THE *DOCTOR* ARCHETYPE

Due to the nature of systems and how they operate, the easiest paths in life are those that are most visible. It is easy to do what everyone else does because there are no social pressures exerted from complacency. It is only in opposition to these standards that these pressures are felt. Imagine traversing a river—it is but a simple endeavor to wade, letting the current take you downstream. But the moment you want to go upstream, enormous pressures are realized as you try to push yourself through the current.

Bad analogies aside, the values of society *do* matter. It matters what people learn to believe as they grow older. Capitalism and patriarchy shape who we become and how we think. Thus, it is important to question the underlying nature of things as they are (apply the *eternal return*). People don’t often naturally come to this realization, for it is often others that bring them into the greater understanding of meaning and beauty—that is the goal of this project, after all.

Great works of art challenge our views of the world in an attempt to tell a story greater than itself. To me, art is a very broad and forgiving descriptor of creation. Art can be something intentionally created, something accidentally brought into the world, or something found naturally. Beauty, as we have come to know, is found all throughout the world. In seeking to become better people, we strive to apply compassion in our thoughts and actions in the hopes that the beauty of the world is realized within each and every one of us. In my *(very biased)* opinion, there is no greater example of this belief than the greater philosophy and stories of the BBC television show, *Doctor Who* (2005–present).

Hear me out! I swear this is such a perfect allegory to the values and beliefs of the world I’ve since written about. Going into this project, I had no intention of talking about *Doctor Who* in any capacity quite like this, but as I got through most of my research I realized that so much of what makes this show so special is its affirmations of beauty and compassion. Before I explain, I think it's probably best that I fill you in about my relationship with this show—because we should all know by now that context is important, especially in the formation of beliefs and perspectives.

During the great Tumblr era of the early 2010s (/s), I was first introduced to the show as a naive high schooler. Due to the highly goofy nature of the show, especially during Matt Smith’s period playing the Doctor, I became infatuated. So much so that my friends from that point in my life will probably cringe at the mention of *Doctor Who* if they ever read this. And I for one don't blame them at all. I was so hopelessly obsessed with the show—buying the toys and dressing up just so that I could wear a bowtie... But I was a sheltered high school kid; that's just what we did.

I still wasn’t mentally mature enough to really understand what all was going on (not that it's that deep at all), but I was able to see the basic principles of the show. Regardless, that’s when I started to absorb a cosmic perspective of life and meaning of and beyond myself. Of course, I had no foundation to apply it to, but it has hung out in the back of my mind ever since. It was only in the formation of this project that I realized that the character of the Doctor is a perfect allegory for life, beauty, and the solidarity of humankind. Because of its intimate relationship to my personal growth and because it can be applied so effortlessly, you will now have to bear my case throughout the rest of this chapter. Enjoy :)

For the purposes of this comparison, I will only be drawing from series 1–10, for the new showrunner has unfortunately diverged from the original intentions and principles. I don’t really want to get into it too much because this is more of a philosophical project and not a critical review of some goofy-ass British TV show, but to summarize my reasoning: Chris Chibnall (the current head showrunner) retconned the essential backstory of the character, making them into yet another “chosen one” story—something no one can aspire to be or relate to. It's such a damn shame too because Jodie Whittaker deserves better. She’s *kicked ass* with what she was given, but unfortunately for everyone, she wasn’t given nearly enough. Ok, shit—I'm getting distracted again... Let’s get into it then, shall we?

This show really is quite goofy, but at its core, there is a real, virtuous story being told. The Doctor is from a species of humanoid people, the most powerful of all the universe—apparently—called “Timelords” (yeah, it’s a bit cringe, but this lore was established in the ’60s). The way their species is crafted is really quite genius for almost any adaptation of media you can think of, but especially for TV. See, a “timelord” doesn’t die, at least not in the way we know it. Instead, their bodies are overcome with terrific energy, and all of their cells are transformed until they seem like a completely different person—and, in a way, they kind of are. In fact, the only thing they retain from their original self is their lived experiences—their memories. This prevents the character from drastically changing their motivations and interests, for they still remember their past and how they came to be who they were. The genius of this process, called “regeneration,” allows the character to shed its skin, so to speak, and become something new. A new actor is brought in and they have their own personality that doesn’t conflict with the previous regenerations’ history. If it serves the story though, they can be contradictory, but only at the cost of changing their values for whatever just reason. To give an example, David Tennant’s character was driven by regret for his role in the “time war” (explanation in a bit), while Matt Smith’s character was more goofy and aloof, choosing to mask the hurt he felt with humor.9 Over their life, the Doctor has had many different faces and many different personalities. In the beginning, he was a rebel of sorts, stealing a time machine and running away from the bigotry of his people.

Hardened by fire, the Doctor is motivated by the spectacular beauty of the universe, traveling around and creating meaning in their life by virtue of the great people they meet and the countless lives they are able to save. In their travels, they are faced with constant engagements that challenge their beliefs of goodness and fairness. In isolation, like anyone else, they pose a threat to themselves, becoming cold and bitter. This is why they prefer to travel with friends. Those that travel with the Doctor know it will be perilous, but the Doctor shows them the greater potential in life and ultimately gives them the opportunity to grow and learn—to become better people.

The Doctor does not carry weapons, seeing meaning and importance in every life they encounter, despite intimately knowing just how big and old the universe will get. In fact, they have an implied conflict-mitigation hierarchy of sorts, founded on the idea of compassion and respect, even in the face of pure hatred. They will always approach the baddie first with reason, attempting to simply “talk it out,” knowing that everyone is motivated by something. Usually, this first step is also an attempt to gather information about what it is they want or wish to do—a backup plan. If they are unable to resolve issues here, which is almost always the case, they then try to out-wit the baddies. After that, they resort to sabotaging their plan(s) to either fail or work in their favor. Ultimately, some baddies pose a threat far beyond the scope of the skirmish—a time when the Doctor has no other choice to stop them before they kill a mass amount of people. In this ultimate case, the Doctor always approaches the baddies, telling them of their intentions and giving them a chance to stop and go home or lose their lives. We can never prevent death outright, but we can do everything we can to mitigate it, as long as its principles are founded on solidarity. It is never an easy decision for the Doctor and ultimately, they are driven by grief of great loss in such an event. For the Doctor, it is not a choice they ever want to make, let alone enjoy being the one to do it. The “time war” is one such instance, where a threat so large puts the entirety of time and the universe in jeopardy. They have to end the war, ultimately resulting in the deaths of both sides (kinda—there’s some lore stuff going on here, but it’s not entirely important). This decision weighs heavily on their conscience and is a major driving force behind their beliefs and how they conduct themselves.

However, this is more so a matter of lore, whereas I want to extract the key elements of what makes this character so spectacular. In doing so, I shall call it the “*Doctor* Archetype.” Regeneration in this case becomes the moment when one changes their mind. People conduct themselves based on the principles they believe and hold close to their hearts. When they change their beliefs, whether immediately or over a period of time, they essentially become a new person, leaving their old ways in the past and conducting themselves anew. The *Doctor* Archetype need not be someone forged in flame and regret, but that certainly provides some urgency to their motivation to do good. The *Doctor* Archetype acts out of love and admiration of the great and bountiful beauty of the universe and of the miracle of life and death. They are not swayed by the temptations of wealth or fame and always stand up for what is right, even in the face of great opposition. The *Doctor* Archetype is in tune with their emotions, trying their best not to let them affect their actions. Truly, the *Doctor* Archetype is one who lives their life on the foundation of compassion and respect.

When we first meet the Doctor (in the 2005 series), he’s just this silly older man trying to stop some living plastic from killing everybody. ...Yeah, the first episode is bonkers. A better introduction to the show is probably S3 E11, *Blink*, or S10 E1, *The Pilot*…. Anyways, after Rose, a human girl that he saves earlier in the episode, asks him who he “really is,” we get a good idea of his unique perspective and experience in the world;

“It's like when you're a kid. The first time they tell you the world’s turning and you can't believe it ‘cos it looks like everything’s standing still,” he pauses, then looks to Rose, an intrigued human that witnessed the unbelievable with him earlier in the episode. “I can feel it.” He takes her hand, hoping she will feel it through him, “The turn of the Earth. The ground beneath our feet is spinning at 1,000 miles an hour. And the entire planet is hurtling around the sun at 67,000 miles an hour. And I can feel it; we’re falling through space, you and me. Clinging to the skin of this tiny world, and if we let go,” he pauses, then lets go of Rose’s hand. “That’s who I am. Now forget me, Rose Tyler. Go home.”10

He illustrates the system of balance between the Earth, the Sun, and our galaxy holding together all that we know. He feels the forces at play—the macro-perspective of the universe—while to Rose, the micro-perspective she holds relative to him is all she knows; that's just how things are. We can replace the “turn of the Earth” with any complicated system we want—say, Capitalism. When we do this, suddenly we can start to see the effects the system has from Rose’s perspective. Because “that’s just how things are” acts as a deflection or denial of reality and the underlying nature of life is hidden and hastily explained away as “just a few bad apples” causing all the bad things. Meanwhile, the system that gives us those ideas remains *unseen* and *unchallenged*. The Doctor knows that to fight the system is hard and dangerous work, because of the attention it brings by opposing it. So to protect this human he just met (who he thinks he will never see again), he just tells her to forget him and return to the bliss and ease of denial or deflection.

But when Rose returns to the memory of that moment with the Doctor, she finds that she doesn’t want to forget. She isn’t willing to return to a life of bliss because she saw the beauty of the world undivided by that great big invisible system. It made no sense at all, but in spite of that, it was beautiful. We see this manifested when, after joining the Doctor, Rose returns to Earth without him;

“What do I do every day, Mum? What do I do? Get up, catch the bus, go to work, come back home, eat chips and go to bed, is that it?”

Her friend replies, “That’s what the rest of us do.”

But Rose can’t stand a life so devoid of meaning, dissolved within an oppressive system obsessed with production, submission, and greed, “It was a better life. I don't mean all the traveling and… seeing aliens and spaceships and things, that don't matter. The Doctor showed me a better way of living your life.” She pleads with her mother and her friend, “you know he showed you, too. That you don’t just give up. You don’t just let things happen. You make a stand. You say no. You have the guts to do what’s right when everyone else just runs away! And I just can’t,” she mutters, running out of the shop as she is overcome with dread.11

Opposition to oppression isn’t only applicable to great feats of heroism—far from it. Any act, no matter how small, that fights the norms presented by “the system” is a small victory in the progress of its undoing. By taking up against it and asserting that “no, I won’t play by these rules,” you demonstrate its weakness(es). The more people become unwilling to participate, the less power it wields over our lives. You can’t expect that to happen if you are unwilling to “make a stand. [To] say no.” The Doctor here is no longer a character, but an idea—the allegory of a meaningful life, of beauty.

The *Doctor* Archetype certainly doesn't call to take up arms. Instead, it calls to lead by example. It shows that good people can exist in the midst of a bad system. Badness is not a symptom of individual negligence—it is a symptom of their environment. To change the system, you must demonstrate its disastrous effects.

The last thing I want to note about the *Doctor* Archetype is the fallible nature of their being. Some may confuse the *Doctor* Archetype as some enlightened and all-powerful being, but that is a far cry from its reality. The show allows for certain liberties because (1) it's a sci-fi TV show, and (2) it’s not trying to be some ultimate metaphor for ‘the perfect human’ or whatever. The *Doctor* Archetype, however, is meant to be entirely relatable—for anyone to place themselves into, given they believe in the spirit of the thing.

A rebel is fallible just as this allegory is, for that is the reason for the concept of the eternal return. To rebel is to be in that state of being, where one makes sure they are doing things for the right reasons, or you know—they try to. With the era of Matt Smith ended, Peter Capaldi’s character invites an interesting display of inner struggle, allowing the audience to see more clearly the process of This Moment in the actions the Doctor has to make. The Doctor still holds the ultimate values of his character, but struggles with the consequences of making harder decisions. Capaldi’s Doctor is concerned that he is losing grasp of his values and asks his friend whether or not he is a “good man.” After the resolution of the episode, his friend has had time to think and brings it up before she leaves, “You asked me if you were a good man and the answer is, I don't know. But I think you try to be and I think that’s probably the point.”12 All we can ask is that we each *try* to be good people. One can only really know if they were a “good person” on the eve of their death. Goodness is a continuous process. The *Doctor* Archetype will always struggle to be good. Constantly fighting against the current is draining. *You cannot win every battle*. Everyone needs breaks. What matters is you get back up and keep going. Because after all, you're fighting for the good and the beauty of everything and everyone.

All in all, the *Doctor* Archetype subscribes to a basic set of values. But a shared agreement of values and beliefs cannot be a manifesto-length appeal to every aspect of one’s personal philosophy. It has to be broken down to its most basic form(s). Capaldi confirms this; “Human progress isn’t measured by industry. It’s measured by the value you place on a life, an unimportant life. A life without privilege. That’s what defines an age. That’s what defines a species.”13 Peter Singer established that “if a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration.”14 With the goal of ending and preventing suffering for all beings, “compassion,” truly, is the value from which we ought to act and react. Compassion sets the basis for the limit we assert onto the world.