

# “Look at the Flowers”: Utilitarian Themes in the Post-Apocalypse

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In recent years, the zombie genre has become pervasive in popular culture. Though there is little surprise in finding the undead in fictional movies and television shows, they also appear in more unlikely places, such as commercial advertisements (Cook 54). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) even began using the zombie genre to advertise disaster preparedness on its website (Ambrosius and Valenzano 89).

This proliferation of zombies into mainstream culture initially seems benign, but it should be noted that public fascination does not end with fictitious storytelling. In recent years, news headlines have excessively featured cannibalism, human mutilation, and unexplained pandemics. Not only do these stories have the potential to spread panic, but they also help to normalize violence in society (Linnemann et al. 507-8). Such events may be considered a moral panic, or “...when a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (Cohen 9).

Public fascination with zombies may be connected to current events. Ho explains that some scholars, such as Hamilton, “have interpreted these apocalyptic fictions as American anxieties over potential catastrophes, ranging from viral pandemics to global warming to alienation in consumer society, with anxieties reflected in and toward the zombie horde” (58).

This paper will examine AMC’s *The Walking Dead (TWD)*, a popular television series in recent years with a focus on a zombie-filled, post-apocalyptic society. Specifically, I address instances of utilitarianism, and contend that examples of these instances are pervasive throughout the series. Here, I convey

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the reflection of the fears of some of America's population by demonstrating behavior possibilities in the event of an apocalypse or disaster scenario.

### Concepts of justice, utilitarianism and television

Understanding the conceptual foundation for utilitarianism is critical to appropriately posit the discussion herein and appropriately apply it to *TWD*. Utilitarianism states that the outcomes should be both the most morally correct and benefit the largest number of individuals in society. Jeremy Bentham's pleasure and pain principle indicates that individuals will seek out actions that maximize their pleasure and simultaneously minimize their pain.

Robinson discusses the role that television shows, including *Hillstreet Blues*, *Perry Mason*, and *ChiPs*, had in helping him formulate his ideals throughout his lifetime. For instance, some lessons learned include "...sometimes the work of one person will bring about justice...", "...it is acceptable and at times necessary to question authority and to resist bureaucracy as long as justice is achieved in the end...", and "...justice demands standing up for what is right even when it is not what is popular..." (333). Television was but one avenue by which Robinson claims to have had these revelations, in addition to films, music, and a range of real-life experiences. This culmination of sources assisted in his ability to comprehend concepts related to crime, justice and utilitarianism, among others.

Previous work has been published examining various issues arising throughout the series. For instance, Wayne Yuen has edited two volumes focusing on various philosophical aspects of *TWD*. Additionally, a few scholarly articles have discussed critical perspectives of *TWD*. The role of institutions constructed throughout the series, including science/medicine, government, religion, and family, has been explored (Ambrosius and Valenzano). These authors found that the only institution that persevered throughout the series and salvaged the characters was family, with other institutions failing over the course of the series. Other studies have explored the characterization and portrayal of race and gender, economic roles, and themes of colonialism (Sugg; Ho).

The value of studying the series is best explained by understanding the value of the decision-making processes:

Though the show is fictional in its content, the reactions of the characters are meant to portray an accurate or at least quasi-accurate

representation of human response to disaster, trauma, death, tragedy, etc. Therefore, analysis of *The Walking Dead* can actually provide useful diagnostic material relevant to post-disaster issues. (Waddell 12)

There has been scant scholarly research dedicated to in-depth analysis of the events, characters and dialogue in the series. While discussions are provided elsewhere on concepts of utilitarianism in the series (See e.g. Dean; Allaire; Yuen; Loza; Hawkes; Devlin and Cooper; Delfino and Lesinki), these are typically either peripheral to the main discussion, or do not contain a full analysis of the dialogue and interactions of the characters. Concepts specifically focused on utilitarianism as portrayed in *TWD* are discussed herein.

## Methodology and *The Walking Dead*

*The Walking Dead* is a television series that follows a group of survivors after zombies (or “walkers” as they are known on the series) have infected civilization. Through the progress of the series we are introduced to new characters, and the characters are almost constantly mobile, providing perpetual opportunities for experiences with walkers and remaining survivors.

The first episode of the show begins with Rick, a former law enforcement officer, waking in his hospital bed after being shot in the line of duty. As he leaves his room and a vacant hospital, he returns to the world outside, only to find that it is no longer recognizable to him. He reunites with his wife, Lori, and son, Carl, as well as his best friend and law enforcement partner, Shane. Over the next several years, the group’s dynamics and the individuals who comprise this group change substantially. Throughout the series, there is a consistent thread of morality and decision-making, as the audience watches the characters struggle with survival.

To analyze the dialogue between the characters, I will use qualitative textual analysis. Specifically, I will focus on narratology, which “focuses on narrative story-telling within a text with emphasis on meaning that may be produced by its structure and choice of words” (Macnamara 15).

For the analysis provided herein, each episode of seasons one through six (the full seasons for which each episode is available at the time of the initial writing of this analysis) of *TWD* was viewed multiple times. Dialog between characters and

major events were recorded and classified within one of the major themes of utilitarianism including: basic necessities, freedom of expression, act utilitarianism, indirect utilitarianism, rule utilitarianism and institutional utilitarianism. Each of these is expressed, either incidentally to the plot or blatantly by the characters, as themes throughout the series.

## Basic Necessities

Though basic needs exist prior to considering more long-term issues (Mulgan), the primary characters foremost concern is with acquiring basic necessities. On the series, there are several examples of the characters securing food, shelter or security, or protecting these amenities, as they are scarce in the post-apocalyptic society. Security is viewed by many utilitarian theorists as the most important interest to protect, and is inclusive of shelter, food and security (Mulgan 16). As time continues, these necessities become scarcer, as there is a lack of production of resources, and individuals continue using the existing supply of resources. Over time, individuals become more independent, for instance, growing their own food. Clearly, security is an issue for the survivors in *TWD* universe, as the characters contend with the constant threat of walkers, and find themselves at odds with other survivors. Scarcity of resources, such as weapons, food and shelter, pit various survivors against one another.

Throughout the series, one theme that consistently appears is the need for adequate and sustainable shelter. The seasons and sub-seasons can be almost categorically broken down by the location of the shelter in which the group inhabits, or is attempting to inhabit. For instance, a campground, farm, prison, or securitized town are all locations inhabited by the group. Each location has its unique set of challenges but offers some form of shelter against the elements and intruders.

After escaping an attack on the farm, the group finds a prison, already inhabited by both zombies and prisoners (including Thomas and Axel),

THOMAS. Group of civilians breaking into a prison you've got no business being in, got me thinking there ain't no place for us to go!

DARYL. Why don't you go find out?

AXEL. Maybe we'll just be going now.

THOMAS. Hey, we ain't leaving!

T-DOG. You ain't coming in either!

THOMAS. Hey, this is my house, my rules, I go where I damn well please! ("Sick")

As seen in this excerpt, the prisoners, trapped within the facility since the outbreak, are unaware of the exact nature of the chaos outside the prison walls, and are unwilling to surrender their existing shelter to this group of strangers. A prison, once regarded as a facility for punishment, has become a place for people to seek refuge. Here, both prisoners and free citizens grapple with viewing this as a safe shelter to keep walkers and human intruders out, rather than to maintain control and surveillance of those housed within.

As the main characters proceed through the landscape of what remains after the apocalypse, they find another group, which includes (among others) Eugene, Rosita and Abraham, who will all become major characters in the remaining seasons. Eugene claims to be a scientist that needs to get to Washington, D.C., and the others have placed their faith in him to be their best chance at security and survival. Eugene creates an elaborate lie to enlist the assistance of the characters to escort him to Washington, D.C. As we find out, this was done to guarantee his own personal security.:

EUGENE. I know I'm smarter than most people, I know I'm a very good liar, and I know I needed to get to DC.

MAGGIE. Why?

EUGENE. Because I do believe that locale holds the strongest possibility for survival, and I wanted to survive. If I could cheat some people into taking me there, well, I just reasoned that I'd be doin' them a solid, too, considering the perilous state of the city of Houston, the state of everything. ("Self Help")

Viewers realize that Eugene, though not the scientist he has masqueraded himself to be, is intelligent and cunning. His personal security, as well as the security of those in his cohort, was more likely if they reached a safer location.

Later in the series, the main characters find an established town called Alexandria. When deciding whether to stay at Alexandria, and how to integrate themselves into the established town, this quote from Rick shows the perseverance and determination of the group: “But it's not gonna happen. We won't get weak. That's not in us anymore. We'll make it work. And if they can't make it... then we'll just take this place.” (“Remember”). Established locations such as Alexandria are in short supply and Rick and his group see the value in a structured town over playing by the rules of those occupying that town.

## Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is another important aspect of utilitarianism. Particularly, if individuals disagree with the views of others, it is still important to allow these views to be expressed.

Throughout the series, there are multiple scenarios where characters disagree. In many instances, the characters are willing to hear one another out to reach a decision. For instance, in season one, Jim is clearly ill (infected). Some members of the group engage in discussion about the best way to handle a visibly ill Jim. This very telling exchange illustrates how various group members believe the situation should be handled.

DARYL. I say we put a pickaxe in his head and the dead girl's and be done with it.

SHANE. Is that what you'd want if it were you?

DARYL. Yeah, and I'd thank you while you did it.

DALE. I hate to say it... I never thought I would... but maybe Daryl's right.

RICK. Jim's not a monster, Dale, or some rabid dog.

DALE. I'm not suggesting...

RICK. He's sick. A sick man. We start down that road, where do we draw the line?

DARYL. The line's pretty clear. Zero tolerance for walkers, or them to be. ("Wildfire").

Here, Daryl is attempting to forge ahead with the utilitarian decision to execute Jim, who is clearly ill and may pose a risk to the remaining members of the group. Ever the moralist of the group, Rick resists this initial decision. To Rick, Jim is still a human, whereas Daryl and perhaps Dale, view him as a threat to the group. Ultimately, they leave Jim behind to fend for himself while they leave in the RV. Perhaps this is a moral negotiation to ease any of the group members from being forced to be Jim's executioner.

In season two, Dale urges Shane to leave the group after Shane has been acting questionably. Dale (correctly) suspects that Shane intentionally killed Otis (Herschel's farmhand), and that he wants to kill Rick, in part out of jealousy. While Dale discusses these issues with Shane, Shane reacts with animosity by threatening Dale "Well, maybe we ought to just think that through. Say I'm the kind of man who'd gun down his own best friend. What do you think I'd do to some guy that I don't even like when he starts throwing accusations my way?" ("Secrets"). Shane is clearly unhappy that Dale has discovered his secrets, and fears these actions being revealed to the other group members. Although Dale may make more morally sound decisions, it can be argued that many of Shane's decisions follow the utilitarian line of reasoning (the greater good rationale).

In the first two seasons, Dale is often in the moral decision-making process, usually elicited through group discussion. A substantial amount of discussion and division is generated between the characters in season two by Randall's presence at the farm. Dale is the most vocal in advocating for keeping Randall alive, but is met with criticism and resistance by other members of the group.

ANDREA. You really want to debate about saving a guy who will lead his buddies right to our door?

DALE. That's what a civilized society does.

ANDREA. Who says we're civilized anymore?

DALE. No, the world we knew is gone, but keeping our humanity? That's a choice.

DALE. But don't you see? If we do this, the people that we were... The world that we knew is dead. And this new world is ugly. It's... Harsh. It's... it's survival of the fittest. And that's a world I don't wanna live in, and I don't.... And I don't believe that any of you do. I can't. Please. Let's just do what's right. Isn't there anybody else who's gonna stand with me? (“Judge, Jury, Executioner”).

Both of these examples involving the group decision-making process highlight Dale’s optimism, even in the face of the apocalypse. Not killing Randal is certainly not a utilitarian move; Randall would certainly be the one who benefitted. Whereas, killing him would allow the others to feel safe, albeit somewhat guilty, for opting to do so. Shortly after a series of catastrophic incidents in season two, the group loses their “moral compass” when Dale is killed.

### Act utilitarianism

Act utilitarianism means the “right act is the act that produces the most well-being” (Mulgan 115). Calculations of what is “right” become problematic when considering issues such as spontaneity, danger, timeliness, friendship, and coordination of calculation between individuals (Mulgan 115-17). Because some of the decisions that must be made by the characters are spur of the moment, they may not be able to adequately consider every factor for the most utilitarian decision. Some decisions, however, are made over a period of time and with more deliberation.

When Rick joins the camp early in season one, he is reunited with Lori and Carl. He feels compelled, by his own set of ethical rules, to return to attempt to save Merle Dixon, who they had left handcuffed to the roof of a building. New to the group, Rick emerges with his unique moral code, which counter Shane’s. Shane bases this decision on his perceptions of Merle’s character

SHANE. ...Merle Dixon...The guy wouldn't give you a glass of water if you were dying of thirst.

RICK. What he would or wouldn't do doesn't interest me. I can't let a man die of thirst... me. Thirst and exposure. We left him like an animal caught in a trap. That's no way for anything to die, let alone a human being. ("Tell it to the Frogs").

Going back solely to rescue Merle, who seems to have increased the number of disagreements and amount of dissention among group members, would run counter utilitarianism ideals. Rick argues against these utilitarian ideals when he argues to return to the roof to save him. However, the second objective to returning to the scene, to secure the duffel bag of weapons that Rick had left behind, would clearly fulfill utilitarian purposes (Yuen What's 244-45). This could allow the group to be better able to protect themselves against walkers (as part and parcel to the basic necessities discussion) or other groups of survivors that may mean their group harm.

A major dilemma falling under the act utilitarianism category the group deals with is Sophia (Carol's daughter) being lost. The group remains divided on whether and how long to search for Sophia. Dale pretends to fix his RV as others search for her and he explains to T-Dog, almost verbatim, the considerations implicit in utilitarianism: "Sooner or later, if she's not found, people will start doing math. I want to hold off the needs of the many versus the needs of the few arguments as long as I can" ("What Lies Ahead").

Although many may view Dale's desire to have the group continue to search for Sophia as morally correct, he clearly indicates in the above that he understands that it is in opposition to utilitarian principles (Dean 92). By maintaining that the RV is not fixable yet, the group is essentially stranded and it makes reasonable sense to continue the search for her, since there are no other viable options to leave. Should Dale have been honest with the other group members about the condition of the RV, the discussion would surely have taken a utilitarian turn toward leaving and abandoning Sophia.

In "Save the Last One" in season two, after Otis (Herschel's farmhand) accidentally shot Carl, Shane and Otis leave to acquire medical supplies. While on this excursion, they are overrun by zombies, and Shane shoots Otis and leaves him behind to be devoured by zombies. Initially, viewers may believe this act was done merely to save his own hide. Viewing Otis as weaker than himself, Shane may spot an opportunity to escape. Shane's quick decision actually served multiple purposes. Not only was he able to save his own life but also was able to

return to the farm with the medical supplies to save Carl as quickly as possible (Gaskin 21). In this case, it could be considered act utilitarianism. Had he not shot Otis, it is possible that neither would have returned with the medical supplies and Carl may not have survived.

Until Abraham discovers Eugene has been dishonest with them, he considers his primary mission making sure Eugene journeys to Washington, D.C. As shown in the two passages below, Abraham is dedicated to the greater good:

ABRAHAM. Got to hand it to him. He's a persistent son of a bitch. I get why you're following him. You're loyal. You're a good person. I like it. But what we're doing... I don't know how else to say it... saving the world is just... is just more important. I mean, even if he does find his wife, so what? How long do you think they'll live happily ever after if we don't get Eugene up to Washington? (“Claimed”).

ABRAHAM. I respect that, but there's a clear threat here to Eugene. I need to extract his ass before things get any uglier. (“Four Walls and a Roof”).

Ironically, this second passage is said just a few episodes prior to the group discovering Eugene “is not a scientist”, and Abraham repeatedly punches Eugene, knocking him unconscious. While the initial actions to protect Eugene were seen as justified by Abraham, regardless of what those actions were, the greater good was worth the consequences from his perspective. Once Eugene is no longer seen as the savior that can find the cure, Abraham feels betrayed and can no longer justify protecting him.

### Indirect utilitarianism

Indirect utilitarianism indicates an individual should attempt to clear their mind prior to making decisions, as well as attempt to go by the “general rule of thumb” (Mulgan 117) for decisions and attempt to make decisions in a timely manner. In addition to trying to conserve precious resources, friendships should also be considered in the decision-making process (Mulgan).

An example of indirect utilitarianism in *TWD* is the decision that sometimes has to be made to kill individuals that are part of the group, even if they aren't walkers, if they are considered a threat to the others. Rick killed his former best friend, Shane, when he was threatening to kill Rick. Carol killed Karen and David because they were ill, and she was concerned they would infect other members of the group.

Carol's choice to kill Karen and David initially seems utilitarian. In an attempt to prevent the spread of the illness, she killed two members of the group. But, her actions counter utilitarianism because 1.) the deaths of the two people did not ultimately prevent the illness from spreading, and 2.) Carol's decision to kill them upset several other group members (Delfino and Lesinski 181), including Tyreese, who Carol had a close relationship with. But the question remains whether it is considered a utilitarian action if the person acting on (in this case, Carol) believes it to be utilitarian, even if the outcomes aren't expected? Carol could not have known that killing Karen and David would be a futile attempt at containing an illness.

Later, Carol chooses to kill Lizzie, one the children in the group, after she discovers that Lizzie is a danger to others (and has killed other members of the group, including Mica, one of the other children). Delfino and Lesinski indicate that, from a utilitarian perspective, killing Lizzie, who was clearly delusional and capable of homicide, may make sense (184-85). Carol tells Lizzie, "You just... Just look at the flowers, Lizzie. Just look at the flowers. Just... just look at the flowers", and then shoots Lizzie in the head ("The Grove"). In this scene, it is apparent that Carol is struggling with her decision to kill Lizzie. Both Lizzie and Mica served as semi-surrogate children to her after the loss of her own daughter, Sophia. But, Carol weighs the costs and the benefits and chooses the best course of action for the greatest number of people within the group. She tells Lizzie to look at the flowers so that she is seeing something beautiful in a world that has turned ugly, and a time when a terrible fate is about to befall her.

### Rule utilitarianism

Rule utilitarianism is defined as "the right act is the act called for by the ideal code" (Mulgan, 119). This means individuals should have and understand a

framework for the specific rules that are being followed, or the rules that the ideal code imposes on them.

In the first season, there is a structure in the communal living at the camp, as evidenced by a seemingly minor infraction, such as when Ed decides to put an extra log on the fire. Although Ed explains how cold it is, which he believes justifies another log on the fire, Shane retorts, “The cold don't change the rules, does it? Keep our fires low, just embers so we can't be seen from a distance, right?” (“Tell it to the Frogs”).

Ed's decision here is not only breaking “the rules” as imposed by the structure of the camp, it is endangering the lives of the inhabitants by potentially alerting walkers to their whereabouts. Shane, who became the temporary and unofficial leader of the camp, enforces the rules against Ed. Under typical circumstances, an extra log on a fire is a minor issue. In the zombie apocalypse, however, every rule seems to matter for survival.

Perhaps no character in the series is more definitive in the standard of self-imposed rules they hold than Morgan. Despite attacks by walkers and other survivor groups, he refuses to take human lives. Morgan's mantra after he resurfaces (after witnessing his own fair share of personal horrors, including losing both his son and his wife), is “all life is precious”. Although he repeats this mantra often throughout the series, this quote from the sixth season explains the internal struggle for Morgan:

MORGAN. Back there I would have killed you as soon as look at you. And I tried. But you, you let me live and then I was there to help Aaron and Daryl. See, if I... if I wasn't there... if they died... maybe those wolves wouldn't have been able to come back here. I don't know what's right anymore. 'Cause I did want to kill those men. I seen what they did, what they keep doing. I knew I could end it. But I also know that people can change. 'Cause everyone sitting here has. All life is precious. And that idea... that idea changed me. It brought me back and it keeps me living. (“Heads Up”).

Throughout most of his presence on the series, Morgan maintains his disciplined belief system, even as their living spaces are under attack by various outsiders. Is this in line with the utilitarian way of thinking? As can be seen in the passage

above, Morgan struggles with the concept of “right”. If killing one saves many, he contemplates the morality of those actions.

### Institutional utilitarianism

In institutional utilitarianism, effective institutions are defined as those that “produce the greatest total well-being” (Mulgan 128). In the series, in the absence of official government structures, there are no formal organizations, so institutions are informally structured. Most of the institutional structures have a clear hierarchy with a leader (such as The Governor, Deanna, or Negan). Rick is consistently called upon or expected to be the primary leader among the primary main protagonists, which has led some viewers to jokingly coin the term “Ricktatorship” to describe his leadership style.

When Andrea and Michonne discover Woodbury in season three, they also discover a town with strictly enforced rules, including a curfew and immediate confiscation of their weapons, including Andrea’s gun and Michonne’s prized possession, her katana. The following dialogue illustrates the security of the town, as well as examples of the rules that are imposed on the citizens.

ANDREA. How many people do you have here?

WOMAN. 73. Eileen’s about to pop, so her kid will make it 74. Still a work in progress, but Rome wasn’t built in a day.

ANDREA. That’s a bold comparison.

WOMAN. I think we’ve earned it. Walls haven’t been breached in well over a month, we haven’t suffered a casualty on the inside since early winter.

ANDREA. How’s that possible?

WOMAN. Our governor’s set a strict curfew. Nobody out after dark. Noise and light kept to the bare minimum, armed guards on the fence and patrolling the perimeter to keep the biters away. (“Walk With Me”).

Clearly, the need for strict rules is a result of the Governor's need for power and control over the citizens. He claims Andrea and Michonne can come and go as they please, but their presence is coerced to stay at Woodbury. The armed guards protect those within Woodbury, but also keep the citizens captive within the town.

An example of Rick's leadership style and the institutional structure is seen when, after the characters take up residence at the prison, several people become ill. Rick and several others immediately enact institutional protocols to contain the illness.

RICK. Patrick got sick last night. It's some kind of flu. It moves fast. We think he died and attacked the cell block. Look, I know he was your friend and I'm sorry. He was a good kid. We lost a lot of good people. Glenn and your dad are okay, but they were in there. You shouldn't get too close to anyone that might have been exposed, at least for a little while. Carl. All of you.

CAROL. Patrick was fine yesterday, and he died overnight. Two people died that quick? We'll have to separate everyone that's been exposed.

DARYL. That's everyone in that cell block. That's all of us. Maybe more.

HERSCHEL. We know that this sickness can be lethal. We don't know how easily it spreads. Is anyone else showing symptoms that we know of?

CAROL. We can't just wait and see. And there's children. It isn't just the illness. If people die, they become a threat.

HERSCHEL. We need a place for them to go. They can't stay in D. We can't risk going in there to clean it up.

CAROL. We can use cell block A. ("Infected").

Since a deadly flu will also result in zombie infection post-mortem, this is a serious threat to the group. Here, Rick works with Carol, Herschel, and Daryl, his trusted companions, to reach a viable solution. As seen in this passage, and

throughout much of the series, Rick's leadership style is one that focuses on generating ideas among the various group members as opposed to simply ordering individuals to complete particular tasks or follow certain rules without question.

At Alexandria, there is a conflict between Rick and Deanna, both of whom are leaders of their subgroups. Pete, one of the town residents, has been abusing his wife and children. Upon learning this, Rick and Deanna engage in conversation that demonstrates differences in informal institutional structure and how to handle those who have clearly violated institutionalized norms and values.

DEANNA. We don't kill people. This is civilization, Rick.

RICK. Warning someone to stop or die, that is civilized nowadays.

DEANNA. Oh.

RICK. So what? So we just let him hit her? We let him kill her?

DEANNA. No, we exile him if it comes to that.

RICK. We do that, we don't know when he comes back and what he does to them. Letting him go makes this place vulnerable. You really want to wait till someone in that tower has to take care of it? And that's if we're lucky.

DEANNA. We are not... executing anyone. Don't ever suggest it again. That sort of thinking doesn't belong in here. ("Try").

Over the course of the show, Rick's character develops in a way that allows him to be more amenable to killing non-walkers (humans). This passage could be compared with the discussion on whether to kill Randall earlier in the series, which Rick adamantly opposed. After this exchange, Rick kills Pete very publicly, despite Deanna's warning.

When Rick's group runs into the Savivors (an opposing group of survivors), a clear example of institutionalized rules and differences in institutions emerges. Rick's group had intended on seizing the Savivors belongings and leaving. However, the Savivors planned on seizing all the groups' belongings, as well as killing one of their members. Clearly, the Savivors recognize their group (institution) as the more powerful of the two, and refuse negotiation.

As Rick and his group become more willing to break the rules that guided them in society as it existed pre-apocalypse, they seem to have fewer casualties, although they do suffer some major losses to their core group to the Savivors. Negan's long term goal seems to be to continue leading the Savivors with various subgroups operating in a hierarchical structure beneath them. It is unclear how well Rick's group (under the "Ricktatorship") will fare, how long Morgan can abide his "all life is precious" mantra, or whether more (or fewer) rules will be necessary for survival in the apocalypse.

## Discussion

The current analysis provides examples of several instances where utilitarianism or a lack thereof, may be applied to *TWD*. Throughout the series they contend with other survivor groups and zombies to have adequate shelter, security and food. Because no location is ever completely "safe", the survivors are constantly challenged and forced to move due to imminent danger.

One constant throughout the series is the willingness for most of the protagonists to openly discuss and debate contentious issues. Some characters, such as Shane, are less willing to listen to the opinions of others if they oppose his views. While many of these dialogues seem to take place in earlier seasons, dissention from the status quo continues throughout the series.

When discussing individual acts, some follow act utilitarianism principles, and some do not. Many acts are not wholly utilitarian or non-utilitarian, but instead contain elements of both. Moreover, while many of Shane's actions may be viewed as non-utilitarian, so may many of Dale's, who historically holds the position of the moral reasoner in the group. This polarity effects the complexity in the decision-making process for many of the situations.

The group of survivors naturally became close to one another throughout their journey, making decisions more nuanced. Often placed in situations where they had to make difficult decisions, and do so quickly or at the expense of other individuals, many choices weigh heavily on the conscience of the characters.

Rules seem to be strictly enforced in many situations. In the absence of a stable structure, consistent rules may be the one thing the survivors hold on to. For instance, in the first season, Glenn adamantly proclaims that they bury bodies of people from their groups but burn the others. Also, sticking to rules on

systematically killing walkers by piercing their brains has been essential to the survival of the group.

As the characters form institutional structures to the best of their abilities, they continue to instill rules. Institutional utilitarianism follows rules, norms and values for survival and protection from walkers and intruders. Not following guidance from the informally organized institutions can lead to various negative consequences, ranging from arguments, to exile, to death.

## Conclusion

*The Walking Dead* provides a unique insight into both the individual and group dynamics in a post-apocalyptic world, where survivors must act in ways they likely would not have otherwise considered in order to live. As Allaire explains, “Since moral values are humanly created and bound by cultural norms, values tend to change as the culture changes over time or as circumstances change” (197). As illustrated herein, individual characters and the story in general of this series illustrate major changes across time and place, as dictated by the new world and the remaining survivors.

Understanding the decisions and rationale behind their choices helps to posit decision-making more broadly. Though individuals are clearly not faced with ethical decisions related to zombies every day, they are faced with ethical decisions. *The Walking Dead* can help us understand the human experience and the process by which individuals make difficult choices.

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