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## **Spike, The Initiative and the Substitution of the Technological for the Metaphysical**

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**“Buffy:** You cannot have a crush on something that is dead and evil and a vampire!

**Dawn:** Right, that's why you were never with Angel for three years.

**Buffy:** Angel is different. He has a soul.

**Dawn:** Spike has a chip, same diff.

**Buffy:** I can't listen to this. Spike is a monster, okay” –Crush

Throughout the final six seasons of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Season five of Angel the viewer is presented with five very different stages in the development of the character of Spike. In this paper I intend to examine each of these stages in Spike's existence and by doing so to explore the implications of the behavior modification chip implanted in his head by The Initiative as a technological substitute for the soul he lost upon becoming a vampire and later regains by traveling to Africa and completing a series of demonic challenges.

The first of these five stages, Spike as a human, is also the one we know the least about. As the show takes place about a hundred years after Spike's death, his life as a human is shown only briefly and in flashbacks during which he is shown living in London and splitting his time between writing extremely bad poetry and using it in failed romantic adventures. While this stage of Spike's life is significant enough to warrant a brief mention, it is not particularly relevant to the issue at hand and we have so little information about it that further discussion would not be productive.

The second stage of Spike's existence, his time as a vampire, when he has neither a soul nor the chip, is the first of the three stages which I consider to be the most important when considering the use of the chip as a soul substitute, the other two being the time between the implantation of the chip and his regaining his soul, and the time after the chip is removed. This period of Spike's existence encompasses all his appearances from season two's *School Hard* through season four's *The Initiative* as well as a guest appearance in *In the Dark*, a part of Angel's first season. During this time frame Spike's behavior is very similar to, and clearly based on, the "typical" vampire behavior presented throughout the show. To clarify, he is presented as being sadistic, self-involved and primarily interested only in blood, sex and fun. One notable exception to this stereotypical behavior does, however, exist in his relationship with his sire and girlfriend Drusilla. While Buffyverse vampires are normally prone to casual sex, and relationships between them are often intertwined with drop of a hat betrayals, double-crosses and even murders, Spike and Drusilla seem to have had a very long (one hundred plus years) and personal relationship which existed on an emotional, as well as sexual, level. This point is driven home during *Lover's Walk* (mid season three) when Spike appears genuinely broken and bordering on insanity after Drusilla leaves him, and in fact he is not seen with another woman until he beds Harmony almost a year later in season four's *The Harsh Light of Day*. In the series only two previous examples of this type of relationship between vampires exist, the relationship between Darla and Angelus and that of James and Elizabeth, from *Heartthrob*, which aired during season three of Angel.

Another example of Spike's differing from the stereotypical vampire behavior during this period of his existence, is his viciousness. While all vampires are portrayed as being sadistic and murdering for fun, as well as food, Spike appears to take particular pleasure in tormenting and torturing his victims, both physically and mentally, prior to killing them. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether this behavior stems from a facet of his personality or is a result of his tutelage at the hands of the deranged Drusilla and also of Angelus, who is represented as one of the most vicious and sadistic vampires of all time. I would also like to mention Spike's brashness. While all vampires seem to act with little regard for their own safety, Spike has a particular penchant for seeking out situations which could destroy him. While it is likely that this behavior is primarily a result of his competitive attitude and desire to outdo Angel(us), it is worth noting that Spike has actively sought confrontation and outright combat with no fewer than three different slayers. This includes one whom he engaged and killed in 1900; at which point he had been a vampire for only about twenty years, a relatively short period of time given the circumstances.

The third stage of Spike's existence is that which is shown from *The Initiative* through season six's *Grave* during which time the behavior control chip has been implanted and is operating while Spike remains soulless. During this stage of his existence he is prevented from harming any living being; however, he still has the impulse and desire to do so. While without a soul but under the chip's control, he clearly still views himself as evil and wishes to kill, for fun as well as sustenance, but he is prevented from acting on his wishes. In fact he compares the chip's effect first to that of

impotence, as is demonstrated in his extended conversation with Willow after attempting to bite her in *The Initiative*, and later to castration, as shown in *Pangs* when he attempts to gain an invitation into Giles' home by comparing his own condition to that of a recently neutered dog, saying "Spike had a little trip to the vet and now he doesn't chase the other puppies anymore." The significance of this is that it conclusively proves that while the chip physically prevents Spike from acting out in certain ways, it does nothing to change his internal dynamic other than to add resentment of the imposed limitations. Thus the chip is in control of his body, but the demon which drove him commit the sadistic acts he was known for prior to the implantation of the chip is firmly in control of his mind. The chip merely prevents him from causing injury.

It is also important to note that during this stage of his existence Spike feels no regret or remorse for his murderous past and, in fact, spends a significant amount of time looking for a way to get the chip removed or deactivated so that he can return to his old ways. Furthermore, he often finds ways to commit acts which would normally be considered to be evil, while acting within the behavioral limits set by the chip. Thus he demonstrates that intelligence can circumvent the rote moral restrictions set by the chip. Some examples of this occur towards the end of season four, when Spike conspires with Adam to lead the Scoobies into a trap that he and Adam assume will result in their deaths and in *This Year's Girl* (earlier in the same season) when, after Xander warns him that Faith has awoken from her coma and wants revenge, he responds "Tell you what I'll do, then. I'll head out, find this girl, tell her exactly where all of you are, and then watch... as she kills you. Can't any one of your damned little Scooby club at least try to remember

that I hate you all?" In addition, the very fact that Spike has to remind Xander that he hates the Scoobies shows how the chip has caused them to think of him as harmless. In response, he takes his first steps on the road to redemption. Because the Scoobies no longer fear him, he is forced to find a new identity in order to gain attention and remain relevant.

In fact, despite the limitations on his actions imposed by the chip, Spike remains, for lack of a better term, evil, until the middle of season five when he realizes his true feelings for Buffy. This realization marks a significant turning point in the development of Spike's character as this realization is accompanied by his discovery that while Buffy has shown that she is willing to have a relationship with a vampire, she is not willing to have one with an evil being. Even though Spike had spent a significant amount of time in the company of, and in some cases, working with, the scoobies between *The Initiative* and season five's *Out of My Mind*, when he, as well as the audience, realizes his feelings for Buffy. The facts that he often demands blood and/or money for his help and is always willing to double-cross them for his own personal gain shows that he is helping them out of necessity rather than a desire to do good or spend time with them. After *Out of My Mind*, however, he genuinely cares about the well-being of Buffy, and to a lesser extent her friends, and he completes a wide variety of tasks for her ranging from the mundane, such as watching Dawn, to the heroic, such as not giving any information to Glory even under torture. When he discovers his love for Buffy he decides, of his own accord, to behave in a more strictly ethical manner than programmed by the chip. Thus not the chip, but love ultimately results in him choosing to get a soul and achieving a balance of

free will and morality that he had not possessed since before his death. While this, voluntary, turn away from evil begins with Spike's decision to launch a romantic pursuit of Buffy and persists through his decision to pursue a soul, which I will discuss in more detail later, I believe that it reaches its pinnacle during season five's *Crush* when Drusilla returns to Sunnydale in an attempt to show Spike how he can be truly evil and act on his vampiric instincts in spite of the behavioral limitations imposed by the chip. Over the course of the episode Spike turns away from Drusilla, whom he had viewed as his one true love up until that point. He does this by preventing her from killing Buffy, who still denies having any feelings for him. I view this as a significant leap of faith in good, because he knows that Drusilla will leave him, but can only hope that Buffy will enter a relationship with him. This is one of the first, of many, times, between the impanation of the chip and his winning back his soul, when Spike demonstrates ethical consideration and moral decision making, two traits not normally associated with vampires. This series of events is significant because it shows the viewer that while Spike's chip acts as a soul would, in the sense that it prevents him from taking certain, immoral, actions, it does not, as a soul would, cause him to voluntarily choose morality and good when presented with an option.

One could make the case that Spike's decision to behave more ethically, in hopes of getting Buffy to admit the feelings he believes her to have for him, is not a choice but rather something he is forced to do by his own mental condition, after all he himself tells Buffy "You know/You got a willing slave/And You just love to play the thought/That you might misbehave" in *Once More, With Feeling*. I believe that while it is true that his

feelings control his actions to some degree, the presence of the chip limits his options and drives him towards the course of action he ultimately takes. What I mean by this is that his past, as well as the actions of other vampires, indicate that if his actions were not limited by the chip he would have raped Buffy, something he does attempt to do after discovering that the chip does not prevent him from harming the magically resurrected Buffy, then killed and, most likely, sired her. However, the chip prevents him from taking this course of action upon initially discovering his feelings for Buffy and, by the time it becomes an option in season six's *Smashed*, he has realized that his feelings for her go far beyond simple lust. Although, after several consensual sexual encounters and the rejection which followed them, he does attempt to rape her, he soon after realizes the immorality of his actions, in spite of his lacking the guidance which could be provided by a soul. He flees Sunnydale in order to get one; thus demonstrating that even though the chip does not give him a conscience, it does result in him spending more time considering his actions and their consequences. This added period of reflection results in his making better and more morally acceptable decisions. However, it should also be noted that-even at this concluding point of the third stage of his development, Spike still feels no regret for his previous actions, with the notable exception of his attempted rape of Buffy.

The fourth stage of Spike's existence runs from *Grave*, the season six finale, through season seven's *The Killer in Me*, during which time he has both the chip and a soul. During this period of time his behavior is similar to that which he exhibits between *Out of My Mind* and *Grave*, with two notable exceptions. First he is, for the first time since becoming a vampire, forced to consider the results of his previous actions and is, as

a result, driven insane by a combination of remorse and the influence of the Hellmouth, until he is rescued from the school basement in *Lessons*, the season seven opener.

Second, while the limitations imposed by the chip are still in effect he is also affected by the moral guidelines imposed by his soul. As a result, while Spike had previously been, and at this point still was, prevented from harming living beings, he had, prior to getting a soul, desired to do so and, in many cases, been extremely angry that he was not able to do so. When he had both the chip and a soul, he had neither the desire, nor the ability to harm living things. During this period of time Spike works closely with the Scoobies and helps Buffy to train the potential slayers. The only time he harms anyone or behaves in a way that would be considered immoral occurs when he is under the control of The First in *Sleeper*. No explanation is given as to why the chip did not prevent him from taking these actions. Finally, it should also be noted that Spike, unsuccessfully, continues his romantic pursuit of Buffy during this period.

The fifth, and final, stage of Spike existence extends from the removal of his chip, in *The Killer in Me*, through his, apparent destruction in *Chosen*, and is continued in *Just Rewards* through *Not Fade Away* of Angel's season five. During this time, he has a soul and the chip has been removed. He is physiologically capable of behaving in any manner he chooses. However, much like Angel, while he can, and in some cases does, injure or kill living beings, he is prevented from acting in an unethical manner by his soul. It is important to remember that unlike the chip, which is a technological device with a hard coded program, a soul does not bring with it unbendable rules, nor does it prevent Spike from acting in any specific way. It merely guides him. A prime example of his occurs in



season seven's *Lies My Parents Told Me* when Principal Wood attempts to kill Spike in retribution for Spike's murder of his mother during the 1970s. Had Spike had the chip during this encounter, he would have been unable to fight back even though doing so was clearly a morally acceptable act of self defense. Had he had neither the soul nor the chip, he likely would have killed Wood without giving it a second thought; however, with the soul he was able to make his own decision as to how to act, ultimately deciding to save himself and wound but not kill his attacker.

The significance of this is two-fold. First it demonstrates that the difference between the chip, a technological method of behavior control, and the soul, a metaphysical one, is largely that of free will. While the chip does function as a substitute for a soul in that it prevents Spike from taking certain, immoral, actions, it is not a suitable replacement for a soul since it, as a device of hard logic, is unable to consider the context of a given action. It can prevent him from taking certain actions but it also prevents him from making the appropriate decisions for himself. Therefore, while the chip strips Spike of his free will in a variety of circumstances and, while it does prevent him from harming living things, it does nothing to stifle his desire to do so or allow him to understand why doing so might be wrong and experience remorse for doing so in the past, or for committing immoral or evil acts that do not require him to directly, and physically harm living beings. Second, it should also be noted that the chip did set him on the path towards good. What I mean by this is that it is unlikely, almost to the point of being inconceivable that Spike would have voluntarily sought, or even accepted, a soul prior to being implanted with the chip. While one might argue that Buffy's values and

Spike's love for Buffy, rather than the chip, lead him towards the decision to get a soul, Spike's past and his encounters with Buffy prior to getting the chip combine to convince me that had he not gotten the chip he would have killed Buffy or been dusted by her long before he could have spent enough time with her to develop the feelings which lead him to pursue a soul.

I would like to conclude by saying that the chip functions in a manner both similar to and different from a soul, and while doing so has many, but by no means all, of the effects a soul would have. To look at this idea from a theological and philosophical standpoint, the issue of chip versus soul poses that of predestination versus free will. The chip removes the element of personal choice by forcibly preventing Spike from taking certain actions regardless of what he wants, while the soul forces him to consider his actions, and their consequences, it allows him to act in any way he chooses. As a result of this, it is easy to view the chip as a substitute for a soul, but it is in fact a poor substitute, as it acts as a form of incarceration rather than rehabilitation. With the chip Spike often desires to commit acts that it prevents him from committing and commits evil acts outside of the narrow scope of directly harming living things. The chip does nothing to direct him towards good, morality or redemption, since it does nothing to educate or elicit any emotions other than anger. Ultimately it is not the chip but love that frees Spike from his evil demon.