

- I. Introduction
- II. Central Questions
 - A. How can The Good Place teach these nuanced lessons where previous sitcoms couldn't find the time?
 - B. And how does it do it without sacrificing humor and keep its audience on its toes?
- III. Thesis: The Good Place uses/harnesses/funnels the institutional power of the sitcom to teach us more nuanced moral lessons.
- IV. Genre power Sitcom
 - A. We're ready to be taught these basic moral lessons after decades of being conditioned to
 - B. Most shows touch on moral lessons of some kind, but some focus on it more than others
 - 1. Andy Griffith Show (60-68)
 - 2. All in the Family (71-79)
 - 3. Cheers/Frasier (82-04)
 - 4. Parks and Rec (09-15)
 - C. Each of these shows is a little more nuanced than the one that came before it, able to stretch the genre just a bit more.
 - D. But shows have often steered clear of straight up preaching about right and wrong, they often focus instead on the right tools to use: patience, trust, compassion, etc.
- V. Premise/Setting
 - A. The Good Place drops us right in the middle of a thought experiment
 - B. The central conflict is clear: Eleanor needs to be a better person
 - C. The world provides instant feedback for her slip-ups
 - 1. This is used to keep us on our toes and for humor as well
 - a) The plant catching fire
 - b) The cake creating the sinkhole
- VI. ABC Plot structure
 - A. Using philosophy of the week style storytelling to introduce a lesson at the beginning of the episode, explore it in its storylines and then offer their slightly nuanced take on it at the end
 - B. Compare two episodes trying to do similar things
 - 1. Cheers 2 Good 2 Be 4 Real
 - 2. 105: Utilitarianism
 - a) "Good causes the most good/pleasure"
 - b) Chidi is trying to help Eleanor
 - c) Tahani didn't do her good for the right reasons
 - d) Eleanor realizes that her happiness means Chidi's unhappiness, meaning it's a utilitarian nightmare so she helps him instead
 - (1) Often, philosophy thought experiments force us to pick between two ideas, when the best answer might be to pick and third option that's not presented

(a) Transition to Michael's Trolley Problem

VII. Serialization

- A. Allows ideas to be strung together, perhaps only possible today with that having become the norm
- B. Pressure rises in each episode to become better before she's found out
- C. They don't rest on that premise and find ways to tweak their paradigm
- D. When combined with other sitcom aspects
 - 1. This allows the show to Trojan horse in some other lessons like "hell is other people"

VIII. Counter-arguments

- A. Spoiler alert
 - 1. Click ahead to the _____ mark
- B. Season 2 is a counter-argument to the twist of season 1
- C. Show constantly reinvents itself and finds out-of-the-box alternatives to the false dichotomies that it presents
 - 1. Michael not betraying the group
 - 2. Michael's Trolley Problem

IX. Conclusion

- A. These kinds of moral television aim to renew our hope. Whether it's in the virtue of the nuclear family or in the inherent goodness of a community or restore faith in local government, watching these shows is meant to be revitalizing and The Good Place is no different. It finds hope in the idea that we can change and improve ourselves and that it's never too late to be better.