Huvudområde

English – Literature

Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape:
The Different Motives of a Utilitarian and an Altruist to Keep Harry Potter Alive

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Introduction
All people have a conscience and base their decisions on some form of moral belief, which help them to assess which choices to make. While some people believe in the utilitarian notion that it is reasonable to sacrifice a few lives if a particular action results in a prosperous future for a great number of people, others are altruistically motivated and are ready to sacrifice their own well-being if it enhances the welfare for someone else. In the *Harry Potter* books by J.K. Rowling (published 1997 – 2007), Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape embody these different moral beliefs and have an enormous impact on the fate of the protagonist Harry Potter. According to Alicia Willson-Metzger, Dumbledore is “a universally admired father-figure to scores of Hogwarts’ students, past and present” while Snape is “hated by many, misunderstood by most” (293, 299). Furthermore, some people are even tempted to make a so-called Faustian Bargain, like the character of Lord Voldemort who gives up all his moral beliefs in favour of pursuing power and dominating the world. While both Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape are tempted to do the same thing, I will argue that the death of a loved one makes them renounce the Faustian temptation of power. Moreover, I will argue that although both the male characters are crucial in aiding Potter in his mission to defeat Lord Voldemort, Albus Dumbledore acts according to his utilitarian belief in “the greater good” while Severus Snape’s actions are altruistic and motivated by his everlasting love for Harry Potter’s mother, Lily and his remorse of having played a part in her death. Lastly, I will argue that Severus Snape is the one who wholeheartedly dedicates himself to ensure that Harry Potter will stay alive, while Albus Dumbledore’s utilitarian outlook on life makes him use both Potter and Snape as tools in order to save the world.

Aims and Approach
From the moment Albus Dumbledore first appears in the *Harry Potter* novels, it seems clear that he provides Harry Potter with guidance in his mission to defeat Lord Voldemort. However, it is not until the very end of the last book of the series that it is revealed that Severus Snape has also played an enormous part in helping Potter to destroy Voldemort. Additionally, both Dumbledore and Snape come close to abandoning their moral beliefs in exchange for power, but the death of a loved one makes them reject the idea and changes their moral philosophies. What is more, Dumbledore and Snape’s actions have an immense impact on Potter’s fate, and although both of them do help Potter, their motives for doing so are different. Thus, this essay aims to analyse these two characters through a close reading of the
novels. First, this essay examines how the consequences of the Faustian temptation which led them to meddle with power in their past have affected the moral beliefs of Dumbledore and Snape. Next, it analyses how utilitarianism and altruism motivate their respective actions to understand why Snape fights to keep Potter alive while Dumbledore uses both of them as tools to further his own agenda.

Before their actions become motivated by utilitarianism and altruism, Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape are tempted by power and come close to make a Faustian bargain. Douglas Schuler writes that the Medieval legend of Faust, made famous by Goethe and Marlow, depicts Faust making a bargain with the devil; he gains power in exchange for his soul (257). Referring to Alexander Mehlmann, making such a decision signifies “the temptations of wealth and power as well as the striving for infinite knowledge” (113). This can be seen in Dumbledore’s neglect of his siblings and how he instead seeks world domination along with his friend Gellert Grindelwald. However, the loss of his sister makes him turn away from this temptation and shapes the utilitarian he becomes. In like manner, Snape is tempted by power and becomes a Death Eater with Voldemort as his master, but when he loses the love of his life, Lily Potter, he chooses to abandon his pursuit for power and instead become a double agent.

Albus Dumbledore is a firm believer in acting for “the greater good,” which in this case is to defeat Lord Voldemort in order to ensure that he will not be able to rule and cause suffering in the wizarding as well as the Muggle world. Chantel M. Lavoie writes that “every lie he tells seems to be a good one – that is, necessary for the greater good” (83). Dumbledore is willing to lie and deceive if it furthers his mission; to maximise the well-being of the greatest number of people, which is the main focus for those who base their moral beliefs on utilitarianism. I will argue that the branch of utilitarianism that Dumbledore follows is act-utilitarianism, and according to Ben Eggleston, act-utilitarians believe that an action is moral if it results in the well-being of as many people as possible (125). Dumbledore’s utilitarian belief is evident in several ways, for instance, as Willson-Metzger writes: “Dumbledore would feel compelled to overlook or overcome any misgivings he might have about exposing one teenager to certain death, if that death can save not only wizards, but also the larger world” (294). This reasoning corresponds to the act-utilitarian notion, which includes the idea that even if an act is seen as illegal or a matter of betrayal, the amount of well-being it produces determines its moral value (Eggleston 126). The utilitarian beliefs will be used as an analytical tool when analysing the character of Dumbledore to understand why he makes particular decisions and why he is willing to use Harry Potter and Severus Snape to further his
agenda. Additionally, to understand why Dumbledore acts the way he does it is necessary to analyse his past, how events in his youth have formed him and made him believe in “the greater good.”

In contrast, Severus Snape is motivated to abandon his former life as a Death Eater and instead ensure the survival of Harry Potter, because of love. When Lord Voldemort murders Harry Potter’s mother, Lily, Snape’s one true love, his loyalties change. According to Catherine Jack Deavel and David Paul Deavel, “his deep love for Lily changes his beliefs and actions. This love motivates Snape to persevere in his dangerous and lonely role of double agent. Through love, Snape is capable of self-sacrifice” (63). Snape acts according to love and is willing to dedicate his life to the mission of protecting Lily’s son without asking for anything in return. This motivation adheres to altruism, which according to Stephen G. Post is a term coined by the French sociologist Auguste Comte in the middle of the nineteenth century (179). Furthermore, Jon Elster describes an altruistic motivation as “the desire to enhance the welfare of others even at a net welfare loss to oneself” (84). In the same way that the utilitarian beliefs will be necessary for the analysis of Albus Dumbledore, the ideas of altruism are essential when analysing Snape. Additionally, it will be essential to examine Snape’s childhood and early school days to understand how his childhood has formed him and makes him willing to sacrifice himself to protect Potter.

Previous Research and Material
Although there are some essays as well as articles which analyse the characters of Dumbledore and Snape, I have found none which focus on utilitarianism and altruism as the driving forces behind their actions. However, without elaborating her claim any further, Diane Duncan indicates that there is a connection between Snape and altruism: “[A]pparently malevolent people like Snape, are capable of protective and altruistic behaviour” (200). Additionally, one of my secondary sources, “The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore: The Ethics of Information Sharing and Concealment in the Harry Potter Novels,” written by Willson-Metzger, analyses Dumbledore’s actions from a consequentialist perspective and hence argues that he is a consequentialist. According to Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller, the main difference between utilitarianism and consequentialism is that utilitarians maintain that well-being is what should be encouraged while consequentialists merely declare that “morality should be based on the maximisation of the good,” and thus, utilitarianism is “a family of views within the larger consequentialist family of views” (8). Moreover, apart from act-utilitarianism, there is rule-utilitarianism. According to Dimmock and Fisher, rule-
utilitarians have a “different moral decision-procedure,“ and they believe that there should be “a set of rules that, if followed, would produce the greatest amount of total happiness” (22). In contrast, act-utilitarians believe that any action which maximises the well-being of people is morally right.

Furthermore, the enormous success of J.K. Rowling’s novels about the young wizard Harry Potter has sprung an interest which can be seen in everything from peer-reviewed articles and books that deal with the Harry Potter series, as well as multiple websites which are dedicated to the novels and their movie adaptations, along with what seems like an endless amount of fanfiction. Diana Patterson reflects on the impact of the books: “There have been at least a score of conferences and hundreds of web sites, dissecting, analysing, and extending the work of J.K. Rowling” (vii). However, with massive success comes a great deal of criticism, both negative and positive. Writer and critic Anthony Holden wrote in The Guardian that “it really doesn’t take a high-minded killjoy to worry what these books are doing to the literary taste of millions of potential young readers” and “[t]hese are one-dimensional children’s books, Disney cartoons written in words, no more” (n.pag.). Another critic is Harold Bloom who in The Wall Street Journal wrote that “[o]ne can reasonably doubt that ‘Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone’ is going to prove a classic of children’s literature” and “[w]hy read it? Presumably, if you cannot be persuaded to read anything better, Rowling will have to do” (n.pag.). However, others have praised Rowling’s work, such as Giselle Liza Anatol who writes: “Rowling’s series is critically significant and should be taken as seriously by adult critics as youthful fans” (x – xi). Elizabeth E. Heilman agrees and writes: “With more than 420 million copies of Rowling’s books in print worldwide in some 60 languages, Harry Potter is present in most of the public and cultural spaces in which we live” (1).

There are seven books in the Harry Potter series, but in this analysis, I will use the following three: Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (2007), Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (2003) and Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2004), all published by Bloomsbury. The reason I will use these novels is that they contain the most crucial information regarding the actions of both Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape.

Moreover, regarding secondary sources, I will rely on the previously mentioned Willson-Metzger’s “The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore: The Ethics of Information Sharing and Concealment in the Harry Potter Novels,” from Harry Potter’s World Wide Influence (Patterson 2009). Willson-Metzger analyses Albus Dumbledore’s life and actions from a consequentialist perspective, which is related to utilitarianism, the approach that I will use. Moreover, I will use Deavel and Deavel’s “Choosing Love: The Redemption of Severus
Snape, featured in Gregory Bassham’s *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles* (2010). This text analyses how Severus Snape’s love for Lily Potter is able to redeem him and make him abandon his past as a Death Eater and instead serve Dumbledore as a double-agent. This change in Snape’s character is also evident in my analysis of him. Additionally, I will use two chapters from Anatol’s *Reading Harry Potter Again: New Critical Essays* (2009). The first chapter is Lisa Damour’s contribution “Harry the Teenager: Muggle Themes in a Magical Adolescence.” In this chapter, Damour examines Dumbledore’s background, which will be helpful when analysing the background of Dumbledore to understand what makes him willing to use both Snape and Harry as tools. The other chapter I will use is Lavoie’s “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Lies in Harry Potter.” Lavoie’s text will be useful for the analysis of both Dumbledore and Snape because she focuses on what Dumbledore symbolises and why Snape’s relationship with Potter is filled with bitterness. Lastly, I will rely on Shira Wolosky Weiss’s *The Riddles of Harry Potter: Secret Passages and Interpretive Quests* (2010), which examines the deeper meanings in the novels in order to understand the implications, values and outcomes in the novels. Weiss’s text will be suitable when analysing the relationship between Snape and Potter because she examines how their past influences their relation to one another.

For information regarding Faustian temptation, I will use two sources, the first is Schuler’s article “Doctor Faustus in the Twenty-First Century” (AI & Society 2013), and the second is “The Faustian Bargain” by Mehlmann, featured in *How People Negotiate: Resolving Disputes in Different Cultures* (Faure 2003). Both texts outline the foundations of Faustian temptations, which will be helpful when analysing the past of Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape.

In order to understand what altruism is and how it motivates Severus Snape’s actions, I will rely on Elliott Sober’s “The ABCs of Altruism,” which is featured in *Altruism and Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Dialogue* (Post et al. 2002). Like Weiss’s text, Sober’s chapter will be valuable in the analysis of Snape’s relationship with Potter since Sober examines altruistic love and how it motivates people to act in certain ways as well as the darker sides of altruism. Moreover, another book I will rely on is Robert Merrihew Adams’ *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (2006). Adams’ book will be useful to understand Snape’s actions and choices as it explores the moral character of humans and how altruism is motivated. Finally, from Jonathan Seglow’s *The Ethics of Altruism*, I will use Robert Paul Churchill and Erin Street’s contribution “Is There a Paradox of Altruism?” (2004). This text outlines what makes an act altruistic and will therefore be
important in the study of Snape’s altruistic act.

For the analysis of Dumbledore’s actions according to his utilitarian belief, I will rely on Jussi Suikkanen’s *This is Ethics: An introduction* (2014). Suikkanen’s book holds a great deal of information regarding act-utilitarianism, and for this reason, it will be used in the analysis of Dumbledore who acts according to his act-utilitarian belief. Furthermore, Eggleston’s “Act Utilitarianism,” from *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism* will be used (Eggleston and Miller 2014). Since I argue that Dumbledore adheres to the act-utilitarian theory, Eggleston’s text will be useful because it includes information about the principles of utilitarianism as well as objections against it. In addition, I will use selected parts from Mark Dimmock and Andrew Fisher’s *Ethics for A-Level* (2017). This book provides a great understanding of utilitarianism and how people like Dumbledore who adheres to this theory reason when they make their decisions. All of these secondary sources are important since they hold vital information necessary when analysing the characters of Dumbledore and Snape in relation to utilitarianism and altruism.

**Analysis**

This section has four different parts. The first part analyses how Albus Dumbledore’s past has influenced him and how the consequences of his behaviour have led him to become a utilitarian. The following part analyses how he uses Harry Potter and Severus Snape to further his utilitarian plan to sacrifice Potter to save the world from Lord Voldemort’s despotism. The third part examines the childhood of Snape and what makes him estranged from his best friend Lily Potter and eventually turns him into a Death Eater. The last part analyses how Snape’s part in Lily’s death turns him away from Voldemort and motivates him to undertake the altruistic act of devoting his life to keep her son safe.

**Towards Utilitarianism: The Young Albus Dumbledore**

Despite graduating as an extraordinary student, Albus Dumbledore must return home and care for his sister and brother, however, back home he befriends fellow wizard Gellert Grindelwald, and is tempted by power and becomes bent on world domination instead. Dumbledore graduates from Hogwarts as “the most brilliant student ever seen at the school” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 22; original emphasis). Despite being an excellent student, Dumbledore has, as Damour writes, “no choice but to return home,” and care for his sister Ariana, and brother Aberforth (5). The reason for this is that his sister is left mentally unstable after a group of boys assault her. Their father goes after the boys and ends up in prison while
their mother dies from an explosion caused by Ariana, and as a result, the siblings are left orphaned. For this reason, Dumbledore leaves Hogwarts and returns home in “anger and bitterness” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 573). At home, he befriends Grindelwald, and through this friendship, Dumbledore becomes tempted by power and has ambitions unknown to most people. Dumbledore’s ambitions are evident in the following letter he sent to his friend Grindelwald:

*Your point about wizard dominance being FOR THE MUGGLES’ OWN GOOD – this, I think, is the crucial point. Yes, we have been given power and, yes, that power gives us the right to rule, but it also gives us responsibilities over the ruled. We must stress this point, it will be the foundation stone upon which we build. Where we are opposed, as we surely will be, this must be the basis of all our counter-arguments. We seize control FOR THE GREATER GOOD.* […]. *Albus.* (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 291; original emphasis)

Although he seems to already believe in the utilitarian philosophy, Dumbledore does not seem to believe that “the greater good” involves maximising the well-being for the greatest number of people. This is also noted by Willson-Metzger, who writes that it does not even seem to “particularly matter that he is proposing domination of one race by another, nor that some force, at least, will be necessary in accomplishing this task” (301). Instead, he is blinded by the Faustian temptation of world domination that the megalomaniac Grindelwald offers him. Schuler explains the essence of a Faustian bargain as “securing short-term personal gain while causing great pain to others” (261). An illustration of this is how Dumbledore neglects his siblings and in particular his vulnerable sister while he pursues power with Grindelwald.

After neglecting his siblings, a duel leads to fatal consequences and a remorseful Dumbledore realises his friendship with Grindelwald has led him astray. The Faustian temptation of power leads Dumbledore to disregard his siblings and leave his brother Aberforth to tend for their sister alone. An illustration of the bitterness it causes is evident in the words of his brother who later on tells Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger that Dumbledore did not have time to care for their sister because he and Grindelwald had “[g]rand plans for the benefit of all wizardkind, and if one young girl got neglected, what did that matter, when Albus was working for the greater good?” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 456).

Taking over the world is what is most important for him during this time, and Aberforth appears to suggest that his brother thought it was necessary to overlook their sister and her needs while he pursued his mission to seek power. But during his friendship with Grindelwald, Dumbledore is obsessed with power and seems to be ready to make a Faustian bargain and, to quote from Mehlmann, exchange his “human pride” for “devilish intelligence”
However, when Ariana Dumbledore is killed in a furious three-way duel between her brothers and Grindelwald, Dumbledore’s grief is profound. According to Damour, this traumatic event is something that “haunts Dumbledore for the rest of his life” (5). The grief over his sister’s death and the guilt of having played a part in it will nevertheless continue to trouble him; however, this event is what makes him reconsider his priorities and abandon the dangerous friendship with Grindelwald and reject the Faustian bargain.

In the aftermath of Ariana’s death, Albus Dumbledore rejects his desires of ruling the world with Gellert Grindelwald and decides to save the world from his dangerous former friend. Dumbledore decides to stop Grindelwald, who has turned to Dark Magic in pursuit of power, because he knows that if he lets Grindelwald roam free, it will cause many people a great deal of suffering. From his own experiences, Dumbledore knows how easily power tempts people and realises that he must stop the man he once considered his friend for the greater good, and as Harry Potter recites in a conversation with his friends: “Grindelwald used the Elder Wand to become powerful. And at the height of his power, when Dumbledore knew he was the only one who could stop him, he duelled Grindelwald, and beat him” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 404). As a result of the duel between Dumbledore and Grindelwald, the former becomes the master of the Elder Wand while the latter is imprisoned. Later on, frightened by the destructive pleasures of power, Dumbledore declines a great position at the Ministry of Magic before he accepts the profession as headmaster at Hogwarts. In a conversation with Potter in limbo, Dumbledore tells him that his friendship with Grindelwald taught him a lesson and that he “was offered the post of Minister for Magic, not once, but several times. Naturally, I refused. I had learned that I was not to be trusted with power” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 575). Despite Dumbledore’s claim that he declined the post as Minister for Magic due to his awareness of his inability to control power, his claim is contradictory because once he accepts the position as headmaster, he does gain a great deal of power. Ultimately, the death of Ariana and the guilt of having contributed to it stops him from making a Faustian bargain and sacrificing his moral beliefs. However, his sister's death motivates his utilitarian belief, and he will use the power he gains as the headmaster of Hogwarts to fight for what he considers to be the greater good.

**The Notion of the Greater Good: The Utilitarian Albus Dumbledore**

Now the headmaster of Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore does not shy away from using his power once he realises that he has the chance to save the world from Lord Voldemort. He understands that it is crucial to keep Harry Potter alive until he can fight Voldemort and
therefore recruits a heartbroken Severus Snape to help him keep Potter safe. Despite encouragement from Snape to keep the Potter family alive, Dumbledore fails and after their murder, a devastated Snape returns to him. When Dumbledore realises Snape’s immense agony and remorse, he tells him: “If you loved Lily Evans, if you truly loved her, then your way forward is clear” (Rowling, Deathly Hallows 544). Dumbledore is an act-utilitarian; consequently, he believes that he acts correctly if he maximises the well-being of as many people as possible. According to Suikkanen, this theory declares that “what is right for you to do in this situation depends only on how good the consequences of these actions will be” (83). For this reason, Dumbledore sees nothing wrong with taking advantage of Snape’s feelings in order to make him work for him because he believes that he will be beneficial in the fight against Voldemort and to defeat Voldemort would mean to save the world from suffering.

However, while Albus Dumbledore cares for Harry Potter, he has never intended to keep him alive but to use him to defeat Lord Voldemort. Seeing that Dumbledore is an act-utilitarian, he deems it necessary to vanquish Voldemort by sacrificing Potter and thus spare the world from suffering. This reasoning corresponds to Eggleston’s claim that act-utilitarians are “ready to impose grave harms on some people in order to provide benefits to others” (138). Dumbledore tells Potter that he knew he would suffer when Dumbledore left him at his aunt and uncle’s house for protection as a toddler, and when he shares his reason for doing so, his dubious feelings towards Potter are noticeable: “My priority was to keep you alive. You were in more danger than perhaps anyone but I realised” (Rowling, Order of the Phoenix 736). On the one hand, this reason may seem solicitous, but on the other hand, Dumbledore’s real reason for keeping Potter alive is because he knows that it is Potter himself who must fight Lord Voldemort and sacrifice his own life if Dumbledore’s plan to enhance the well-being for the majority of people is to succeed. Willson-Metzger agrees: “Dumbledore, however, continues to see Harry’s impending death as one more loss in a process that will eventually lead to the betterment of mankind” (299). Even though Dumbledore is determined to sacrifice Potter, he does care about him. The mixed emotions of his affection for Potter are visible in the following conversation between them:

‘Do you see the flaw in my brilliant plan
now? I had fallen into the trap I had foreseen, that I had told
myself I could avoid, that I must avoid.’ […]
‘I cared about you too much,’ said Dumbledore simply. ‘I cared
[...] more for your peace of mind than my plan, more for your life than the lives
that might be lost if the plan failed.’ (Rowling, Order of the Phoenix 739)
It is obvious that Dumbledore cares about Potter, and that his fatherly love has led him astray from his plan. Regardless of this, he cannot let his personal feelings influence his judgement, because, as Dimmock and Fisher explain, as an act-utilitarian “you must look at the situation as any neutral observer would and not give special preference to anyone irrespective of your emotional attachments” (19). Since he adheres to this theory and bases his decisions on its ideas, he will have to set his emotions aside and sacrifice Potter for the greater good.

As the inevitable battle with Lord Voldemort comes closer, Albus Dumbledore reveals his real intentions regarding Harry Potter’s fate to Severus Snape, and the latter’s fury shows how different their beliefs are. Dumbledore discloses the truth to Snape about Potter being a Horcrux and thereby has a part of Lord Voldemort’s soul inside of him. He then tells Snape that it is essential that he forwards this information to Potter when the time is right. Snape tells him that he thought they were working to keep the boy alive, whereupon Dumbledore tells him:

‘We have protected him because it has been essential to teach him, to raise him, to let him try his strength’ [...].
‘If I know him, he will have arranged matters so that when he does set out to meet his death, it will, truly, mean the end of Voldemort.’ (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 551)

While Snape intends to keep Potter alive, Dumbledore plans to sacrifice him for what he considers to be the greater good. Willson-Metzger agrees and claims that Dumbledore believes that Potter’s inevitable suffering and probable death will be “a small price to pay” if it means that it will save the world (296). Consequently, Dumbledore has formed a close relationship with Potter and taught him what he believes is necessary so that Potter will be able to defeat Voldemort. Suikkanen explains that from a utilitarian perspective “[t]he rightness and wrongness of your acts is thus directly a result of how good the consequences they have are” (83). As Dumbledore believes that the end will justify the means, he is confident that he is doing the right thing because the approaching battle will, as Willson-Metzger writes, “either doom wizardkind to enslavement under Lord Voldemort, or will allow the good to triumph over that certain living death for an entire race of beings” (296). From Dumbledore’s utilitarian point of view, the morally right thing to do is to sacrifice one human life to save the lives of a substantial number of people since a part of Voldemort lives inside of Potter.

After Albus Dumbledore reveals his intentions regarding Harry Potter’s fate, he places Severus Snape in even greater danger by orchestrating his own death with Snape as his murderer. Realising he has less than a year to live and well aware of Lord Voldemort’s plan to
have the young pupil Draco Malfoy murder him, Dumbledore turns to Snape. When Snape asks if Dumbledore will let Malfoy fulfil the plan, he responds:

‘Certainly not. You must kill me.’ [...] ‘You alone know whether it will harm your soul to help an old man avoid pain and humiliation,’ said Dumbledore. ‘I ask this one, great favour of you, Severus, because death is coming for me.’ (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 548; original emphasis)

It may seem noble of Dumbledore to ask Snape to be the one who kills him instead of having Malfoy perform the deed, however, it is not out of mercy for the young boy that Dumbledore does this. He plans to let Snape kill him, thus “making it possible for Snape himself to seem the rightful owner of the Elder Wand; this directs Voldemort’s attention to Snape, away from Harry and Draco” (Appelbaum 95). As a result, Dumbledore puts Snape in even more danger and practically signs his death sentence because he knows that Voldemort will stop at nothing to have the powerful Elder Wand in his possession. What is more, Snape will also have to carry the burden of being regarded as the murderer of ‘the great Dumbledore.’

With both Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape dead, Harry Potter learns the truth about his intended fate through Snape’s memories and decides to accept Dumbledore’s plan. After Potter has watched the memories of Snape unfold in Dumbledore’s pensieve and thus learnt that he must sacrifice himself, an enlightened Potter accepts the plan Dumbledore has orchestrated and sets out to meet Lord Voldemort:

He [Harry Potter] had never questioned his own assumption that Dumbledore wanted him alive. Now he saw that his lifespan had always been determined by how long it took to eliminate all the Horcruxes. [...] And Dumbledore had known that Harry would not duck out, that he would keep going to the end, even though it was his end, because he had taken trouble to get to know him, hadn’t he? Dumbledore knew, as Voldemort knew, that Harry would not let anyone else die. (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 555)

This passage shows that Dumbledore was right in taking it for granted that Potter would sacrifice himself once he knew the truth. Against this background and with all the lives at stake, how can Potter contemplate not surrendering himself? The situation Dumbledore has placed him in leaves Potter with no choice and when Potter understands that he must die if Voldemort is to be defeated, he does not hesitate to sacrifice himself because just like Snape, he is ready to die for the sake of others. Willson-Metzger writes that in contrast to Dumbledore, Snape’s actions are motivated “by a lifelong devotion to a single human being.
And in this, he is far different from Albus Dumbledore” (299). In short, Dumbledore’s utilitarian belief is motivated by the death of his sister and persuades him to do what he believes is best for the greater good while loyalty towards the woman Snape has loved since childhood motivates his actions.

Towards Altruism: The Early Severus Snape
A troubled and lonely Severus Snape is an outsider who has a troublesome situation at home but finds happiness and love in his first real friend, Lily Potter (née Evans). Snape’s mother Eileen is a witch who constantly quarrels with her violent muggle husband Tobias, whom Ronnie Carmeli describes as “an intimidating, unloving father” (30). However, when Snape befriends Lily, he finds love and happiness for the first time in his life. They live close to each other, and after they realise that they both can perform magic, they become best friends. In Lily, Snape finds a confidant, and in one of their conversations, Lily implies that the situation in Snape’s family is not a pleasant one:

‘How are things at your house?’ Lily asked.
A little crease appeared between his eyes.
‘Fine,’ he said.
‘They’re not arguing any more?’
‘Oh, yes, they’re arguing,’ said Snape. […].
‘Doesn’t your dad like magic?’
‘He doesn’t like anything, much,’ said Snape. (Rowling, Deathly Hallows 535)

This conversation shows how close their friendship is since Snape trusts Lily enough to tell her the truth about his parent’s marriage which is far from harmonious. Additionally, it shows Lily’s sincere concern for Snape’s well-being. Commenting on the unpleasant situation in his family, Deavel and Deavel claim that Snape cannot wait to begin his education at Hogwarts because he sees it as his chance to get away from the constant feuds (58 – 59). Not only will Snape finally escape his quarrelling parents and instead learn advanced magic, but his best friend Lily will also join him on this new adventure.

As a talented young wizard, Severus Snape finds a home at Hogwarts, but like Albus Dumbledore, he is tempted by knowledge and power which leads to estrangement from Lily Potter. In school, Snape proves to be a skilled student with an attraction for the Dark Arts, and at Hogwarts “he was part of a gang of Slytherins who nearly all turned out to be Death Eaters” (Rowling, Goblet of Fire 460 – 461). To fit in amongst the other children at school, the outcast Snape forms friendships with other children who are into the powerful but
dangerous Dark Arts. Unlike Snape, Lily abhors Dark Magic, and their estrangement becomes apparent when Snape tells her that he thought they were best friends and she responds: “We are, Sev, but I don’t like some of the people you’re hanging around with!” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 540). Lily is concerned as she openly opposes his choice of friends and it is clear that they are drifting apart. Nevertheless, Lily still considers Snape her best friend and therefore defends him multiple times when he is the victim of James Potter and Sirius Black’s harassment.

Despite their differences, Lily Potter defends Severus Snape against his tormentors, but due to humiliation and Snape’s attraction to power, their friendship comes to an end. Snape is the constant victim of James Potter and Sirius Black’s bullying, and when they humiliate him publicly Lily comes to his rescue, but the outcome of this event has severe consequences for Snape:

‘LEAVE HIM ALONE!’ […]
‘There you go,’ he [James Potter] said, as Snape struggled to his feet. ‘You’re lucky Evans was here, Snivellus –’
‘I don’t need help from filthy little Mudbloods like her!’
Lily blinked.
‘Fine,’ she said coolly. ‘I won’t bother in future.’ […] (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 571)

Calling someone the derogatory name ‘Mudblood’ is equal to calling someone the n-word, something Lily cannot forgive. Regardless of her concern for Snape, this puts an end to their friendship. Afterwards, when he tries to apologise, Lily tells him: “I can’t pretend any more. You’ve chosen your way, I’ve chosen mine” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 542). Although Snape calls her this demeaning word after having been humiliated, the consequences of his actions are permanent. He has lost the only real friend he has ever had, the only one he has ever loved. While Lily goes on to marry James Potter and fight Lord Voldemort, Snape is lured by the Faustian temptation of power offered by Voldemort, and despite his everlasting love for Lily, his actions as a Death Eater will have fatal consequences for Lily and James and this will lead to a fundamental change of Snape’s moral beliefs.

**Acting According to Love: The Altruist Severus Snape**

Several years later, after Severus Snape has shared the prophecy with Lord Voldemort which leads to Lily Potter’s death, the heartbroken Snape renounces the Faustian temptation and devotes himself to the altruistic act of protecting her orphaned son, Harry Potter. Having overheard a prophecy and shared it with his master, Voldemort, Snape realises that Lily’s life
is in danger because the prophecy refers to her son and therefore Snape comes running to Albus Dumbledore and pleads with him to save her. When Dumbledore asks what Snape will offer him in return, he says that he is willing to do “Anything” (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 544). Unfortunately, Voldemort kills Lily along with her husband James, and the only survivor is their young son. Although Snape gains the power he desires as a Death Eater, he loses the love of his life, which corresponds to Schuler’s claim that the power a person acquires through a Faustian bargain comes “at a very dear price” (257). This loss is the reason he decides to abandon his life as a Death Eater and Dumbledore then asks the grief-stricken Snape to protect Lily’s son:

‘If you loved Lily Evans, if you truly loved her, then your way forward is clear.’ […]
‘You know how and why she died. Make sure it was not in vain. Help me protect Lily’s son.’ […]

At last he said, ‘Very well. Very well. But never – never tell, Dumbledore! This must be between us! Swear it! I cannot bear ... especially Potter’s son ... I want your word!’ (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 545)

What Snape agrees to do here when he accepts to help Dumbledore is an altruistic act. According to Churchill and Street, an act is altruistic if a person engages in it deliberately, if care for another person is the primary force behind the action, and if the person performing the deed does not intend to benefit from it (91). Snape accepts Dumbledore’s request freely, and his reason for doing so is to keep the son of his beloved Lily safe, and since he agrees to take on this dangerous mission, he does not seem to expect any personal profit from it. As Deavel and Deavel write, “Snape acts primarily for the love of Lily, not of Harry. He wills Harry’s good for the mother’s sake, but he acts to protect Harry nonetheless” (62). Hence, it is Snape’s altruistic and self-sacrificing love for Lily as well as the guilt for having played a part in her death that makes him willing to protect the son she has left behind.

Although Severus Snape acts altruistically in regard to Lily Potter, he cannot stand her son due to the resemblance between Harry Potter and his father, James Potter, the man who tormented Snape throughout his school years. Nevertheless, he secretly continues to dedicate his life to ensure the survival of the boy. The nature of Snape and Potter’s relationship is obvious to anyone who cares to notice, because “Snape and Harry’s mutual enmity had been absolute from the moment Harry had set foot in Hogwarts” (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 212). At this time, Potter cannot possibly
understand why Snape despises him, and because of Snape’s unfair treatment of him, Potter naturally resents him. Weiss claims that the reason for Snape’s vile attitude towards Potter is due to his inability to overcome the bitterness towards Harry’s father, James (121). Lavoie agrees and states that because of Snape telling Potter unpleasant things about his father, James, “Harry, unknowingly, automatically, accuses him of lying” (81). Potter glorifies his deceased father and therefore overlooks every accusation Snape makes against James. In the same manner, Snape’s resentment of the young boy stems from James’ despicable treatment of Snape in their youth and the fact that the younger Potter is the perfect likeness of his father only make things worse. Weiss may claim that “[a]bove all, Snape hates Harry,” but another way of viewing this is that Snape does not despise Potter, but his conflicting feelings make it impossible for him to like him (121). As Sober writes, a “dark side” of altruism is that “being nice to someone can involve being nasty to third parties” (26). Snape acts according to his love for Lily; it is for her sake that he dedicates his life to ensure the survival of her son and this does not mean that he must like Potter. After all, Potter’s appearance generates contrasting emotions in Snape since he serves as a constant reminder of Snape’s torturer as well as the love of his life.

Having devoted his life to the altruistic act of keeping Harry Potter alive, Severus Snape feels betrayed when Albus Dumbledore reveals his real agenda and asks the unthinkable of him. Knowing that Lord Voldemort has ordered the young pupil Draco Malfoy to murder him, the already dying Dumbledore tells Snape that he must kill him whereby Snape responds: “You take a great deal for granted, Dumbledore! Perhaps I have changed my mind!” (Rowling, Deathly Hallows 550). Snape is upset and believes that Dumbledore is asking for too much as there is a vast difference between acting as a double agent and murdering someone. Moreover, the revelation that comes next is what makes Snape feel deceived. Dumbledore tells him that he must tell Harry that he is a Horcrux and therefore has to die in order to defeat Voldemort:

‘So the boy ... the boy must die?’ asked Snape, quite calmly.
‘And Voldemort himself must do it, Severus. That is essential.’
Another long silence. Then Snape said, ‘I thought ... all these years ... that we were protecting him for her. For Lily.’ (Rowling, Deathly Hallows 551)

Ever since he agreed to work for Dumbledore, Snape has acted on the premise that he will do what is necessary to keep Harry Potter alive. As Adams explains, “Altruism signifies any motive that takes as its end or goal the good or well-being of one or more
or all persons other than oneself” (65). Snape’s goal is to keep Potter alive for his dear Lily’s sake.

Albus Dumbledore’s revelation, therefore, contradicts everything Severus Snape has been working for, and unsurprisingly he is shocked and feels betrayed. In Snape’s response to Dumbledore, the frustration over his betrayal and Snape’s everlasting love for Lily Potter is unmistakable:

‘I have spied for you, and lied for you, put myself in mortal danger for you. Everything was supposed to be to keep Lily Potter’s son safe. Now you tell me you have been raising him like a pig for slaughter –’
‘But this is touching, Severus,’ said Dumbledore seriously.
‘Have you grown to care for the boy, after all?’
‘For him?’ shouted Snape. ‘Expecto patronum!’
From the tip of his wand burst the silver doe: she landed on the office floor, bounded once across the office and soared out of the window. Dumbledore watched her fly away, and as her silvery glow faded he turned back to Snape, and his eyes were full of tears.
‘After all this time?’
‘Always,’ said Snape. (Rowling, Deathly Hallows 551-552; original emphasis)

The only spell powerful enough to protect wizards and witches against Dementors, which feed upon human happiness, is the Patronus charm. According to Rowling, the Patronus charm is “a pure protective magical concentration of happiness and hope,” and a person’s Patronus may change its form to resemble the Patronus of a loved one (Rowling). Given this, the fact that Snape’s Patronus is a doe, just like Lily Potter’s, proves his undying love for her. Deavel and Deavel insist that Snape’s deeds “are a testament both to his love for Lily and to the substance of his redemption” and that “Snape’s love and remorse are manifest not primarily in his emotional states but in his ongoing acts of the will to pursue the good of another” (63). It takes a great deal of courage to commit the selfless act Snape has done and seeing that he has done it voluntarily, it proves that Snape has acted according to his love for Lily the entire time and consequently performed an act of absolute altruism.

Despite being detested by most colleagues and pupils, Severus Snape turns out to have acted altruistically the entire time and is redeemed when Harry Potter discovers the truth. As Albus Dumbledore predicted, Lord Voldemort is desperate to get his hands on the Elder Wand and, as he believes that Snape is its rightful owner, he demands his snake to kill him during the Battle of Hogwarts. Potter witnesses these events unfold
while hiding under his invisibility cloak and once Voldemort vanishes, he approaches a
dying Snape who is desperate to keep his word: “A terrible rasping, gurgling noise
issued from Snape’s throat. ‘Take ... it ... Take ... it ...’ Something more than blood was
leaking from Snape” (Rowling, Deathly Hallows 528). Snape has not forgotten the
promise he made to Dumbledore to tell Potter the truth, therefore he summons his
memories so that Potter can bring them to Dumbledore’s pensieve and gain the
necessary information. Once he has collected and handed them over to Potter, Snape
pleads to him:

‘Look ... at ... me ...’ he whispered.
The green eyes found the black, but after a second something
in the depths of the dark pair seemed to vanish, leaving them
fixed, blank and empty. The hand holding Harry thudded to the
floor, and Snape moved no more. (Rowling, Deathly Hallows 528)

Taking his final breath while looking into the eyes of the boy who is repeatedly told he has his
mother’s eyes, it is reasonable to believe that it is Lily’s eyes that Snape sees when he dies.
Deavel and Deavel claim that “what we see in Severus Snape is that love can radically
transform a life” and that “his deep love for Lily changes his beliefs and actions […] Through
love, Snape is capable of self-sacrifice” (63). Through his love for Lily, Snape realised that
love was more important than power and therefore he chose to dedicate his life to protect
Potter in honour of Lily. The most poignant illustration of Snape’s redemption is Potter’s way
of honouring him by naming one of his children after him: “‘Albus Severus,’ […] ‘you were
named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably
the bravest man I ever knew.’” (Rowling, Deathly Hallows 607). Despite Snape’s past as a
Death Eater, and his bitter relation to Potter, he is redeemed because he chose to act according
to love and sacrifice everything to keep the son of Lily Potter safe.

Conclusion

While Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape worked together to keep Harry Potter safe and
to defeat Lord Voldemort, their intentions and motives for doing so were much different.
Dumbledore had no intention of ensuring the survival of Potter; rather, his plan was a
utilitarian one. His ambition was to teach and prepare Potter for the inevitable confrontation
with Voldemort, therefore Dumbledore deemed it essential to keep Potter alive. Dumbledore
was always aware that Potter had to die, and although he confessed his great affection for
Potter, he was willing to sacrifice him and let him die for what he considered to be the greater
good. Dumbledore believed that the death of Potter was necessary to bring about a more stable world and to maximise the welfare of people. For that reason, Dumbledore was willing to let Potter die. Severus Snape, on the other hand, abandoned his life as a Death Eater, tried to save the Potter family and when he failed to do so, he chose to act altruistically and devote his life to protect the son of the only woman he had ever loved. Even though Snape knew that there was nothing he could gain personally from the mission of protecting Potter, he nevertheless accepted to do it. The pressure on him was intense, not only did he find himself in the constant presence of a boy who was the spitting image of his father, James, the man who tormented Snape his entire time at Hogwarts and married the woman Snape loved. Also, he had to endure constant mistrust from his pupils, colleagues and others in the wizarding world because of his ambiguous nature and secret mission. Dumbledore used him to further his utilitarian agenda.

If viewed from a utilitarian perspective, then Albus Dumbledore acted correctly. He believed that sacrificing the lives of some people, despite his affection for them, would benefit the majority of people and therefore it was a small price to pay and thus necessary. However, although Potter and Snape had absolute trust in him, Dumbledore continuously lied and withheld vital information from them. He never considered the individuals he sacrificed and merely used Potter and Snape as tools in his attempt to rid the world of Voldemort. Potter’s fate was in fact predetermined from the moment Dumbledore understood that Potter was a Horcrux and decided that he had to die. With that said, Snape was the greater man because he was the one who fought hardest with complete sincerity and commitment to bring about Voldemort’s downfall to ensure the survival of Lily’s son, motivated by his everlasting love for her.
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