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UFR LANGUES, LITTÉRATURES ET CIVILISATIONS ÉTRANGÈRES
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**A PHILOSOPHICAL READING OF *HARRY POTTER* BY J.K. ROWLING:
LEARNING ETHICS FROM A PLATONIC AND SARTREAN PERSPECTIVE**



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Écrit par :

Maxine RICHARD

Sous la direction de :

Laurent MELLET

Professeur de cinéma et de littérature britannique à l'université Toulouse Jean Jaurès

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EDITORIAL NOTE

In footnote references, *Harry Potter* novels' titles will be abbreviated as follows:

PS: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (or *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*)

CS: *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

PA: *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

GF: *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

OP : *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

HBP: *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*

DH: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

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INTRODUCTION

THE PROPAEDEUTIC DIMENSION OF *HARRY POTTER*

*'No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty.'*¹

For many children, everything changed on the 26th of June 1997, when the British writer from Bristol, J.K. Rowling, published her first novel *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Rapidly enough, the universe of *Harry Potter* expanded all around the globe and words such as 'Quidditch' or 'Hogwarts' entered the vocabulary of every language in the world². One could even interpret that Rowling predicted the success of her first novel through Professor McGonagall's words when she said that '[h]e'll be famous—a legend—I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter day in the future—there will be books written about Harry—every child in our world will know his name!'³ And it did. The seven novels were adapted into films, and on the 1st of January 2022, a reunion film entitled *Return to Hogwarts* was released to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the first film release of the series, which could be considered as 'Harry Potter day' in the cinematographic world as Rowling put it. Besides, books have indeed been written and continue to be written on *Harry Potter*, which attract not only young readers and fantasy lovers, but also many literary scholars and academics⁴.

However, this success was not immediate and Rowling's novel was refused by twelve publishing houses before Bloomsbury Children's Books accepted to print her novel. The reasons for these rejections included that the manuscript was too long, too conventional, too old-fashioned or too complicated to be a children's book.⁵ In a personal interview with the British newspaper *The Independent*⁶, the chairman of Bloomsbury Publishing Nigel Newton

¹ Clive Staples Lewis, *On Stories. And Other Essays on Literature*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002, 14.

² David Baggett and Shawn E. Klein, eds, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, Carus, 2004, 1.

³ Joanne Kathleen Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Bloomsbury, 2004, 20.

⁴ D. Baggett and S.E. Klein, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, *op. cit.*, 1.

⁵ Tim Ruten, 'Fifth Potter proves good storytelling still sells', *Los Angeles Times*, published on the 25th of June 2003, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-jun-25-et-ruten25-story.html> (last accessed 27 April 2022).

⁶ Recalled in an article entitled 'Revealed. The eight-year-old girl who saved Harry Potter,' published in *The Independent* on the 3^d of July 2005.

listed several reasons which led publishing houses to reject Rowling's novel, such as the fact that it was too slow to start. Newton adds that the first pages of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* were more 'telling' than 'showing' which could easily bore the reader, along with the fact that the novel does not immediately introduce Harry or begin inside his head. Indeed, the first chapter acts as a contextualisation of the events and takes place about ten years before the actual story. Besides, Newton also states that the first chapters introduce some of the least likeable characters of the story, namely the Dursleys, as well as the ones with which the readers could least identify, such as Rubeus Hagrid, Professor Dumbledore or Professor McGonagall for instance. In this interview, Newton confesses that when Rowling's agent Christopher Little sent a sample of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to Bloomsbury Publishing, he brought it home and gave it to his eight year-old daughter, Alice, to read instead of doing it himself. Bloomsbury's chief executive recalls that '[s]he came down from her room an hour later glowing [...] saying "Dad, this is so much better than anything else"'7. Newton then made a cheque to Rowling for £2,500, showing how the publisher did not believe in the potential of the novel, but which eventually turned out to be one of the greatest investments in publishing history. The British author even had to change the title of her first novel from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in order to be published in the United States, as it was assumed that a book referring to philosophy would not sell much in the children's section.

However, the relation between the *Harry Potter* novels and philosophical theories has been the subject of multiple studies. The theme of death, which is a central element of the story, has aroused the interest of many people, who started analysing it from a philosophical perspective. From Albus Dumbledore's symbolic phoenix, Fawkes, to the Horcruxes introduced in the sixth novel of the series, by way of Nicolas Flamel's Philosopher's Stone and the Deathly Hallows, the question of death appears to be at the very heart of the series8. Multiple articles, essays and academic papers have been written on this question in relation to philosophy—notably linking it to Nietzsche's theory on the eternal return, with Lord Voldemort being the perfect example of how people tend to reject and fear finitude9—as well

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/revealed-the-eightyearold-girl-who-saved-harry-potter-296456.html> (last accessed 27 April 2022).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ 'Beyond the Veil. Death, Hope, and Meaning' in William Irwin and Gregory Bassham, eds, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy. Hogwarts For Muggles*, John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

⁹ 'Le refus de la finitude' in Marianne Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, Ellipses, 2015.

as religion¹⁰. Several studies also referred to the way philosophy could be applied to the political and historical dimension of the *Harry Potter* universe. For instance, the condition of house elves has often been analysed in relation to the question of slavery¹¹, and Voldemort's ideas on purity of blood is not without reminding the reader of Adolf Hitler's wish for racial purity. However, Lord Voldemort is not the only character in the Wizarding World which could be considered as a wizard equivalent for the German Fuhrer. Indeed, the character of Grindelwald is explicitly associated with the Second World War as well, and uses the argument of the danger of the nuclear weapon to build his army against Muggles, and it is only in 1945 that he is defeated by Dumbledore.¹² The characters of Gellert Grindelwald and Lord Voldemort have also been at the centre of several studies which tackled the question of desires and Stoicism in relation to the series, notably regarding the desires for immortality and power¹³.

So far, it is estimated that the series has been translated into 80 languages and that around 500 million copies were sold in the entire world¹⁴, allowing its readers to give free rein to their imagination and to lose themselves in the wizarding world of *Harry Potter*. In *Chance or The Dance*, Thomas Howard writes about imagination and claims that:

Imagination is, in a word, the faculty by which we organize the content of our experience into some form, and thus apprehend it as significant. Put another way, it is what makes us refuse to accept experience as mere random clutter, and makes us try without ceasing to shape that experience so that we can manage it.¹⁵

Imagination, which is what gives life to a literary piece, is therefore what allows the reader to live through the eyes of the characters of a book. Many people describe reading as an escape from reality. However, according to Howard, it appears that this is only half true, as the reader connects to the characters of the story and learns with them lessons which can, and usually should, be applied to their real life. Kate Daley-Bailey writes that 'imagination allows

¹⁰ Jerry L. Walls, 'Heaven, Hell, and Harry Potter' in D. Baggett and S. E. Klein, eds, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, op. cit.

¹¹ Steven W. Patterson, 'Kreacher's Lament. S.P.E.W. as a Parable on Discrimination, Indifference, and Social Justice', in D. Baggett and S. E. Klein, eds, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, op. cit.

¹² Aurélie Lacassagne, 'War and Peace in the *Harry Potter* series', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13th of July 2015, Vol.19, No 4, 318-334, <https://journals-sagepub-com.gorgone.univ-toulouse.fr/doi/full/10.1177/1367549415592895> (last accessed 19 May 2022).

¹³ 'Harry Potter à l'école stoïcienne' in M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, op. cit.

¹⁴ According to the *Expanded Ramblings* website, <https://expandedramblings.com/index.php/harry-potter-statistics-facts/> (last accessed 27 April 2022)

¹⁵ Thomas Howard, *Chance Or the Dance? A Critique of Modern Secularism*, Ignatius, 2018, 12.

us to make meaning of our lives and fantasy allows readers to live vicariously through the characters in the novel [...]. The readers are enveloped in an alternative world but the lessons they learn are meant to carry back over into the so called “real world”¹⁶. In that sense, the reader is not only confronted with the characters’ actions, decisions and choices, but actually learns to act along with them as they turn the pages of the book, and these choices teach them a lesson which they can apply to their own life. This is precisely the difference between morality and ethics. Indeed, as morality could be defined as a set of dogmatic rules imposed by society, ethics, on the other hand, is more subjective and corresponds to an inner feeling of what is right and what is not, for ourselves as well as for other people around us. Whereas morality is often limited to belief and conviction, ethics aims at praxis, that is to say, action. It defines itself through doubts, hesitations and choices¹⁷. Literature therefore started to act as a way to teach virtue through imagination, which could be considered as a vehicle for ethics between the author and the reader. According to Emmanuel Levinas, the only way to understand a person’s choices is to access their alterity by taking responsibility for their actions and their mistakes¹⁸. We can only understand the other person by becoming them and being responsible for them. This is precisely the role of imagination as Howard claims it. Through literature, the reader becomes the character to whom they identify and makes a parallel between the choices of the character and their own personal vision of ethics. Thanks to imagination, the reader can learn and define ethics.

The *Harry Potter* novels seem to be no exception to the rule, as Rowling’s series can be considered as a contemporary cornerstone in the ethical turn of literature. Indeed, it seems that the British novelist, who trained as a teacher in Edinburgh¹⁹, teaches her young readers a lesson on ethics, whether deliberately or not. Although the novels were published as children’s literature, the series actually acts as a coming of age story in which the reader grows up with Harry. The first novel of the series being published in 1997 and the last one in 2007, the children who read *Harry Potter and The Philosopher’s Stone* will have been teenagers or young adults, by the time *Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows* was published. Even nowadays, many people who read the series when they were children appreciate reading it again at a more advanced age and discover a new perspective to it. Readers grow up and

¹⁶ Kate Daley-Bailey, *Harry Potter and Aristotle’s Cultivation of Virtue*, Academia, 2010 [online] https://www.academia.edu/1594816/Harry_Potter_and_Aristotle_s_Cultivation_of_Virtue (last accessed 27 April 2022), 5.

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Seuil, 1990.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l’extériorité*, Librairie Générale Française, 2009.

¹⁹ From her online biography, <https://www.jkrowling.com/about> (last accessed 28 April 2022).

learn to define themselves throughout the novels, following their favourite characters and identifying themselves to them. Rowling's story could therefore be interpreted as having a propaedeutic dimension, in which the reader learns ethics by becoming responsible for the characters with which they identify. Daley-Bailey writes that 'Rowling, like C. S. Lewis and Tolkien before her, uses fantasy (consciously or not) to educate readers in ethics, showing them how to "live well"'²⁰. Although the *Harry Potter* novels cannot be considered to have been written to be an ethical lesson in themselves, they thrive with philosophical value teaching the reader what is the right way to live²¹, through the development of its characters.

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the reader is introduced to *The Tales of Beedle The Bard*, a collection of tales for young witches and wizards which was published on the 4th of December 2008. These tales could be considered as a literary mise en abyme which refers to a book read by characters within a book, the latter therefore appearing as the real world. In the seventh novel of the series, Hermione receives a copy of *The Tales of Beedle The Bard*, following Dumbledore's last will and testament. When the trio of wizards goes to Xenophilius Lovegood to learn about *The Tale of the Three Brothers*, Luna's father tells them that it is 'a children's tale, told to amuse rather than to instruct'²². An interesting parallel could be made with this mise en abyme, as the *Harry Potter* novels themselves were at first considered to be 'children's tale[s].' However, children need to be instructed, and it could be analysed that this is what *The Tales of Beedle The Bard*, and therefore the *Harry Potter* series, does. This is precisely what Professor Dumbledore seems to suggest as he writes in his testament: 'To Miss Hermione Jean Granger, I leave my copy of *The Tales of Beedle The Bard*, in the hope that she will find it entertaining and instructive'²³. Here, Dumbledore states that, although *The Tales of Beedle The Bard* are intended for children, this does not make them less instructive. In that sense, the idea of a children's tale having an educative dimension does not seem to be rejected in the *Harry Potter* novels. Besides, Xenophilius Lovegood, who is portrayed as an odd character having ridiculous and naive beliefs, refers to *The Tales of The Three Brothers* in the seventh volume of the series and states that 'it's just a morality tale'²⁴. The use of the word 'morality' seems to be immediately mocked in a way here, as the following passage demonstrates:

²⁰ K. Daley-Bailey, *Harry Potter and Aristotle's Cultivation of Virtue*, op. cit., 5.

²¹ D. Baggett and S.E. Klein, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, op. cit., 3.

²² Joanne Kathleen Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Bloomsbury, 2013, 333.

²³ *Ibid*, 106.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 336.

‘[...] it’s obvious which gift is best, which one you’d choose—’
The three of them spoke at the same time: Hermione said, ‘the cloak,’ Ron said, ‘the wand,’ and Harry said, ‘the stone.’
They looked at each other, half surprised, half amused.²⁵

Here, the fact that this word is directly associated with a character as uncanny and bizarre as Xenophilius Lovegood plays on discrediting his statement about the tales being a lesson on morality, rather paving the way towards an ethical reading of the novels. This idea appears to be emphasised by the fact that Hermione, Ron and Harry would all choose a different hallow, and that there is therefore nothing ‘obvious’ about this choice, which needs to be the result of a process of reflection and hesitation. Incidentally, Harry, who chose the stone at this point of the story after losing so many loved ones, eventually changes his mind through the novel and rejects the stone when he becomes in possession of it. In that sense, Rowling’s novels seem to reject morality in this key passage in which she demonstrates that there is no such thing as a universal rule of what is the right choice to make. Instead, the choice is subjective and needs to be reflected upon in order to resonate with the characters’ ethics. The characters of the story therefore have to decide what is the right thing to do and whether they want to do it or not. They are the ones to define their own ethics. According to Daley-Bailey, ‘[w]e must train ourselves to make good moral choices through an endless pattern of action and correction’ and that ‘action is an essential element in becoming anything.’²⁶

In his book *Soi-même comme un autre*, published in 1990, Paul Ricœur studies the difference between morality and ethics and writes that a novel is a place where ethics is built and in which the characters reflect upon what they think is right and just. They can have doubts, go back to their previous decisions and change their minds. Step by step, authors started to sideline moralistic characters in favour of flawed ones, who sometimes make mistakes but who always find their way towards ethics. In *Harry Potter*, even Professor Dumbledore, Hogwarts’ Headmaster, who is described as one of the wisest characters of the series, has made mistakes in his past. In that sense, the *Harry Potter* novels could be read as having a propaedeutic dimension, in which ethics is built through a process of hesitations, doubts and mistakes.

But what is the point in being ethical? Why does Rowling’s series seem to put the emphasis on the need to be ethical and to act for what is right and just? In her book, *Harry*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ K. Daley-Bailey, *Harry Potter and Aristotle’s Cultivation of Virtue*, *op. cit.*, 2.

Potter à l'école de la philosophie, Marianne Chaillan wonders about this question and writes that:

Cette problématique du critère de l'action morale et de la possibilité d'une véritable action morale²⁷ s'articule à la question de savoir laquelle des deux vies, celle de l'homme juste et celle de l'homme injuste, est la plus heureuse. Puisqu'une action vertueuse est possible, il convient dès lors de se poser la question du genre de vie le plus souhaitable. [...] À quoi bon agir vertueusement ? L'homme immoral n'est-il pas souvent plus heureux que celui qui choisit d'agir moralement ? Sur ce problème moral classique, auquel Platon accorde une place importante dans ses dialogues, J.K. Rowling apporte une réponse, là encore platonicienne.²⁸

Here, virtue and happiness appear to be inextricably linked, and Chaillan analyses this relationship from a Platonician perspective and applies it to the *Harry Potter* series. Indeed, according to the Greek philosopher Plato—a theory which will later be developed by his pupil Aristotle—, being virtuous is the only way to reach happiness, or rather *eudaimonia*, a Greek word used to refer to well-being and living well²⁹. Chaillan refers to *Gorgias*, a Socratic dialogue written by Plato between his teacher Socrates and a group of sophists. In this dialogue, Socrates establishes a hierarchy according to which the happiest person is the one whose soul is pure, without any vice, followed by the person who confesses his misdemeanours and who is punished for them. According to Plato, punishment does not necessarily come from the exterior. Chaillan writes that '[I]'acte injuste souille l'âme comme l'action vertueuse accomplit son essence'³⁰. In that sense, a misdeed is necessarily punished, whether from the exterior if the person confesses it, or from the interior, as the fact of being unethical deteriorates the soul. For Socrates, the person who is the least happy is the one who never confesses his misdemeanours and who is therefore never judged and punished for them. According to Chaillan, 'est plus malheureux celui qui a été injuste sans se faire prendre et donc sans se faire punir'³¹. In that sense, happiness appears to be inseparable from virtue and ethics.

Plato's student, Aristotle, considered happiness, or *eudaimonia*, as an activity of human flourishing:

Individual flourishing occurs when the individual has consistently developed a balance between reason and desire [...]. Happiness or 'living well' can only be achieved by cultivating virtues of

²⁷ Chaillan does not differentiate morality and ethics in her book, but rather refers to the philosopher Kant in her definition of morality, in which she opposes a moral action and an action performed in accordance with morality.

²⁸ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 21.

²⁹ K. Daley-Bailey, *Harry Potter and Aristotle's Cultivation of Virtue*, op. cit., 2.

³⁰ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

character [...]. [T]he virtuous individual [...] is one who ‘makes the right choices regularly, time and time again, although not necessarily every single time’^{32, 33}

In that sense, happiness appears to be a choice that anyone can make. In this reference, Adler, through the words of Daley-Bailey, states that an individual can be virtuous even though it has not always been the case. This corresponds to Socrates’ theory, according to which a person who has done misdemeanours in their life can still be virtuous if they confess them and accept to be punished for them. By the same token, a person can still choose to repent and be virtuous at any point of their life. Aristotle refers to four cardinal virtues: justice, temperance, courage and wisdom³⁴. According to the Greek philosopher, *eudaimonia* can be reached by choosing to incorporate these virtues—which, we will see, are present everywhere throughout the *Harry Potter* novels, and which can arguably be represented by the four Hogwarts houses—into our way of life.

Therefore, anyone can choose to live in such a way that they can reach *eudaimonia*. In that sense, the question of choice appears to be at the very heart of this theory according to which ethics and happiness are inextricably tied up, which can be found everywhere between the lines of the seven *Harry Potter* novels. But how is this possibility of choosing represented in the series? Isn’t the idea of a predetermined future, on the contrary, at the centre of the story, with the prophecy which links Harry to Voldemort?

In an interview with the Dutch newspaper *Volkskrant* in 2007, Rowling declared that she used the Professor Trelawney, Hogwarts’ Professor of Divination and presumable seer, to demonstrate her idea according to which there is no such thing as destiny³⁵. It could therefore be analysed that the British writer incorporates a philosophical debate regarding free will and destiny into her series. Indeed, Rowling uses characters and elements of her story which appear to be in favour of these ideas, such as the discipline of Divination, the prophecies—notably the Lost Prophecy made by Sybill Trelawney which is one of the most important elements of the series—, or even the Centaurs. Some characters of the novels also act in accord with the idea of predetermined situations, stating for instance that wizards from

³² Extracted from *Aristotle for Everybody. Difficult Thought Made Easy* by Mortimer J. Adler.

³³ K. Daley-Bailey, *Harry Potter and Aristotle’s Cultivation of Virtue*, *op. cit.*, 2.

³⁴ Michel Meyer, ‘L’Éthique selon la vertu. D’Aristote à Comte-Sponville’, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 2011, n°258, 57-66,

<https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-philosophie-2011-4-page-57.htm> (last accessed 26 October 2021), 58.

³⁵ Jeremy Pierce, ‘Destiny in the Wizarding World’, in W. Irwin and G. Bassham, eds, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy. Hogwarts For Muggles*, John Wiley & Sons, 2010, 43.

pure-blood families³⁶ are destined to have greater powers than wizards from families in which some members are Muggles³⁷. It could be interpreted that Rowling turns these characters into ridicule to a certain extent, and chooses to portray characters—whom she knows will be liked by the reader and who often tend to be the wisest of the series, as it is the case for Professor Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall, or Hermione for instance—on the side of freedom of action. The *Harry Potter* novels could therefore be read from an existentialist perspective, developed by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who was opposed to the idea of a predetermined future and believed in free will. According to the French philosopher, we are condemned to be free, which—as will later be developed in this dissertation—means three things:

[L]'homme projette librement les valeurs qui déterminent son action ([dont] il est lui-même le seul et dernier fondement), [il] peut réviser à volonté ses valeurs, voire effectuer le célèbre renversement des valeurs. [Enfin,] devenu conscient de sa liberté et de la responsabilité qui y est attachée, l'homme est angoissé devant cette responsabilité.³⁸

In that sense, it appears that existentialism as Sartre views it is closely related to the question of ethics, and one could make a parallel between what Seel refers to as *valeurs* and Aristotle's cardinal virtues. Free will therefore appears to be the key to *eudaimonia*. Being condemned to be free means that the responsibility of our happiness is in our hands only, and that, by the same token, the only cause for our misfortune is ourselves. In the *Harry Potter* universe, happiness therefore appears as a choice to be ethical and virtuous in a life in which nothing is predetermined and in which anyone can become whoever they want to be.

This dissertation will therefore lead to a philosophical interpretation of the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, and the way the novels could be analysed as having a propaedeutic dimension, teaching the readers ethics. In what way do the *Harry Potter* novels seem to act as a contemporary landmark of the ethical turn in literature? How does Rowling appear to be incorporating philosophical theories into one of the most famous children's series in the world in order to show her readers the way towards an ethical life and therefore happiness? In order to be able to answer these questions, this dissertation will tackle the theories of two main philosophers, Plato and Sartre—albeit some references to other philosophical theories will sometimes be necessary—, and will be articulated into three parts.

³⁶ That is to say wizards' families in which all members of the family tree are wizards.

³⁷ People born without magical abilities.

³⁸ Gerhard Seel, 'La morale de Sartre. Une reconstruction', *Le Portique*, 2005, <http://journals.openedition.org/leportique/737>, (last accessed 28 September 2021), 4.

The first part will deal with the conflict between divination—or destiny—and free will in *Harry Potter*, and the way the novels could be read from an existentialist point of view. In the second part, the representation of the soul in the series in relation to its different conceptions in philosophy will be analysed so as to better understand the role and the impact that free will has on it, focusing on the importance of ethics and how it is defined both in the novels and in philosophy. Finally, the relation between ethics and happiness in the *Harry Potter* universe will be the object of study in the last part of this dissertation, in which we will see how happiness is arguably depicted as a choice that anyone can make.

PART ONE

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN DIVINATION AND FREE WILL

*'The right of nature... is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life.'*³⁹

The very first volume of the *Harry Potter* series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, could be interpreted as introducing the possible relation between the wizarding universe and philosophy within its title. One of the most central conflicts in the series is the one which opposes the belief in fate and the question of free will. The following section deals with the way this conflict is represented in the novels and how the *Harry Potter* series could be read from an existentialist perspective.

I. The possibility of a predictable future

To begin with, Rowling's novels seem to introduce several elements and characters which act in favour of the possibility of a written future, which could be understood as fate or destiny, according to which everything is predetermined and can therefore be foreseen, often without giving characters the opportunity to change the course of events.

A. Professor Trelawney and the subject of Divination

One of the most significant characters in relation to the question of fate and the idea of a predictable future is Professor Sybill Trelawney, Hogwarts' Professor of Divination, who is introduced in the third volume of the series, and who is presented as a caricature of a fortune-teller:

Harry's immediate impression was of a large, glittering insect. Professor Trelawney moved into the firelight, and they saw that she was very thin; her large glasses magnified her eyes to several times their natural size, and she was draped in a gauzy spangled shawl. Innumerable chains and

³⁹ From Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Extracted from *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts* by David Baggett and Shawn E. Klein, 228.

beads hung around her spindly neck, and her arms and hands were encrusted with bangles and rings.⁴⁰

The caricature, in which the character of Sybill Trelawney is metaphorically portrayed as an insect, perhaps to highlight her insignificance through irony, also seems to be represented through Rowling's choice of Professor Trelawney's name. Indeed, in the ancient world, a sibyl was a noun used to refer to 'any of a number of women believed to be oracles or prophetesses.'⁴¹ In that sense, Hogwarts' Professor of Divination appears to be narrowed to her self-proclaimed ability to predict the future. Her character is therefore limited to the only information which the reader has on her, without looking any deeper into her personality or her life.

Besides, Harry, Ron and Hermione enrol for their course of Divination for the first time in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*,—which corresponds to their third school year at Hogwarts—and this subject immediately seems to divide characters in the series. Divination can be defined as 'the art or practice of discovering what will happen in the future using supernatural means.'⁴² When the manager of Flourish and Blotts⁴³ talks to Harry about Divination and all the 'basic fortune-telling methods—palmistry, crystal balls, bird entrails'⁴⁴, the young wizard's attention is captured by something else as Rowling writes that 'Harry wasn't listening' and that '[h]is eyes had fallen on another book, which was among display on a small table'⁴⁵. The subject of Divination therefore already appears to be a cause of division amongst the different characters of the novels, and Rowling portrays her hero as being completely uninterested by this new course from the very first moment he is introduced to it. However, if Divination is absurd and devoid of interest, why is it taught at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry? Doesn't this mean that, on the contrary, the subject of Divination deserves to be studied and looked into? Indeed, if Dumbledore accepted to let Divination be taught at Hogwarts, doesn't this mean that he believes in the possibility of actually being able to predict the future?

⁴⁰ Joanne Kathleen Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Bloomsbury, 1999, 79.

⁴¹ *Collins Dictionary* [online], 'Sibyl', <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sibyl> (last accessed 5 May 2022).

⁴² *Collins Dictionary* [online], 'Divination', <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/divination> (last accessed 6 May 2022).

⁴³ Bookstore located in Diagon Alley, one of the most famous shopping areas for wizards and witches.

⁴⁴ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, *op. cit.*, 45.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

When Professor Trelawney meets her new students in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, she introduces them to the subject of Divination and describes it as ‘the most difficult of all magical arts’⁴⁶. According to the seer, divination is an art which can be learned, although not without difficulty. In that sense, it appears that there is indeed a conflict between wizards and witches who do not and who view divination as an unreliable and uncertain branch of magic, based on coincidences and contingencies, and the ones who believe in the possibility of reading into the future.

Besides, in the third volume of the series, Harry goes back to see Professor Trelawney after their class is over and finds her in a state of trance:

‘It will happen tonight.’

Harry wheeled around. Professor Trelawney had gone rigid in her armchair; her eyes were unfocused and her mouth sagging. ‘S—sorry?’ said Harry.

But Professor Trelawney didn’t seem to hear him. Her eyes started to roll. Harry sat there in a panic. She looked as though she was about to have some sort of seizure. He hesitated, thinking of running to the hospital wing—and then Professor Trelawney spoke again, in the same harsh voice, quite unlike her own:

*‘The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these twelve years. Tonight, before midnight... The servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant’s aid, greater and more terrible than ever he was. Tonight... before midnight... the servant... will set out... to rejoin... his master...’*⁴⁷

This marks a turning point in the novel as Harry begins to take Professor Trelawney and the subject of Divination more seriously and even worries about the prophecy made by the seer. The emphasis on her eyes, which are described as ‘unfocused’ and which ‘started to roll,’ makes a parallel with the first encounter Harry has with his Divination teacher, whose eyes were then mocked for their large size. In that sense, it could be interpreted that the emphasis on the Seer’s eyes demonstrates that she, unlike other characters, can see forthcoming events, as this passage, in which she predicts Lord Voldemort’s rise to power, seems to prove. At this point of the novel, Harry believes that Sirius Black, his Godfather who betrayed his parents and led Lord Voldemort to them, has escaped from Azkaban, the wizards’ prison, in order to kill him. In that sense, he immediately interpreted Professor Trelawney’s prophecy, associating ‘the servant’ to Sirius Black and ‘his master’ to Lord Voldemort. However, the prophecy states that the servant will escape the same night, which cannot correspond to Sirius Black, as he had already broken free from Azkaban at that time.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

Although this may prove that the future is not predetermined and that it is therefore impossible to predict it, this prophecy eventually comes to be true. Indeed, towards the end of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry and his friends realise that Sirius Black was not the one who betrayed his parents, and that he was only following him so as to protect him against their former friend, Peter Pettigrew, whom the prophecy was really about. Pettigrew, under his Animagus appearance as a rat, manages to escape at the end of the third novel and eventually goes back to Lord Voldemort, whom he will help rise to power in the following volume, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. In that sense, although Divination and Professor Trelawney tend to not be taken seriously in the series—notably through their caricatural representation—, her character appears to act in favour of the possibility of predicting the future in the *Harry Potter* novels.

B. The centaurs

In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Harry, Ron, Hermione and Draco are given detention for being up and out past curfew. They were sent to the Forbidden Forest, which surrounds the walls of Hogwarts and the access of which is prohibited⁴⁸ to students mostly because of the dark creatures which can be found in these woods. The purpose of their detention was to help Hagrid, Hogwarts' Keeper of Keys and Grounds, look for a missing unicorn. During their detention, the five characters encounter a creature, which introduces the reader—through Harry's eyes—to the centaurs: 'And into the clearing came—was it a man, or a horse? To the waist, a man, with red hair and beard, but below that was a horse's gleaming chestnut body with a long, reddish tail.'⁴⁹

The centaurs are immediately placed on the side of a determinist view of life as they believe in a written future which can be predicted, although not in the same way as Professor Trelawney does. Hagrid describes them as '[r]uddy star-gazers [n]ot interested in anythin' closer'n the moon'⁵⁰. This description can be considered as pejorative with Hagrid's turn of phrase based on a negative structure which implies that the only centre of interest of the centaurs is 'the moon,' thus creating a form of distance between the horse-like creatures and the wizards, the former apparently not attaching importance to the latter. The centaurs are

⁴⁸ Except for detention and the Care of Magical Creatures class during which a teacher always supervises the students.

⁴⁹ J.K. Rowling, *PS, op. cit.*, 273.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 275.

therefore presented here as creatures who share a common interest for the universe and who believe that the future can be foretold thanks to astrology. Astrology is defined as ‘the study of the movements and positions of the sun, moon, planets, and stars in the belief that they affect the character and lives of people.’⁵¹ In *Harry Potter*, centaurs analyse celestial events and interpret what they see in order to be able to read the future. For instance, the repetition of the sentence ‘Mars is bright tonight’ delivered both by Ronan and Bane⁵² depicts how much interest they show in the movement of planets and could also suggest that something is going to happen. Besides, later on in this chapter, Firenze, another centaur who lives in the Forbidden Forest, saves Harry from Lord Voldemort, who was drinking blood from a dead unicorn’s body. The relationship with wizards being a subject of division amongst the centaurs, Firenze’s choice to save Harry triggered Bane’s anger and led to an argument between the two creatures:

Ronan pawed the ground nervously. ‘I’m sure Firenze thought he was acting for the best,’ he said in his gloomy voice.

Bane kicked his back legs in anger.

‘For the best! What is that to do with us? Centaurs are concerned with what has been foretold!’⁵³

Here, it is interesting to note how the idea of a predetermined future acts as a bone of contention within the community of centaurs. Indeed, as Ronan refers to the possibility of ‘acting for the best’, Bane answers with the counterargument of being only concerned with ‘what has been foretold.’ In that sense, Bane has a very deterministic view and believes in a written future which can be—and which has been—predicted by centaurs, by analysing the planets and stars’ movement. On the other hand, it seems that Ronan’s opinion is less firmly fixed than Bane’s, as he appears to be thinking of a possibility of action. Indeed, a future which is already written would leave no room for a need to act for the best, as acting for the best implies the chance to change the course of events.

Therefore, the idea of a predetermined future is not only a subject of division between people who believe in it and those who do not, but also within the community of people who share this determinist view. Indeed, as Bane states that centaurs believe in the possibility of foretelling the future as a universally admitted fact about their species, Firenze accepts to question the reliability of astrology when he says that ‘[t]he planets have been read wrongly

⁵¹ *Cambridge Dictionary* [online], ‘Astrology’, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/astrology> (last accessed 6 May 2022).

⁵² J.K. Rowling, *PS, op. cit.*, 274.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 281.

before now, even by centaurs'⁵⁴. Although this does not go against the possibility of reading the planets and predicting the future, Firenze still admits that it is not always reliable and mistakes can be made. This is repeated in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, in which Firenze is Hogwarts' new Divination professor:

[H]e seemed perfectly unconcerned that not one of them could see any of the signs he described, telling them that humans were hardly ever good at this, that it took centaurs years and years to become competent, and finished by telling them that it was foolish to put too much faith in such things anyway, because even centaurs sometimes read them wrongly.⁵⁵

Here, despite the fact that Firenze believes, like every other centaur, in the possibility of predicting the future thanks to astrology and states that '[their] findings teach [them] that the future may be glimpsed in the sky above us'⁵⁶, he admits that it is not a perfectly reliable science and that they have made mistakes in their readings in the past. The use of the word 'glimpse' here is important to note, as it appears that Firenze's views on the possibility of predicting the future are more flexible than Professor Trelawney's. Indeed, whereas the former Divination teacher believes in a fixed fate which can be predicted in its entirety thanks to the gift of clairvoyance, Firenze's use of the word 'glimpse' appears to demonstrate that, not only can Divination be an unreliable science, but it is also impossible to read the future as a whole and the centaurs can only foretell events by snippets. This passage is all the more interesting as Rowling seems to play on a paradox in which Firenze's discourse shifts from taking his Divination class very seriously and placing centaurs above humans to assuming that even centaurs have a precarious and shaky knowledge on the subject, even qualifying it as 'foolish.' It therefore seems that Divination is described ironically through the character of Firenze as a criticism of this deterministic view.

This idea is emphasised through the division that Divination and the possibility of being able to predict the future cause within the wizarding world. Firstly, Firenze qualifies Professor Trelawney's class as 'human nonsense'⁵⁷ when Parvati Patil tells him about what her former professor has taught them:

'Sybill Trelawney may have Seen, I do not know,' continued Firenze, and Harry heard the swishing of his tail again as he walked up and down before them, 'but she wastes her time, in the main, on the self-flattering nonsense humans call fortune-telling. I, however, am here to explain

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁵⁵ Joanne Kathleen Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Bloomsbury, 2013, 532.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 531.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 531.

the wisdom of centaurs, which is impersonal and impartial. We watch the skies for the great tides of evil or change that are sometimes marked there. It may take ten years to be sure of what we are seeing.’⁵⁸

This passage depicts the idea that foretelling future events is a subject of disagreement even within the community of people who share this deterministic view, as Firenze appears to be strongly opposed to Professor Trelawney’s abilities as a seer. Although Firenze’s views also seem to be less fixed as the centaur uses linguistic markers of doubts such as the adverb ‘sometimes’ or the modal ‘may’, this still shows how delicate and fragile this science, which is mainly based on interpretation and in that sense specific to each, truly is. Besides, it would be relevant to note that Rowling links the characters who believe in divination and the possibility of predicting the future to the animal kingdom, Professor Trelawney being compared to an insect, and the centaurs being half-horses, emphasised here in this passage with Firenze’s ‘swishing of his tail.’ Believing in fate therefore appears to be portrayed in relation to a loss of humanity, as this dissertation will later demonstrate with the question of free will and human life.

Moreover, we will later see that this deterministic view which is shared both by the centaurs and Professor Trelawney is also a source of division in the wizarding world between characters who believe in it and characters who do not. To begin with, in the first volume of the series, when the reader is first introduced to the centaurs, Hagrid tells Harry, Ron, Hermione and Draco to ‘[n]ever [...] try an’ get a straight answer out of a centaur’⁵⁹. The centaurs being portrayed as vague creatures with which you cannot have a proper conversation show how uncertain and approximate their predictions of the future can be, by playing on a discrepancy between them and the reader, through Harry’s eyes. Besides, Hermione uses Professor McGonagall’s words to discredit the centaurs’ predictions when she states that ‘[i]t sounds like fortune-telling to [her], and Professor McGonagall says that’s a very imprecise branch of magic’⁶⁰. Ironically, Rowling, whether consciously or not, uses the same expression of ‘fortune-telling’ in the first novel when the character of Hermione refers to the centaurs’ prediction about Harry and Lord Voldemort as in the fifth novel when the character of Firenze refers to Professor Trelawney’s predictions. In that sense, it seems that, whether it comes from centaurs or from human beings, predicting the future is always based on coincidences and contingencies, rather than facts.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 531.

⁵⁹ J.K. Rowling, *PS, op. cit.*, 275.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 282.

C. Stoicism, Spinoza, and the idea of a written future

This determinist idea that the future is written and can therefore be predicted can be interpreted as a mirror of the conflict between philosophers who believe in a fatalist approach to life and those in favour of free will, who believe in existentialism. It is with the former that this part will deal. Baggett and Klein write that ‘[a]ccording to fatalists, the future is already completely fixed and determined [and] freedom is an illusion’⁶¹.

Stoicism is a school of philosophy which was founded during the Hellenistic period, in the 3^d century BC in ancient Greece, with philosophers such as Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus as its key figures. One of the Stoics’ main concerns was ethics, based on the idea of ‘living in accordance with experience of what happens by nature’⁶². They believed, like Aristotle, in the cardinal virtues of wisdom, justice, temperance and courage in order to live an ethical life. According to them, only a person able to cultivate these virtues regardless of their life situation could be considered as ethical, which is the way towards *eudaimonia*. For the Stoics, the only way to reach happiness is to live in agreement with nature, which many of them used as a synonym for fate. In that sense, the Stoic definition of happiness appears to be inextricably linked to determinism:

pour les stoïciens, il existe une disposition immuable dans l’ordre des choses, une sorte de *nexus causarum* (un ordre ou une liaison de causes). Plutarque écrit ainsi dans *La Vie de philosophes* que, pour les stoïciens, il existe ‘un ordre et une connexion qui ne peuvent jamais être forcés ni transgressés’.⁶³

Therefore, for Stoics, happiness can be defined as the cultivation of cardinal virtues regardless of their life situation brought by nature—or fate. When the idea of a *nexus causarum* creates a situation in which nothing can be changed, the only possible thing to alter is our reaction to it. Chaillan adds that:

Cette croyance se trouve être la conséquence logique de leur conception du cosmos comme un tout organisé dans lequel tout s’enchaîne de manière causale. En effet, si tout est lié, si le monde

⁶¹ D. Baggett and S.E. Klein, eds, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, op. cit., 214.

⁶² Phillip Mitsis, ‘Moral Rules and the Aims of Stoic Ethics’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Oct. 1986, Vol.83, No.10, 556-557, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2026430> (last accessed 10 June 2022), 557.

⁶³ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l’école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 78.

n'est que le déploiement rigoureux d'une chaîne de causes et d'effets, il doit être possible, connaissant la cause de prédire l'effet.⁶⁴

Here, it appears that the Stoics' determinist view, according to which everything is written and that things happen because they were supposed to, resonates with Rowling's series, as the centaurs could be interpreted as the Stoics of the *Harry Potter* universe in many ways. Indeed, the centaurs believe in a written future which can be predicted by analysing the movements of the planets and the stars. In that sense, Chaillan declares that the Stoics' belief in a cosmic nature, which leads to a succession of events which cannot be changed or avoided, leads to the possibility of predicting the future. In other words, assuming that the future is already written involves the idea that it can therefore be foretold.

The Stoic school of thought can sometimes be associated with classical pantheism, which was developed in 1953 by Charles Hartshorne, according to which everything is determined by God, which some people tend to use as a synonym for the universe. This theory was picked up on by the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Indeed, Spinoza was considered to be a fatalist—derived from the Latin word *fati*, meaning destiny or fate—because of his deterministic view on human life. The Dutch philosopher believed that free will necessarily leads to misfortune as it plunges people into the illusion of freedom, according to which they would be able to escape the laws of nature. Just like the Stoics, Spinoza assumed that happiness was the result of accommodating ourselves to what the Stoics referred to as the *nexus causarum*, and that free will was therefore illusory, as the only freedom lies in our reaction to the laws of nature, which cannot be escaped or changed.

The question of determinism and divination was also studied by Marcus Cicero, a Roman orator and philosopher, in his dialogue *De Divinatione*, which is divided into two books dealing with Roman divination. In the first book, Cicero looks into the interpretation of dreams, oracles and the subject of astrology and takes the possibility of fate and predicting future events into consideration through the words of his brother Quintus. However, in the second book, he uses his own words and places himself against the ideas he considered in the first book, stating that predicting the future is impossible.

Besides, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who believed in atheist existentialism and free will, analyses the possible reactions which follow the realisation that

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

there is no such thing as a *nexus causarum* or a divine entity which would predetermine the future. He calls one of these reactions ‘mauvaise foi’⁶⁵—translated into ‘bad faith.’ Seel lists several characteristics specific to bad faith such as ‘agir comme si valeurs et normes venaient d’une instance supérieure (Dieu, la nature ou la société) et à refuser ainsi d’assumer la responsabilité des actes qui découlent de ces valeurs’⁶⁶, and a form of ‘distance vis-à-vis de soi-même et de ses propres valeurs, un “n’être pas ce que l’on est”, ce qui est le contraire de l’engagement’⁶⁷. In that sense, Sartre opposes his philosophy to Stoicism or to Spinoza’s deterministic pantheism, and states that believing in determinism is a form of bad faith, rejecting free will and therefore any form of responsibility in case of misfortune.

The possibility of a written future which can be foretold thanks to divination is therefore described as a source of conflict in the *Harry Potter* novels, opposing characters, such as Professor Trelawney or the centaurs, who appear to be the Stoics of the wizarding world as they believe in the idea of a predetermined future which answers to a causal universe, and characters who reject this idea, placing themselves on the Sartrean side.

II. The question of determining situations

The issue of determining situations is present all along the seven *Harry Potter* novels, and many characters appear to be blaming their own situations or the situation of others for their own failures or hardship. According to Catherine and David Deavel, Peter Pettigrew, Vernon Dursley’s sister Marge and even Harry himself at some point in the series believe that some people are born bad and that whether you are good or evil depends on destiny⁶⁸.

Before we can be able to tackle the question of determining situations in the series and how their description in the *Harry Potter* novels could be interpreted as the base for Rowling’s lesson on ethics, we need to understand what we mean by ‘determining situations.’ This expression was developed by Jean-Paul Sartre, who defines a situation as an ‘existence au milieu d’autres existences [...], ni subjective ni objective’⁶⁹. In that sense, Sartre uses the

⁶⁵G. Seel, ‘La morale de Sartre. Une reconstruction’, *op. cit.*, 4.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁸Catherine Deavel and David Deavel, ‘A Skewed Reflection. The Nature of Evil’, in D. Baggett and S. E. Klein, eds, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, *op. cit.*, 142.

⁶⁹ Angèle Kremer-Marietti, *Jean-Paul Sartre et le désir d’être. Une lecture de ‘L’être et le néant’*, L’Harmattan, 2005, 58.

word ‘situation’ as a synonym for life or existence and states that ‘c’est en situation [...] que l’homme se détermine par rapport à l’universalité de la condition humaine’⁷⁰. Free will therefore appears to be at the core of life, as Sartre defines a situation as the starting point of the process of becoming. The French philosopher is therefore opposed to the belief in determining situations, which is defined as the ‘dénonciation d’une “attitude courante, un des mille visages de la mauvaise foi, qui consiste à se consoler, voire à se donner bonne conscience de l’échec de sa vie en invoquant un destin averse”’⁷¹. In that sense, according to Sartre, people who believe in determining situations use the excuse of a written future which led them to their current situation and which can be blameworthy for their misfortune. The goal of this section will therefore be to analyse how the issue of determining situations appears to be tackled in the *Harry Potter* novels as opposed to the possibility of free will.

A. Purebloods against Muggle-borns

One of the central conflicts in the *Harry Potter* universe opposes pureblood wizards, issued from a family in which all members are wizards, and Muggle-borns, pejoratively referred to as Mudbloods, whose family tree include members without magical abilities. The question of determining situations therefore appears to be at the centre of this conflict. Indeed, characters who agree to the idea of a hierarchy in the wizarding world according to which purebloods families would be above Muggle-born families thus believe in determining situations. To them, the blood situation of a wizard determines their place in the wizarding world as well as the greatness of their magical abilities and their success. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Professor Binns, Hogwarts’ History of Magic Professor, tells his students about the creation of Hogwarts:

For a few years, the founders worked in harmony together, seeking out youngsters who showed signs of magic and bringing them to the castle to be educated. But then disagreements sprang up between them. A rift began to grow between Slytherin and the others. Slytherin wished to be more selective about the students admitted to Hogwarts. He believed that magical learning should be kept within all-magic families. He disliked taking students of Muggle parentage, believing them to be untrustworthy.⁷²

⁷⁰ Alexandre Randal and Vincent Guillaume, ‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme’ de Jean-Paul Sartre (*Analyse de l’œuvre*), Primento, 2011, 8.

⁷¹ Sophie Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur ‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme de Jean-Paul Sartre’*, PUF, 2000, 36.

⁷² Joanne Kathleen Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Bloomsbury, 2010, 116.

This passage demonstrates how old the conflict opposing wizards and Muggles truly is, as Professor Binns explains that even the founders of Hogwarts, which was founded in the 10th century, disagreed on the subject. Professor Binns declares that ‘it was an age when magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution’⁷³. In that sense, mutual fear and resentment appears to be at the root of this conflict, which later transformed into hate and extreme hostility, leading some wizards to reject members of the wizarding community with a heterogeneous bloodline.

The character of Draco Malfoy appears to be the perfect example of the way this belief in the idea of a blood hierarchy among wizards and witches is spread through generations. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, Harry meets Draco for the first time in Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions, and the two wizards have a conversation about Harry’s blood status:

‘They were a witch and wizard, if that’s what you mean.’
‘I really don’t think they should let the other sort in, do you? They’re just not the same, they’ve never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families.’⁷⁴

Here, we can note how the Malfoy family believes in the idea of a hierarchy based on blood status and how they share their convictions to new generations, as Draco Malfoy, who is only eleven years old in this passage, appears to be influenced by their beliefs and accepts them as his own. The question tag ‘do you?’ at the end of Draco’s sentence acts as a rhetorical question in which the answer goes without saying, as if there was no other opinion possible. Besides, it is interesting to notice that Draco makes a distinction between ‘witch and wizard’ and ‘the other sort,’ as if the latter, based on the fact that they do not have a homogeneous bloodline, should not be considered as witches or wizards. This is emphasised when Draco and Harry meet again later in this first volume, right before the Sorting Ceremony, and the former tells the latter that ‘some wizarding families are much better than others’ which he refers to as ‘the wrong sort’⁷⁵. Here, we can see a progression in Draco’s beliefs, who moves from considering Muggle-born wizards and witches as ‘the other sort’ to ‘the wrong sort.’ In that sense, it appears that the Malfoy family—like many other characters in the series such as Lord Voldemort and all of his Death Eaters or Professor Slughorn for instance—believes in

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁷⁴ J.K. Rowling, *PS, op. cit.*, 89.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

determining situations according to which a witch or a wizard's magical abilities, and in that sense their success and accomplishment, depend on their blood status, that is to say, their situation.

However, this point of view is a source of conflict in the wizarding world, and many characters do not share this belief. In the second volume of the series, Draco calls Hermione a 'Mudblood'⁷⁶, which Ron defines as 'a really foul name for someone who is Muggle-born'⁷⁷. In the following passage, Ron and Hagrid discuss the conflict opposing purebloods and Muggle-born wizards and witches:

'There are some wizards—like Malfoy's family—who think they're better than everyone else because they're what people call pure-blood. [...] I mean, the rest of us know it doesn't make any difference at all. Look at Neville Longbottom—he's pure-blood and he can hardly stand a cauldron the right way up.'
'An' they haven't invented a spell our Hermione can' do,' said Hagrid proudly, making Hermione go a brilliant shade of magenta.⁷⁸

Here, we can see how both characters reject the idea that wizards and witches issued from a 'pure' bloodline and use two examples to prove that there is no such thing as a determining situation based on blood status: Neville Longbottom, who was born in a family of wizards but who—at that point in the series, but which will later change—struggles to win his spurs as a wizard, and Hermione Granger, whose parents are both Muggles, but who will later be described by Harry as 'the best in [their] year'⁷⁹. The same example goes for Harry's mother, Lily Potter, who was, like Hermione, born in a Muggle family, as the following passage, which is a conversation between Lily and Severus Snape, demonstrates:

'Does it make a difference, being Muggle-born?'
Snape hesitated. His black eyes, eager in the greenish gloom, moved over the pale face, the dark red hair.
'No,' he said. 'It doesn't make any difference.'⁸⁰

In this passage, Snape clearly states that blood status does not change anything, and that there is therefore no such thing as a determining situation based on bloodlines. It is what wizards and witches choose to do with their magic which evaluates their power and the person they

⁷⁶ J.K. Rowling, *CS, op. cit.*, 86.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁹ Joanne Kathleen Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Bloomsbury, 2005, 71.

⁸⁰ J.K. Rowling, *DH, op. cit.*, 535.

are. In that sense, it appears that Rowling's good characters⁸¹ are opposed to the idea of determining situations, which she mainly attributes to the evil characters of her series, and proves that you can become whoever you choose to be, regardless of your situation, which is demonstrated in this passage in which Snape hesitates after Lily's question, but eventually decides that 'it doesn't make any difference. The process of hesitation is articulated through a colour palette which acts as a symbolic representation of the divergences of ideas, between 'black' and 'greenish,' and 'pale' and 'dark.'

B. Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter: mirroring situations

Another example in the *Harry Potter* novels which could be analysed in relation to the question of determining situations is the parallel between the characters of Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort—also known as Tom Riddle. Both characters indeed share similar situations. This idea of mirroring situations between the two wizards is introduced for the first time in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, when Harry, who has just found out that is a wizard, goes to Ollivander's to buy his wand:

'I remember every wand I've ever sold, Mr Potter. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another feather—just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand when its brother—why, its brother gave you that scar. [...] The wand chooses the wizard, remember... I think we must expect great things from you, Mr Potter... After all, He Who Must Not Be Named did great things - terrible, yes, but great.'⁸²

In this passage, Harry discovers that the wand which chose him is composed of a phoenix's feather, and that the bird⁸³ from which the feather has been taken has given another feather, which composes Lord Voldemort's own wand. The wizarding situations of Harry and Voldemort are therefore directly depicted as similar as soon as the series begins, as their wands could be considered as twins. The wands can thus be interpreted as a symbolic representation of Harry and Voldemort's mirroring situations. Additionally, Ollivander assumes that Harry will do great things, because of his similar situation to Lord Voldemort's, who did great things himself. It is however interesting to note that, although it is the wand

⁸¹ The character of Snape will later be analysed in this dissertation, which will demonstrate that he can, in fact, be considered as one of the good characters of the series, although he was portrayed as a villain during the first six novels.

⁸² J.K. Rowling, *PS, op. cit.*, 96.

⁸³ In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the reader learns that it is Dumbledore's phoenix, Fawkes, which gave these two feathers.

which chooses the wizard, it is the wizard or the witch who chooses what they want to do with their wand. According to Ollivander, Lord Voldemort did great things, but they were terrible. Besides, the epanalepsis ‘great things—terrible, yes, but great,’ in which the adjective ‘great’ is used both at the beginning and at the end of the clause, creates a framing effect, in which the adjective ‘terrible’ which refers to Voldemort’s magic, is enclosed. In that sense, the words ‘great’ and ‘terrible’ do not share the same level of importance, as it appears that the latter is simply a subcategory of the former. Therefore, this does not mean that Harry, who is supposedly bound to do great things, will do terrible things for all that.

This parallel between the situations of Harry and Voldemort is deepened in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, when Harry realises that he is a Parselmouth⁸⁴, which Ron describes as a bad gift, not very common amongst wizards⁸⁵. Indeed, later on in this novel, Harry finds out that he shares this ability with Lord Voldemort and Salazar Slytherin, both considered to be evil and dangerous wizards:

There are strange likenesses between us, after all. Even you must have noticed. Both half-bloods, orphans, raised by Muggles. Probably the only two Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even look something alike...⁸⁶

Here, Harry meets Lord Voldemort—under his Tom Riddle appearance—in the Chamber of Secrets and the latter points out all the similarities between them. They share the same blood status as well as the same family status as both lost their parents and were sent to be raised by Muggles and both speak Parseltongue. The two wizards therefore share almost identical situations as they have similar backgrounds. In this passage, Voldemort refers to him and Harry in terms of situations and omits the subject, only speaking in phrases rather than in sentences. It therefore appears that the linguistic devices used here articulate the possibility of determining situations, as Harry and Voldemort’s are compared in a semantic context in which their individuality as human beings is erased, as if the only thing which mattered was their situations.

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Voldemort’s past is brought to light as Harry and Dumbledore go into the Pensieve to the moment when Hogwarts’ Headmaster

⁸⁴ Name used to refer to witches and wizards who can talk to snakes.

⁸⁵ J.K. Rowling, *CS*, *op. cit.*, 145.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

went to Wool's Orphanage, in which young Tom Riddle used to live, and met Mrs Cole, the matron of the orphanage:

'I was wondering whether you could tell me anything of Tom Riddle's history? I think he was born here in the orphanage?'

'That's right,' said Mrs. Cole, helping herself to more gin. 'I remember it clear as anything, because I'd just started here myself. [...] And this girl, not much older than I was myself at the time, came staggering up the front steps. Well, she wasn't the first. We took her in, and she had the baby within the hour. And she was dead in another hour.'⁸⁷

This passage illustrates the similarities between Harry and Voldemort, who were both orphans at a very young age—as Harry's parents were killed by Voldemort when he was only one year old, and Tom Riddle's father had abandoned his family and his mother died while giving birth, as this passage demonstrates—and who were both raised by Muggles.

The similarity in Harry and Voldemort's situations goes even further in the following extract of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*:

'Voldemort was, I believe, more attached to this school than he has ever been to a person. Hogwarts was where he had been happiest; the first and only place he had felt at home.'
Harry felt slightly uncomfortable at these words, for this was exactly how he felt about Hogwarts too.⁸⁸

Here, it is demonstrated that, because they were both raised by Muggles in poor conditions, Harry and Voldemort feel the same way about Hogwarts, which they both considered as their first real home. In that sense, it is interesting to note that Harry and Voldemort not only share similar situations, but also similar feelings. However, whereas the two characters indeed share the same feelings about Hogwarts, they do not have the same reasons for these feelings. In this passage, Dumbledore explains that both wizards were the happiest they had ever been when they were at Hogwarts. Nevertheless, as Harry's happiness resided mainly in being surrounded by his friends and classmates, Voldemort was happy because he could quench his thirst for power by learning new spells. This is emphasised when Dumbledore says that he was 'more attached to this school than he has ever been to a person,' which is precisely what differentiates Harry and Voldemort. This dissertation will thus analyse how, regardless of how similar their situations might be, the two characters eventually turned out to have radically different lives. The theory of determining situations therefore seems to be refuted in the *Harry Potter* novels through the opposition between Harry and Voldemort.

⁸⁷ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, *op. cit.*, 249.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 404.

C. Peter Pettigrew, or *le salaud Sartrien*

In the *Harry Potter* novels, the question of determining situations is also very present with characters who tend to blame their own situation, therefore believing that they are predetermined to be the way they are and that there is nothing which can be done about it. The character of Peter Pettigrew is the perfect example to illustrate this idea, as he could be considered as Rowling's representation of what Sartre calls a *salaud*. Before being able to analyse how Peter Pettigrew acts as one of the most striking examples of how the question of determining situations is tackled in the novels, we need to understand what Sartre means by *salaud*.

According to the French philosopher, every human being is free by nature, which can lead to a feeling of anxiety, often associated with bad faith. Sophie Bilemdjian defines bad faith as 'l'échec de la liberté butant sur elle-même, l'art de se chercher des excuses'⁸⁹. In that sense, bad faith is a way of hiding 'both from the responsibility of choosing and sustaining our present lifestyle and from the ever present possibility of changing our lifestyle'⁹⁰. It is a rejection of freedom and free will because of the responsibility it involves, which ultimately leads to anxiety, which is described as 'un sentiment lié à l'exercice effectif de notre liberté et, comme tel, inséparable de toute action authentique'⁹¹. Indeed, if every human being is free by nature, this means that they are responsible for their own life and everything it involves, and that the only person they can blame in case of misfortune is themselves. This freedom can therefore trigger a feeling of discomfort and difficulty due to the great responsibility it involves and some people tend to want to run away from it with bad faith⁹². Sartre divides these people into two categories:

Les uns qui se cachent, par l'esprit de sérieux ou par des excuses déterministes leur liberté totale, je les appellerai lâches ; les autres qui essaieront de montrer que leur existence était nécessaire, alors qu'elle est la contingence même de l'apparition de l'homme sur la terre, je les appellerai des salauds.⁹³

⁸⁹ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur 'L'existentialisme est un humanisme' de Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit.*, 69.

⁹⁰ Joseph Catalano, 'Successfully Lying to Oneself. A Sartrean Perspective', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Jun., 1990, Vol. 50, No. 4, 673-693, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2108229> (last accessed 10 June 2022), 677.

⁹¹ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur 'L'existentialisme est un humanisme' de Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit.*, 27.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Nagel, 1970, 84.

In that sense, it appears that the French philosopher would refer to characters such as Professor Trelawney or the centaurs, who believe in divination and therefore reject their free will in favour of determinism, as *lâches*. It is what he calls *salaud* which is of interest in this passage. Sartre defines his *salaud* in relation to quietism, which can be understood as the absolute opposite of existentialism, which is described as ‘l’attitude des gens qui disent : les autres peuvent faire ce que je ne peux pas faire. [S]ouvent ils n’ont qu’une seule manière de supporter leur misère, c’était de penser : les circonstances ont été contre moi’⁹⁴. According to the French philosopher, people tend to take refuge in quietism as a reaction to their absolute free will so as to reject any sort of responsibility for their own misfortune. In that sense, they blame external circumstances for their hardship and find excuses for themselves. This is the case for both *lâches* and *salauds*. To Sartre, ‘le salaud est donc celui qui préfère délaissier le fardeau de la liberté et qui, en toute mauvaise foi, va imputer à sa nature ou à la situation les actions qu’il a engagées’⁹⁵. Therefore, a *salaud* is a person who, unlike the *lâches* who tend to use the excuse of fatalism, blames his own situation as the reason for their lack of action. In other words, *salauds* believe in determining situations according to which they were born to be a certain way and that nothing can be done about it, which is the reason why they do not act against it.

In the *Harry Potter* novels, several characters resort to blaming their own situations as the reason for their misfortune. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, the reader is introduced to the character of Peter Pettigrew, who used to be a friend of Harry’s father but who eventually joined Lord Voldemort’s side. At the end of this novel, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, friends of James Potter’s and former friends of Peter Pettigrew’s, confront the latter. In the following passage, Pettigrew appears to be blaming his situation for his betrayal against James and Lily⁹⁶ as he says: ‘Sirius, Sirius, what could I have done? The Dark Lord... you have no idea... he has weapons you can’t imagine... I was scared, Sirius, I was never brave like you and Remus and James. I never meant it to happen... He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named forced me—’⁹⁷. Here, Peter Pettigrew appears to be the perfect example of how some characters in the series believe in determining situations, as he blames his own as opposed to Sirius’ and declares that, unlike the latter, being brave is not in

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁹⁶ Pettigrew was the Potters’ Secret-Keeper when they were hiding from Lord Voldemort. He betrayed them as he became a spy for the Dark Lord and delivered his friends to him in the First Wizarding War. For more information, see section ‘*The contagion of virtue: the case of Peter Pettigrew.*’

⁹⁷ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, *op. cit.*, 274.

his nature. Besides, more than just placing responsibility on his situation, which would determine the way he is now, he justifies his actions—or rather his lack of action against the Dark Lord or his situation—by stating that he had no choice. His cowardice is highlighted by the anticlimactic gradation in his appellations for Voldemort, shifting from ‘The Dark Lord’ to ‘He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.’ In that sense, it appears that Rowling builds her character of Peter Pettigrew as a representation of the Sartrean *salaud*, who rejects his freedom and the responsibility it brings about, and who, out of bad faith, blames his situation which makes him a coward instead of acting to be brave.

However, according to Sartre, ‘le pessimisme existentialiste est en réalité une ‘dureté optimiste’ (idée que le choix est toujours possible) qui empêche de se réduire et de se lamenter sur ce qu’on aurait pu faire’⁹⁸. In other words, free will offers the opportunity to become whoever we want to be, without having to blame external circumstances such as fate or determining situations, which are only excuses found out of idleness and anxiety. In that sense, it seems that Peter Pettigrew, as an example—whether made on purpose or not by the British writer—of Sartre’s *salaud*, blames his situation, which he considers to be determining, purely and simply because he never acted to change this situation, therefore rejecting his free will.

D. The Mirror of Erised

In the first volume of the novels, Harry goes into the restricted section without being allowed to, and when Argus Filch, Hogwarts’ Caretaker, finds him, the young wizard hides into a room, which contains nothing but ‘a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed feet. There was an inscription carved around the top: Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi’⁹⁹. This inscription, spelled backwards, reads ‘I show not your face but your heart’s desire.’ In that sense, this mirror, which is named The Mirror of Erised, shows the person who looks into it their own reflection with their deepest desire come true. When Harry looks into it for the first time in this passage of the novel, he sees himself surrounded by his parents:

⁹⁸ A. Randal and V. Guillaume, ‘*L’existentialisme est un humanisme*’ de Jean-Paul Sartre (*Analyse de l’œuvre*), *op. cit.*, 2011, 14.

⁹⁹ J.K. Rowling, *PS*, *op. cit.*, 225.

A woman standing right behind his reflection was smiling at him and waving. He reached out her hand and felt the air behind him. If she was really there, he'd touch her, their reflections were so close together, but he felt only air—she [...] existed only in the mirror. [...] The tall, thin, black-haired man standing next to her put his arm around her.¹⁰⁰

It therefore appears that the Mirror of Erised could be interpreted in relation to determining situations. It is interesting to note the use of the verb 'existing' to refer to Lily, which depicts the fact that she can only be, without having the possibility to build her essence anymore, emphasised by the adverb 'only' which connotes an idea of impossibility. Here, it shows Harry's wish to change his own situation of being an orphan after his parents were killed by Lord Voldemort when he was only a baby, to be surrounded by his father and his mother, who would still be alive. However, not only is this impossible, but it would also alter Harry's entire situation. Indeed, if Lily and James Potter were still alive, it is likely that Lord Voldemort would not have been weakened by Harry after his mother's sacrifice and protection, and Harry would not be the wizard he is today, famous for defeating the Dark Lord as a baby. His entire life would be different. In that sense, it seems that the Mirror of Erised is a symbolic representation of determining situations, as it shows a reflection which, according to the person who looks into it, would be a better situation than the one they have, in which they would be happier. Immediately after he discovers this mirror, Harry shows it to Ron, who looks at his own reflection:

'I'm alone—but I'm different—I look older—and I'm Head Boy!'

'What?'

'I am—I'm wearing the badge like Bill used to—and I'm holding the House Cup and the Quidditch Cup—I'm Quidditch captain, too!'¹⁰¹

In this passage, Ron sees a completely different reflection than Harry's when he looks into the mirror himself, as he can picture himself being Head Boy of his Hogwarts' House, Gryffindor, and winning both the House Cup and the Quidditch Cup. Indeed, being the last boy of a family of six brothers and one daughter, Ron tends to have less attention from his parents and fears being less successful than his brothers. Therefore, when he looks at his reflection in the Mirror of Erised, Ron sees himself slightly older, either to represent that he no longer is the youngest of his brothers or to picture himself in the future, and successful, which shows how he wishes to modify his own situation.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

In that sense, it appears that the Mirror of Erised is inextricably tied up with the question of happiness in relation to situations, as the person who looks into it sees themselves with another situation, in which they would be happier than with their current one. Therefore, the person who sees their reflection with a better situation blames, consciously or not, their present situation for their misfortune. This idea is highlighted by Professor Dumbledore later on in this first volume:

The happiest man on earth would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror, that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly as he is. [...] The Mirror will be moved to a new home tomorrow, Harry, and I ask you not to go looking for it again. If you ever do run across it, you will now be prepared. It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that.¹⁰²

Here, it appears that the Mirror is only magical for an unhappy person, that is to say in this context, a person who blames their situation and wishes to have another. In this passage, the words ‘dreams’ and ‘live’ appear to be used in an oxymoronic context, in which staying stuck in dreams, which Dumbledore refers to in this context as a synonym for different situations, would prevent the person from truly living. Professor Dumbledore therefore advises Harry to stop wishing for a different situation and blaming his own and tells him that the most important thing is to live. But what does Professor Dumbledore mean by ‘live?’ How is a person supposed to live according to Rowling’s novels?

III. Freedom of action and free will: you are free to become what you choose to be

In the *Harry Potter* novels, there is therefore a form of conflict between determinism and free will, in which the series could be interpreted to be on the side of free will. Indeed, Rowling appears to oppose her wisest characters to divination and demonstrate how there always seems to be a choice in the series.

A. The opposition between the ‘science’ of Divination and the wisest characters of the series

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 231.

To begin with, as seen earlier in this dissertation, the novels articulate an opposition between Divination with characters who believe the possibility of predicting the future, against characters who reject this idea in favour of free will, and all the wisest characters of the series appear to refute the possibility of Divination as an exact science.

1. Hermione Granger

The character of Hermione Granger, Harry and Ron's best friend, is depicted as one of the smartest and most brilliant witches of her time. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, she is given by Professor McGonagall—with the authorisation of Professor Dumbledore—a Time-Turner, which allows her to take all the optional classes of the year, including Divination. However, Hermione started to despise Divination as soon as she had her first class with Professor Trelawney:

'I think Divination seems very woolly,' she said, searching for her page. 'A lot of guesswork, if you ask me. [...] If being good at Divination means I have to pretend to see death omens in a lump of tea leaves, I'm not sure I'll be studying it much longer!'¹⁰³

In this passage, we can see how Hermione not only despises Divination but also discredits it as a science. She states that it is vague and imprecise and uses words such as 'guesswork' and 'pretend' which shows how dubious this subject is, based on interpretation rather than actual facts. Eventually, Hermione even stops going to Divination classes, which is very important to note as she is a character who is interested in many subjects and who likes to expand her knowledge on every one of them. In that sense, the fact that she drops out of Divination can be considered as a rather revolutionary act for her character and shows how much she rejects it.

2. Professor McGonagall

Moreover, several Hogwarts' professors also appear to stand against Divination and to reject it as a science. This is the case of Professor McGonagall, Hogwarts' Professor of Transfiguration and Head of Gryffindor House. Indeed, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry and his classmates go to their Transfiguration class directly after their Divination class, in which Professor Trelawney predicted Harry's death after she saw the

¹⁰³ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, *op. cit.*, 85.

Grim, considered to be a death omen, when reading his tea leaves. After seeing the worried faces of her students and realising that they had gotten out of Divination, Professor McGonagall sarcastically asks ‘which of [them] will be dying this year,’ which shows that Professor Trelawney apparently predicted the death of a student every year. When Harry tells her that it is his death that their Divination professor predicted, Professor McGonagall’s reaction is the following:

‘Then you should know, Potter, that Sybill Trelawney has predicted the death of one student a year since she arrived at this school. None of them has died yet. Seeing death omens is her favourite way of greeting a new class. If it were not for the fact that I never speak ill of my colleagues—’ Professor McGonagall broke off, and they saw that her nostrils had gone white. She went on, more calmly, ‘Divination is one of the most imprecise branches of magic. I shall not conceal from you that I have very little patience with it.’¹⁰⁴

This passage illustrates Professor McGonagall’s hostility towards the subject of Divination, represented through a climatic description of this field of study, in which Hogwarts’ Professor of Transfiguration begins by stating a fact (namely that ‘Sybill Trelawney has predicted the death of one student a year’), and continues by sarcastically comparing ‘greeting’ and predicting the death of a student as synonyms when she refers to Professor Trelawney’s class. The climax of this gradational reaction to the subject of Divination is reached when Professor McGonagall is about to ‘speak ill’ of her colleague, which she prevents herself from doing, represented through the dash in this passage. The fact that Professor Trelawney predicts the death of a student every year therefore truly gets on her nerves, which is represented by the way her face and her tone change simply by mentioning it. She states that none of Professor Trelawney’s death predictions came true, and that Divination is far from being an accurate science and should not be taken as such.

3. Professor Dumbledore

Professor Albus Dumbledore, Hogwarts’ Headmaster, is one of the wisest characters of the *Harry Potter* novels. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry discusses the question of Divination in relation to Professor Trelawney’s prophecies with Professor Dumbledore and the latter declares that ‘it was against [his] inclination to allow the subject of Divination to continue at all’¹⁰⁵. This passage demonstrates perfectly how Professor

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁰⁵ J.K. Rowling, *OP, op. cit.*, 740.

Dumbledore himself rejects the subject of Divination as a science, as he wanted to stop it from being taught at Hogwarts. According to Marianne Chaillan, ‘la leçon de Dumbledore est claire : il n’y a pas de destin, et donc pas de prophétie possible. Nous ne sommes pas déterminés. Les actions humaines sont soumises à la contingence, et peuvent se produire ou non’¹⁰⁶. In that sense, the fact that Professor Dumbledore does not believe in Divination and Professor Trelawney’s prophecies proves how he acts in favour of free will, according to which there is no such thing as a written future, but rather only a series of consequences of our actions.

Towards the end of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Sirius Black, Harry’s godfather, is going to be sent to Azkaban although he is innocent and Hagrid’s hippogriff Buck has been sentenced to death. Professor Dumbledore then advises Hermione to go back in time in order to change the course of events:

‘What we need,’ said Dumbledore slowly, and his light blue eyes moved from Harry to Hermione, ‘is more time.’ [...] ‘Now, pay attention,’ said Dumbledore, speaking very low, and very clearly. ‘Sirius is locked in Professor Flitwick’s office on the seventh floor. Thirteenth window from the right of the West Tower. If all goes well, you will be able to save more than one innocent life tonight.’ [...]

Hermione turned the hourglass over three times. The dark ward dissolved. Harry had the sensation that he was flying very fast, backward. A blur of colours and shapes rushed past him, his ears were pounding, he tried to yell but couldn’t hear his own voice—[...]

‘We’ve gone back in time,’ Hermione whispered, lifting the chain off Harry’s neck in the darkness. ‘Three hours back...’¹⁰⁷

In this passage, Dumbledore suggests the possibility of changing the course of events by going back in time with Hermione’s Time-Turner and doing things differently. In that sense, he stands against Divination and the possibility of predicting the future, as, according to him, the future is simply the result of our actions, and hadn’t these actions been the same, the future would be completely different. The Time-Turner therefore could be interpreted as the perfect representation of the theory according to which the future is the result of our free will and cannot be foretold, as Dumbledore invites Hermione and Harry to change the course of events¹⁰⁸: ‘Hasn’t your experience with the Time-Turner taught you anything, Harry? The consequences of our actions are always so complicated, so diverse, that predicting the future is a very difficult business indeed... Professor Trelawney, bless her, is living proof of

¹⁰⁶ M. Chaillan. *Harry Potter à l’école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 90.

¹⁰⁷ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, op. cit., 288.

¹⁰⁸ M. Chaillan. *Harry Potter à l’école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 92.

that...'¹⁰⁹ Here, Professor Dumbledore explicitly admits that Professor Trelawney's unrealised prophecies are the proof that predicting the future is almost impossible—although he does not say that it necessarily is, and that it is sometimes indeed possible—for the pure and simple reason that it is the result of our actions, and that a million different possible choices can lead to a billion different possible futures. Chaillan writes that the Time-Turner therefore is the proof that 'nos actes sont la source de l'avenir et non qu'ils sont comme lui, à titre d'événements confatals, prévus'¹¹⁰.

B. 'The Chosen One': the prophecy and Voldemort's choice

In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry and Dumbledore have a discussion about Professor Trelawney's prophecy. Hogwarts' Headmaster tells Harry that he had gone to meet an applicant for the post of Divination professor at Hogwarts, who turned out to be Professor Trelawney, the great-great-granddaughter of the famous Seer Cassandra Trelawney. When Professor Dumbledore told Sybill Trelawney that she did not fit the job and began to leave, the Seer made the following prophecy:

'The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies...'¹¹¹

This prophecy, which is at the heart of the *Harry Potter* novels, refers to a person whose parents would have defied Lord Voldemort three times and who was born at the end of the month of July. When Severus Snape, who was a Death Eater at that time, overheard the prophecy made by Sybill Trelawney, he immediately went and told the Dark Lord, who presupposed it referred to Harry Potter, as he was born on the 31st of July 1980 and his parents, who were members of the Order of the Phoenix against Lord Voldemort. However, Professor Dumbledore declares that the prophecy never explicitly mentions Harry Potter, or even the gender of the person to whom it refers:

'The odd thing is, Harry,' he said softly, 'that it may not have meant you at all. Sybill's prophecy could have applied to two wizard boys, both born at the end of July that year, both of whom had

¹⁰⁹ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, *op. cit.*, 311.

¹¹⁰ M. Chaillan. *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, *op. cit.*, 92.

¹¹¹ J.K. Rowling, *OP*, *op. cit.*, 741.

parents in the Order of the Phoenix, both sets of parents having narrowly escaped Voldemort three times. One, of course, was you. The other was Neville Longbottom. [...] You are forgetting the next part of the prophecy, the final identifying feature of the boy who could vanquish Voldemort. . . . Voldemort himself would “mark him as his equal.” And so he did, Harry. He chose you, not Neville. He gave you the scar that has proved both blessing and curse.’¹¹²

In that sense, it appears that it is Voldemort himself, perhaps out of fear that someone might defeat him and therefore in an attempt to prevent it from happening, who set the prophecy into motion and who made it real. According to Bilemdjian, ‘[la liberté] est [...] tellement inconfortable, privant l’homme de toute assise ontologique justificatrice de son existence, que la première attitude à son égard semble être une tentative pour la fuir’¹¹³. In that sense, it seems that Voldemort’s choice to believe Sybill Trelawney’s prophecy and to act against it by going after Harry was an attempt for him to have control over the unpredictability of the future. Sartre states that ‘l’homme existe d’abord, c’est-à-dire que l’homme est d’abord ce qui se jette vers un avenir et ce qui est conscient de se projeter dans l’avenir’¹¹⁴. This is precisely what Voldemort did by believing the prophecy and therefore fulfilling it. Indeed, the prophecy has only become true because Voldemort decided to make it true, by choosing Harry as his nemesis. Dumbledore’s semantic choices demonstrate this idea as he uses the word ‘choose’ to refer to Lord Voldemort’s interpretation of the prophecy. By going after Harry, Voldemort accomplished his essence. Dumbledore’s use of the oxymoronic words ‘blessing’ and ‘curse’ to refer to Voldemort’s choice shows how nothing is predetermined. Indeed, the prophecy could be interpreted in multiple different ways, either as a curse—for Voldemort who now has a nemesis with the power to defeat him, or for Harry who now has to spend his life on the run from Voldemort—or as a blessing—as Voldemort now has the possibility to kill Harry and therefore reach absolute power, as well as for Harry and the rest of the wizarding community who now have the possibility to defeat Voldemort and to finally live in peace. According to Randal and Guillaume, ‘[l’homme] est entièrement responsable, autant de ses passions que de son interprétation du monde’¹¹⁵. It is therefore Voldemort himself who wrote his future by choosing to give credit to Sybill Trelawney’s prophecy. Katrin Dahlbäck writes that:

It had thus not been decided to whom the prophecy was referring: it was not a matter of fate, but rather a matter of choice. Since ‘Voldemort himself would mark him as his equal’ [...] it is

¹¹² J.K. Rowling, *OP, op. cit.*, 742.

¹¹³ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur ‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme’ de Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit.*, 65.

¹¹⁴ J.-P. Sartre, *L’existentialisme est un humanisme, op. cit.*, 23.

¹¹⁵ A. Randal and V. Guillaume, *‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme’ de Jean-Paul Sartre (Analyse de l’œuvre), op. cit.*, 2011, 7.

suggested that Voldemort was the only one who could make the prophecy come true: he was the only one who could choose which of the two children the prophecy would end up referring to.¹¹⁶

In that sense, Lord Voldemort is the one who chose Harry Potter to be his nemesis, and who, by the same token, gave the latter the power to vanquish him as the prophecy states it. It is explicitly mentioned in the prophecy that Voldemort would ‘mark him as his equal,’ which puts the responsibility in his hands only. Besides, the fact that Harry is referred to as ‘The Chosen One’ multiple times throughout the novels highlights this idea that nothing was predetermined and that, on the contrary, Voldemort actually fulfilled the prophecy and chose Harry to become ‘the one with the power to vanquish’ him, rather than Neville for instance. Professor Dumbledore declares that ‘Voldemort made a grave error and acted on Professor Trelawney’s words [...] and himself created his worst enemy, just as tyrants everywhere do’¹¹⁷. In the last volume of the series, even Lord Voldemort himself eventually admits his mistake when he states that ‘[t]here have been too many mistakes where Harry Potter is concerned’ and that ‘some of them have been [his] own’¹¹⁸. In that sense, Voldemort recognises and acknowledges his part of responsibility in the life he has created for himself and no longer blames it on the prophecy, as it is his own choices which led to his current situation. He therefore appears to move up on the Sartrean scale of bad faith as he realises that the future he feared so much was nothing more than the result of his actions and choices, yet he keeps giving credit to the prophecy as he is still convinced that one must kill the other.

C. Freedom of choices

The *Harry Potter* novels could therefore be analysed as the perfect representation of Sartre’s theory according to which every human being is born with unlimited free will and everything that happens is the result of our absolute freedom of choices. To support this idea, this section will focus on three examples in the series: the Sorting Ceremony, the case of Sirius Black and the case of Dobby the house-elf.

1. The case of Harry Potter and the Sorting Ceremony

¹¹⁶ Katrin Dahlbäck, *The True Master of Death. An Existential Reading of Harry Potter*, Stockholm University Department of English, 2013, 47.

¹¹⁷ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, *op. cit.*, 476.

¹¹⁸ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, *op. cit.*, 13.

In the first volume of the series, the reader is introduced to the Sorting Ceremony as Harry and the other wizards and witches from his year arrive at Hogwarts. The Sorting Ceremony takes place in Hogwarts' Great Hall, in front of all the teachers and the other students. The new students have to put on a hat, called the Sorting Hat, which will analyse their faculties and qualities and assign them to a house. It is stated that '[e]very year, this aged old hat, patched, frayed, and dirty, sorted new students into the four Hogwarts houses (Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin)'¹¹⁹.

Before Harry has to get sorted, Hagrid tells him that '[t]here's not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin' and that 'You-Know-Who was one'¹²⁰, alluding that Slytherin was not a good house to be sorted into, as he affirms that every evil witch or wizard went to Slytherin. Taking Hagrid's words into account, Harry begs the Sorting Hat not to put him in Slytherin:

Harry gripped the edges of the stool and thought, 'Not Slytherin, not Slytherin.'
'Not Slytherin, eh?' said the small voice. 'Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that—no? Well, if you're sure—better be GRYFFINDOR!'¹²¹

This passage is key in the analysis of how choices and free will are represented in the novels, as the Sorting Hat could be interpreted as a mirror of Sartre's theory regarding free will. Indeed, Harry, who has a similar situation to Lord Voldemort's—emphasised by the polyptoton of the words 'great' and 'greatness' which echo Ollivander's words—who was sent to Slytherin, refuses to be sorted in the same house, simply because Hagrid told him that every evil wizard or witch went into this house. In that sense, Harry chooses to define himself, rather than being defined by something external such as the Sorting Hat, and rejects the possibility of being evil, which is here associated with Slytherin. Katrin Dahlbäck argues that 'by requesting that the Sorting Hat should put him in Gryffindor, Harry chooses who he is and who he wants to become'¹²². In that sense, this passage could be interpreted as Harry's realisation of his free will as Sartre understands it. In his analysis of the Sorting Ceremony, Bassham writes that 'our abilities show us what we can do, but our choices reveal most clearly our qualities of character and what we care about most deeply'¹²³, meaning that

¹¹⁹ J.K. Rowling, *CS, op. cit.*, 61.

¹²⁰ J.K. Rowling, *PS, op. cit.*, 90.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹²² Katrin Dahlbäck, *The True Master of Death. An Existential Reading of Harry Potter, op. cit.*, 44.

¹²³ Gregory Bassham, 'Choices vs. Abilities. Dumbledore on Self-Understanding', in G. Bassham and W. Irwin, eds, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy. Hogwarts for Muggles, op. cit.*, 170.

although Harry has the necessary qualities to be sorted into Slytherin, it is who he decides to be which matters here.

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry sees the Sorting Hat again in Dumbledore's office and questions it:

'You've been wondering whether I put you in the right House,' said the hat smartly. 'Yes... you were particularly difficult to place. But I stand by what I said before—' Harry's heart leapt—'you would have done well in Slytherin—' [...]
'You're wrong,' he said aloud to the still and silent hat.¹²⁴

Here, although he appears to have some doubts and hesitations about the decision of the Sorting Hat to finally put him in Gryffindor, Harry pulls himself together and maintains his position about refusing to be sorted into Slytherin. In that sense, Harry does not let himself be determined by his situation and chooses to become the person he wants to be—that is to say brave and good. Besides, it could be relevant to note that there is a form of anticlimactic gradation in the way the hat refers to Harry's capacities as a Slytherin, which shifted from 'great' in the first novel to just 'well' in this passage, which demonstrates that Harry managed to win his spurs as a Gryffindor and to define himself. Dahlbäck writes that:

It is not predetermined which house he should be in: rather, by choosing to state his opinion concerning the matter, and by advocating his free will, Harry achieves his freedom. It is, in turn, this action, the courage of achieving freedom, that determines that he belongs in Gryffindor, not Slytherin.¹²⁵

In that sense, the Sorting Ceremony appears to be the perfect example of how Rowling's novels act in favour of free will, as the reader learns, when they enter Hogwarts with Harry, that they can choose to become whoever they want, and that what their life will be is entirely up to them. According to Dahlbäck, the 'Sorting Hat does not offer the students a choice; rather, they have to achieve their freedom by realizing that there is a possible choice to be made'¹²⁶. Therefore, the Sorting Ceremony pushes students to not accept their situation as determining but rather to choose who they want to be. In the epilogue of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, which marks the end of the series, Harry tells his son Al that '[t]he Sorting Hat takes [their] choice into account'¹²⁷. The series could therefore be interpreted as ending on an existential lesson on free will and freedom of choices.

¹²⁴ J.K. Rowling, *CS*, *op. cit.*, 154.

¹²⁵ Katrin Dahlbäck, *The True Master of Death. An Existential Reading of Harry Potter*, *op. cit.*, 43.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²⁷ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, *op. cit.*, 607.

2. The case of Sirius Black

The character of Sirius Black is introduced in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, as one of James Potter's best friends and Harry's godfather. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry and his godfather stand in front of Sirius' family tree, which is titled 'The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black: "Toujours Pur,"'¹²⁸ which shows how Sirius' family believed in the supremacy of pureblood wizards as opposed to half-bloods and Muggle-borns. In this passage, Sirius tells Harry that he left his family because of their convictions:

'But... why did you..?'

'Leave?' Sirius smiled bitterly and ran a hand through his long, unkempt hair. 'Because I hated the whole lot of them: my parents, with their pure-blood mania, convinced that to be a Black made you practically royal... my idiot brother, soft enough to believe them... [...] Stupid idiot . . . he joined the Death Eaters.' [...]

'Were—were your parents Death Eaters as well?'

'No, no, but believe me, they thought Voldemort had the right idea, they were all for the purification of the Wizarding race, getting rid of Muggle-borns and having purebloods in charge.'¹²⁹

Sirius therefore refused to be determined by his situation according to which he should have agreed with his family's beliefs. Instead, he fulfilled his free will by choosing to stand for his own convictions and running away from his family, whose beliefs are rejected with the repetition of the adjective 'idiot' used twice to refer to his brother in this passage. He therefore chose to be a different person than his family members. Furthermore, when Harry realises that Bellatrix Lestrange, one of Voldemort's most loyal Death Eaters, is Sirius' cousin, the latter states that '[a]s far as [he's] concerned, they're not [his] family'¹³⁰. In that sense, Sirius rejects the idea of a determining situation as he refuses to be associated with members of his family who agree with Voldemort's ideas, and accomplishes his free will by choosing to stand for his own convictions.

3. The case of Dobby

¹²⁸ J.K. Rowling, *OP, op. cit.*, 103.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

Moreover, free will does not seem to be limited to human characters in the *Harry Potter* novels. Indeed, in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, the reader is introduced to the house-elves, with the character of Dobby, who is described as a ‘little creature [with] large, bat-like ears and bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls’¹³¹. The role of house-elves is to serve the family of wizards to which they belong—usually rich families. However, Dobby chose to disobey the family he serves by going to see Harry in order to warn him about the dangers which awaits him if he goes back to Hogwarts:

‘Do they know you’re here?’ asked Harry curiously.
Dobby shuddered.
‘Oh, no, sir, no... Dobby will have to punish himself most grievously for coming to see you sir. Dobby will have to shut his ears in the oven for this. If they ever knew, sir—’¹³²

This passage shows what Dobby exposes himself to if his masters find out that he chose to go to see Harry Potter to warn him without having been allowed to. It therefore appears that Dobby acted upon his own free will and chose to be brave and do what he believed was the right thing to do—that is to say protecting Harry from Voldemort—regardless of his masters’ possible punishment or their convictions.¹³³ In that sense, even non-human characters appear to be free of their own choices in the *Harry Potter* universe, as Dobby refuses to be determined by his situation of house-elf and chooses to be good, regardless of his Death Eater masters.

D. Sartre and free will

The *Harry Potter* novels could therefore be read as an existentialist lesson, encouraging the readers to act upon their free will and make their own choices, which is not without reminding Sartre’s famous theory according which ‘existentialism is a humanism,’ which will be the title of one of his most famous works, published in 1946, and in which he states that ‘existence precedes essence’¹³⁴. The distinction between essence and existence was first thematised by Plato’s student, Aristotle, according to whom essence can be defined as what something is and existence as the fact that something is—in other words, that it exists¹³⁵. According to Sartre, ‘l’essentialisme a le tort de laisser impensée l’existence comme telle. Le

¹³¹ J.K. Rowling, *CS, op. cit.*, 15.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³³ It is declared later on in the novel that Dobby serves the Malfoy family, who are on Lord Voldemort’s side.

¹³⁴ J.-P. Sartre, *L’existentialisme est un humanisme, op. cit.*, 29.

¹³⁵ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur ‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme’ de Jean-Paul Sartre, op. cit.*, 21.

point de vue essentialiste occulte l'historicité de l'homme [...] et est une pensée idéaliste et anhistorique : elle se réfère à une abstraction d'homme n'ayant jamais existé'¹³⁶. In that sense, it appears that, for the French philosopher, the essentialist view is mistaken, as it does not take into account the question of existence. It is an anachronic perspective of human life, according to which essence would be at the centre of it. However, according to Sartre, there is no essence without existence, and existence precedes essence. He writes that 'l'homme existe d'abord, se rencontre, surgit dans le monde, et [...] se définit après'¹³⁷. In that sense, existence appears to be the blank page of human life and essence could be considered as the ink of the pen which fills the page. According to Bilemdjian, 'l'homme surgit dans le monde, existe de façon contingente, sans raison, et [ensuite] seulement il acquiert un être déterminé : une essence'¹³⁸.

Sartre's theory is therefore based on the question of existentialism, which is based on human existence and the way it should be led, taking into account the choices which can be made and the consequences of these choices. Bilemdjian distinguishes two different types of existentialism: Christian existentialism and atheistic existentialism¹³⁹. In Christian existentialism, 'le but de la vie est de se rapprocher de Dieu et d'essayer d'atteindre sa perfection en devenant un chrétien authentique'¹⁴⁰. This idea appears to be rather contradictory as human existence therefore has an aim, which is to get closer to God, and in that sense, it seems that essence precedes existence. Sartre writes that 'l'existentialisme athée, que je représente, est plus cohérent. Il déclare que si Dieu n'existe pas, il y a au moins un être chez qui l'existence précède l'essence, un être qui existe avant de pouvoir être défini par aucun concept, et que cet être c'est l'homme, ou comme dit Heidegger, la réalité humaine'¹⁴¹. Indeed, assuming that God does not exist involves that human beings have to give meaning—essence—to their existence themselves.

Bilemdjian states that 'la liberté [...] est le thème unificateur des notions de subjectivité, de projet, d'acte et de responsabilité qui sont les implications anthropologiques directes de l'axiome premier de l'existentialisme athée'¹⁴². In other words, the question of freedom is at the centre of atheistic existentialism. According to Sartre, 'la liberté précède

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³⁷ J.-P. Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, op. cit., 21.

¹³⁸ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur 'L'existentialisme est un humanisme' de Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., 23.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴¹ J.-P. Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, op. cit., 21.

¹⁴² S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur 'L'existentialisme est un humanisme' de Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., 23.

l'essence de l'homme et la rend possible, l'essence de l'être humain est en suspens dans sa liberté'¹⁴³. In that sense, essence is the result of the absolute freedom of human life, which cannot be escaped. Bilemdjian writes that:

La liberté sartrienne [...] est un fait auquel nous sommes condamnés, puisque nous n'avons pas choisi d'être libres et que nous ne sommes pas libres de cesser d'être libres. [...] Ainsi, bien que n'étant pas le fondement de son être, l'homme est responsable, de façon accablante, du monde et de lui-même comme manière d'être, de sorte que jamais rien ne peut lui arriver que par lui-même.¹⁴⁴

In that sense, human existence comes with free will, which means that any human being is responsible for their essence, which is the consequence of their choices. This idea is shared by the Greek philosopher Plato, who is 'profondément convaincu que l'homme est le propre démiurge de son destin, qu'il se sauve ou se damne librement'¹⁴⁵. Therefore, being human means being free, and this state of freedom cannot be escaped. According to Randal and Guillaume, '[l]'homme est un éternel projet, il ne se laisse pas fixer, réduire ou déterminer, il est libre : dès lors, l'existentialisme est un humanisme car il cherche à rendre l'homme à lui-même, à le mettre en face de sa liberté et de ce qu'il est'¹⁴⁶. Therefore, hiding behind determinist excuses is a way to reject this freedom. Sartre writes that 'on ne pourra jamais expliquer par référence à une nature humaine donnée et figée; autrement dit, il n'y a pas de déterminisme, l'homme est libre, l'homme est liberté'¹⁴⁷. In that sense, free will and freedom are inherent from human existence.

Conclusion

To conclude, the conflict between the possibility of a written and predictable future and the belief in free will and freedom of actions is at the heart of the *Harry Potter* series. However, the novels could be interpreted as teaching a Sartrean lesson on existentialism to the readers, demonstrating that, even in the most magical universe, there is no such thing as fate, and that magic lies within each of us.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁴⁵ Jean-Marie Lovinfosse, 'La morale de Platon', *L'Antiquité Classique*, T.34, fasc.2, 1965, 484-505, https://www.persee.fr/doc/antiq_0770-2817_1965_num_34_2_1451 (last accessed 10 June 2022), 501.

¹⁴⁶ A. Randal and V. Guillaume, 'L'existentialisme est un humanisme' de Jean-Paul Sartre (*Analyse de l'œuvre*), *op. cit.*, 2011, 13.

¹⁴⁷ J.-P. Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, *op. cit.*, 36.

According to Sartre, ‘on a toujours la vie qu’on mérite, et c’est encore une fois se masquer sa liberté et sa responsabilité que se retrancher derrière le paravent de prétendues potentialités (valeur, talent, désir...) qui ne s’actualiseraient jamais’¹⁴⁸. The same idea is arguably present in Rowling’s series, in which characters who hide themselves behind determinist excuses such as the idea of a possible fate or the question of situations actually neglect and reject their free will. Chaillan studies these two dimensions from a Sartrean perspective and writes that:

soutenir que tout est écrit, qu’il existe un Destin, semble rendre inutile toute tentative d’action puisque, se refuser à prêter notre concours à un événement, ou à l’inverse lui prêter notre concours, est encore un événement également prévu à titre de fait co-déterminé. C’est ce que l’on appellera à juste titre ‘l’argument paresseux’. Le déterminisme entraîne une paresse devant l’action.¹⁴⁹

In that sense, it appears that using determinist excuses is not only a rejection of free will, but also a form of idleness and laziness according to which there is no use in action because it would not change anything for the pure and simple reason that our future is already written, no matter what we do. This view, which is very oedipal in the sense that our actions would simply lead the way towards our inevitable future, would amount to letting life pass by us on the pretext that we do not have any power over it because of fatalism. The same idea goes for the question of determining situations:

Nous héritons tous d’une situation. Mais cette situation n’est en rien déterminante. Elle attend d’être éclairée par un projet librement choisi par son auteur. À ce titre, ce que nous sommes dépend de l’interprétation que nous donnons à la situation et non de notre situation elle-même! Nous sommes libres de nous choisir, quel que soit notre passé, quelle que soit notre hérédité. Rien ne me définit (pas même des épreuves cruelles) sinon mes choix et les actes qui les incarnent.¹⁵⁰

Situations should therefore never be considered to be determining. Indeed, it is in our power as human beings to decide what we want to do with this situation, that is to say, whether we want to let ourselves be defined by it or if we want to define ourselves through the choices we make. According to Bilemdjian, ‘[c]hoisir, c’est non seulement se choisir, mais choisir l’humanité. Tout choix révèle en effet des valeurs et, par là même, dessine une image de l’homme que je juge préférable à d’autres’¹⁵¹. In that sense, free will and freedom of choices allow us to become who we want to be and to build our qualities and values as a person. The

¹⁴⁸ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur ‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme’ de Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., 36.

¹⁴⁹ M. Chaillan. *Harry Potter à l’école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 85.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁵¹ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur ‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme’ de Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., 25.

second part of this dissertation will deal with the way this idea is represented in the *Harry Potter* series and the way the soul acts as the meeting point between free will and ethics.

PART TWO:

THE SOUL AND THE IMPACT OF FREE WILL

*'Man is a being with free will; therefore, each man is potentially good or evil, and it's up to him and only him (through his reasoning mind) to decide which he wants to be.'*¹⁵²

The *Harry Potter* novels therefore seem to stand in favour of free will and existentialism, according to which there is always a choice to become whoever you want to be. The goal of this part will be to analyse how it appears that the best choice which needs to be made is to be good in the series, focusing on the impact of free will on the soul in relation to ethics and happiness.

I. The representation of the soul in the wizarding world

The soul is an entity which is the object of many philosophical studies and attracts several fantasy authors who like to incorporate it into their stories. The *Harry Potter* series is no exception. The goal of this first section will therefore be to analyse the way the soul is represented in the novels in order to be able to understand how free will and ethics appear to be related in Rowling's series.

A. The different conceptions of the soul in philosophy

The soul is an enigmatic and mysterious entity which is a subject of division and divergence of opinion when it comes to defining it. Scott Sehon, in his analysis of the question of the soul and its representation in the *Harry Potter* series, focuses on five main different philosophical conceptions of this entity, which are necessary to take into account before we can understand how the soul is represented in the series.

¹⁵² Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, Penguin, 2005, 9.

Sehon begins with what he calls the ‘life-source view,’ born in Ancient Greece according to which ‘the soul accounts for life itself’¹⁵³, which appears to consider the soul as the source of life and that all living things would therefore have a soul. He then refers to the ‘sentience-view,’ according to which ‘the soul is responsible for sentience, the ability some organisms have to feel pleasure and pain and sense the world around them’¹⁵⁴, which claims that everything which can feel pain or pleasure would have a soul. The third conception of the soul Sehon refers to is the famous Cartesian view, named after the French philosopher René Descartes, according to whom ‘our immaterial soul is responsible only for higher-level cognitive functions, including beliefs, desires, and, especially, our ability to use language’¹⁵⁵, therefore linking the soul to our mental faculties which qualifies us as human beings. Sehon writes that in the case of the three first views, ‘the soul is usually thought to be some sort of immaterial substance’¹⁵⁶. This idea is not shared by the materialists, according to whom ‘all mental functioning, including language and emotions, is due to physical processes in the brain, and there simply is no extra entity above and beyond this’¹⁵⁷, which would mean that there is no life after death simply because there is no such thing as a soul. Finally, the last conception of the soul Sehon refers to is the sentimental view, according to which the use of the word ‘soul’ is a metaphor of what ‘makes us most human and makes life most full: our deepest emotions, our ability to love, our moral conscience’¹⁵⁸. This view, unlike the previous ones, does not seem to attribute a metaphysical dimension to the conception of the soul, but rather links it with emotions and feelings as a form of metaphorical representation of their conscience.

B. J.K. Rowling’s sentimental conception of the soul

According to Sehon, ‘Rowling’s picture of the soul is an interesting mix of views. In many ways, it seems that her conception of the soul is closest to the sentimental view, but she combines it with a metaphysics that incorporates parts of the Cartesian and sentience

¹⁵³ Scott Sehon, ‘The Soul in Harry Potter’, in W. Irwin and G. Bassham, eds, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy. Hogwarts for Muggles*, op. cit., 8.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

views'¹⁵⁹. Indeed, in the *Harry Potter* novels, the soul appears to be depicted as a separate entity from the body, thus making life beyond death possible:

“‘The last enemy that shall be defeated is death...’” A horrible thought came to him, and with a kind of panic. ‘Isn’t that a Death Eater idea? Why is that there?’
‘It doesn’t mean defeating death in the way the Death Eaters mean it, Harry,’ said Hermione, her voice gentle. ‘It means... you know... living beyond death. Living after death.’¹⁶⁰

This section will therefore tackle the different conceptions of the soul in the seven volumes of the series and the way they could be understood in accordance with the sentimental view.

1. The ghosts

As soon as Harry arrives at Hogwarts in the first volume of the series, the reader is introduced to the ghosts of the school, in which each House is represented by a ghost. Nearly Headless Nick, also known as Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington, represents Gryffindor. The Grey Lady, Rowena Ravenclaw, represents Ravenclaw, which was founded by her mother. She was murdered by Slytherin’s ghost, The Bloody Baron. Lastly, Hufflepuff is represented by The Fat Friar. Other ghosts who live in Hogwarts are introduced in the novels, such as Hogwarts’ History of Magic Professor Binns, Moaning Myrtle who was killed by Voldemort when he first opened the Chamber of Secrets, or the Poltergeist¹⁶¹ Peeves. Professor Snape defines a ghost as ‘the imprint of a departed soul left upon the earth’¹⁶². The conception of the soul as an entity which can be separated from the body therefore appears to be represented through these characters. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Sir Nicholas reflects on his decision to become a ghost and admits that ‘he was afraid of death [and] chose to remain behind’¹⁶³. This statement therefore highlights the idea that ghosts could be the representation of the soul as a separate entity from the body, therefore allowing a form of life to continue after the death of the body.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶⁰ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, *op. cit.*, 269.

¹⁶¹ According to the Cambridge Dictionary online, a Poltergeist can be defined as ‘a spirit or force that moves furniture and throws objects around in a house.’ It is an entity which likes to create trouble and chaos. *Cambridge Dictionary* [online], ‘Poltergeist’ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/poltergeist> (last accessed 18 May 2022)

¹⁶² J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, *op. cit.*, 431.

¹⁶³ J.K. Rowling, *OP*, *op. cit.*, 759.

2. Semi-ghostly appearances and The Resurrection Stone

In addition to these ghosts, Rowling also includes semi-ghostly appearances in her novels, which are first introduced in the fourth volume of the series, when Harry and Cedric Diggory are taken to a graveyard in Little Hangleton, where a ritual is performed to create a new body for Lord Voldemort to return to power, after Barty Crouch Jr. transformed the Triwizard Cup into a Portkey. Peter Pettigrew, under Voldemort's orders, killed Cedric Diggory with his master's wand. When Harry and Voldemort both cast a spell against each other, their wands, which are twins, connected, forcing one of the wands 'to regurgitate spells it has performed—in reverse'¹⁶⁴. In that case, the last spell which was cast by Voldemort's wand being the Killing Curse, all his last victims appeared under semi-ghostly forms in reverse order, which Dumbledore calls echoes, and which retain the victim's appearance and character¹⁶⁵. This passage could therefore be analysed in relation to the sentimental conception of the soul in the series, as the echoes of Lord Voldemort's victims kept their personality traits and their emotions, helping Harry defeat Voldemort. These semi-ghostly appearances thus highlight the idea that the soul appears to be depicted as a separate entity in the novels, which would be responsible for our feelings and emotions.

A similar representation of the soul can be found in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, in which one of the said hallows is called the Resurrection Stone. This stone, introduced in *The Tale of the Three Brothers*, is said to have 'the power to recall others from Death'¹⁶⁶. In the original tale, the power of the stone is described as follows:

Meanwhile, the second brother journeyed to his own home, where he lived alone. Here he took out the stone that had the power to recall the dead, and turned it thrice in his hand. To his amazement and his delight, the figure of the girl he had once hoped to marry before her untimely death appeared at once before him.

Yet she was silent and cold, separated from him as though by a veil. Though she had returned to the mortal world, she did not truly belong there and suffered. Finally, the second brother, driven mad with hopeless longing, killed himself so as truly to join her.¹⁶⁷

It is interesting to note how the possibility of coming back to life appears to be rejected in this passage, which is built on a mirror construction in which the first paragraph, which focuses on the living world, is written with the lexical field of happiness with words such as

¹⁶⁴ Joanne Kathleen Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Bloomsbury, 2013, 605.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 606.

¹⁶⁶ Joanne Kathleen Rowling, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, Bloomsbury, 2008, 90.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

‘amazement,’ ‘delight’ and ‘hoped,’ whereas the second paragraph, on the other hand, marks a rupture with the text itself and is written with the lexical field of despair to tackle the question of death, using words such as ‘silent,’ ‘cold,’ ‘suffered’ and ‘hopeless.’ Although the possibility of coming back to life therefore appears to be rejected in the series, the idea of a superior entity which can itself remain or come back after the death of the body is not excluded. Besides, these semi-ghostly appearances are depicted as ‘neither ghost nor truly flesh [...] [l]ess substantial than living bodies, but much more than ghosts’¹⁶⁸, thus highlighting the conception of a soul as a non-substantial entity which could therefore be separated by the body.

3. The veil

Another element which contributes to the representation of the soul as a separate entity from the body in the *Harry Potter* novels is introduced in the fifth volume of the series, when Harry and his friends go to the Department of Mysteries, at the Ministry of Magic, to prevent the Death Eaters from taking the prophecy about Harry and Voldemort. There, the five friends enter a room in which a mysterious veil is located:

[T]here was a raised stone dais in the centre of the lowered floor, and upon this dais stood a stone archway that looked so ancient, cracked, and crumbling that Harry was amazed the thing was still standing. Unsupported by any surrounding wall, the archway was hung with a tattered black curtain or veil which, despite the complete stillness of the cold surrounding air, was fluttering very slightly as though it had just been touched. [...] ‘Someone’s whispering behind there,’ he said [...] continuing to frown at the veil. [...] ‘I can hear them too,’ breathed Luna, joining them around the side of the archway and gazing at the swaying veil. ‘There are people in there!’¹⁶⁹

This veil, which is very enigmatic, appears to be a form of wall between two different worlds, as if there were people behind it who could only be reached by crossing it. Indeed, Rowling writes that Harry ‘had the strangest feeling that there was someone standing right behind the veil on the other side of the archway’ and that ‘he edged around the dais, but there was nobody there; all that could be seen was the other side of the tattered black veil’¹⁷⁰. It is only when Sirius, Harry’s godfather who came to help him and his friends against the Death Eaters, is killed by Bellatrix Lestrange, that the reader understands the function of the veil,

¹⁶⁸ J.K. Rowling, *DH, op. cit.*, 560.

¹⁶⁹ J.K. Rowling, *OP, op. cit.*, 692.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 693.

‘as [Sirius] fell through the ancient doorway and disappeared behind the veil, which fluttered for a moment as though in a high wind and then fell back into place’¹⁷¹. This veil therefore seems to indeed function as a passage between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and could be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the way the soul leaves the body after the death of the latter, amusingly located in The Department of Mysteries as a way to refer to the mysticism which surrounds this entity.

4. Horcruxes

Nevertheless, it seems that the most important representation of the conception of the soul as an entity which can be separated from the body in the *Harry Potter* series is introduced in the sixth novel, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, when Harry finds out about the Horcruxes. According to Professor Slughorn, ‘a Horcrux is the word used for an object in which a person has concealed part of their soul’¹⁷². Indeed, creating a Horcrux means to detach a part of our soul and put it into an object. This definition thus explicitly shows that the soul can be separated from the body, and that the former can exist without the latter. In other words, the body can be killed but the soul remains intact. It is only when the concealed part of the soul is destroyed that the person truly dies. In that sense, Voldemort, who created seven Horcruxes, did not really die after his body was killed. In the first volume of the series for instance, he has to live as parasite on Professor Quirrell’s body:

‘See what I have become?’ the face said. ‘Mere shadow and vapour... I have form only when I can share another’s body... but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds... Unicorn blood has strengthened me, these past weeks... you saw faithful Quirrell drinking it for me in the Forest... and once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be able to create a body of my own...’¹⁷³

Once again here, the soul is depicted as a non-substantial entity as Lord Voldemort, who no longer has a body of his own, describes himself as ‘mere shadow and vapour.’ The same idea is present in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, when Voldemort appears as ‘a memory [...] preserved in a diary for fifty years’¹⁷⁴. Here, it appears that the only way Voldemort remains alive is through his Horcruxes—in this specific case, his diary—, in

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 711.

¹⁷² J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, *op. cit.*, 464.

¹⁷³ J.K. Rowling, *PS*, *op. cit.*, 315.

¹⁷⁴ J.K. Rowling, *CS*, *op. cit.*, 227.

which he has concealed a part of his soul. In that sense, although he no longer has a substantial body, he does not die for all that matter and remains somewhere between life and death as long as his soul is intact.

5. The Dementor's Kiss

It therefore seems undeniable that the soul and the body can be separated in the *Harry Potter* universe. But what does the soul represent in the series? In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, a new creature, named Dementor, is introduced:

Standing in the doorway, illuminated by the shivering flames in Lupin's hand, was a cloaked figure that towered to the ceiling. Its face was completely hidden beneath its hood. Harry's eyes darted downward, and what he saw made his stomach contract. There was a hand protruding from the cloak and it was glistening, greyish, slimy-looking, and scabbed, like something dead that had decayed in water...¹⁷⁵

In this passage, the Dementor, whose face is 'completely hidden beneath its hood,' is portrayed to have a very similar appearance as Death, which is presented and personified as 'a hooded figure'¹⁷⁶ in *The Tale of The Three Brothers*. In that sense, it appears that the Dementors are presented as death-like creatures, able to take away the soul of a person and leave them in a lifeless state. Professor Lupin describes them as follows:

Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them. Even Muggles feel their presence, though they can't see them. Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the Dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself—soulless and evil.¹⁷⁷

The Dementors are very interesting to analyse in relation to the conception of the soul in the *Harry Potter* novels. In this passage, Lupin uses a bleak lexical field with words such as 'darkest,' 'filthiest,' 'decay,' 'despair' to refer to the Dementors and states that they can suck out the soul of a witch and wizard, who will then become similar to the creature who took it. In that sense, Lupin does not only describe the Dementors in this passage, but depicts by the same token what it would be like to live without a soul—as Voldemort does after dividing his

¹⁷⁵ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, *op. cit.*, 65.

¹⁷⁶ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, *op. cit.*, 330.

¹⁷⁷ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, *op. cit.*, 140.

soul in seven parts, for instance. This idea is illustrated by the Dementor's Kiss, which is described by Professor Lupin as such:

'They call it the Dementor's Kiss,' said Lupin, with a slightly twisted smile. 'It's what Dementors do to those they wish to destroy utterly. I suppose there must be some kind of mouth under there, because they clamp their jaws upon the mouth of the victim and—and suck out his soul. [...] You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no... anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever... lost.'¹⁷⁸

It is interesting to note here that the Dementor's Kiss, which leaves the victim soulless, is said to 'destroy' the person whose soul is being sucked. In other words, it appears that, in the *Harry Potter* series, living without a body is more tolerable than living without a soul, which would be equivalent to being 'empty.' Indeed, in this passage, Lupin affirms that being deprived of your soul involves being deprived of your 'sense of self'—which seems to correspond to the sentimental view of the soul, responsible for our affinities and interests—, and of your 'memory'—used a form of synecdoche to refer to all of our mental faculties as human beings, thus corresponding to the Cartesian view of the soul. Besides, Lupin asserts that '[y]ou can exist without your soul [...] as long as your brain and heart are still working.' The use of the verb 'exist,' repeated twice in this passage, could be analysed as an echo to Sartre's theory on existentialism, as it appears here that, without your soul, you can only exist. In other words, it seems that essence, which is built through free will, can only be found within the soul. In the wizarding world, it is thus the soul which allows us to become who we want to be.

C. The soul according to Plato

Before we can go any further on the philosophical representation of the soul in the *Harry Potter* series and its relation to free will, we need to make a detour via Plato's conception of the soul, as both views will in fact prove to be rather close to each other. Indeed, Chaillan writes that:

Pour Platon, l'homme est l'union d'une âme immortelle et d'un corps mortel. Selon qu'elle vit bien ou mal, l'âme connaîtra après la mort du corps un destin différent. L'homme est donc à la

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

fois corps et âme, mais ce qui le constitue proprement en tant qu'homme, c'est l'âme. C'est notre âme qu'il convient de soigner en cette vie car elle seule nous appartient en propre.¹⁷⁹

This sums up perfectly the Greek philosopher's idea according to which the body is the prison of the soul, which he developed in his dialogue *Phaedo*, which focuses on the question of the soul and the afterlife. Indeed, Plato believed in the idea that the soul remains intact after the death of the body. Chaillan explains that, in that sense, it is our soul which needs to be taken care of rather than our body. She states that, although human beings are composed of both a soul and a body, the soul is the only one which truly belongs to us, as we will eventually be deprived of our body when death comes. In that sense, it is in a possible afterlife that the soul will continue on its way, in which it will have a different path according to the life which has been led.

However, Gérard Verbeke declares that, for Plato, 'la perfection de l'homme ne peut se réaliser au-delà de la mort : l'intensité de la vie n'y est pas assez grande pour que l'homme puisse s'y développer pleinement en exerçant son activité la plus parfaite. L'idéal de la vie morale devra donc se réaliser sur terre'¹⁸⁰. In that sense, it seems that Plato's conception of the soul and morality are inextricably linked in the sense that it is morality which has an influence on the soul and its immortality. The Greek philosopher therefore describes the soul through a comparison with the city. Richard D. Parry writes that '[t]he soul has a structure similar to that of the city. As the city has three classes of citizens, the soul has three parts: reason, the spirited part (*thymos*) and appetites'¹⁸¹, and adds that:

Reason is similar to the rulers, who alone have the intelligence needed to rule in the city. Socrates holds that reason alone has the intelligence needed to guide the soul. The spirited part is similar to the auxiliaries, the aggressive military class; the spirited part is capable of such aggressive emotions as anger. Finally, the appetites are similar to the artisans, who alone in the city have money and possessions; the appetites are also possessive and consuming.¹⁸²

In that sense, the soul and the city appear to have similar structures. Michael W. Austin writes that '[f]or Plato, reason is the aspect of the human soul that desires knowledge, including knowledge of moral reality. Spirit is the aspect of the soul that desires honor and gets angry, and appetite is the aspect of the soul that desires food, drink, sex, and other bodily

¹⁷⁹ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie, op. cit.*, 32.

¹⁸⁰ Gérard Verbeke, 'Thèmes de la morale aristotélicienne. À propos du commentaire des PP. Gauthier et Jolif sur L'éthique à Nicomaque', *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 1963, troisième série, tome 61, n°70, 185-214, https://www.persee.fr/doc/phlou_0035-3841_1963_num_61_70_5205 (last accessed 22 October 2021), 190.

¹⁸¹ R.D. Parry, 'Morality and Happiness. Book IV of Plato's *Republic*', *The Journal of Education*, 1996, Vol.178, No.3, 31-47, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42741824> (last accessed 19 May 2022), 34.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 34.

pleasures'¹⁸³ Therefore, the soul needs to be taken care of in order for the person to be happy in the same manner as the city needs to be ruled in order to be prosperous. Lovinfosse states that 'un état prospère est un état juste, un homme heureux est un homme juste'¹⁸⁴. But how can we be just? How can we define justice? According to Lovinfosse, justice is 'ce qui fait que l'homme juste ne permet pas qu'aucune partie de lui-même fasse rien qui lui soit étranger, ni que les trois principes de son âme empiètent sur leurs fonctions respectives'¹⁸⁵. Justice can therefore be found through a balance between the three dimensions of the soul. According to Austin, '[w]hen reason rules over spirit and appetite, there is an inner harmony that constitutes happiness'¹⁸⁶. In that sense, it is reason, which is explicitly linked to morality in Plato's theory, which needs to rule the soul in order to be just and reach *eudaimonia*.

II. The different conceptions of morality and ethics

Sehon writes that '[i]f the soul is associated with what makes us deeply human and good, then it at least makes poetic sense that the soul would be damaged by committing the ultimate evil'¹⁸⁷. The idea according to which ethics and the soul are linked is central in the *Harry Potter* novels, in which it appears that being good is the only way to preserve the soul and therefore to reach happiness.

A. Morality, ethics: different definitions

Before we can be able to tackle the relationship between the soul and ethics in *Harry Potter*, it is necessary to define ethics and to differentiate it from morality, as these two words are often considered to be interchangeable. Paul Ricoeur writes that 'rien dans l'étymologie ou dans l'histoire de l'emploi des mots ne l'impose : l'un vient du grec, l'autre du latin, et les deux renvoient à l'idée de mœurs (ethos, mores)'¹⁸⁸. It is in the origin of this question of mores that the difference lies:

¹⁸³ Michael W. Austin, 'Why Harry and Socrates Decide to Die', in W. Irwin and G. Bassham, eds, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy. Hogwarts for Muggles*, *op. cit.*, 262.

¹⁸⁴ J.-M. Lovinfosse, 'La morale de Platon', *op. cit.*, 489.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 489.

¹⁸⁶ M.W. Austin, 'Why Harry and Socrates Decide to Die', *op. cit.*, 262.

¹⁸⁷ S. Sehon, 'The Soul in Harry Potter', *op. cit.*, 17.

¹⁸⁸ Paul Ricoeur, 'Éthique et morale', *Lectures 1. Autour du politique*. Seuil, 1991, 258.

[O]n peut toutefois discerner une nuance, selon que l'on met l'accent sur ce qui est *estimé bon* ou sur ce qui *s'impose* comme *obligatoire*. C'est par convention que je réserverai le terme d'«éthique» pour la visée d'une vie accomplie sous le signe des actions estimées bonnes, et celui de «morale» pour le côté obligatoire, marqué par des normes, des obligations, des interdictions caractérisées à la fois par une exigence d'universalité et par un effet de contrainte.¹⁸⁹

In that sense, it seems that, albeit morality and ethics both appear to have the same goal—that is to say, to live well—, they are not issued from the same source. Indeed, morality could therefore be considered to be originated from the exterior world, as a set of dogmatic rules imposed by society, whereas ethics appears to define itself from the inside, in the sense that it corresponds to an inner feeling of what is right. Ricœur continues by stating that:

On reconnaîtra aisément dans la distinction entre visée de la vie bonne et obéissance aux normes l'opposition entre deux héritages : l'héritage aristotélicien, où l'éthique est caractérisée par sa perspective *téléologique* (de telos, signifiant 'fin') ; et un héritage kantien, où la morale est définie par le caractère d'obligation de la norme, donc par un point de vue *déontologique* (déontologique signifiant précisément 'devoir').¹⁹⁰

Here, it appears that morality does not have a precise aim other than the obedience of a set of dogmatic rules imposed by society, whereas ethics, on the other hand, is based on the results of an ethical life. Alexander Larry and Michael Moore define deontology and declare that 'it falls within the domain of moral theories that guide and assess our choices of what we ought to do (deontic theories), in contrast to those that guide and assess what kind of person we are and should be'¹⁹¹. It therefore appears that morality is incompatible with Sartre's theory regarding free will, as it prevents the accomplishment of our essence due to the constraints it imposes on human beings, as opposed to ethics, which answers to an inner feeling of what is right, therefore contributing to the realisation of our freedom.

According to Chaillan, there are five different types of moralities. The first one is called 'l'eudémonisme antique' which 'désigne ainsi une morale téléologique (c'est-à-dire qui pose comme principe d'évaluation de l'action morale la fin qu'elle vise) dont la fin est le bonheur ou souverain bien'¹⁹², which could be considered as a synonym for ethics. She then refers to 'la morale déontologique,' according to which '[l]e principe d'évaluation de l'action

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁹¹ Alexander Larry and Michael Moore, 'Deontological Ethics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2021, first published on the 21st of November 2007, <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=ethics-deontological> (last accessed 20 May 2022).

¹⁹² M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 169.

morale devient alors la maxime de mon action (et non plus sa fin)¹⁹³. The third type of morality Chaillan refers to is called ‘morale conséquentialiste,’ according to which ‘une action est évaluée comme morale non plus en vue de sa fin ni de son principe, mais en fonction de ses conséquences’¹⁹⁴. She then refers to ‘la morale utilitariste,’ which can be considered as a subcategory of the consequentialist morality, defined by the need to act ‘de telle sorte qu’il en résulte la plus grande quantité de bonheur pour le plus grand nombre’¹⁹⁵. Finally, the last type of morality is what she calls ‘morale du sentiment’ ou ‘intuitionnisme’¹⁹⁶, according to which ‘certaines vérités morales nous sont connues immédiatement, *via* une intuition’¹⁹⁷.

B. Plato, Aristotle and Kant’s morality and ethics

Ricœur therefore differentiates morality and ethics in relation to what he calls *héritages*, and declares that morality has a Kantian heritage, whereas ethics has an Aristotelian heritage. The goal of this section will therefore be to take a closer look at these heritages so as to be able to understand the differences between these two terms.

According to Kant, ‘the supreme principle of morality is a standard of rationality that he dubbed the “Categorical Imperative”’¹⁹⁸, which can be defined as ‘an objective, rationally necessary and unconditional principle that we must always follow despite any natural desires or inclinations we may have to the contrary’¹⁹⁹. This categorical imperative therefore seems to act as a moral guide. According to Adam Cureton, ‘[t]he idea of a good will is supposed to be the idea of one who is committed only to make decisions that she holds to be morally worthy and who takes moral considerations in themselves to be conclusive reasons for guiding her behavior’²⁰⁰. Good will is therefore the acceptance of the moral law as valid and worthy of obedience. Cureton develops this idea and states that ‘[a]ssuming an action has moral worth only if it expresses a good will, such actions have no genuine ‘moral worth’²⁰¹.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁹⁸ Adam Cureton, ‘Kant’s Moral Philosophy’, *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2022, first published on the 23^d of February 2004,

<https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=kant-moral> (last accessed 20 May 2022).

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

In that sense, it appears that an action can be considered as moral only if it is disinterested and made without a motive other than duty. Kant therefore distinguishes a moral action and an action made in compliance with morality:

To act out of respect for the moral law, in Kant's view, is to be moved to act by a recognition that the moral law is a supremely authoritative standard that binds us and to experience a kind of feeling, which is akin to awe and fear, when we acknowledge the moral law as the source of moral requirements.²⁰²

In that sense, an action is moral when the person who performs it considers the moral law as right and worthy. On the other hand, an action which is made in compliance with morality cannot be considered as moral in itself as it is not dutiful in the sense that it has another aim than obedience. For the German philosopher, therefore, the aim of morality is not to be happy, but rather to deserve happiness by becoming worthy of it.

On the other hand, Plato's ethics, later developed by Aristotle, aims at *eudaimonia*, which can be defined as 'happiness as the result of an active life governed by reason'²⁰³. Chaillan refers to this view and writes that '[u]ne action conforme à la morale si elle me permet d'accomplir mon essence—ce en quoi réside le bonheur'²⁰⁴. Besides, Bassham states that:

One of the earliest philosophers to grapple with the issue [of choices] was Aristotle [...] who in his *Nicomachean Ethics* carefully distinguished 'choice' (*prohairesis*) from related concepts such as wish, appetite, emotion and voluntary decision. He concluded that choice is a kind of 'deliberative desire' for things that are within our power.²⁰⁵

Ethics, as Plato and Aristotle understand it, therefore appears to be built through choices which can ultimately lead to happiness—or what Aristotle refers to as 'living well,' which he uses as a synonym for *eudaemonia*²⁰⁶, and which can be reached by being virtuous. Meyer writes that 'Aristote est le père de la morale centrée sur les vertus. À la fois source de bonheur et de justice, la vertu est ce juste milieu qui permet à chacun de vivre avec bonheur tout en tenant compte des autres'²⁰⁷. Indeed, according to the Greek philosopher, virtue is the key to an ethical way of life, and therefore to happiness. According to Patterson, a person can

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Collins Dictionary [online], 'Eudemonia', <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/eudemonia> (last accessed 21 May 2022).

²⁰⁴ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, *op. cit.*, 169.

²⁰⁵ Gregory Bassham, 'Choices vs. Abilities. Dumbledore on Self-Understanding', *op. cit.*, 158.

²⁰⁶ K. Daley-Bailey, *Harry Potter and Aristotle's Cultivation of Virtue*, *op. cit.*, 1.

²⁰⁷ M. Meyer, 'L'Éthique selon la vertu. D'Aristote à Comte-Sponville', *op. cit.*, 58.

be considered as virtuous when they know ‘what is morally good and what it requires of [them]’²⁰⁸, when they ‘choose to do what is morally good because it morally good’²⁰⁹, and finally when their ‘morally good acts are done out of a firm disposition to act in such ways’²¹⁰. In that sense, it seems that ethics are not only built, but also chosen as something which resonates as being right and just. This could be analysed in relation to Sartre’s idea regarding free will, which he developed in 1946. Indeed, according to Bilemdjian, ‘il n’y a pas de vie morale sans incertitudes, sans doutes et sans déchirements’²¹¹. Sartre’s theory on free will therefore seems to be opposed to Kant’s morality, as existentialism involves the idea that we are responsible for our actions and that our choices depend only on us, in such a way that there are no instructions to follow in order to make the right decisions. It is thus by hesitating and going back on our previous decisions that one can accomplish their essence. Indeed, Seel states that ‘l’impératif catégorique ne suffit pas [et] que la morale doit à tout moment être réinventée et concrétisée selon la situation’²¹². This idea appears to be developed by the French philosopher as he writes that ‘l’homme se fait ; il n’est pas tout fait d’abord, il se fait en choisissant sa morale’²¹³. It therefore seems that ethics can be studied in relation to existentialism, as Sartre declares that ‘il faut que l’homme se retrouve lui-même et se persuade que rien ne peut le sauver de lui-même [...]’. En ce sens, l’existentialisme est un optimisme, une doctrine d’action’²¹⁴.

C. Greater good against greatest good

Chaillan’s five different types of moralities can all arguably be considered to be present in the *Harry Potter* novels. Randal and Guillaume write that ‘puisque les hommes sont seuls face à leur totale liberté, chaque choix individuel engage toute l’humanité, [...] on doit toujours se demander : qu’arriverait-il si tout le monde en faisait autant ?’²¹⁵. In the last volume of the series, the reader is introduced to the idea of ‘greater good’ developed by Gellert Grindelwald and young Albus Dumbledore, which could be analysed in relation to

²⁰⁸ Steven W. Patterson, ‘Is Ambition a Virtue?’, in D. Baggett and S. E. Klein, eds, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, *op. cit.*, 124.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

²¹² G. Seel, ‘La morale de Sartre. Une reconstruction’, *op. cit.*, 8.

²¹³ J.-P. Sartre, *L’existentialisme est un humanisme*, *op. cit.*, 78.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

²¹⁵ A. Randal and V. Guillaume, ‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme’ de Jean-Paul Sartre (*Analyse de l’œuvre*), *op. cit.*, 14.

what Chaillan refers to as *morale utilitariste*, which could be defined in terms of acting in such a way that it would result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people:

Gellert—

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 counterarguments. We seize control FOR THE GREATER GOOD. And from this it follows that where we meet resistance, we must use only the force that is necessary and no more. (This was your mistake at Durmstrang! But I do not complain, because if you had not been expelled, we would never have met.) Albus.²¹⁶

The use here of the comparative 'greater' instead of the superlative 'greatest' is rather interesting to analyse in relation to the *morale utilitariste*. Indeed, it appears that, although Grindelwald can be interpreted to use the excuse of the 'greater good' to quench his thirst for power and domination, young Albus Dumbledore seems to truly believe in the possibility of leading the highest number of people to the greatest good possible. However, Chaillan writes that, with this type of morality, '[i]l est possible ou moralement acceptable qu'une minorité soit sacrifiée ou, du moins, que son bien-être soit diminué afin d'augmenter le bien-être général'²¹⁷. This idea is highlighted when Albus' brother, Aberforth, has a conversation with Harry about his brother's past and declares that they had '[g]rand plans for the benefit of all wizardkind, and if one young girl neglected, what did that matter, when Albus was working for the *greater good*?²¹⁸. Aberforth's rhetorical question therefore seems to echo Chaillan's words, in which he blames the greater good for the neglect of a girl²¹⁹. In that sense, it appears that what the idea of 'the greater good,' which can be analysed in parallel with what Chaillan calls *morale utilitariste*, tolerates the eventuality of possible sacrifices and losses as long as it is compensated and results in the greatest good for the highest number of people, which is portrayed through Ariana's death, collateral damage of Albus Dumbledore and Gellert Grindelwald's quest for the greater good.

Eventually, Hogwarts' Headmaster rejects the idea of the greater good and abandon his convictions on the *morale utilitariste*, apologising to Harry about his youthful mistakes in the last volume in the series:

²¹⁶ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, *op. cit.*, 291.

²¹⁷ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, *op. cit.*, 175.

²¹⁸ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, *op. cit.*, 456.

²¹⁹ Here, Albus and Aberforth's sister, Ariana, who was mistakenly killed during a fight between Albus, Aberforth and Gellert Grindelwald.

For the first time since Harry had met Dumbledore, he looked less than an old man, much less. He looked fleetingly like a small boy caught in wrongdoing. 'Can you forgive me?' he said. 'Can you forgive me for not trusting you? For not telling you? Harry, I only feared that you would fail as I had failed. I only dreaded that you would make my mistakes. I crave your pardon, Harry. I have known, for some time now, that you are the better man.'²²⁰

Here, Dumbledore is portrayed as feeble, with the repetitive use of the adverb 'less,' which emphasises his fragile aspect as it is used to qualify 'old man,' which already refers to a frail person, paradoxically also compared to 'a small boy.' In that sense, Dumbledore appears to be as weak as an old person, who made youth mistakes. His former convictions are even described as 'wrongdoings,' which seems to depict how the *morale utilitariste* is eventually rejected in the *Harry Potter* universe. Besides, Dumbledore is described in opposition to Harry, which he calls 'the better man.' Indeed, Harry, as opposed to Dumbledore, always rejects the idea of the 'greater good,' as he constantly refuses to sacrifice anyone. Chaillan writes that 'Harry refuse tout sacrifice—fût-il nécessaire au 'plus grand bien''²²¹.

D. The rejection of deontological morality in the wizarding world

To begin with, the previous sections have demonstrated that deontological morality, as Kant views it, can be defined as a set of dogmatic rules and instructions intended to guide a person towards being good, and that an action can be considered as moral if it can universally be defined as such. In the *Harry Potter* novels however, this does not seem to always be the case. Indeed, Harry, Ron and Hermione are often portrayed breaking rules and lying to get what they want²²². In the first volume of the series, for instance, in order to prevent Voldemort from getting the Philosopher's Stone which is hidden at Hogwarts, Harry goes out past curfew as Rowling writes that he is 'going out of here tonight and [that he is] going to try and get to the Stone first'²²³. Harry's actions cannot therefore be qualified as moral as they cannot be universalised as such. It could however be considered as ethical from a teleological perspective, as Harry wishes to prevent Voldemort from going back to power, as he declares that '[i]f Snape gets hold of the Stone, Voldemort's coming back!'²²⁴. This idea is emphasised when he finds himself in possession of the Stone and Professor Dumbledore declares that

²²⁰ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, op. cit., 571.

²²¹ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 176.

²²² D. Baggett, 'Magic, Muggles, and Moral Imagination', in D. Baggett and S.E. Klein, eds, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, op. cit., 164.

²²³ J.K. Rowling, *PS*, op. cit., 291.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 291.

‘only one who wanted to *find* the Stone—find it, but not use it—would be able to get it’²²⁵. It is thus not the action in itself which matters, but rather the end of that action. In that sense, even if Harry lied about his reflection in the Mirror of Erised, his intentions were good and were rewarded. Therefore, although Harry’s actions could often be considered as immoral, it appears that it is actually the result of these actions and the intentions behind it which truly matter in the wizarding world.

In the second volume of the series, it is Ron’s sister, Ginny, who performs an immoral action as she breaks into Harry’s dormitory and steals Tom Riddle’s diary from him. However, her actions can still be considered as ethical, as the end of her actions was to protect Harry from Lord Voldemort, who communicated with Ginny through the diary. A similar pattern can be found in Dobby’s actions in this same volume, as the following example demonstrates:

‘See why I’ve got to go back to Hogwarts? It’s the only place I’ve got—well, I think I’ve got friends.’
 ‘Friends who don’t even write to Harry Potter?’ said Dobby slyly.
 ‘I expect they’ve just been—wait a minute,’ said Harry, frowning. ‘How do you know my friends haven’t been writing to me?’
 Dobby shuffled his feet.
 ‘Harry Potter mustn’t be angry with Dobby. Dobby did it for the best—’²²⁶

In this passage, Dobby admits that he intercepted the letters of Harry’s friends so that the latter would feel lonely and thus would not want to go back to Hogwarts. Although the action of stealing Harry’s letters could indeed be considered as immoral from a deontological perspective, it appears that Dobby’s intentions were good, as he wanted to protect Harry from Lord Voldemort, who wanted to open the Chamber of Secrets at Hogwarts that same year. The shift between immorality and ethics is represented in Dobby’s attitude, shifting from being ‘sly,’ in relation to immorality, to being shy and uncomfortable as he ‘shuffle[s] his feet,’ in relation to ethics. The house elf will even be rewarded for his actions with his freedom at the end of the novel. According to Baggett, ‘ethics is about more than just rigidly obeying inflexible rules; it’s about the kind of person one is and the sorts of moral goods one cherishes, such as human dignity, freedom and life’²²⁷.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 323.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

²²⁷ D. Baggett, ‘Magic, Muggles, and Moral Imagination’, *op. cit.*, 166.

In the fourth volume of the series, the reader is introduced to the three unforgivable curses: the Imperius Curse, which allows a person to have total control over another²²⁸, the Cruciatus Curse, which tortures its victim²²⁹, and the Killing Curse, of which the name speaks for itself²³⁰. Professor Moody declares that ‘[t]he use of any of them on a fellow human being is enough to earn a life sentence in Azkaban’²³¹. These three curses, which are classified as illegal by the Ministry of Magic, are therefore described as the worst possible spells which can be cast by a witch or wizard, and, according to Kant, any witch or wizard which would use one of them would immediately be considered as immoral. However, it appears that this is not a universal and undeniable fact in the novels, as the following example illustrates:

Hatred rose in Harry such as he had never known before. He flung himself out from behind the fountain and bellowed ‘Crucio!’
 Bellatrix screamed. The spell had knocked her off her feet, but she did not writhe and shriek with pain as Neville had—she was already on her feet again, breathless, no longer laughing. Harry dodged behind the golden fountain again—her counterspell hit the head of the handsome wizard, which was blown off and landed twenty feet away, gouging long scratches into the wooden floor. ‘Never used an Unforgivable Curse before, have you, boy?’ she yelled. She had abandoned her baby voice now. ‘You need to mean them, Potter! You need to really want to cause pain—to enjoy it—[...]’²³²

In this passage, Harry attempts to use the Cruciatus Curse on Bellatrix Lestrange after she killed his godfather, Sirius Black. According to Kant, the simple use of the curse would qualify Harry’s action as immoral. However, it is the end of the action which is evaluated here. Indeed, Bellatrix states that ‘[y]ou need to mean them.’ It therefore appears that it is the end of the action which matters here, as Harry, who does not deeply consider his actions to be right, fails to perform the curse. A similar example can be found in the last volume of the series, when Harry, Ron and Hermione go to Gringotts in order to break into Bellatrix’s vault and find a Horcrux. Not only would the action of breaking into a vault be considered as immoral from a deontological perspective, but Harry also uses the Imperius Curse on a goblin so as to enter the vault without being stopped. However, the spell fades rather quickly and Harry states that ‘[he does not] think [he] did it strongly enough’²³³. In that sense, Harry still fails to perform the Unforgivable Curses in the last volume of the series as the end of his actions remains ethical, which appears to be emphasised by the repetition of Bellatrix’s words in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in a flashback which comes across Harry’s

²²⁸ J.K. Rowling, *GF*, *op. cit.*, 188.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 190.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

²³² J.K. Rowling, *OP*, *op. cit.*, 715.

²³³ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, *op. cit.*, 429.

mind as Rowling writes that ‘[a]nother memory darted through his mind, of the real Bellatrix Lestrange shrieking at him when had first tried to use an Unforgivable Curse: “You need to *mean* them, Potter!”’²³⁴. Indeed, as Harry does not really intend to hurt the goblin on which he cast the spell, the curse is not efficient enough. Besides, Harry’s intentions can even be considered as ethical as he uses the Unforgivable Curse in order to destroy the Horcrux in Bellatrix’s vault, so as to be able to finally defeat Voldemort. The *Harry Potter* series could therefore be interpreted to stand in favour of ethics—or eudaimonistic morality—and sentimentalism.

III. To be virtuous is to be happy

According to Jerry L. Walls, ‘one fundamental assumption of traditional morality is that our ultimate happiness and well being is served [...] by being moral’²³⁵. In that sense, free will appears to be the key to reaching happiness. Human beings are born with free will, which allows them to make choices which they consider to be right, and that they can therefore choose to be happy by being ethical, that is to say, as Aristotle defines it, virtuous. Walls states that ‘[t]his assumption makes sense if there is life after death and we are accountable for our actions in such a way that our eternal happiness depends on doing the right thing and choosing what is truly good’²³⁶. This idea can be considered to be at the centre of the *Harry Potter* novels, in which it appears that happiness is only reached by being virtuous.

A. Happiness: a definition from ancient Greece

First and foremost, we need to take a closer look at the definition of happiness from an ancient Greek perspective. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that the ultimate end of an ethical life is happiness. Indeed, for Aristotle, ‘happiness refers to a life of well-being or flourishing: a life that goes well for you’²³⁷. In that sense, it appears that, if human beings are free of becoming whoever they want to be and choosing the life which they consider to be right, they can thus choose to become happy. Indeed, Aristotelians, as well as

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 429.

²³⁵ J. L. Walls, ‘Heaven, Hell, and Harry Potter’, *op. cit.*, 70.

²³⁶ J. L. Walls, ‘Heaven, Hell, and Harry Potter’, *op. cit.*, 70.

²³⁷ Dan Haybron, ‘Happiness’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 6th, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/happiness> (last accessed 10 October 2021).

Platonicians before them, ‘take well-being (*eudaimonia*) to consist in a life of virtuous activity—or more broadly, the fulfillment of our human capacities’²³⁸. Happiness can therefore be reached by the accomplishment of our essence as human beings, condemned to be free. In other words, our own happiness depends only on us. Lovinfosse writes that ‘[le] bonheur consistera à accomplir sa fonction propre, du mieux qu’il peut, à maintenir en son âme une harmonie parfaite’²³⁹. In ancient Greece, the concept of happiness is thus closely related to the question of the soul. Indeed, we have seen that, for Plato, *eudaimonia* can be reached by a form of balance between the three dimensions of the soul, namely reason, the spirited part and appetites, and it is only when the soul is ruled by reason that one can be ethical, and therefore happy. Gabriela Roxana Carone writes that, for Plato, ‘even if you are suffering the most severe of misfortunes, or circumstances that the many way count as detrimental to your happiness, in reality—and despite appearances—all that matters to your happiness is virtue’²⁴⁰. Therefore, it appears that virtue is the meeting point between free will and happiness. According to Plato, to be virtuous is to be just. Roxana Carone states that ‘the just person is happy, and the unjust is miserable’²⁴¹, which is an idea developed by Plato in the first book of his *Republic*, introduced in the *Gorgias*. This idea appears to be illustrated in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*:

What was making Harry feel so horrified and unhappy was not being shouted at or having jars thrown at him—it was that he knew how it felt to be humiliated in the middle of a circle of onlookers, knew exactly how Snape had felt as his father had taunted him, and that judging from what he had just seen, his father had been every bit as arrogant as Snape had always told him.²⁴²

Here, the use of the adjective ‘unhappy’ to refer to Harry’s state of mind after entering Snape’s memories is very interesting to analyse from a Platonic perspective regarding happiness. Indeed, in this passage, Harry finds out about his father’s past immoral actions and the way he used to bully Severus Snape. In eudaimonism, to be ethical is to be happy. When Harry realises how unethical his father was in his youth, he feels ‘unhappy.’ Ethics and happiness therefore seem to be inextricably tied up in the wizarding world. Besides, ethics can be considered as the answer to an inner feeling of what is right for yourself as well as for others. Here, although Harry despises Snape, he still feels sorry for him. According to Meyer,

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ J.-M. Lovinfosse, ‘La morale de Platon’, *op. cit.*, 491.

²⁴⁰ Gabriela Roxana Carone, ‘Pleasure, Virtue, Externals and Happiness in Plato’s Laws’, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Oct. 2002, Vol.19, n°4, 327-342, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27744930> (last accessed 25 May 2022), 327.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁴² J.K. Rowling, *OP, op. cit.*, 573.

‘c’est par notre relation à autrui (*pathos*) que la morale se définit selon Aristote’²⁴³. In that sense, Harry’s ethics is built in relation to Snape’s memories, with which he can relate as he was himself bullied by his cousin Dudley and his friends before he came to Hogwarts.

B. Criteria of the ethical action in *Harry Potter* and Plato’s Ring of Gyges

In the *Republic*, Plato introduces the myth of Gyges, which needs to be analysed in order to study the way ethics is represented in the *Harry Potter* novels. Paul Schubert states that ‘le mythe de Gygès sert d’introduction à la défense d’une justice en tant que but à rechercher pour lui-même, sans égard pour les éventuels avantages que l’on pourrait en retirer’²⁴⁴. In that sense, an ethical action is an action which is just and selfless. Schubert adds that ‘[d]ans sa version du mythe de Gygès, Platon introduit un élément crucial que l’on ne trouve pas tel quel dans les autres versions : il s’agit de l’anneau, en tant qu’objet procurant l’invisibilité’²⁴⁵. It is this object which serves to evaluate the criteria of the moral or ethical action in this myth. In his *Republic*, Plato describes the ring of Gyges and writes that ‘[le berger au service du roi] aperçut un cadavre [...] qui avait à la main un anneau d’or, dont il s’empara. [...] [I]l tourna par hasard le chaton de la bague vers l’intérieur de sa main ; aussitôt il devint invisible à ses voisins, qui parlèrent de lui comme s’il était parti’²⁴⁶. This ring therefore offers the person who wears it the power to become invisible to other people, and this myth studies the actions of a person when there is no one around to judge them. Schubert explains the myth as follows:

[u]ne fois le mythe de Gygès exposé, Socrate imagine deux personnages, l’un juste et l’autre injuste, à qui l’on donnerait un anneau semblable à celui de Gygès. Le juste ne recevrait aucune récompense pour sa justice, et il s’agirait d’observer le comportement de chacun des deux jusqu’à la mort.²⁴⁷

The different uses of the ring of Gyges are therefore analysed by comparing a just person’s actions to the actions performed by an unjust person. In the dialogue which opposes Glaucon and Socrates, the former believes that none of them would be just enough to act selflessly and in compliance with what is right:

²⁴³ M. Meyer, ‘L’Éthique selon la vertu. D’Aristote à Comte-Sponville’, *op. cit.*, 58.

²⁴⁴ Paul Schubert, ‘L’anneau de Gygès. Réponse de Platon à Hérodote’, *L’Antiquité Classique*, 1997, T.66, 255-260, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41659309> (last accessed 25 May 2022), 258.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

²⁴⁶ Platon, *La République*, trad. et notes par Georges Leroux, Garnier Flammarion, 2016, 109.

²⁴⁷ P. Schubert, ‘L’anneau de Gygès. Réponse de Platon à Hérodote’, *op. cit.*, 258.

[S]i donc il existait deux anneaux de cette sorte, et que le juste reçût l'un, l'injuste l'autre, aucun, pense-t-on, ne serait de nature assez adamantine pour persévérer dans la justice et pour avoir le courage de ne pas toucher au bien d'autrui, alors qu'il pourrait prendre sans crainte ce qu'il voudrait sur l'agora, s'introduire dans les maisons pour s'unir à qui lui plairait, tuer les uns, briser les fers des autres et faire tout à son gré, devenu l'égal d'un dieu parmi les hommes. En agissant ainsi, rien ne le distinguerait du méchant : ils tendraient tous les deux vers le même but.²⁴⁸

Glaucou declares that people act morally because they are afraid of the possible repercussions and punishments which would follow an immoral action. However, the Ring of Gyges granting the person who wears it the power to be invisible, the risk of being caught performing an immoral action and therefore being punished for it is non-existent. In that sense, as Chaillan writes it, 'l'anneau de Gygès est l'artifice symbolique qui permet, en levant l'imputabilité, de démasquer le véritable motif de nos actions'²⁴⁹. Indeed, wouldn't the person who does whatever they want to do without ever being punished be happier than the one who puts morality before their personal wishes and desires? The myth of Gyges therefore differentiates an action which is performed in compliance with morality as opposed to an action which is truly ethical. Chaillan declares that:

J.K. Rowling s'inscrit dans ce débat entre Glaucou (*selon lequel si nous agissons conformément au devoir, ce n'est pas par vertu mais par crainte d'être surpris et punis*) et Socrate pour prendre le parti qui est celui de Platon et soutenir qu'une action morale est possible et que l'homme juste, loin d'être un insensé relativement à l'homme injuste, est simplement plus heureux que celui-ci.²⁵⁰

In that sense, it can be understood that a person is just as long as they act in response to what they believe is the right thing to do, regardless of the possible punishment or reward which might ensue from these actions. In other words, the person who is just and right even when no one is here to judge them is the truly virtuous one. According to Socrates and Plato, it is the just person who is the happiest, in opposition with the unjust one. This idea is articulated through several examples in the novels which appear to follow the same thought pattern as the myth of Gyges.

1. The Animagi

²⁴⁸ Platon, *La République*, op. cit., 109.

²⁴⁹ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 16.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

One of the elements which seem to evaluate the ethics of a character is introduced as early as in the first chapter of the first volume of the series, when Vernon Dursley keeps seeing a tabby everywhere he goes. Later on in this novel, Professor Dumbledore arrives in Surrey and joins the cat:

He turned to smile at the tabby, but it had gone. Instead he was smiling at a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses exactly the shape of the markings the cat had had around its eyes. She, too, was wearing a cloak, an emerald one. Her black hair was drawn into a tight bun. She looked distinctly ruffled.²⁵¹

In this passage, the reader can see the process of the cat, shapeshifting into a woman, which will later be identified as Professor McGonagall, who is an Animagus. In the third volume of the series, Professor McGonagall gives a class on Animagi and defines it as ‘wizards who [can] transform at will into animals’²⁵². Professor McGonagall, who can then herself change into a tabby, is what is called a Registered Animagus. Indeed, wizards and witches with the ability to turn into an animal have to submit their names to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement in order for the Ministry of Magic to keep track of all the Animagi in the wizarding world, as Hermione states that ‘the Ministry of Magic keeps tabs on witches and wizards who can become animals; there’s a register showing what animal they become’²⁵³. Animagi who refuse to register can be sentenced and sent to Azkaban. In that sense, it appears that the fact of turning into animals needs to be controlled by the Ministry of Magic, as, without surveillance, many could act as they please without ever being punished. Professor Remus Lupin declares that ‘there used to be three unregistered Animagi running around Hogwarts’²⁵⁴, alluding to Sirius Black, who could change into a dog, James Potter, who could become a stag, and Peter Pettigrew, who had the ability to shapeshift into a rat. The question of ethics and morality in relation to Animagi appears to lie in the reason why witches and wizards decide to change into animals. Indeed, the fact that Sirius Black, James Potter and Peter Pettigrew never registered as Animagi to the Ministry of Magic could highlight the fact that they did not want their actions to be controlled and regulated, so as to be able to do whatever they pleased. However, Lupin explains the reason behind their choice to become Animagi as a form of friendly support for him, a werewolf, who therefore had no choice but to change into an animal every month:

²⁵¹ J.K. Rowling, *PS, op. cit.*, 16.

²⁵² J.K. Rowling, *PA, op. cit.*, 83.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 257.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 258.

Now, my three friends could hardly fail to notice that I disappeared once a month. I made up all sorts of stories. I told them my mother was ill, and that I had to go home to see her... I was terrified they would desert me the moment they found out what I was. But of course, they, like you, Hermione, worked out the truth... And they didn't desert me at all. Instead, they did something for me that would make my transformations not only bearable, but the best times of my life. They became Animagi.²⁵⁵

Here, the decision of Lupin's friends to become Animagi can be considered as virtuous as they choose to do so in order to make their friends' transformation more tolerable, which can be qualified as a selfless action made out of affection for Lupin. However, as time passed, their use of their ability to shapeshift into animals changed and served other purposes. In this same volume, the reader finds out that Peter Pettigrew became a spy for Lord Voldemort, and, as he was made Secret-Keeper²⁵⁶ for James and Lily Potter, he betrayed them and faked his own death after Voldemort's downfall, therefore being on the run for twelve years. In that sense, it appears that Pettigrew used his ability to turn into a rat to an immoral end, that is to say, escaping punishment for his actions and staying close to Harry under the form of Ron's pet in order to eventually deliver the former to Lord Voldemort. On the contrary, Sirius, who was mistakenly sent to Azkaban instead of Pettigrew but who managed to escape, used his dog appearance to keep an eye on Harry so as to protect him from Lord Voldemort and his servant, all the while trying not to get caught and be sent to Azkaban again. This idea is emphasised by Rowling's symbolic choice of animals, as Sirius can turn into a dog, known for their faithfulness and loyalty, whereas the rat can be considered as untrustworthy and associated with betrayal. It therefore appears that Pettigrew could be considered as the unjust man, who refuses to act for what is right but rather out of cowardice and fear, as opposed to Sirius who seems to be the just one, risking his own freedom for the protection of Harry.

2. The Polyjuice Potion

Another element which can account as a criterion of evaluation of the ethical action is the Polyjuice Potion, introduced in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, which 'transforms you into somebody else'²⁵⁷. In this novel, Harry, Ron and Hermione decide to investigate the Slytherin heir, who has opened the Chamber of Secrets. As they suspect Draco

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 259.

²⁵⁶ A witch or a wizard meant to keep a secret by means of the Fidelius Charm, 'an immensely complex spell involving the magical concealment of a secret inside a single, living soul.' The secret cannot be divulged nor found unless the Secret-Keeper chooses to speak. Defined as such by Professor Flitwick in the tenth chapter of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*.

²⁵⁷ J.K. Rowling, *CS, op. cit.*, 120.

Malfoy, they choose to create a Polyjuice Potion in order to take the appearance of three Slytherin students and question their Slytherin enemy so as to make him confess. The creation of Polyjuice Potion, just like the ability to change into an animal, is controlled and regulated at Hogwarts, as Hermione states that ‘getting hold of the recipe [is] very difficult’ and that ‘it [is] in a book called *Moste Potente Potions* and it’s bound to be in the Restricted Section of the library’²⁵⁸. In that sense, it appears that the use of Polyjuice Potion can be very dangerous and therefore needs to be supervised, as a person who can take the appearance of another can not only act as they please without ever being punished, but can also lead to the punishment of an innocent person, of whom they would have taken the physical appearance. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, it seems that the intentions of the trio of wizards can be considered as ethical as they chose to act for what they thought was the right thing to do, that is to say the protection of Hogwarts.

However, in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the Death Eater Barty Crouch Jr. drinks the Polyjuice Potion to take the appearance of Hogwarts’ Professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts, Alastor ‘Mad-Eye’ Moody. Here, Barty Crouch Jr. appears to be irreproachable from a deontological perspective. Indeed, he keeps giving classes to the students, bonds with Harry and even helps him with the tasks of the Triwizard Tournament. However, at the end of the novel, the reader finds out that he was not the real Moody, and that he is the one who put Harry’s name in the Goblet of Fire. In addition, he only helped Harry in order to deliver him to the Dark Lord after he cast a spell on the Triwizard Cup, turning it into a Portkey²⁵⁹. Barty Crouch Jr. even faked his own death with the help of his mother, who died after she drank Polyjuice Potion, thus taking the physical appearance of her son. In that sense, it appears that the Polyjuice Potion can also be used to immoral ends, as it is used in this instance to perform evil by serving Lord Voldemort.

The Polyjuice Potion can also be found in the last volume of the series in which Hermione, Ron, Fred, George, Fleur Delacour and Mundungus Fletcher take the appearance of Harry in order to help him fly safely away from Little Whinging. In this context, the six wizards and witches do not take Harry’s physical appearance to an immoral end and to act as they please without being caught or punished. On the contrary, they choose to do so for Harry’s protection. Their action can thus be qualified as ethical as they acted for what they estimated to be the right thing to do for Harry and for the many people which could

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 121.

²⁵⁹ J.K. Rowling, *GF, op. cit.*, chapter 35.

eventually be saved if the latter vanquishes Voldemort, even risking their own lives by doing so. Later on in the same novel, Harry, Ron and Hermione use Polyjuice Potion in order to enter the Ministry of Magic without being identified, taking the appearance of people who work there. However, they do not use their different physical appearance to do immoral things which would serve their appetite, but are rather guided by reason and use it to reach Umbridge, who wears the Slytherin locket, one of Voldemort's seven Horcruxes.

3. The Invisibility Cloak

However, it appears that the most important element which could be analysed in relation to Plato's myth of Gyges and the way an action can be evaluated as ethical or not is introduced in the first volume of the series as well, during Harry's first Christmas at Hogwarts:

This left only one parcel. Harry picked it up and felt it. It was very light. He unwrapped it. Something fluid and silvery grey went slithering to the floor, where it lay in gleaming folds. Ron gasped. [...]
'It's an Invisibility Cloak,' said Ron, a look of awe on his face. 'I'm sure it is—try it on.'
Harry threw the Cloak around his shoulders and Ron gave a yell.
'It is! Look down!'
Harry looked down at his feet, but they had gone. He dashed to the mirror. Sure enough, his reflection looked back at him, just his head suspended in mid-air, his body completely invisible. He pulled the Cloak over his head and his reflection vanished completely.²⁶⁰

In this passage, Harry receives a cloak which gives the person who wears it the power to become invisible to the eyes of the others. In that sense, the Invisibility Cloak can be interpreted as a possible mirror of Plato's Ring of Gyges, allowing the person to become invisible and to therefore avoid being seen doing immoral actions and, by the same token, being punished for it. One might thus wonder why we should be ethical or moral in such a possession. With the present Harry received in this passage came the following note:

Harry pulled off the Cloak and seized the letter. Written in narrow, loopy writing he had never seen before were the following words:

Your father left this in my possession before he died.
It is time it was returned to you.
Use it well.
A Very Merry Christmas to you.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ J.K. Rowling, *PS, op. cit.*, 218.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 218.

The advice to ‘[u]se it well’ is rather interesting to note here. Indeed, Professor Dumbledore, who will later be revealed in this novel to be the sender of the present, does not tell Harry to be moral or to be good, but specifically uses the word ‘well.’ This could be analysed in relation to the Aristotelian definition of *eudaimonia*, as the Greek philosopher, as mentioned previously, believed that the only way to reach *eudaimonia* was to live well, that is to say, to be virtuous. In that sense, by advising Harry to ‘use [the cloak] well,’ Professor Dumbledore appears to tell Harry to be ethical. The Invisibility Cloak can therefore be considered as a criterion of evaluation of the ethical action in itself. Harry will indeed use it in an immoral way from a deontological perspective, but his intentions will always be good and selfless, acting in response to what he feels is the right thing to do in order to protect Hogwarts and his friends from evil and danger.

C. The immoral action as the destruction of the soul

In addition, it could be interpreted that the immoral action eventually leads to the destruction of the soul in the wizarding world. The following passage extracted from the last volume of the series appears to articulate this idea:

He had spotted the thing that was making the noises. It had the form of a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, and it lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath. He was afraid of it. Small and fragile and wounded though it was, he did not want to approach it. Nevertheless he drew slowly nearer, ready to jump back at any moment. Soon he stood near enough to touch it, yet he could not bring himself to do it. He felt like a coward. He ought to comfort it, but it repulsed him.

‘You cannot help.’ [...]

‘What is that, Professor?’

‘Something that is beyond either of our help,’ said Dumbledore.²⁶²

In this passage, Harry, who has just been killed by Lord Voldemort after he found out he was himself one of the last Horcruxes which had to be destroyed, finds himself in a form of alternate space resembling King’s Cross station. The frail and tiny creature which is depicted here can be understood to be the representation of Lord Voldemort’s soul. Rowling compares it to a child, in a form of anthropomorphism, perhaps to represent the idea that Voldemort’s soul did not develop the way it should have. This child-like representation of his soul appears

²⁶² J.K. Rowling, *DH, op. cit.*, 566.

to have been mistreated and abandoned by its owner, as the lexical field of misery demonstrates, with words such as ‘rough,’ ‘shuddering,’ ‘left,’ ‘unwanted,’ or ‘struggling’ for instance. It also appears to be weak and vulnerable, depicted as ‘small,’ ‘naked,’ ‘raw,’ and ‘flayed-looking.’ Besides, the repetition of the adjective ‘small’ to describe it seems to demonstrate how the size of Voldemort’s soul significantly reduced as he became immoral and started creating Horcruxes. In that sense, it therefore appears that the immoral action indeed destroys the soul in the *Harry Potter* universe through this symbolic representation of Voldemort’s soul. It is interesting to notice, however, that Professor Dumbledore tells Harry that it is ‘beyond either of [their] help.’ In that sense, it appears that the only person who can help mend that soul is Voldemort himself.

This theory can be studied in relation to Plato’s thoughts on the relationship between ethics and the soul as David Lucas writes that, for the Greek philosopher, ‘[s]i la raison est en quelque sorte le moyen de la morale, c’est-à-dire la faculté qui permet de distinguer le bien du mal, l’âme est effectivement le lieu où se décide si l’homme est moral ou ne l’est pas’²⁶³. In that sense, it would appear that, if it is in the soul that the ethical action of a person is judged, the immoral action would indeed lead to the destruction of this entity. This is what Lucas defines as ‘*philosophia medicans*’ according to which ‘une âme immorale est une âme malade, et la philosophie antique conçoit effectivement que les défauts de raison morale sont un problème de santé’²⁶⁴. This idea is developed by Plato in the tenth book of *Republic*:

La maladie, qui est le vice du corps, le mine, le détruit, et le réduit à n’être plus un corps; et toutes les choses dont nous parlions il n’y a qu’un instant, du fait de leur vice propre, qui s’établit à demeure en elles et les détruit, aboutissent à l’anéantissement, n’est-ce pas? [...] Eh bien! considère l’âme de la même manière. Est-il vrai que l’injustice ou quelque autre vice, en s’établissant en elle à demeure, la corrompt et la flétrisse jusqu’à la conduire à la mort, et à la séparer du corps? Nullement.²⁶⁵

In that sense, Plato compares the immoral action to an illness and states that, as the illness slowly destroys the body, the immoral action destroys the soul. However, as opposed to the body, the soul cannot die, and it therefore appears that a soul keeps existing after the death of the body, no matter how damaged it is. It therefore needs to be taken care of.

²⁶³ David Lucas, ‘La philosophie antique comme soin de l’âme’, *Le Portique* [online], first published on the 14th of June 2007, <http://journals.openedition.org/leportique/948> (last accessed 28 May 2022), 2.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁶⁵ Platon, *République*, *op. cit.*, 375.

1. The creation of Horcruxes

This idea of a ‘*philosophia medicans*’ appears to be at the centre of the *Harry Potter* series, notably through the creation of Horcruxes. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Professor Slughorn explains to young Tom Riddle how Horcruxes are created:

‘How do you split your soul?’

‘Well,’ said Slughorn uncomfortably, ‘you must understand that the soul is supposed to remain intact and whole. Splitting it is an act of violation, it is against nature.’

‘But how do you do it?’

‘By an act of evil—the supreme act of evil. By committing murder. Killing rips the soul apart.’²⁶⁶

Here, Professor Slughorn explicitly states that committing murder, which he declares to be ‘the supreme act of evil,’ destroys the soul. In that sense, it seems that the immoral action damages the soul in the wizarding world. This is precisely what the Horcruxes represent, as killing someone appears to cut the soul in half. The idea of a ‘*philosophia medicans*’ seems to be incorporated into the wizarding world from a reversed perspective, as it is here the wish to destroy the soul which needs to be done by performing the ultimate immoral action. Chaillan writes that ‘l’acte injuste souille l’âme comme l’action vertueuse accomplit son essence. La sanction de l’homme injuste est la misère de son âme et de sa vie’²⁶⁷. This idea is emphasised as Professor Slughorn states that ‘[d]eath would be preferable’²⁶⁸, which highlights the fact that not only does the soul remain after the death of the body, but also that it would be better for it to die than to keep existing in such a miserable state.

2. The rat-like appearance of Peter Pettigrew

Jennifer Hart Weed writes that ‘just as evil diminishes a human being by causing him to lose his natural goal, happiness, so evil dehumanizes the evildoer. In other words, evil actions transform an evildoer from a human being into an animal, not literally of course, but figuratively’²⁶⁹. It therefore appears that, in the *Harry Potter* series, damaging or harming our soul leads to a neglect and a rejection of our very own humanity. This idea seems to be

²⁶⁶ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, *op. cit.*, 465.

²⁶⁷ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l’école de la philosophie*, *op. cit.*, 24.

²⁶⁸ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, *op. cit.*, 465.

²⁶⁹ Jennifer Hart Weed, ‘Voldemort, Boethius, and the Destructive Effects of Evil’, in D. Baggett and S. E. Klein, eds, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, *op. cit.*, 151.

illustrated through the physical representations of the immoral characters of the series, notably with the character of Peter Pettigrew, for instance:

He was a very short man, hardly taller than Harry and Hermione. His thin, colourless hair was unkempt and there was a large bald patch on top. He had the shrunken appearance of a plump man who has lost a lot of weight in a short time. His skin looked grubby, almost like Scabbers's fur, and something of the rat lingered around his pointed nose and his very small, watery eyes.²⁷⁰

Here, Rowling uses a zoomorphic metaphor to describe Peter Pettigrew, who is depicted as having rat-like physical features even under his human appearance. This idea is highlighted by the lexical field of negligence with words such as 'unkempt,' 'plump,' or even 'grubby.' In that sense, it appears that the character of Peter Pettigrew, who spent twelve years hiding under his Animagus form of rat in order to avoid being punished for his immorality, is described as more animal than human, due to the alteration of his soul caused by his actions. The destruction of his soul is thus made visible through his physical ugliness.

3. The dehumanisation of Lord Voldemort

A similar pattern can be found in the physical changes in Lord Voldemort's appearance. Indeed, in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Professor Dumbledore and Harry go into the Pensieve to look at several memories the former has of young Tom Marvolo Riddle, who is described as 'tall, pale, dark-haired and handsome'²⁷¹. It is interesting to note that before he came to Hogwarts and even before he found out about his magical abilities, Tom Riddle was portrayed as a very beautiful young man. The physical alteration of his traits begins as soon as he learns that he is a wizard:

'I knew I was different,' he whispered to his own quivering fingers. 'I knew I was special. Always, I knew there was something.'
'Well, you were quite right,' said Dumbledore, who was no longer smiling, but watching Riddle intently. 'You are a wizard.'
Riddle lifted his head. His face was transfigured: There was a wild happiness upon it, yet for some reason it did not make him better looking; on the contrary, his finely carved features seemed somehow rougher, his expression almost bestial.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, *op. cit.*, 269.

²⁷¹ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, *op. cit.*, 340.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 254. It is also interesting to note that the adjective 'bestial' used here to refer to Tom Riddle's expression is not translated in French into the French adjective 'bestial' which would be the literal translation of the word used by Rowling in the source text. Jean-Luc Ménard rather writes that Tom Riddle's expression 'enlevait [à ses traits] d'une certaine manière un peu de leur humanité.' In that sense, it appears that the idea according to which the destruction of the soul leads to the destruction of our humanity in itself is emphasised in the French translation of this passage.

This passage is built on a chiasmic structure, the two parts which are opposed being separated by the semicolon, in which the first part represents the former beauty of Tom Riddle, and the second highlights his physical transformation, which is described as ‘almost bestial.’ In that sense, it appears that the immoral actions, as they destroy the soul, slowly drives a person to lose their humanity. Through the Pensieve, Harry and Professor Dumbledore enter a memory in which Tom Riddle started working at Borgin and Burkes²⁷³ after he left Hogwarts and refused as Professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts, and specialised in Dark Magic. His physical traits are described as follows:

Voldemort had entered the room. His features were not those Harry had seen emerge from the great stone cauldron almost two years ago: They were not as snakelike, the eyes were not yet scarlet, the face not yet masklike, and yet he was no longer handsome Tom Riddle. It was as though his features had been burned and blurred; they were waxy and oddly distorted, and the whites of the eyes now had a permanently bloody look, though the pupils were not yet the slits that Harry knew they would become. He was wearing a long black cloak, and his face was as pale as the snow glistening on his shoulders.²⁷⁴

In this passage, Tom Riddle’s immoral actions and by the same token, destruction of his soul, is represented by his physical lack of human traits, almost looking like a monster. However, Rowling insists on the fact that he was not yet at his physical worst, that is to say, that his soul was not yet damaged beyond repair. It is in the first volume of the series, fifty three years after his first year at Hogwarts²⁷⁵, that the one who now answers to the name of Lord Voldemort is described as ‘a face, the most terrible face Harry had ever seen. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake’²⁷⁶. Here, his loss of humanity and the destruction of his soul caused by fifty three years of immoral actions is represented by the zoomorphic description of Voldemort’s face, which is compared to a snake, often characterised as vicious. Chaillan writes that ‘J.K. Rowling rend physiquement visible cette altération de l’âme sous l’effet de l’injustice dont parle Platon. Plus Tom Jedusor choisit la voie de l’immoralité, plus son corps change, alors qu’il était beau, pour devenir effrayant lorsque nous le rencontrons’²⁷⁷. In that sense, it appears that Rowling’s novels could be interpreted as a literary application of Plato’s theory regarding immorality and the destruction of the soul. Chaillan adds that ‘la laideur [des traits de Voldemort], miroir de celle de son

²⁷³ An antique shop which sells dark artefacts.

²⁷⁴ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, *op. cit.*, 413.

²⁷⁵ Tom Riddle started studying at Hogwarts in 1938, whereas Harry began attending Hogwarts in 1991.

²⁷⁶ J.K. Rowling, *PS*, *op. cit.*, 315.

²⁷⁷ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l’école de la philosophie*, *op. cit.*, 24.

âme, atteste du malheur qui est le sien'²⁷⁸. It therefore seems that immoral actions indeed lead to misfortune and misery.

D. Happiness as the way to preserve the soul

Thus, in order to preserve the soul in the wizarding world, we need to be virtuous and ethical. According to Klein, being virtuous is therefore first and foremost an activity:

[T]his view—is somewhat like Aristotle's view that *eudaimonia*—or long-term, deep happiness or flourishing—is something that should be classed as an activity. To be happy, in Aristotle's sense, requires that one be engaged in the kinds of activities in which a rational animal should be engaged. Being good isn't just something someone is, it is something that one must become and be in the process of constantly and consistently becoming.²⁷⁹

In that sense, it appears that happiness needs to be cultivated by leading an ethical life. In that sense, it can be understood that the best way to accomplish our essence as human beings is through ethics, in order to cultivate *eudaimonia*. This is what Dumbledore seems to imply as, after he has asked Snape to kill him rather than letting Draco do it, in order to protect the young wizard's soul by preventing him from committing evil. In this passage, the Professor of Potions tells Dumbledore that, by doing so, it is his own soul which would be damaged, to which Hogwarts' Headmaster answers that '[he] alone know[s] whether it will harm [his] soul to help an old man avoid pain and humiliation'²⁸⁰. In that sense, Professor Dumbledore states that, on the contrary, by ending his suffering and helping Draco towards an ethical life, Snape's actions would be considered as virtuous and that soul will therefore be preserved. Besides, it appears that it truly is the end of an action which matters in Rowling's series, as Dumbledore tells Snape that he is the only one who can judge if his action is ethical or not. In other words, Dumbledore places himself on the teleological side and declares that, if Snape kills him with the intention of putting an end to his misery and preventing Draco's soul from being damaged by the same token, then his actions can be considered as ethical, as they would respond to what is estimated to be the right thing to do. It therefore seems that it is indeed by being virtuous that one can be happy, and can thus preserve their soul.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁷⁹ S. E. Klein, 'The Mirror of Erised', in D. Baggett and S. E. Klein, eds, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, *op. cit.*, 101.

²⁸⁰ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, *op. cit.*, 548.

This idea according to which the only way to preserve our soul is by cultivating happiness—that is to say, by being virtuous—appears to be at the centre of the third volume of the series, in which the spell of the Patronus is introduced:

‘The Patronus is a kind of positive force, a projection of the very things that the Dementor feeds upon—hope, happiness, the desire to survive [...]’
‘And how do you conjure it?’
‘With an incantation, which will work only if you are concentrating, with all your might, on a single, very happy memory.’²⁸¹

The Patronus is a spell which acts as a magical shield against Dementors, in order to prevent them from giving their Kiss, that is to say, from sucking one’s soul away from their body. In that sense, the representation of the Patronus could be understood as demonstrating that it is by being happy that we can preserve our soul, as it can only be conjured by focusing on a happy memory.

Conclusion

The soul therefore appears to be the meeting point between free will and ethics in the *Harry Potter* novels, in which it is the end of an action and the intention behind it which is evaluated. Richard Parry describes the relationship between the soul and ethics from a Socratic and Platonic perspective as follows:

‘In the closing passage of Book IV, Socrates addresses the question whether the life of justice is more profitable than that of injustice. [...] He claims that life with a diseased body, even if it is accompanied with all the one wants to eat and drink, is intolerable. In the same way, life with a diseased soul—i.e., one without psychic harmony—is not worth living.’²⁸²

In that sense, the soul, which remains even after the death of the body in the wizarding world, needs to be ruled by reason in order for it to be preserved. In other words, it is by being ethical and virtuous that the soul can be taken care of. The immoral action thus damages the soul. In *Harry Potter*, which could be analysed as a literary representation of Sartre’s theory regarding free will, it is through our choices and decisions that we can choose to be happy and it appears that the only way to reach this *eudaimonia* is to be ethical, or, as Plato and Aristotle believed, virtuous.

²⁸¹ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, *op. cit.*, 176.

²⁸² R.D. Parry, ‘Morality and Happiness. Book IV of Plato’s *Republic*’, *op. cit.*, 47.

PART THREE:

CHOOSING ETHICS, CHOOSING HAPPINESS

‘We call the intention good which is right in itself, but the action is good, not because it contains within it some good, but because it issues from a good intention.’²⁸³

The *Harry Potter* novels therefore seem to stand in favour of teleology, according to which it is the intrinsic value of an action which truly matters. In that sense, in the wizarding world, it appears that the best way to use free will is by leading an ethical life. Indeed, if human beings are born with free will and their essence is simply the result of their choices and actions, it is entirely up to themselves to be happy, by choosing to be ethical.

I. Same situations, different choices

David and Catherine Deavel write that ‘we are what we choose to make our lives. We are evil only if we choose evil [and] moral evil results from free choice of the will’²⁸⁴. This idea could be interpreted to be central in the *Harry Potter* novels, in which two characters with similar—or sometimes almost identical—situations can make different choices, leading them to realise their essence in radically different ways. According to Kate Daley-Bailey, in the wizarding world, ‘[o]ur choices determine who we are, or rather who we become’²⁸⁵.

A. Harry Potter and Tom Marvolo Riddle

To begin with, the clearest parallel of situations which can be made in the *Harry Potter* novels is the one between the protagonist of the series, Harry Potter, and his nemesis Lord Voldemort. The previous sections of this dissertation have demonstrated that, indeed,

²⁸³ Pierre Abélard, *Éthique ou Connais-toi toi-même*, quoted as such in D. Baggett and S. E. Klein, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, eds, *op. cit.*, 228.

²⁸⁴ C. Deavel and D. Deavel, ‘A Skewed Reflection. The Nature of Evil’, *op. cit.*, 144.

²⁸⁵ K. Daley-Bailey, *Harry Potter and Aristotle’s Cultivation of Virtue*, *op. cit.*, 2.

both wizards were born in a half-blood family. They were also orphans at a very young age, which led them to be raised by Muggles: Harry lived with his uncle and his aunt, Vernon and Petunia Dursley, whereas young Tom Riddle grew up in Wool's Orphanage. Besides, they can both speak Parselmouth, and even their wands have a similar composition, both containing a Phoenix feather, taken from the same bird. It is clear in that sense that both have very similar situations. However, the fact that the two characters grew up to become radically different people demonstrates that there is nothing predetermining in the situations which we inherit at birth and that it is our choices which build our essence.

This idea is explicitly developed in the sixth volume of the series, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, in which Professor Dumbledore shares his memories of the one who still answered to the name of Tom Riddle with Harry and declares that he 'had no idea that he was to grow up to be what he is'²⁸⁶. Here, Sartre's theory according to which existence precedes essence and that what we become is simply the result of our choices and actions can be read between the lines of Hogwarts' Headmaster, as he states that, when he first met Tom Riddle, nothing could predetermine that he would become the one who many call The Dark Lord. This idea is symbolically represented through the way the latter chose to change his name from Tom Marvolo Riddle to Lord Voldemort. Chaillan writes that 'Lord Voldemort, anagramme de Tom Riddle, symbolise comment il nous revient d'agencer les éléments de notre situation pour nous choisir nous-mêmes. Ce baptême à la première personne incarne bien ce trait de la philosophie sartrienne selon lequel nous ne sommes rien sinon ce que nous choisissons d'être'²⁸⁷. This is what the following passage seems to articulate:

'Voldemort,' said Riddle softly, 'is my past, present, and future, Harry Potter...'
He pulled Harry's wand from his pocket and began to trace it through the air, writing three shimmering words:

TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE

Then he waved the wand once, and the letters of his name rearranged themselves:

I AM LORD VOLDEMORT

'You see?' he whispered. 'It was a name I was already using at Hogwarts, to my most intimate friends only, of course. You think I was going to use my filthy Muggle father's name forever? I, in whose veins runs the blood of Salazar Slytherin himself, through my mother's side? I, keep the name of a foul, common Muggle, who abandoned me even before I was born, just because he found out his wife was a witch? No, Harry—I fashioned myself a new name, a name I knew wizards everywhere would one day fear to speak, when I had become the greatest sorcerer in the world!'²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, op. cit., 258.

²⁸⁷ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 98.

²⁸⁸ J.K. Rowling, *CS*, op. cit., 231.

Here, Voldemort appears to be the very proof that we are not predetermined by the life situations which we inherit at birth, as he happens to reject his. This symbolic anagram could therefore be analysed in relation to Sartre's theory on free will and the fact that existence precedes essence. Indeed, the letters which the Dark Lord moves from his birth name to form a new one, to which he feels like he corresponds better, could be understood to metaphorically represent the different elements of his situation which he chose to move and organise differently in order to become the person he wanted to. It is himself only, thus, who decided to walk down the path of Dark Magic and evil, through his choices and his actions.

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Rowling writes that '[t]he wand is only as good as the wizard'²⁸⁹. This statement seems to prove that regardless of the identical composition of their wands, it is what Harry and Voldemort choose to do with them and which spells are cast with these wands which truly matter. It therefore appears that the wands are indeed a metaphorical representation of their situations, and the way these situations are in no way determining, as it is entirely up to the witch or the wizard to be good or not. Moreover, David Baggett writes that 'Harry isn't always a moral exemplar, but he is learning as he goes'²⁹⁰. Indeed, as the previous sections have demonstrated, Harry is often portrayed breaking rules and lying. However, what Baggett appears to imply here is that Harry accomplishes his essence and builds his ethics as he grows up throughout the novels. In that sense, regardless of the similarity of their situations, that is to say their existence in a way, Harry and Voldemort's essence differ completely as the result of their different choices and actions. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Professor Dumbledore and Harry have a conversation about the sameness of their situations:

'Professor Dumbledore... Riddle said I'm like him. Strange likenesses, he said...'
 'Did he, now?' said Dumbledore, looking thoughtfully at Harry from under his thick silver eyebrows. 'And what do you think, Harry?'
 'I don't think I'm like him!' said Harry, more loudly than he'd intended. 'I mean, I'm—I'm in Gryffindor, I'm...'
 But he fell silent, a lurking doubt resurfacing in his mind. [...]
 'The Sorting Hat could see Slytherin's power in me, and it—'
 'Put you in Gryffindor,' said Dumbledore calmly. 'Listen to me, Harry. You happen to have many qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his hand-picked students. His own very rare gift, Parseltongue—resourcefulness—determination—a certain disregard for rules,' he added, his moustache quivering again. 'Yet the Sorting Hat placed you in Gryffindor. You know why that was. Think.'²⁹¹
 'It only put me in Gryffindor,' said Harry in a defeated voice, 'because I asked not to go in Slytherin...'

²⁸⁹ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, *op. cit.*, 286.

²⁹⁰ D. Baggett, 'Magic, Muggles, and Moral Imagination', *op. cit.*, 164.

²⁹¹ J.K. Rowling, *CS*, *op. cit.*, 244.

‘Exactly,’ said Dumbledore, beaming once more. ‘Which makes you very different from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.’²⁹²

In this passage, Harry is depicted as sad and worried as he calls the House he has been sorted into in question. The repetition of the unfinished sentence ‘I’m’ could be analysed as demonstrating that he does not know what his essence is supposed to be, due to the similarities he shares with Voldemort. This idea appears emphasised by the numerous markers of hesitations, such as the suspension points at the end of Harry’s sentences, or the lexical field of uncertainty with words such as ‘doubt’ and ‘defeated.’ However, Professor Dumbledore’s words seem to perfectly embody Sartre’s theory according to which our essence is the result of our choices rather than our situations which would be determining, as he states that ‘[i]t is our choice [...] that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.’ In that sense, Harry who chose to refuse to be sorted into Slytherin, made the decision of being good, after Hagrid told him that every evil witch and wizard had been sorted into Slytherin. The Sorting Hat could therefore be interpreted to be the symbolic representation of Sartre’s theory on free will and the way our essence is the result of our choices.

B. Young Albus Dumbledore and Lord Voldemort

However, Harry is not the only character of the series with whom Tom Riddle, later to become Lord Voldemort, shares a similar situation. Indeed, the previous sections of this dissertation have demonstrated that Albus Dumbledore, when he was still a young adult, joined Gellert Grindelwald’s side in a quest for absolute power, looking for the Deathly Hallows in order to be the Masters of Death and rule not only over the wizarding world, but also seeking dominance over Muggles, which many wizards feared during this time of Second World War, because of the destructive and deadly weapons in their possession. Nevertheless, as Dumbledore eventually rejected these convictions and ideologies and refused to continue this quest for power and dominance, Tom Riddle, who left Hogwarts at the end of the Second World War, started practising Dark Magic with the goal of becoming the most powerful wizard of his time. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort even goes after the Elder Wand, one of the Deathly Hallows, as he believes that it would make him invincible. It therefore appears that Lord Voldemort and young Albus Dumbledore share a similar situation from an ideological perspective. However, Dumbledore ended up

²⁹² J.K. Rowling, *CS*, op. cit., 244.

spurning this idea and the shift in his convictions is highlighted when he confronts the former Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge and tells him that he ‘place[s] too much importance [...] on the so-called purity of blood’ and that he ‘fail[s] to recognise that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be’²⁹³. This demonstrates how Dumbledore eventually chose to repent from his former ideology according to which wizards should dominate over Muggles and that wizards issued from pureblood families are more powerful and more important than the ones whose family trees include Muggles. Indeed, Dumbledore here once again appears to place himself on the Sartrean side as he states that what matters the most is what a person ‘grow[s] to be.’ In that sense, Dumbledore no longer believes in a hierarchy of wizards based on bloodline, which would be predetermining, but rather encourages the idea that everything is simply the result of our choices and actions and that we can choose to become whoever we want to be. This is highlighted in the following passage, extracted from *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*:

Voldemort’s expression remained impassive as he said, ‘Greatness inspires envy, envy engenders spite, spite spawns lies. You must know this, Dumbledore.’
 ‘You call it “greatness,” what you have been doing, do you?’ asked Dumbledore delicately.
 ‘Certainly,’ said Voldemort, and his eyes seemed to burn red. ‘I have experimented; I have pushed the boundaries of magic further, perhaps, than they have ever been pushed—’
 ‘Of some kinds of magic,’ Dumbledore corrected him quietly. ‘Of some. Of others, you remain . . . forgive me . . . woefully ignorant.’²⁹⁴

Here, the opposition between Lord Voldemort and Albus Dumbledore, who grew to change his convictions and his ideologies as opposed to the former, who still wishes to have absolute power and to dominate the wizarding world, is articulated through stylistic features. Indeed, Voldemort uses a gradational anadiplosis as he states that ‘[g]reatness inspires envy, envy engenders spite, spite spawns lies,’ in which he praises his own accomplishments and declares that Dumbledore has no other choice but envy Voldemort’s success and power, which would, according to the Dark Lord, led him to become immoral. However, Dumbledore, who has chosen to become a very different person, answers with an anaphoric reformulation of Voldemort’s words as he says that the latter has only pushed the boundaries ‘[o]f some kinds of magic,’ emphasised as he repeats ‘[o]f some’ in the same sentence, which demonstrates that Voldemort has chosen a very different path from Dumbledore by focusing on Dark Magic. Hogwarts’ Headmaster, on the other hand, refused to continue on the way to darkness and chose to repent.

²⁹³ J.K. Rowling, *GF*, op. cit., 614.

²⁹⁴ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, op. cit., 415.

C. Dobby and Kreacher

Besides, it appears that free will is not limited to human beings in the wizarding world, and that creatures, such as house elves for instance, can also choose to become the version of themselves which they estimate to be the most honourable and righteous, regardless of their situations. This idea can be illustrated through the parallel between Dobby and Kreacher. Indeed, both can be considered to share similar situations as they are both house elves who each serve a family of Death Eaters. However, throughout the novels, both make different choices which lead them to have different lives. This idea is represented towards the end of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*:

Quickly, wondering if this plan could possibly work, Harry took off one of his shoes, pulled off his slimy, filthy sock, and stuffed the diary into it. Then he ran down the dark corridor. He caught up with them at the top of the stairs.
'Mr. Malfoy,' he gasped, skidding to a halt, 'I've got something for you.'
And he forced the smelly sock into Lucius Malfoy's hand.
'What the—?'
Mr. Malfoy ripped the sock off the diary, threw it aside, then looked furiously from the ruined book to Harry. [...]
'Come, Dobby. I said, come!'
But Dobby didn't move. He was holding up Harry's disgusting, slimy sock, and looking at it as though it were a priceless treasure. [...]
'Dobby has got a sock,' said Dobby in disbelief. 'Master threw it, and Dobby caught it, and Dobby—Dobby is free.'²⁹⁵

Dobby, the Malfoy family's house elf, had indeed heard about Voldemort's plot to reopen the Chamber of Secrets and chose to protect Harry the entire year, regardless of the convictions and the position of the family he serves, often lying and disobeying them to do so. In this passage, Dobby's ethical actions and choices are rewarded with a sock, symbol of his freedom²⁹⁶. In other words, it appears that Sartre's theory is illustrated in a reversed way here, as Dobby, who made his own decisions and choices and who chose to be ethical, earns his freedom. It is by accomplishing his essence as an ethical character that Dobby can be considered as free. The house elf will eventually die helping his friends, choosing to be ethical until the very end of his life. The opposite can at first be said of Kreacher, who is introduced in the fifth volume of the series as the house elf of the Black family. In this novel, Kreacher lied to Harry by telling him that Sirius is being tortured at the Ministry of Magic:

²⁹⁵ J.K. Rowling, *CS*, op. cit., 248.

²⁹⁶ House elves are set free when their master gives them a piece of human clothing.

‘Kreacher lied,’ said Dumbledore calmly. ‘You are not his master, he could lie to you without even needing to punish himself. Kreacher intended you to go to the Ministry of Magic.’

‘He—he sent me on purpose?’

‘Oh yes. Kreacher, I am afraid, has been serving more than one master for months. [...] Kreacher seized his opportunity shortly before Christmas,’ said Dumbledore, ‘when Sirius, apparently, shouted at him to “get out.” He took Sirius at his word and interpreted this as an order to leave the house. He went to the only Black family member for whom he had any respect left. . . . Black’s cousin Narcissa, sister of Bellatrix and wife of Lucius Malfoy.’²⁹⁷

In this passage, Harry discovers that Kreacher chose to betray Sirius as he allied with the Malfoys, leading both Harry and Sirius to the Ministry of Magic where Lord Voldemort’s followers await them, resulting in Sirius’ death. Dumbledore however excuses Kreacher’s immoral actions for his poor treatment by his master Sirius:

Kreacher is what he has been made by wizards [...]. Yes, he is to be pitied. His existence has been as miserable as your friend Dobby’s. He was forced to do Sirius’ bidding, because Sirius was the last of the family to which he was enslaved, but he felt no true loyalty to him. And whatever Kreacher’s faults, it must be admitted that Sirius did nothing to make Kreacher’s lot easier’²⁹⁸

In that sense, it appears that Kreacher did not have the chance to truly accomplish his essence the way Dobby did, as it is highlighted with his name, which can be considered as an homonym of the word ‘creature,’ therefore limiting him to his mere existence. Kreacher will nonetheless have his redemption as he helped Regulus Arcturus Black find Slytherin’s Locket, one of Voldemort’s seven Horcruxes, and tried to destroy it with him, in vain. Kreacher is the one who tells Harry where to find the Horcrux in the last volume of the series, therefore choosing to be ethical.

D. Remus Lupin and Fenrir Greyback

Finally, it appears that a similar parallel can be made between the characters of Remus Lupin and Fenrir Greyback, who both became werewolves after being bitten. However, the two characters, who therefore both share the same illness of lycanthropy, still chose radically different paths. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Remus Lupin describes his condition of werewolf as follows:

²⁹⁷ J.K. Rowling, *OP*, op. cit., 731.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 733.

I was a very small boy when I received the bite. My parents tried everything, but in those days there was no cure. The potion that Professor Snape has been making for me is a very recent discovery. It makes me safe, you see. As long as I take it in the week preceding the full moon, I keep my mind when I transform... I'm able to curl up in my office, a harmless wolf, and wait for the moon to wane again.²⁹⁹

This passage demonstrates how Lupin feels about his condition of werewolf, which he seems to reject and blame. He feels dangerous to other people and he appears to be willing to try everything in his power to avoid hurting people. After he graduated from Hogwarts, Lupin even chose to join the Order of the Phoenix to fight against Lord Voldemort in the First Wizarding War. The same thing cannot be said for Fenrir Greyback, who chose to use his werewolf condition to a very different end. This character is introduced in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*:

‘Who’s Greyback?’

‘You haven’t heard of him?’ Lupin’s hands closed convulsively in his lap. ‘Fenrir Greyback is, perhaps, the most savage werewolf alive today. He regards it as his mission in life to bite and to contaminate as many people as possible; he wants to create enough werewolves to overcome the wizards. Voldemort has promised him prey in return for his services. Greyback specialises in children... Bite them young, he says, and raise them away from their parents, raise them to hate normal wizards.’³⁰⁰

This passage illustrates how Fenrir Greyback does not have the same view as Lupin on their similar condition. Indeed, Greyback chose to offer his services to the Dark Lord and became a Death Eater, biting as many people as he could to build his army against the Order of the Phoenix. This parallel demonstrates that it is therefore possible to make radically different choices, even when sharing similar situations, and that the person you become is simply the result of these choices.

II. Choosing courage is to be virtuous

In the wizarding world, characters are therefore portrayed as entirely free of their actions and it seems that their essence is nothing more than the result of their choices. However, amongst an infinity of possible choices, it appears that the most important one which needs to be made in order to be virtuous, and to therefore reach *eudaimonia*, is courage, and most of the good characters of Rowling’s novels are indeed sorted into the

²⁹⁹ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, op. cit., 258.

³⁰⁰ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, op. cit., 313.

Gryffindor House, which values bravery. In that sense, among the four cardinal virtues, it could be analysed that the one of courage is the most praised and encouraged in the *Harry Potter* universe.

A. Aristotle and the question of virtue

According to Socrates, a theory later developed by Plato, there are several virtues in the soul. Aristotle studied the question of virtues and came to the conclusion that only a virtuous person can be happy. In other words, according to the Greek philosopher, virtue is the key to reaching *eudaimonia*. He then distinguishes four virtues which he states to be cardinal, namely prudence, temperance, courage and justice. Michael W. Austin writes that ‘[a] person with the four “cardinal virtues” of wisdom³⁰¹, moderation³⁰², courage and justice is the truly happy person’³⁰³. It could moreover be interpreted that these four cardinal virtues are incorporated into the *Harry Potter* novels through the representation of the four Hogwarts Houses. The lyrics of the Sorting Hat’s song in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* lists the different qualities and characteristics associated with each House:

‘So try me on and I will tell you
Where you ought to be.
You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve, and chivalry
Set Gryffindors apart;
You might belong in Hufflepuff,
Where they are just and loyal,
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true
And unafraid of toil;
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw, if you’ve a ready mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind;
Or perhaps in Slytherin
You’ll make your real friends,
Those cunning folk use any means
To achieve their ends.’³⁰⁴

This song highlights the idea that each House could indeed act as a symbolic representation of a cardinal virtue. In that sense, Gryffindor, which is associated with bravery, appears to represent the virtue of courage. Hufflepuffs can be understood to be the representation of

³⁰¹ A synonymical term used for prudence.

³⁰² A synonymical term used for temperance.

³⁰³ M.W. Austin, ‘Why Harry and Socrates Decide to Die’, op. cit., 262.

³⁰⁴ J.K. Rowling, *PS*, op. cit., 129.

justice, as the Sorting Hat explicitly uses the adjective ‘just’ to describe them. Ravenclaws, as far as they are concerned, can be considered to represent temperance, or as Austin calls it, ‘moderation,’ which can be defined in Ancient Greece as the fact of being ruled by reason. It appears thus, that Ravenclaws, known for their intelligence, can be associated with this virtue. In that sense, Slytherin arguably represents the virtue of prudence, or wisdom. Indeed, the snake, which is their emblem, is often associated with wisdom, notably in Biblical references. Slytherins are represented as ambitious, and Patterson writes about them that ‘[i]t is admirable to want to do great things, but it is even more admirable to be wise (and hence virtuous) in the course of doing them’³⁰⁵. It therefore appears that Slytherin can therefore indeed be associated with the virtue of wisdom, according to Aristotle’s definition. Besides, it could be interpreted that the readers of *Harry Potter* novels are encouraged not only to be virtuous, but also to choose the path towards courage, which Richard Parry defines as ‘[f]ollowing the lead of reason not just in battle but in any circumstance’³⁰⁶, as the vast majority of the ethical characters are placed in the Gryffindor House.

B. Being brave is a choice

In that sense, being brave is a choice which needs to be made in the wizarding world. Daley-Bailey writes that ‘it is by our actions in the face of danger and by our training ourselves to fear or to courage that we become either cowardly or courageous’³⁰⁷. In other words, it appears that no one is either born brave or born a coward. On the contrary, these qualities are built as the result of a series of choices and actions. This is precisely Sartre’s idea regarding free will and existentialism as he writes that ‘ce que dit l’existentialisme, c’est que le lâche se fait lâche, que le héros se fait héros, il y a toujours une possibilité pour le lâche de ne plus être lâche et pour le héros de cesser d’être un héros’³⁰⁸. This idea appears to be perfectly represented through the character of Neville Longbottom, who grows to become one of the bravest characters of the *Harry Potter* novels. Indeed, as he enters Hogwarts, Neville is sorted into the Gryffindor House, which means that the Sorting Hat saw courage in him. However, throughout the first volume of the series, Neville, referred to as ‘poor, blundering Neville’³⁰⁹, is represented as a clumsy character who struggles to find his place

³⁰⁵ S. W. Patterson, ‘Is Ambition a Virtue?’, op. cit., 129.

³⁰⁶ R. D. Parry, ‘Morality and Happiness. Book IV of Plato’s Republic’, op. cit., 41.

³⁰⁷ K. Daley-Bailey, *Harry Potter and Aristotle’s Cultivation of Virtue*, op. cit., 2.

³⁰⁸ J.-P. Sartre, *L’existentialisme est un humanisme*, op. cit., 61.

³⁰⁹ J.K. Rowling, *PS*, op. cit., 263.

amongst his classmates. Gregory Bassham defines abilities as ‘a power or a capacity to do something’³¹⁰ and states that ‘it’s how you use these abilities that really matters’³¹¹. In that sense, it could be interpreted that Neville was sorted into Gryffindor because of his ability to be brave. Professor Dumbledore seems to confirm this idea at the end of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* when he declares that ‘[i]t takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to your enemies, but just as much to stand up to your friends’³¹². Neville therefore grows to be brave through his choices and his actions.

The idea that being brave is a choice which needs to be made is also represented through the name of Lord Voldemort. Indeed, many characters in the series do not dare saying his name, afraid that it might bring bad luck and make him come back to power. This is not the case for Harry, who has always called Lord Voldemort by his name, not afraid of what it might bring, maybe caused by the fact that he did not grow up in a family of wizards and was therefore not aware of the danger The Dark Lord represented when he first heard of him. When Ron appears to be surprised that Harry calls Voldemort by his name, the latter declares that he is ‘not trying to be brave or anything, saying the name’³¹³. In that sense, it appears that saying Voldemort’s name is directly associated with the idea of courage, and that choosing to pronounce his name is a form of courage.

C. Accepting death: the ultimate act of courage

Furthermore, Sartre’s idea according to which existence precedes essence and human beings are condemned to be free is inextricably tied up with the idea that our essence ends when our life does. In that sense, death represents the final step of the process of building our essence, which is therefore defined as what it is when the body dies. Angèle Kremer-Marietti writes that:

La conséquence de cette condamnation à la liberté n’est autre que la responsabilité : ‘l’homme, étant condamné à être libre, porte le poids du monde tout entier sur ses épaules’. Tout désigne cette responsabilité : la place du sujet, son passé, ses entours, son prochain, et enfin sa mort, qui est un terme ôtant à la vie toute signification.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Gregory Bassham, ‘Choices vs. Abilities. Dumbledore on Self-Understanding’, op. cit., 163.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

³¹² J.K. Rowling, *PS*, op. cit., 329.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 112.

³¹⁴ A. Kremer-Marietti, *Jean-Paul Sartre et le désir d’être. Une lecture de ‘L’être et le néant’*, op. cit., 58.

Death is therefore the step which puts an end to the process of becoming. According to Jonathan L. Walls and Jerry L. Walls, ‘death represents both the ultimate individuating event and the culmination of the process by which each of us forms our essence through our choices’³¹⁵. In that sense, the inevitability of death often leads to fear, which itself leads to the desire to avoid it. The title of the first novel of the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, introduces an element which appears to perfectly represent the desire for immortality in order to avoid death, and therefore being ultimately defined by it. The Philosopher’s Stone is thus described as a stone which ‘produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal’³¹⁶. In that sense, the Stone is presented as a magical artefact which could satisfy the desire to avoid death and therefore relieve the fear which is associated with it. Harry, who is just eleven at this moment of the series and therefore still growing to come of age, declares that ‘[a]nyone would want it’³¹⁷. This idea is refuted by Professor Dumbledore:

To one as young as you, I’m sure it seems incredible, but to Nicolas and Pernelle, it really is like going to bed after a very, very long day. After all, to the well-organised mind, death is but the next great adventure. You know, the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all—the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things which are worst for them.³¹⁸

Here, Hogwarts’ Headmaster gives meaning to the name of this Stone. Indeed, a philosopher can briefly and generally be defined as ‘someone who studies or writes about the meaning of life’³¹⁹. However, one cannot think about the meaning of life without considering the inevitability of death. In that sense, the Philosopher as it is referred to in this passage, appears to be the one who chooses to accept death and to embrace it, rather than the one who manages to escape it.

It therefore appears that Voldemort’s desire to avoid it by any possible means is a representation of Sartre’s *angoisse*, which is a consequence of the realisation of his existentialism³²⁰, as he declares that ‘[t]here is nothing worse than death’³²¹. It is therefore clear that, for Voldemort, an immoral life is worth better than no life at all. This will lead him to kill in order to be able to divide his soul in several parts, therefore perpetrating the most

³¹⁵ Jonathan L. Walls and Jerry L. Walls, ‘Beyond Godric’s Hollow’, in W. Irwin and G. Bassham, eds, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy. Hogwarts for Muggles*, op. cit., 252.

³¹⁶ J.K. Rowling, *PS*, op. cit., 238.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 320.

³¹⁹ *Cambridge Dictionary* [online], ‘Philosopher’ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/philosopher> (last accessed 1 June 2022)

³²⁰ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur ‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme’ de Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., 26.

³²¹ J.K. Rowling, *OP*, op. cit., 718.

immoral acts of all in order to remain alive. Chaillan writes that ‘Voldemort privilégie une vie maudite à la mort, là où Harry affirme comme une évidence qu’il faut préférer mourir que vivre pareille vie’³²². In that sense, Harry, who claimed that anyone would want to avoid death in the first volume of the series, grows to be brave and to accept death as an inevitable step of life in the final novel, in which he realises that he has to die in order to defeat Voldemort:

‘Tell him that on the night Lord Voldemort tried to kill him, when Lily cast her own life between them as a shield, the Killing Curse rebounded upon Lord Voldemort, and a fragment of Voldemort’s soul was blasted apart from the whole, and latched itself onto the only living soul left in that collapsed building. Part of Lord Voldemort lives inside Harry, and it is that which gives him the power of speech with snakes, and a connection with Lord Voldemort’s mind that he has never understood. And while that fragment of soul, unmissed by Voldemort, remains attached to and protected by Harry, Lord Voldemort cannot die.’ [...] ‘So the boy...the boy must die?’ asked Snape quite calmly. ‘And Voldemort himself must do it, Severus. That is essential.’³²³

In this passage, Harry finds out that he is the Horcrux that Voldemort never intended to create and that he therefore needs to die, like the six other Horcruxes needed to be destroyed. Harry therefore accepts this necessary condition and surrenders to Voldemort. Daley-Bailey writes that:

The choice to die determines Harry’s entire existence: while he chooses to die he does not do so because he wants to die, but rather because he is prepared to die in order to save the world. Harry thus symbolises the ‘willingness to accept full responsibility—that is, responsibility for all the implications of [his] actions—complements the previous characterization of free will.’³²⁴

In that sense, Harry places himself as a brave character who embraces his existentialism in its entirety with all the responsibilities it involves, without resorting to bad faith. The question of death, which is central in the *Harry Potter* novels, thus appears to evaluate the courage of the characters from a Sartrean perspective, and is therefore the final virtuous step towards an ethical life.

D. Draco Malfoy’s courage: Sartre’s *garçon de café*

Furthermore, the character of Draco Malfoy could be interpreted as a literary illustration of Sartre’s *garçon de café*. Bilemdjian writes that ‘la mauvaise foi est une certaine

³²² M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l’école de la philosophie*, 219.

³²³ J.K. Rowling, *DH, op. cit.*, 551.

³²⁴ K. Daley-Bailey, *Harry Potter and Aristotle’s Cultivation of Virtue, op. cit.*, 3.

modalité du rapport qu'une conscience entretient avec elle-même. C'est une certaine façon qu'a la conscience de biaiser, de ruser avec elle-même, de se tromper elle-même sur ses intentions'³²⁵. The *garçon de café*, as Sartre describes it, is a form of bad faith as a response to existentialism and free will. According to Bilemdjian, 'il est de mauvaise foi dans la mesure où il joue à être, et que, jouant à être, il cherche à constituer, à donner corps à un être en-soi du garçon de café en lequel il puisse croire et sur lequel il puisse se reposer'³²⁶. It therefore seems that Draco Malfoy could indeed be considered as the *garçon de café* throughout the first novels of the series, as he comforts himself in the idea that he is a bad person, born in a family of Death Eaters, and thus spends most of his time at Hogwarts bullying Harry, Ron and Hermione. Draco even adopted the beliefs of his family regarding blood purity. In that sense, it could be interpreted that Draco is a symbol of bad faith, as he believes that he is a bad person and acts in accordance with this idea, therefore hiding his true self behind the person he pretends to be. In the sixth volume of the series, he joins the side of Lord Voldemort as Harry declares that 'he's been branded with the Dark Mark'³²⁷. To prove his loyalty as a Death Eater, Draco has to fulfil the mission the Dark Lord gave him, that is to end Professor Dumbledore's life. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* therefore marks a shift in the representation of the character of Draco through an anticlimactic gradation of his spitefulness which is built throughout the entire novel:

'Listen to me,' said Snape, his voice so low now that Harry had to push his ear very hard against the keyhole to hear. 'I am trying to help you. I swore to your mother I would protect you. I made the Unbreakable Vow, Draco—'
'Looks like you'll have to break it, then, because I don't need your protection! It's my job, he gave it to me and I'm doing it, I've got a plan and it's going to work, it's just taking a bit longer than I thought it would!'³²⁸

This passage, which occurs towards the middle of the story, depicts Draco determined to fulfil his mission and even states that he has a plan to do it. In that sense, he can still be compared to the *garçon de café* here as he keeps comforting himself in the idea that he was born to be a Death Eater, like his parents. However, it appears that being so evil so as to murder someone is unlike him:

'No one can help me,' said Malfoy. His whole body was shaking. 'I can't do it... I can't... It won't work... and unless I do it soon... he says he'll kill me... '

³²⁵ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur 'L'existentialisme est un humanisme' de Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., 70.

³²⁶ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur 'L'existentialisme est un humanisme' de Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., 70.

³²⁷ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, op. cit., 129.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 301.

And Harry realised, with a shock so huge it seemed to root him to the spot, that Malfoy was crying—actually crying—tears streaming down his pale face into the grimy basin.³²⁹

Here, Harry realises how tortured Draco truly is, as he finds him crying in the bathroom. Draco appears to be completely frightened and panicked, and his dislocated words based on unfinished and repeated sentences highlight how broken and terrified he is. The shift in Draco's character is emphasised with Harry's reaction, who is so used to Draco being a brute and a bully, in shock after he saw him crying, which is repeated and highlighted by the dashes which surround the word. When Draco goes to the Astronomy Tower to fulfil his mission, he states that he has 'no choice'³³⁰, and Rowling writes that 'his wand hand [was] shaking very badly'³³¹. The fact that Draco believes that he has 'no choice' seems to highlight the idea that he could indeed be analysed in relation to Sartre's *garçon de café*, as he hides himself behind excuses and the person he thinks he is meant to be instead of acting for himself and to become the person he truly wishes to be. Rowling then writes that 'Malfoy was showing less resolution than ever. He looked terrified as he stared into Dumbledore's face, which was even paler, and rather lower than usual, as he slid so far down the rampart wall'³³². Draco therefore seems unable to kill Dumbledore, and appears to be more scared to perform such an evil and immoral action than he is of the consequences if he does not. To the French philosopher Sartre, not choosing is still a choice. In that sense, it could be analysed that, by being too afraid to kill Dumbledore and by refusing to do it, Draco actually showed courage and chose to stand against Lord Voldemort's orders. In one of Snape's memories which Harry visits in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the former Professor of Potions asks Dumbledore why he did not let Draco kill him, to which the Hogwarts' Headmaster answers that 'that boy's soul is not yet so damaged' and that he 'would not have it ripped it apart on [his] account'³³³. In that sense, it appears that Draco was actually not as immoral as he was portrayed in the first volumes of the series, as his soul is not beyond repair yet.

III. The contagion of virtue

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 488.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 552.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 552.

³³² *Ibid.*, 555.

³³³ J.K. Rowling, *DH, op. cit.*, 548.

Besides, virtue could be understood to be contagious in the wizarding world, which is a theory which can be found in Ancient Greece philosophy. According to Catherine and Paul Deavel, ‘Greek philosophers distinguished between three kinds of love: eros, philia and agape’³³⁴. Eros can be defined as ‘the type of love found in romantic relationships’³³⁵, philia refers to ‘friendship love’³³⁶, and agape corresponds to ‘universal, self-giving and unconditional love’³³⁷. It is *philia* which will be the object of study of this section. Guy Samama states that ‘Aristote, pour sa part, conçoit la *philia* (= amitié) comme une vertu’³³⁸. In that sense, according to the Greek philosopher, the relationships we share with others is highly important regarding ethics, as it is through these relationships that we can define and build our ethics. Jonathan and Jerry Walls write that ‘Aristotle noted how our actions put us on a trajectory, turning us gradually into particular kinds of people, each choice incrementally shaping our souls’³³⁹. It therefore appears that it is indeed our relationships with other people which helps us build our essence and, by the same token, our ethics. Several examples in the *Harry Potter* series seem to illustrate this idea.

A. The case of Cedric Diggory

To begin with, in the fourth volume of the series, it is through the character of Cedric Diggory that this idea appears to be articulated. Indeed, in this novel, he and Harry face each other as well as Viktor Krum and Fleur Delacour in the Triwizard Tournament, in which they have to compete against one another in three different tasks. As Harry finds out, through Hagrid, that the first task is to get past dragons and that Viktor and Krum are already aware of it, Harry immediately goes to warn Cedric, which he assumes is the just thing to do:

‘Cedric,’ said Harry, ‘the first task is dragons. [...] They’ve got four, one for each of us, and we’ve got to get past them. [...] But I’m not the only one who knows. Fleur and Krum will know by now—Maxime and Karkaroff both saw the dragons too.’ [...] ‘Why are you telling me?’ he asked. Harry looked at him in disbelief. He was sure Cedric wouldn’t have asked that if he had seen the dragons himself. Harry wouldn’t have let his worst enemy face those monsters unprepared—[...]

³³⁴ Catherine Deavel and David Deavel, ‘Choosing Love. The Redemption of Severus Snape’, in W. Irwin and G. Bassham, eds, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy. Hogwarts for Muggles*, op. cit., 55.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

³³⁸ Guy Samama. *Analyses & réflexions sur Aristote. Éthique à Nicomaque (Livres VII et IX)*, Ellipses, 2001, 27.

³³⁹ J. L. Walls and J. L. Walls, ‘Beyond Godric’s Hollow’, op. cit., 253.

‘It’s just . . . fair, isn’t it?’ he said to Cedric. ‘We all know now . . . we’re on an even footing, aren’t we?’³⁴⁰

In this passage, when Cedric asks him why Harry is being so friendly with him regardless of the fact that they are in a competition, Harry answers that it is ‘just fair,’ which depicts how just and virtuous the protagonist truly is. Virtue being built in relation to others, Cedric will in his turn be just towards Harry:

‘Listen...’ Cedric lowered his voice as Ron disappeared. ‘I owe you one for telling me about the dragons. You know that golden egg? Does yours wail when you open it?’
‘Yeah,’ said Harry.
‘Well . . . take a bath, okay?’
‘What?’
‘Take a bath, and—er—take the egg with you, and—er—just mull things over in the hot water. It’ll help you think. . . . Trust me.’³⁴¹

Here, Cedric helps Harry with the second task of the Triwizard Tournament by advising him to take the dragon egg underwater, and justifies his action by declaring that he owes Harry. In that sense, virtue appears to be developed in relation to others in the wizarding world, as Cedric acts virtuously as a way to thank Harry for doing the same for him.

B. The case of Narcissa Malfoy

This idea of a contagion of virtue also appears to be present in the following passage extracted from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*:

‘Is Draco alive? Is he in the castle?’
The whisper was barely audible, her lips were an inch from his ear, her head bent so low that her long hair shielded his face from the onlookers.
‘Yes,’ he breathed back.
He felt the hand on his chest contract: her nails pierced him. Then it was withdrawn. She had sat up.
‘He is dead!’ Narcissa Malfoy called to the watchers.³⁴²

In this passage, Harry has just surrendered himself to Lord Voldemort in order to be the last Horcrux destroyed, but the spell did not kill him for all that matter. Narcissa Malfoy, Draco’s mother and follower of Lord Voldemort, goes to check if Harry is dead and asks him if her son is still alive. When Harry, who saved Draco earlier in this same novel, answers that her

³⁴⁰ J.K. Rowling, *GF*, op. cit., 298.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 375.

³⁴² J.K. Rowling, *DH*, op. cit., 581.

son is safe and sound, Narcissa lies to Lord Voldemort and the other Death Eaters by declaring Harry dead. This could be interpreted in relation to the contagion of virtue, as Narcissa, as a way to show her gratitude towards Harry's virtue which led him to save Draco, is herself virtuous by protecting Harry from the Dark Lord and his Death Eaters. It therefore appears that ethics are indeed developed in relation to other people in the *Harry Potter* novels.

C. The case of Peter Pettigrew

Another example which seems to illustrate this idea in the series can be found through the character of Peter Pettigrew. Indeed, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry saves Peter Pettigrew's life by preventing Sirius from killing him for betraying Lily and James Potter, in order to let him spend the rest of his days in Azkaban instead. However, Peter Pettigrew manages to escape before being sent there and Professor Dumbledore declares to Harry that 'Pettigrew owes his life to [him]'³⁴³ and that '[w]hen a wizard saves another wizard's life, it creates a certain bond between them'³⁴⁴. The bond to which Professor Dumbledore refers here could be analysed in relation to Aristotle's theory according to which virtue is built through our relations to others. Indeed, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Peter Pettigrew and Harry meet again in the Malfoy Manor:

'You're going to kill me?' Harry choked, attempting to prise off the metal fingers. 'After I saved your life? You owe me, Wormtail!'
The silver fingers slackened. [...] Wandless, helpless, Pettigrew's pupils dilated in terror. His eyes had slid from Harry's face to something else. His own silver fingers were moving inexorably toward his own throat.³⁴⁵

In this passage, Harry reminds Peter Pettigrew that he saved his life four years back, which leads the latter to choose to end his own life rather than Harry's, so that the other Death Eaters will therefore think that Harry and his friends did it and that they managed to escape, allowing Pettigrew to thank Harry for sparing his life by doing the same for him. It therefore appears that virtue is indeed contagious in the wizarding world and is represented by the 'certain bond' to which Professor Dumbledore refers in the third volume of the series, as virtue could be understood as a link between two wizards. Besides, it is interesting to note

³⁴³ J.K. Rowling, *PA*, op. cit., 311.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

³⁴⁵ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, op. cit., 380.

that Pettigrew slashes his own throat, thus saving Harry's life, with the silver finger that Lord Voldemort gave him as a reward for his immorality. In that sense, it appears that there is still a possibility to act virtuously regardless of our past immoral actions.

IV. Remorse as the only way to mend a damaged soul

Existentialism and the fact that we are condemned to be free means that 'l'homme peut peut réviser à volonté ses valeurs, voire effectuer le célèbre renversement des valeurs'³⁴⁶. In that sense, it appears that, in the *Harry Potter* novels, any character can choose to become ethical and virtuous regardless of their past.

A. Plato's theory on remorse

This idea could be analysed in relation to Plato's studies on remorse. Chaillan borrows Monique Canto Sperber's translation and refers to a theory developed by the Greek philosopher in *Gorgias*:

[L]e plus heureux des hommes est donc celui qui n'a aucun vice en son âme [...] Puis, l'homme qui vient en second est sans doute celui qu'on délivre de son mal [...] c'est-à-dire l'homme qui se soumet aux reproches, aux châtiments et qui est justement puni [...] en revanche, l'homme qui vit le plus mal est l'homme qui garde son injustice et qu'on ne délivre pas de son mal.³⁴⁷

Here, Plato refers to happiness in relation to the soul and declares that there are three happiness stages: the first one is the one whose soul is pure thanks to a virtuous and ethical life, the second one is the one who has been immoral in the past but who is judged and punished for his actions, and the last one is the one who never confesses his immorality, making himself the most miserable of all. In that sense, it appears that, for the Greek philosopher, feeling remorse is a necessary step for the immoral person to be happy:

S'il arrive malgré tout qu'on commette une injustice, soi-même ou toute autre personne qu'on chérit, il faut courir de son plein gré là où on sera le plus vite puni—chez le juge donc comme on irait chez le médecin ; et il faut s'empresse d'y aller pour éviter que la maladie de l'injustice ne devienne chronique, qu'elle n'infecte l'âme et la rende incurable.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ G. Seel, 'La morale de Sartre. Une reconstruction', op. cit., 4.

³⁴⁷ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l'école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 23.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

Plato therefore compares immorality to an illness and judgement to a diagnosis, and states that it is essential for the immoral person to be judged and punished for their immoral actions in order for the soul to be healed. In other words, an immoral person needs to feel remorse in order to be ethical and therefore reach *eudaimonia*. Charles Taliaferro writes that ‘the person who has committed a serious wrong needs to confess what he has done, express sincere remorse, repudiate any pleasure or gain that he got from this wrongdoing’³⁴⁹. In that sense, it appears that, for a person who has been immoral, remorse is a necessary step in the process of being ethical. Chaillan writes that ‘se repentir serait alors la première action morale qui pourrait entraîner un début de purification’³⁵⁰.

B. Redemption in the series

The idea of an essential feeling of remorse appears to be very present in the *Harry Potter* series, in which many characters appear to have their redemption. Indeed, free will and existentialism can be understood to be at the centre of the wizarding world. According to Bilemdjian, the idea according to which human beings are condemned to be free suggests that ‘jusqu’à sa mort l’homme peut, par un acte de liberté, démentir ce qu’il a fait de lui jusqu’alors’³⁵¹. In that sense, it appears that anyone can choose to be ethical and virtuous, regardless of their past, as long as they feel remorse for their immoral actions.

1. The case of Gellert Grindelwald

The character of Gellert Grindelwald in the *Harry Potter* novels can be analysed as an illustration of this theory about remorse. Indeed, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the reader learns more about Albus Dumbledore’s past and the way he became friends³⁵² with Gellert Grindelwald, and that they wanted to reunite the three Deathly Hallows in order to become the most powerful wizards of the world and to dominate Muggles. Rowling writes that ‘[t]he name of Grindelwald is justly famous: [i]n a list of Most Dangerous Dark Wizards

³⁴⁹ Charles Taliaferro, ‘The Real Secret of the Phoenix. Moral Generation Through Death’, in W. Irwin and G. Bassham, eds, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy. Hogwarts for Muggles*, op. cit., 230.

³⁵⁰ M. Chaillan, *Harry Potter à l’école de la philosophie*, op. cit., 31.

³⁵¹ S. Bilemdjian, *Premières leçons sur ‘L’existentialisme est un humanisme’ de Jean-Paul Sartre*, op. cit., 48.

³⁵² Joanne Rowling later added that Grindelwald was Dumbledore’s love interest, which was developed in the series of films *Fantastic Beasts*, of which she wrote the script.

of All Time, he would miss out on the top spot only because You-Know-Who arrived, a generation later, to steal his crown³⁵³. In that sense, Grindelwald is depicted as one of the darkest wizards of the wizarding world and has performed a great deal of immoral actions, for which he will eventually be sent to Nurmengard Castle, a prison for wizards, located in the Austrian Alps. However, he appears to feel remorse for his past as Dumbledore states that ‘they say he showed remorse in later years’³⁵⁴ and that ‘[p]erhaps that lie to Voldemort was his attempt to make amends... to prevent Voldemort from taking the Hallow’³⁵⁵. Here, although the fact that Grindelwald felt remorse for his past actions remains a theory developed by several wizards, it could be considered to be true as Dumbledore’s former friend and love interest lied to Voldemort about the location of the Elder Wand in order to prevent him from getting hold of it. Grindelwald’s action could therefore be qualified as ethical as he chose to feel remorse and to act to stop Voldemort in his quest for power.

2. The case of Horace Slughorn

Another character which could be analysed in relation to the question of remorse is Horace Slughorn, Hogwarts’ Professor of Potions in the sixth volume of the series. In this novel, Harry and Dumbledore go into the Pensieve to study one of Professor Slughorn’s memories:

‘As you might have noticed,’ said Dumbledore, reseating himself behind his desk, ‘that memory has been tampered with.’

‘Tampered with?’ repeated Harry, sitting back down too.

‘Certainly,’ said Dumbledore. ‘Professor Slughorn has meddled with his own recollections.’

‘But why would he do that?’

‘Because, I think, he is ashamed of what he remembers,’ said Dumbledore. ‘He has tried to rework the memory to show himself in a better light, obliterating those parts which he does not wish me to see. [...]’³⁵⁶

In this passage, Harry realises that Professor Slughorn modified his memory in order to avoid being judged by Professor Dumbledore for his immoral actions. Indeed, when Tom Riddle was still a student at Hogwarts, he questioned Professor Slughorn about Horcruxes in order to know how they could be created. Thinking that Tom Riddle was simply being curious and without suspecting anything, Hogwarts’ Professor of Potions shared his knowledge on the

³⁵³ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, op. cit., 290.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 576.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 576.

³⁵⁶ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, op. cit., 347.

subject with his student, leading him to create seven Horcruxes and to therefore become invincible as long as these Horcruxes remained intact. Although Professor Slughorn 'is ashamed' of what he did, partially leading Voldemort to become the most dangerous wizard of the world, he seems to refuse to confess his past actions and to be judged for them. However, he will change his mind throughout the novel and share his true memory with Harry:

'I am not proud...' he whispered through his fingers. 'I am ashamed of what—of what that memory shows... I think I may have done great damage that day...' 'You'd cancel out anything you did by giving me the memory,' said Harry. 'It would be a very brave and noble thing to do.' [...]
Then, very slowly, Slughorn put his hand in his pocket and pulled out his wand. He put his other hand inside his cloak and took out a small, empty bottle. Still looking into Harry's eyes, Slughorn touched the tip of his wand to his temple and withdrew it, so that a long, silver thread of memory came away too, clinging to the wand tip. Longer and longer the memory stretched until it broke and swung, silvery bright, from the wand. Slughorn lowered it into the bottle where it coiled, then spread, swirling like gas. He corked the bottle with a trembling hand and then passed it across the table to Harry.³⁵⁷

Here, the idea that Professor Slughorn is ashamed of his actions is repeated, but it leads to a different choice from the previous passage, as he decides to confess to Harry, which could therefore make him the second man to whom Plato refers. He admits that his revelations have had a great impact on the wizarding world and feels guilty about it. However, Harry affirms that, by confessing, his actions would be undone. Of course, admitting his mistakes would not change the fact that Lord Voldemort created Horcruxes, but it could be understood that what Harry meant by stating that Slughorn would 'cancel out anything [he] did by giving [him] the memory' was that he would mend his soul from the damage he caused. In that sense, it seems that feeling remorse is indeed the only way to fix a soul which has been deteriorated by immorality in the *Harry Potter* novels.

3. The case of Albus Dumbledore

Moreover, one of the characters whose redemption is the most developed in the series is Hogwarts' Headmaster, Professor Albus Dumbledore. Indeed, the previous sections of this dissertation have demonstrated that the latter joined Gellert Grindelwald in his quest for domination, looking for the three Deathly Hallows in order to become the most powerful wizards of the world. When Harry finds out about Professor Dumbledore's past, he sourly

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 458.

declares that ‘they were the same age as [they] are now’³⁵⁸ and that, yet, ‘here [they] are, risking [their] lives to fight the Dark Arts, and there he was, in a huddle with his new best friend, plotting their rise to power over the Muggles’³⁵⁹. The parallel which Harry makes here highlights the different choices which they made, therefore leading the characters of the novels to build different essences. However, as Dumbledore’s past is developed in the last volume of the series, Hermione declares that:

He changed, Harry, he changed! It's as simple as that! Maybe he did believe these things when he was seventeen, but the whole of the rest of his life was devoted to fighting the Dark Arts! Dumbledore was the one who stopped Grindelwald, the one who always voted for Muggle protection and Muggle born rights, who fought You-Know-Who from the start, and who died trying to bring him down!³⁶⁰

The possibility of changing thus appears to be present in the *Harry Potter* series, and a person who has made immoral decisions in the past can still choose to be ethical. This is the case for Professor Dumbledore here, as Hermione repeats in an epanalepsis that ‘he changed.’ Indeed, Hogwarts’ Headmaster decided to repent himself by rejecting his former convictions and leaving Grindelwald's side. Further than simply changing his ideologies, he confesses the worst thing he ever did to Harry:

‘The argument became a fight. Grindelwald lost control. That which I had always sensed in him, though I pretended not to, now sprang into terrible being. And Ariana . . . after all my mother’s care and caution . . . lay dead upon the floor.’
Dumbledore gave a little gasp and began to cry in earnest. Harry reached out and was glad to find that he could touch him: He gripped his arm tightly and Dumbledore gradually regained control.³⁶¹

Here, Professor Dumbledore is humanised as he is portrayed crying for the first time in the series, therefore breaking the image of a wise man who has always been ethical his entire life. He accepts to be judged by Harry for his immoral past actions which led to the death of his sister Ariana, and could therefore be analysed in relation to the second man described by Plato, feeling remorse for what he did. When Harry meets Professor Dumbledore’s brother, Aberforth, he explains him what Albus felt:

‘He was never free,’ said Harry.
‘I beg your pardon?’ said Aberforth. ‘Never,’ said Harry. ‘The night that your brother died, he drank a potion that drove him out of his mind. He started screaming, pleading with someone who wasn't there. “Don't hurt them, please . . . hurt me instead.”’

³⁵⁸ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, op. cit., 294.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 574.

Ron and Hermione were staring at Harry. He had never gone into details about what had happened on the island on the lake: The events that had taken place after he and Dumbledore had returned to Hogwarts had eclipsed it so thoroughly.

‘He thought he was back there with you and Grindelwald, I know he did,’ said Harry, remembering Dumbledore whispering, pleading. ‘He thought he was watching Grindelwald hurting you and Ariana . . . It was torture to him, if you’d seen him then, you wouldn’t say he was free.’³⁶²

The repetition of the word ‘free’ in this passage seems interesting to note, as Harry declares that Dumbledore was never free, for the pure and simple reason that he never confessed his immoral actions and repented for them until he told Harry. In that sense, his soul was still damaged and was preventing him from building his essence as a truly ethical person. It is only by using his free will to confess and to be judged for his actions that he could mend his soul, feeling remorse for the death of his sister.

4. The case of Severus Snape

Severus Snape is arguably one of the most complex characters of the *Harry Potter* novels. Throughout the first six novels of the series, he is portrayed as a villain, always acting against Harry and doing everything in his power to punish him. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Igor Karkaroff even exposes him as a Death Eater. Moreover, it is Snape himself who told Voldemort about Professor Trelawney’s prophecy, leading the Dark Lord to kill James and Lily Potter. Besides, in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, he presents himself to the Dark Lord as a faithful Death Eater, a smuggled spy in the Order of the Phoenix:

‘I have played my part well,’ said Snape. ‘And you overlook Dumbledore’s greatest weakness: He has to believe the best of people. I spun him a tale of deepest remorse when I joined his staff, fresh from my Death Eater days, and he embraced me with open arms—though, as I say, never allowing me nearer the Dark Arts than he could help. Dumbledore has been a great wizard—oh yes, he has, [...] the Dark Lord acknowledges it. I am pleased to say, however, that Dumbledore is growing old. The duel with the Dark Lord last month shook him. He has since sustained a serious injury because his reactions are slower than they once were. But through all these years, he has never stopped trusting Severus Snape, and therein lies my great value to the Dark Lord.’³⁶³

Here, Snape praises his worth as a Death Eater as he declares that he gained Dumbledore’s trust and that he can help Voldemort defeat him as he gets more and more information about Hogwarts’ Headmaster and his weaknesses. However, in the last volume of the series, as

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 457.

³⁶³ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, op. cit., 36.

Snape is dying after Voldemort cast the Killing Curse on him, Hogwarts' former Professor of Potions gives his tears to Harry, advising him to drop them into the Pensieve. As Harry goes through Snape's memories, he realises how he has played as a double agent for Dumbledore ever since Lily's death, as the following conversation between the two wizards shows:

'You know how and why she died. Make sure it was not in vain. Help me protect Lily's son.'
 'He does not need protection. The Dark Lord has gone—'
 'The Dark Lord will return, and Harry Potter will be in terrible danger when he does.'
 There was a long pause, and slowly Snape regained control of himself, mastered his own breathing. 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!'³⁶⁴

Catherine and David Deavel write that 'love is the key to Snape's redemption because it allows him to feel remorse'³⁶⁵. This is precisely what this conversation between Snape and Dumbledore seems to demonstrate. Indeed, Snape, who has always been in love with Lily Potter, blames himself for her death and accepts to act as a double agent for the protection of her son, Harry, as an ultimate proof of his love for her. Snape, who therefore feels remorse, goes to see Professor Dumbledore and accepts to be judged for his actions, which leads him to have his redemption, from acting as a spy for Voldemort, to being a double agent for Dumbledore and joining the Order of the Phoenix, therefore acting for what he believes is the right thing to do, that is to say, the protection of Harry. Professor Dumbledore states that 'Severus Snape was indeed a Death Eater [but] he rejoined [their] side before Lord Voldemort's downfall and turned spy for us, at great personal risk'³⁶⁶ and that '[h]e is now no more a Death Eater than [he is]'³⁶⁷. Snape therefore seems to have accepted to be judged for his past immoral actions and repented himself by being judged, punished and turning towards ethics.

5. Lord Voldemort's refusal

However, Lord Voldemort could be interpreted to be the representation of the third man described by Plato. Indeed, the Dark Lord always refused to repent himself and to be judged and punished for his immoral actions. This idea appears to be articulated through the fact that Professor Dumbledore and Harry always call him by his former name:

³⁶⁴ J.K. Rowling, *DH*, op. cit., 544.

³⁶⁵ C. Deavel and D. Deavel, 'Choosing Love. The Redemption of Severus Snape', op. cit., 62.

³⁶⁶ J.K. Rowling, *GF*, op. cit., 603.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 603.

‘So, Tom . . . to what do I owe the pleasure?’
Voldemort did not answer at once, but merely sipped his wine.
‘They do not call me “Tom” anymore,’ he said. ‘These days, I am known as—’
‘I know what you are known as,’ said Dumbledore, smiling pleasantly. ‘But to me, I’m afraid, you will always be Tom Riddle. It is one of the irritating things about old teachers. I am afraid that they never quite forget their charges’ youthful beginnings.’³⁶⁸

In this passage, Professor Dumbledore calls Lord Voldemort by his birth name, Tom, and refers to his ‘youthful beginnings.’ It could here be interpreted that Professor Dumbledore invites Voldemort to return to his existence, and to, by the same token, undo his immoral actions and go back on building a new essence. In other words, Professor Dumbledore opens the possibility of change and different choices to Voldemort, rejecting the identity and the essence he created in order to show him the path towards ethics. It is however interesting to note that Voldemort stands firm on his position as he states that he no longer answers to the name of Tom. In the last volume of the series, before the final duel which will oppose him to the Dark Lord, Harry also appears to invite Lord Voldemort to repent as he declares: ‘[B]efore you try to kill me, I’d advise you think what you’ve done... Think, and try for some remorse, Riddle... [...] It’s your one last chance, [...] it’s all you’ve got left... I’ve seen what you’ll be otherwise... Be a man... try... Try for some remorse...’ Here, not only does Harry call Voldemort by his former name, Riddle, but he also explicitly advises him to feel remorse, stating that this is his last chance and warning him about what he might become if he does not. This quotation appears to be highly relevant in this dissertation as it seems to incorporate all the theories mentioned in this section. Indeed, by referring to ‘what [he’ll] be otherwise,’ it could be understood that Harry refers to Voldemort’s soul, which would be damaged beyond repair if he does not choose to repent now. Besides, Harry advises Voldemort to be ‘a man,’ which could show how immoral actions lead to the dehumanisation of a person. He thus advises him to feel remorse, presented as the only solution to repent, which Voldemort will ultimately refuse, leading him to his downfall.

Conclusion

To conclude, it could be interpreted that the *Harry Potter* novels articulate Sartre’s idea according to which human beings are condemned to be free and that they can therefore

³⁶⁸ J.K. Rowling, *HBP*, op. cit., 413.

choose to be happy by choosing to be virtuous. The virtue of courage is indeed depicted as very important in the series and could be understood to be necessary in order to be happy in the wizarding world, in which virtue is contagious and is built through our relationships with others. Besides, it appears that the ultimate proof of free will in the novels is that one can always choose to repent for their past immoral actions by feeling remorse and by eventually choosing ethics.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

A CHILDREN'S SERIES WITH PHILOSOPHICAL VALUE

*“Philosophy begins in wonder,” Plato said. The mystery and marvel of it all is rarely lost on a child. Youngsters don’t need to be taught philosophical curiosity. It just comes naturally.*³⁶⁹

The success of the *Harry Potter* novels was not immediate, and there were indeed mixed receptions to the series around the globe. In a 2000 interview with *Manufacturing Intellect*, the late literary critic and Sterling professor of Humanities at Yale University, Harold Bloom qualified the *Harry Potter* series as an ‘endless string of clichés’, declaring that ‘there is nothing there to be read.’³⁷⁰ Bloom also added that Rowling’s *Harry Potter* is not worth Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* or Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*, and stated that it is nothing more than what he called ‘a period piece,’ which is a phrase used to refer to a piece of writing which becomes popular for a short time due to a ‘fashion effect.’ However, on the 26th of June this year, the series will celebrate its 25th anniversary since the publication of the first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, and it is still the fifth most-sold book of all times today, with 107 million copies sold.³⁷¹ James Clear’s *Top 25 Best-Selling Books of All-Time* also holds seven places for the seven novels of the series. In that sense, the *Harry Potter* novels can arguably be considered to have shaped the landscape of contemporary fantasy literature. Published in the children’s section, the series shares similarities with J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of The Rings*, which is very likely to have influenced Joanne Rowling, who said in an interview with *Newsweek* in 2000 that she had indeed read it before she began writing it³⁷², and both series appear to thrive with philosophical value³⁷³. As we read the *Harry Potter* novels again at a more mature age, our reception to the series changes and its significance can shift into something more complex, and we can arguably find hidden meanings between the lines of the story, which could be interpreted to

³⁶⁹ D. Baggett and S. E. Klein, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, eds, op. cit., 2.

³⁷⁰ *Manufacturing Intellect*, ‘Harold Bloom interview on Harry Potter, the Internet and more’, 2000, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVWiwd0P0c0> (last accessed 12 June 2022)

³⁷¹ James Clear, ‘Best-Selling Books of All Time’, <https://jamesclear.com/best-books/best-selling> (last accessed 12 June 2022)

³⁷² Malcolm Jones, ‘The Return of *Harry Potter*’, *Newsweek*, published on the 10th of July 2000, <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2000/0700-newsweek-jones.html> (last accessed 9 June 2022)

³⁷³ D. Baggett and S. E. Klein, *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, eds, op. cit., 3.

incorporate political, religious, psychological or even philosophical subjects into its plot. It is this last dimension which has been the object of study of this dissertation.

Happiness is one of the most tackled subjects in philosophy, raising the question of how it can be reached. The *Harry Potter* novels could be analysed in relation to this issue as many elements appear to contribute to bringing an answer to this question. In that sense, the first part of this dissertation has demonstrated that the conflict which opposes the subject of Divination and the idea of free will in the wizarding world could be read as a literary illustration of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's studies on existentialism, which led him to conclude that existence precedes essence and that human beings are condemned to be free. In the series, multiple characters are depicted as rejecting this idea in favour of a deterministic perspective, according to which the future is already written, and that events which are supposed to happen can even be foretold thanks to different techniques such as astrology—this is notably the case for the centaurs—, palmistry or clairvoyance—which is the case for Hogwarts' Divination teacher, Professor Trelawney—, for instance. Besides, there are several characters in the novels who believe in determining situations, particularly regarding blood status, leading them to think that the future success and the greatness of the magical abilities of a witch or a wizard depends on the family in which they were born. In that respect, several elements could be interpreted as depicting that the *Harry Potter* novels could be placed on a Sartrean side, as every character is actually presented as the result of their choices and actions. This idea could be analysed through the representation of the wisest characters of the series, such as Hermione, Professor McGonagall or Professor Dumbledore, for instance, who are all opposed to the science of Divination and who rather believe in free will and freedom of action. The series also often portrays characters who share similar situations but who make very different choices, leading them to build their essence in radically opposed ways. In that sense, the *Harry Potter* novels could be read as an existentialist lesson, in which the reader can learn that their happiness depends entirely on their actions and their decisions and that they can therefore choose to be happy.

Thus, the second part of this dissertation has dealt with the conception of the soul in the *Harry Potter* novels and the impact of free will, focusing more on a Platonic reading of the series, in which the soul appears to be represented as an entity which can be separated from the body after the death of the latter, notably through elements such as the ghosts or the Resurrection Stone, for instance. Besides, the Dementor's Kiss could be interpreted as an

literary illustration of the idea that the soul, which appears to be linked to sentimentality, feelings and emotions in the wizarding world, can indeed be separated from the body. According to the Greek philosopher Plato, the body is the prison of the soul, and the latter is the only one which truly belongs to us, therefore needing to be preserved by leading an ethical life. In that regard, the *Harry Potter* novels could be read as a literary illustration of this theory developed by the Greek philosopher, as they could be interpreted to stand in favour of ethics, focusing on the intrinsic value and the end of an action rather than the action in itself, as a way to preserve the soul. Immoral characters are therefore portrayed as lacking humanity, as their soul is destroyed. The Horcruxes could themselves be analysed as the very representation of this idea according to which the immoral action destroys the soul, as it is described as a piece of a soul hidden in an object, which needs to be created by killing someone. It therefore appears that it is by being ethical that one can preserve their soul in the wizarding world as well. Several elements in the *Harry Potter* novels could then be studied in relation to Plato's Ring of Gyges, criterion of the ethical action, such as the Polyjuice Potion, the Animagi or the Invisibility Cloak, for instance, which all allow characters to act in such a way that no one is there to judge them or punish them. In that sense, it appears that it is indeed the intrinsic value of an action which truly matters in the series, in which the action performed in conformity with morality is dissociated from the action which answers to an inner feeling of what the right thing to do is. Bassham studies the question of free will and choices in the *Harry Potter* novels and distinguishes different categories of choices, such as internal-choices, which is a phrase he uses to describe 'a purely internal mental event, an act of decision that may or may not result in any overt physical act'³⁷⁴, act-choices, which refers to 'an observable physical act performed in a context of presumed alternatives'³⁷⁵, and motive-choices, which '[combine] both internal and external elements'³⁷⁶, and concludes by declaring that:

The most revealing kinds of choices will generally be motive-choices. Motive-choices convey more information than either internal-choices or act-choices do. They tell us not only what choice we have made (mentally), but also what motivated us to make the choice and whether we had the strength and consistency of character to act on the choice.³⁷⁷

In that sense, it appears that actions and choices are indeed evaluated by their intrinsic value in the wizarding world, arguably placing the novels on the side of ethics and teleology.

³⁷⁴ G. Bassham, 'Choices vs. Abilities', *op. cit.*, 158.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

If human beings are condemned to be free and build their essence through their choices, it could therefore be argued that they can choose to be happy. Albeit it cannot be declared that Rowling deliberately incorporated a lesson on happiness into her novels, the idea that happiness is a choice which needs to be made can be read between the lines which compose the story of the *Harry Potter* series. Indeed, according to the Greek philosopher Plato, it is by being just and by letting reason rule the soul that one can truly reach *eudaimonia*. His student Aristotle later developed this idea and demonstrated in his studies that happiness was reached by ‘living well.’ For Plato’s student, four cardinal virtues need to be incorporated into our lifestyle in order to live well and therefore reach *eudaimonia*: courage, justice, temperance and prudence. The four Hogwarts Houses could therefore be interpreted as representing these four cardinal virtues, and it seems that the virtue of courage is at the heart of the series, in which most characters are sorted into Gryffindor, which values bravery. However, it appears that every character can choose to be brave and to incorporate the virtue of courage into their way of life in the novels, and the character of Draco Malfoy, sorted into Slytherin, could be considered to be the perfect illustration of the idea that courage is indeed a choice. Besides, it could be interpreted that the greatest form of courage in the *Harry Potter* universe is to accept and embrace death as the inevitable outcome of life. Free will and happiness are therefore inextricably bound up in the novels, which could be analysed as demonstrating that, if we can choose to become whoever we want to be, we can therefore choose to be happy. This idea appears to be articulated through the representation of characters in the series who share similar situations—such as Harry and Voldemort or Dobby and Kreacher, for instance—but who made different choices and who grew to be different people. In that sense, there is no such thing as a written future or predetermining situations in the *Harry Potter* novels, and anyone can choose to be virtuous, and therefore reach *eudaimonia*.

Moreover, the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who studied the question of friendship in relation to virtue, believed in the idea that virtue could be learnt in relation to others, and distinguished between three forms of love: *eros*, ‘the type of love found in romantic relationships’³⁷⁸, *philia*, which refers to ‘friendship love’³⁷⁹, and *agape*, ‘universal, self-giving, and unconditional love’³⁸⁰. Catherine and David Deavel write that:

³⁷⁸ C. Deavel and D. Deavel, ‘Choosing Love’, *op. cit.*, 55.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

The prominence of love as a theme in the Potter books is hard to miss. Lily's love saves and protects Harry. Harry's love defeats Professor Quirrell and prevents Lord Voldemort from possessing Harry's soul. And Voldemort's fatal weakness, Dumbledore tells us, is that he never understood that love is the most powerful magic of all.³⁸¹

In that sense, love is at the core of the *Harry Potter* novels and is placed as the most powerful source of magic. According to Aristotle, love is the key to learning ethics and to reach *eudaimonia*. Besides, Greek philosophers placed *philia* above every other forms of love³⁸² and this idea could be interpreted to be highly significant in Rowling's series. Indeed, it is through *philia* that characters build their essence in relation to ethics in the novels. Harry, for instance, grows to be a virtuous character in relation to his friends, Ron and Hermione, as opposed to Lord Voldemort who rejects any form of feelings or attachment, leading him to be the most immoral wizard of the series. Catherine and David Deavel write that '[f]riendship strenghtens the soul's integrity: friends become better people by acting for the other's good and building virtue'³⁸³ Besides, a character which has been immoral in the past can learn to be virtuous and it could be interpreted that love acts as the light which guides them on the way of remorse in order to become ethical. According to Charles Taliaferro, '[m]oral reform requires that a person proceed to some positive new identity, passing through remorse to a new life'³⁸⁴. In that sense, it appears that love is the key to rebuilding our essence by feeling remorse and therefore choosing ethics. Catherine and David Deavel, who focus on love in relation to the character of Snape, write that:

Love does not transform easily or immediately. But what we see in Severus Snape is that love can radically transform a life. [...] [H]is 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, like Lily—and Harry.³⁸⁵

Love is indeed the most powerful magic of all in the wizarding world, lighting up the path towards ethics and virtue in order to reach happiness.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁸⁴ C. Taliaferro, 'The Real Secret of the Phoenix', *op. cit.*, 232.

³⁸⁵ C. Deavel and D. Deavel, 'Choosing Love', *op. cit.*, 63.

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