



Dr Who - More to Learn

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'And with that sentence you've just lost the right to even talk to me.'

The Doctor in 'Bad Wolf'

No human failing annoys the Doctor more than having a closed mind. He berates Charles Dickens for having 'one of the best minds in the world' yet failing to accept what he had plainly seen when the gaseous Gelth showed themselves ('The Unquiet Dead'). Later, when Dickens refuses to take part in a seance, the Doctor has to encourage him to think again, saying, 'Humbug? Come on – open mind!' But the great writer isn't there yet. He has prided himself on his scepticism concerning paranormal activity (which he refers to as 'illusions', 'cheap mummery' and 'the work of fantasists') but is in fact as resistant to the truth as some of those he has sought to 'unmask'. The curious contradiction within Dickens at this point is not really explored. Self-styled 'sceptics' frequently present themselves as 'free thinkers' who don't accept religious or paranormal ideas and experiences at face value, trying to find explanations which exclude the supernatural. This is exemplified by the Charles Dickens we meet at the beginning of this episode – a 'free-thinker' who refuses to think freely, who refuses to

countenance the idea that there could be something beyond what he already knows. Time and again the Doctor has struggled with the obstinacy, pettiness, selfishness and stupidity of closed minds. In 'Paradise Towers' (1987), Sylvester McCoy's Doctor finds himself in a giant, decaying tower block, the inhabitants of which are busy fighting each other while a megalomaniac caretaker tries to destroy them all. The challenge for the Doctor is to persuade the factions to look beyond their differences and see the common enemy. Very often it is closed-minded humans refusing to accept what the Doctor says who hamper his efforts and get people killed. In 'Dalek', the Doctor tries to help van Statten's soldiers in their battle with the Dalek, only for his advice to be rebuffed with a dismissive, 'Thank you Doctor, but I think I know how to fight one single tin robot.' The carnage that follows is an eloquent proof that the officer's confidence was misplaced.

Different is Wrong

Closed minds are, like stagnant ponds, liable to give rise to other unpleasant characteristics. The most obvious of these is intolerance. The Doctor has met many deeply intolerant beings in his time. The essence of every evil genius is either greed or hate, or both. The greedy are often just careless of others' lives, but the hateful are driven by intolerance, none more so than the Daleks. Just how intolerant they are, the Doctor makes clear to Henry van Statten:

van Statten: I thought you were the great expert, Doctor. If you're so impressive, then why not just reason with this Dalek? It must be willing to negotiate. There must be something it needs – everything needs something.

The Doctor: Where's the nearest town?

van Statten: Salt Lake City.

The Doctor: Population?

van Statten: One million.

The Doctor: All dead. If the Dalek gets out it will murder every living creature. That's all it needs.

van Statten: But why would it do that?

The Doctor: Because it honestly believes they should die. Human beings are different, and anything different is wrong. It's the ultimate in racial cleansing. And you, van Statten, you've let it loose!

The Daleks have always been extreme fascists – 'the alien equivalent of Nazis'.^[1] So strong is their hatred of anything different from themselves

that when a group of renegade Daleks vies with the Imperial Daleks to find the Hand of Omega ('Remembrance of the Daleks', 1988), they want to destroy each other, as Ace explains:

Renegade Daleks are blobs. Imperial Daleks are bionic blobs with bits added. You can tell that Daleks are into racial purity. One lot of Daleks reckon the other lot of blobs are too different. They're mutants. Not pure in their 'blobbiness' . . . They hate each other's chromosomes – war to the death.

Russell T. Davies gives an interesting new twist to the Daleks at the end of the 2005 series. Reflecting the concerns of today's world rather than old fears of Nazi fascism, he turns them into religious fundamentalists ('Parting of the Ways'). The Emperor Dalek tells the Doctor that in order to rebuild his army, the Daleks have harvested 'the waste of humanity. The prisoners, the refugees, the dispossessed – they all came to us. The bodies were filleted, pulped, sifted. The seed of the human race is perverted; only one cell in a billion is fit to be nurtured.' Rose comments that the new Dalek army must be half-human, and is shouted down by Daleks accusing her of blasphemy. This prompts the Doctor to ask, 'Since when did the Daleks have a concept of blasphemy?' In reply, the Emperor echoes and parodies the God of the Bible, saying, 'I reached into the dirt and made new life. I am the god of all Daleks!' His followers chorus, 'Worship him!' and the Doctor comments, 'They're insane! Hiding in the silence for hundreds of years, that's enough to drive anyone mad, but it's worse than that. Driven mad by your own flesh – the stink of humanity. You hate your own existence, and that makes them more deadly than ever.'

Davies seems to be suggesting here that religious fanaticism is fuelled by self-loathing. There may be some truth here. Although the Christian faith at least is clear about the mess in the human heart, it also emphasises God's grace – his undeserved love and kindness to us. But when the negative side is emphasised to the detriment of the positive, it can give rise to a malign drive to make everybody and everything conform to certain standards.

All Welcome

The point of all these intolerant enemies is that

they are so opposite to the Doctor. *Doctor Who* is often said to be fundamentally promoting tolerance. As Alan McKee points out in an essay on value judgements '*Doctor Who* includes the celebration of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and the celebration of difference.'^[2] The celebration of difference encompasses different race, gender and species.

In the 2005 series, diversity of sexual orientation also became something to applaud. When the Doctor, Jack and Rose go to the crash site ('The Doctor Dances'), Rose offers to distract the attention of Algy, the officer on duty, but Jack knows him and says he should go instead saying, 'He's not your type.' Rose looks uncertain, but the Doctor says, 'Relax, he's a fifty-first-century guy. He's just a bit more flexible when it comes to dancing.' 'How flexible?' Rose asks. 'By his time, you lot are spread out around the galaxy,' replies the Doctor. Rose presses him to explain. He says, 'So many species, so little time.' 'What?' exclaims Rose. 'That's what we do when we get out there? That's our mission, we seek new life and – ' 'Dance,' concludes the Doctor euphemistically.

The call for a more tolerant attitude is nothing new to *Doctor Who*. Matt Jones draws a parallel between the state on Terra Alpha trying to stamp out happiness ('The Happiness Patrol', 1988) and the opposition of Margaret Thatcher's Government to homosexuality. He writes:

'The Happiness Patrol' is a celebration of difference. A critique of the idea that one way of living is inherently or naturally better than any other. It outlines the horrors that occur when one group in a society rams their vision of social life down the throats of all the others. . . . you may disagree with what I've written and that's good. In fact, it's brilliant. Because if 'The Happiness Patrol' teaches us anything, it is the danger of there only being one view, one voice that shouts down all others.^[3]

The message of celebrating difference and diversity is present in many of the Doctor's adventures. A good example is 'Kinda' (1982), written by Christopher Bailey. 'Kinda' was based on Ursula Le Guin's 1972 novel, *The Word for World is Forest*, and included some Buddhist ideas promoting the ideals of cooperation, communication and harmony with

nature. The same themes are reinforced even by some very minor incidents through the years, as in 'Remembrance of the Daleks' when Ace is in a 1963 London boarding house run by a kindly, welcoming woman, and finds a sign in the window reading, 'No coloureds'. Ace is clearly appalled, and rightly so. Script editor Andrew Cartmel recalls being so proud of this scene, that when BBC Head of Drama Mark Shivas was distracted by a phone call, thus missing it in his official viewing of the finished programme, Cartmel insisted on his boss rewinding the tape and watching the scene:

John [Nathan-Turner, *Doctor Who's* producer at the time] looked at me with a combination of astonishment and amusement. But Mark Shivas indulged me. He rewound the tape. He watched the scene. He looked at me.

All he said was, 'You should have had her tear up the sign'.

Maybe he was right.[4]

Sylvester McCoy recalls John Nathan-Turner's account of interviewing Cartmel for the script editor's job. When asked what one thing he would want to achieve with *Doctor Who*, Cartmel apparently replied that he would want to 'overthrow the government'. Nathan-Turner decided to hire him on the spot, but replied that, 'the most he could do on a show like *Doctor Who* was get a message across about how black people and white people and green people and purple people were all equal'.[5] When the Doctor wants to be so inclusive of an extraordinary array of species from around the galaxy, how could we possibly entertain racism here on Earth? The beginning of 'Remembrance of the Daleks' shows a shot of Earth from space with the sound of broadcasts playing. The first, in English, is a snippet from a speech of John F. Kennedy: 'Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future.'[6] The implications are clear. What unites us as human beings is far more important than our differences. Diversity is something to be welcomed and celebrated, not despised. Tom Baker's Doctor waxes lyrical in 'The Ark In Space' (1975) when he sees the cryogenically preserved survivors of humanity: 'It's an amazing sight isn't it? The entire human race

in one room. All colours, all creeds – all differences finally forgotten.' It is clear that the Doctor sees intolerance as an evil attitude which results in all kinds of evil actions towards others. And, since he sees intolerance – and the closed minds which spawn it – as a root of all kinds of evil, his greatest mission is to open people's minds.

A Mission to Open Minds

The reason that the Doctor overcomes his dismissive attitude towards Rose is that she quickly demonstrates that she has an open mind. When he begins to explain her experiences with the menacing mannequins, he says, 'It's not a price war. They want to overthrow the human race and destroy you. Do you believe me?' When she replies, 'No,' the Doctor remarks, 'But you're still listening.' She is sceptical, but still open to being convinced. Although Rose falters from time to time, generally speaking she is remarkably open to what she encounters. It marks her out from many other human beings that the Doctor meets. Although Dickens is struggling with the extraordinary new things he is encountering in Cardiff, he does also begin a determined effort to consider the possibility of being mistaken. 'Can it be,' he asks, 'that I have the world entirely wrong?' That's the right kind of question for the Doctor, who gently says to him, 'Not wrong. There's just more to learn.' By the time the danger has been averted, Dickens is on a high – not just because of the excitement, but because his whole outlook on life has been broadened. He quotes Shakespeare to the Doctor and Rose: 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' Even for you, Doctor.' Then as they part, he says, 'This morning I thought I knew everything in the world. Now I know I've just started.' That kind of sentiment is music to the Doctor's ears.

Curiously, given Adam's intelligence and his experience of alien artefacts (which admittedly, he doesn't always understand), he finds it difficult to be open-minded when he arrives on Satellite Five with Rose and the Doctor ('The Long Game'). He seems to be open to things which are new and alien as long as they remain theoretical or remote, but finds the messy business of engaging personally with them to be more challenging. When he does respond to the Doctor's instructions to throw himself into the experience, his goal is not discovery, but making a fortune from stolen

technological secrets. While he is hardly being intolerant, his self-interest still falls considerably short of the Doctor's ideals.

A Better Future

As the Doctor helps people to become more receptive, so they become more able to fulfil their potential. MP Harriet Jones is able to quickly take on board both the situation in 10 Downing Street ('World War Three') and the Doctor's approach to dealing with it. Her open mind enables her to rise to the challenges of the post-Slitheen situation and she is to become one of Britain's greatest Prime Ministers. This is the quality which, in *Doctor Who*, characterises human beings at their best. This is what has enabled them to spread through the stars.

An earlier example of the Doctor attempting to broaden people's minds is in the 'Curse of Peladon' (1972). When the Doctor first arrives, Peladon is a feudal, unenlightened society which is ruled over by a king and a high priest. The Doctor encourages the king to join the Galactic Federation in order to easily market the planet's chief raw material, tricilicate – a rare mineral previously mined only on Mars. This brings much more wealth and a new social order to the planet. But when the Doctor returns a few years later (in 'The Monster of Peladon', 1974), the king has died and his daughter has come to power – but as a puppet ruler in a still patriarchal society. The real power lies with Chancellor Ortron who remains committed to the 'ancient ways' of idol worship. He and his fellow nobles are retaining the new wealth for themselves, and the working class miners are on the point of rebelling. An external threat comes from a greedy human mining engineer and a force of Martian Ice Warriors. The Doctor urges them to move quickly towards democracy in order to deal with the internal problems – the way ahead, as far as the Doctor is concerned, is to become a society more like the progressive model of western Europe in the mid-1970s. And his companion Sarah-Jane Smith doesn't see why the young queen should be subservient to her chancellor or anyone else. She explains to the queen:

Women's liberation, your Majesty. On Earth it means women don't let men push us around. . . . There's nothing 'only' about being a girl, your Majesty. Never mind why they made you a queen, the fact is you are the Queen, so just you jolly well

let them know it.

There is an interesting tension here, at least from our early twenty-first-century perspective. On the one hand, the Doctor wants to liberate this society from its subjugation to tradition, superstition and feudalism. He and Sarah-Jane see it as their duty to bring these poor benighted people out of their Dark Ages into a new world of wealth, equality, democracy and co-operation with other species. On the other hand, we could ask, who does the Doctor think he is to interfere with this traditional, uncomplicated society? Principles of postmodern tolerance might argue that he should leave well alone rather than impose his modernist, capitalist, cultural imperialism on people who have every right to live as they choose. The postmodern argument outlined above coincides with the view of the Time Lords and their strict policy of non-intervention. The Doctor's readiness to do whatever is necessary to protect the weak and ignorant against the dominating and strong is at odds with this, and gets him into trouble with his people. Perhaps the fact that we feel he is right to do so suggests that we all know that there are limits to tolerance: there really is injustice and evil which must be addressed and to stand by doing nothing makes us as culpable as the perpetrators of the evil.

A Line in the Sand

Tolerant he may be, but the Doctor is not a complete relativist, believing that morality is simply a choice for each individual to make. He believes in values – in good and evil. He may rebuke Rose when she objects to using Gwyneth to help the Gelth occupy dead bodies, saying, 'It is different, yeah, it's a different morality. Get used to it or go home' ('The Unquiet Dead'). But he also believes that there is a line which must not be crossed, that evil beings must be stopped. When he understands the Gelth's true intentions, he knows he must stop them – even if it means sacrificing Gwyneth. In 'Rose', the Doctor tries to persuade the Nestene Consciousness to quietly go, leaving the Earth in peace, but the monster's refusal to do so leads to its destruction. The Doctor takes some anti-plastic as 'insurance' when he goes to negotiate with the Consciousness. He genuinely does not want to destroy it, but he is prepared to do so because he will not countenance the Autons waging war on humanity. Similarly, the Slitheen must be stopped

at all costs – even if the Doctor has to risk both his own life and Rose’s in order to do so (‘World War Three’). And again, when he runs into Margaret Slitheen a second time, the Doctor feels compelled to stop her. Script editor Helen Raynor says, ‘Margaret Slitheen is essentially a hugely evil creature and it’s clear he can’t let her potter about Cardiff because she’ll kill us all.’[7]

The Doctor is also all too aware that his greatest enemies, the Daleks, are irredeemably evil. Their intense xenophobia and their desire to overthrow and enslave or destroy the residents of other planets is not something he will tolerate. While the Doctor is at heart a tolerant, peace-loving resolver of other people’s problems, there are limits. He wants to include other species in all their diversity. But how can such unmitigated evil be tolerated with a resigned shrug of the shoulders? How can such hateful beings be included in any fellowship of peaceable beings? They cannot. The Doctor exults in the destruction, as he thinks, of the Dalek race when he comes face to face with the last survivor (‘Dalek’). Later, when the Dalek has escaped, the Doctor finds a weapon capable of annihilating it – but Rose stands in his way. ‘That thing killed hundreds of people,’ says the Doctor. ‘I’ve got to do this. I’ve got to end it. The Daleks destroyed my home, my people; I’ve got nothing left.’ We see here something of the Doctor’s mixed motivations in wanting to destroy the last of the Daleks. It is not just because of the deeply evil nature of the thing, and the certainty of enormous loss of human life if it was to escape. There is also a sprinkling of vengeance in the mix. Eccleston comments:

In ‘Dalek’ they expose a Doctor we haven’t seen before. He becomes unreasonable and he goes mad – because he’s frightened. Of all the aliens he’s met, he knows their power. They are the ancient enemy of the Time Lords.[8]

At this point Rose is able to see what the Doctor can’t – that maybe even a Dalek can find some redemption. And that the Doctor can also be intolerant, closed-minded and ruthless, displaying the very qualities he despises in others. She says, ‘It couldn’t kill van Statten; it couldn’t kill me. It’s changing. What about you, Doctor? What the hell are you changing into?’ The Doctor’s encounter with Margaret Slitheen is interesting because of the discussion they have about the

ethics of the Doctor’s lifestyle. Russell T. Davies says:

The whole point of [‘Boom Town’] is to get to those scenes in the restaurant where the Doctor sits down with an enemy who he’s defeated. And they get to talk to each other and they explore the consequences of the Doctor’s actions. The real story in this is who the Doctor is, and what gives him the right to live this lifestyle, and what happens afterwards. And inevitably you have to look at this and say, part of saving the world, part of that, probably involves a good few deaths. I like the Doctor’s ruthlessness. I, personally, have given him a fair old streak of that just because I think it’s more interesting. We’re dealing with a Time Lord now who’s sort of war damaged. I’ve always been fascinated by the fact that the Doctor is a man who always leaves.[9]

Margaret does her best to emotionally manipulate her captors, saying, ‘Since you’re taking me to my death, that makes you my executioners – each and every one of you.’ When Mickey tells her she deserves it, she retorts, ‘You’re very quick to say so. You’re very quick to soak your hands in my blood. Which makes you better than me how, exactly?’ The Doctor points out that he does not make the law. ‘But you deliver it,’ says Margaret. Yes, he does. He is prepared to take her back to face death on Raxacoricofallapatorius because she is an evil creature who would happily slaughter the entire human race. She cannot be allowed to go free. Margaret tries to persuade the Doctor that she is becoming a changed character. He is not impressed:

You let one of them go, but that’s nothing new. Every now and then a little victim spared because she smiled, because he’s got freckles, because they begged. And that’s how you live with yourself, that’s how you slaughter millions because once in a while, on a whim, if the wind’s in the right direction, you happen to be kind.

Margaret turns the tables on the Doctor, suggesting that he is like her:

Only a killer would know that. Is that right? From what I’ve seen, your funny little happy-go-lucky life leaves devastation in its wake. Always moving on because you dare not go back. Playing with so many people’s lives you might as well be a god.

And you're right, Doctor, you're absolutely right. Sometimes you let one go.

This strikes a nerve with the Doctor. He does sometimes leave devastation in his wake; he does materialise in a crisis, arrogantly impose his solutions on a situation he doesn't always fully understand, and dematerialise again without ever having to face the consequences of his actions. He is deeply flawed. But the difference is that he has an understanding of good and evil, and he resolutely stands for the good against the evil. That means he cannot always be tolerant and he must interfere. He must attempt to do what is right and not judge the value of every action only by its consequences, because there are fundamental moral principles at stake. His high-handed rashness may cause problems at times, but that doesn't mean the overall direction of his life is wrong.

Tolerance and Redemption

At times the Doctor's foes are offered some kind of redemption, or at least a negotiated settlement. The TARDIS intervenes to give Margaret Slitheen the opportunity we all crave at times – the possibility of a fresh start. 'The idea that you get another chance and go back to the beginning and do it all again in the right way is such a beautiful and seductive idea and such a sad one as well.'^[10]

'She can start again, live her life from scratch. If we take her home, give her to a different family, tell them to bring her up properly, she might be alright,' the Doctor tells Rose and Jack who replies, 'Or she might be worse.' 'That's her choice,' insists the Doctor.

We commented above on the possibility of religion going bad when only the negative side of human nature is emphasised. But when the positive side is included too – the grace of God at work in our world – it becomes something transforming. The Christian conviction in God's kindness, love and mercy to even rebellious human beings like ourselves should so move us that we, too, exemplify kindness, love and mercy. Tolerance and inclusion are at the heart of the Christian faith even more than they are at the heart of *Doctor Who*. God's concern for all people, for 'the prisoners, the refugees, the dispossessed' goes right through the Bible. But

alongside it, as in *Doctor Who*, there is a clear sense that there is real good and real evil, and that lines must be drawn in the sand. If the Doctor will do whatever is necessary to defeat forces of evil, how much more will God. At the very heart of the Christian faith is the self-sacrifice of God's Son in order to both defeat evil and redeem rebellious human beings – an action which is paralleled by the Doctor's own willingness to lose his life to save others.

Like Jesus, the Doctor is intolerant of things that do not deserve to be tolerated – evil, oppression, injustice – but his opposition to these things is not a high-handed, arrogant intolerance. Such opposition is not cheap, and it sometimes demands the ultimate price of death. The Doctor can be defended from charges of cultural imperialism because he is not acting for his own benefit, but for others. More than this, he himself bears the cost of his interventions. He may tell the Emperor Dalek that 'if there's one thing I can do, it's talk', but that is by no means the only thing that he does. He also walks the walk.

[1] Clayton Hickman, *Doctor Who Confidential: The Daleks* (BBC3, first broadcast 30 April 2005)

[2] Alan McKee, 'Which is the best *Doctor Who* story? A case study in value judgements outside the academy', *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*, Issue 1, Spring/Summer 2001 – www.cult-media.com/issue1/Amckee.htm

[3] Matt Jones, 'Tory Alpha: In search of a Queer nation' in Paul Cornell (ed) *License Denied: Rumbblings from the Doctor Who Underground* (Virgin, 1997), p. 56

[4] Andrew Cartmel, *Script Doctor: The Inside Story of Doctor Who, 1986–89* (Reynolds and Hearn, 2005), p. 111

[5] Sylvester McCoy in the foreword to Andrew Cartmel, *Script Doctor: The Inside Story of Doctor Who, 1986–89*, p. 7

[6] Above ground nuclear testing speech by John F. Kennedy, Washington D.C., 10 June 1963. Kennedy continued, 'And we're all mortal.'

[7] Helen Raynor, *Doctor Who Confidential: 'Unsung Heroes and Violent Deaths'*, (BBC3, first broadcast 4 June 2005)

[8] Christopher Eccleston, *Doctor Who Confidential: 'The Daleks'*

[9] Russell T. Davies, *Doctor Who Confidential*.

'Unsung Heroes and Violent Deaths'
[10] Helen Raynor, *Doctor Who Confidential*:
'Unsung Heroes and Violent Deaths'

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