, at the very least, excusable? In short, what if that monster is really a lot like you and me, a genuine member of the moral community?

## **Moral Community? Is That Like a Coven?**

Moral philosophy is concerned with matters of right and wrong, and with answering questions about how we should live. Moral philosophy aims to tell us how to think about particular moral dilemmas; it aims to give us principles by which we can make moral decisions; and it aims to give us insight into how those moral principles are grounded. In doing all of this, moral philosophy should also help us to determine precisely whom, or what, we should consider when making moral decisions. In other words, moral philosophy should be able to tell us which creatures deserve moral consideration, which beings we must take into account when deciding which actions are right and which actions are wrong.

By telling us these things, moral philosophy sets boundaries on what philosophers refer to as the "moral community." In essence, to be a member of the moral community is to be the type of being that deserves moral consideration from others. For example, most people believe that it is wrong to kill another human being just for the fun of it. The reason we feel this way is because humans are members of the moral community. The fact that you are a member of the moral community means that you can't be killed for the fun of it. In any moral decision that we make, we must take into account the effects that it might have for members of the moral community.

So how do we know who or what belongs to the moral community? One way that philosophers have gone about defining the boundaries of the moral community is by paying special attention to the notion of moral responsibility. In other words, they have attempted to define the moral community as the group of individuals who are capable of being held responsible for their actions.

In his essay, “Freedom and Resentment,” P.F. Strawson argues that we ought to understand moral responsibility as being tied to the “reactive attitudes.”<sup>1</sup> Reactive attitudes are emotions that we experience in response to another’s actions toward us; some of these emotions—such as resentment or indignation—are of an overtly moral nature. Therefore, it is best to understand moral responsibility as applying only to those beings that are the *appropriate* target of these moral emotions. For example, when a toddler uses a living room wall as a canvas for her finger-paint masterpiece, it might be *appropriate* to feel frustration toward her, but surely, it would *not be appropriate* to resent the child for her actions. We would say that the person who is morally outraged at the toddler’s behavior is overreacting. Children are different from fully developed adults who should know better. Thus, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a moralized attitude ought to give us insight into the moral status of the creature toward which we hold the attitude.

For Strawson, there are two factors that might render a moral emotion inappropriate: how much control you have of your actions and the type of thing you are. For example, in “Asylum,” Sam shoots Dean in the chest with a shotgun full of rock salt while under the control of the spirit of Dr. Ellicott. Since Sam’s actions aren’t under his control, Dean shouldn’t be *angry* with him. After all, it wasn’t really Sam’s fault. It was Dr. Ellicott’s spirit. Sometimes, however, a creature can be perfectly in control of its actions, and yet, because of the type of thing it is, we cannot appropriately feel moral emotions toward it. Consider Sam’s character navigating life without the benefit of having a soul throughout most of Season 6. Assuming a popular understanding of the soul, which says a soul is necessary to act morally, we ought to consider Sam in a much different light as far as moral responsibility is concerned. In Season 6, Sam is simply not the type of creature toward which it is appropriate to hold the moral attitudes. Being angry with Sam in this situation is like being angry with a robot. We ought to consider him with what Strawson calls an “objectivity of attitude.” He is a being whom we must manage or control; such beings are unable to enter into normal moral relationships wherein the moral emotions have a place. As a result, we must treat them objectively, as if they were an “object of social policy.”

How can we tell when a creature is the sort of thing that is the appropriate target for moral emotions? One promising approach makes an individual the appropriate target of moral emotions only if the being has the ability to understand and be motivated by moral reasons. In other words, the being must be able to understand when a situation presents her with a duty to act in a certain way, and the recognition of this fact must motivate her to fulfill that duty.

### **Monsters and the Moral Community: Group 1—Low-Functioning Monsters**

Sam and Dean have a veritable trophy case of monster hunts. They have killed everything from your run-of-the-mill werewolves, vampires, and shapeshifters to more exotic creatures such as shtrigas, wraiths, and djinn. Thus, it will be helpful to begin placing these creatures into different categories based on our intuitions about their status as members of the moral community. Doing this allows us to distinguish those monsters that are firmly outside the boundaries of the moral community, thereby highlighting the hard cases, wherein moral status is more difficult to determine.

In “Heart” Dean sums up our first group, low-functioning monsters, saying, “What about a human by day, freak, animal, killing-machine by moonlight don’t you understand?” These monsters obviously fall outside of the moral community. They kill humans out of a basic instinct. Their mental abilities are no more advanced than a wild animal, and, thus, they show no ability to understand or be motivated by moral reasons. For this reason, it would be absurd to criticize them for acting immorally. For example, if my dog rummages through the garbage at night making a huge mess in the house, it would make sense for me to be angry and say, “Bad dog!” It wouldn’t, however, make sense for me to feel offended and say, “How dare you treat my home with such disrespect!”

One excellent example of a low-functioning monster comes to us in the second episode of Season 1, “Wendigo.” A wendigo is a creature that hunts humans for food. They actually begin life as human beings

and become monsters when they turn to cannibalism for survival after being stranded in the wilderness. If enough human flesh is consumed, “over years, [the cannibal] becomes this less than human thing ... always hungry.” The wendigo, then, is an example of an animal-like monster. It is a skilled hunter, but its skill is a product of its instincts. It does not have the normal human emotional capacities. Instead, it is driven by self-preservation and its need to feed.

Another enlightening example of a low-functioning monster is the werewolf. In the episode “Heart,” Sam and Dean encounter a woman named Madison, who turns out to be a werewolf. As noted before, Dean describes them as “freak, animal, killing-machines.” While in their werewolf state, these monsters are driven by base, animal instincts. Later in the episode, Sam exhorts Dean to refrain from killing Madison, saying, “Maybe she really doesn’t know she’s changing, you know? Maybe when the creature takes over she blacks out ... What if some animal part of her brain saw both of those guys [the murder victims] as threats?” Sam is pointing out how werewolves pose an interesting moral question for us, which we will come back to. For now it seems clear that while they are in their wolf-state, these creatures are not members of the moral community.

## **Group 2–Antisocial Monsters**

In addition to the Group 1 monsters, there is another set of creatures that falls clearly outside of the boundaries of the moral community. These are the “antisocial monsters.” Such creatures share distinct similarities with individuals who are diagnosed with various forms of antisocial personality disorder, which is typically characterized by an inability to feel empathy and regard for the rights of others, appearing manipulative and lacking in conscience. Monsters from this category fall outside of the moral community as well, albeit in a very different way.

Demons provide a good illustration of antisocial monsters. Throughout the series, demons are portrayed as purely evil, wantonly killing human beings and engaging in torture for fun. Unlike the Group 1 monsters, however, they have highly developed

mental abilities. They rely on reasoning to plan and achieve their goals and, by all accounts, they appear to be equal to human beings in terms of mental prowess.

Similarly, leviathans are prototypical antisocial monsters. They lack any regard for the human race and implement a plan to turn us into a factory-farm-style food supply. Leviathans show a high degree of intelligence, and they are clearly able to conceive of and execute elaborate plans for the sake of achieving a rational goal, which is ultimately what precludes them from being classified among the Group 1 monsters.

Why shouldn't we consider Group 2 monsters full members of the moral community, and simply hold them morally responsible for their actions? The answer, I think, lies in their inability to recognize moral reasons. Demons, for example, are *purely* evil and simply cannot understand a moral demand made by a human. Suppose that instead of making plans to kill Lilith in order to avert the Apocalypse, Sam and Dean decided that they should explain to her that she has a moral obligation to avoid destroying humanity. Obviously, we could expect Lilith to make short work of the brothers and continue on her quest to destroy humanity. But why is this so obvious?

The reason seems to be that she is incapable of understanding a moral reason with respect to humans. She may very well be aware that human beings live according to a moral code, but she certainly wouldn't care in the least about it. It simply wouldn't motivate her, and this motivational component is part of what it means to be a member of the moral community. The same explanation could be given with respect to the leviathans. They simply aren't moved by moral reasons, thus precluding them from being members of the moral community and thereby excluding them as appropriate targets of the moral emotions.

### **Group 3–The Moral Monsters**

For any creature to be a member of the moral community it must care about and be motivated by moral reasons. Moral reasons don't register as important decision-making factors for either