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“The Idea of Order/The Order of Ideas”

The Nature of Order in the *Twilight* Series

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In Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series, readers are presented with varying ideas about order. There is a religious sense of order based on heaven and hell which may or may not be influenced by a person’s adherence to religious conventions such as the Ten Commandments and the abstention from pre-marital sex, but not on church attendance, good works, or charity. There is the human sense of order defined by American legal codes, parental authority over children, and small town sensibilities in Forks, Washington. There is the vampire world’s sense of order in which the primary code is the secrecy of the vampire world and beyond which corruption and unscrupulous attainment of power are tolerated as long as they are inconspicuous. Most vampires find no qualms with killing their human prey or their status of the “eternally damned.” The Cullens, however, chose an alternative vampire sense of order which “respects” human life and has them feed on animal blood rather than human. Lastly, there is the werewolf sense of order which is based on protecting both the Quileute tribe members and the larger community members from the tribe’s one enemy, vampires, and keeping their status of “wolves that turn into men” (Meyer, *Twilight* 124) a secret from those outside

the tribe. Despite the claims of these five sets of order or ideas about order, if one looks closely, one will see that all five sets of order are bankrupt or flawed and, therefore, made meaningless. In this meaningless space, there is an order that is missing—an order that effectively and clearly articulates the codes involved and disciplines infractions against the codes. Such codes establish boundaries between good and bad, and they make authority figures accountable for their actions and protect would-be victims from abuse. The absence of such an order allows the Volturi to try and take by force the Cullen prizes they seek (Alice, Edward, and Bella) just as it allows Edward and Jacob to try and coerce Bella into choosing them.

The nature of the religious order in the *Twilight* series is only implied and the exact requirements are undefined. In the first book, readers are told that Carlisle, the head of the Cullen family and the creator of most of them (excluding Alice and Jasper), was the son of an Anglican pastor, born in the sixteen-forties in London. The cross from Carlisle's father's vicarage adorns their home, but Edward explains the presence of the cross to Bella in terms of Carlisle's association with it to his father (Meyer, *Twilight* 330-331), not in terms of any religious function for Carlisle or any member of the Cullen family.

In the second book, while Carlisle is stitching up Bella's arm after her paper cut and the resultant fight to get Jasper away from Bella, Carlisle explains to her that he believes in God and that he hopes heaven is a possibility for himself and his family

members. In other words, he believes that vampires have souls and can go to heaven like humans if they have lived virtuously. When Bella agrees with him, he explains that no one else in his family believes as he does, and Bella guesses that the real reason Edward won't turn her into a vampire is for fear of damning her soul (Meyer, *New Moon* 36-37). Thus, a religious order is established that contains heaven, God, and hell.

Though Carlisle has never fed on a human being, through the series, nevertheless, he is active in defending his family (in which he includes Bella) and killing vampires who threaten that family (James and Victoria and her newborn army). Readers are told that Rosalie kills the five men who raped her and left her for dead, including her fiancée (plus his two guards), but she murdered them, she didn't feed off of them (Meyer, *Eclipse* 163). Edward, Emmett, and Jasper have all fed off of humans before becoming more practiced and disciplined about their "vegetarian" diets—although Jasper still struggles to maintain the non-human diet. All, like Carlisle, fight to defend their family (Bella included) from hostile vampires and kill vampires or are willing to kill them as the need arises. When Edward went off the wagon, he hunted evil people. Reading their minds, he was able to identify murderers or rapists and prey exclusively on them, but he began to empathize even with them and returned to Carlisle and Esme to recommit to Cullen way (Meyer, *Twilight* 343). It is implied that Alice and Esme have "fallen off the wagon," in the third book, when Rosalie tells Bella her story and comments that her "feeding" history is nearly as spotless as Carlisle's and better than Esme's (Meyer, *Eclipse* 163). Although she doesn't explicitly reference Alice, the implication is that Rosalie's feeding

record is the closest to Carlisle's; thus, Alice must have slipped at some point, but readers are given no specifics.

In this religious order, the fact that the Cullens deny their vampire natures and abstain from human blood seems to cleanse them of other sins including prior feeding off humans (Edward, Emmett, Jasper, Alice, and Esme), murdering for revenge (Rosalie), and murdering other vampires (all of the Cullens). Other vampires seem to find the Cullen choice of abstaining from human blood a sacrifice, and Garrett calls it such in the last book (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 718). The Cullen absolution of murder in self-defense or in times of war corresponds to human notions of religious order and justifications for violence even within "most major belief systems" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 453-454), but the majority of the Cullens kill humans for reasons beyond self-defense or during times of war (Edward, Rosalie, Emmett, and Jasper). Is denying their vampire natures enough to absolve them from bouts of rebelliousness (Edward) (Meyer, *Twilight* 342), or revenge (Rosalie), or falling off the wagon (Emmett, Esme, Alice, and Jasper), or being created to serve and then lead in Maria's armies (Jasper) (Meyer, *Eclipse* 296)? It appears so and indicates a strange or convenient religious order.

When Edward is coercing Bella into agreeing to marry him in the third book, he puts off having sex with her (her condition for agreeing to marry him) by insisting that they get married before they have sex. His rationale is that they are both virgins, and though he has broken many of the Ten Commandments (taking the Lord's name in vain, not honoring the Sabbath, failing to honor Carlisle and Esme at times, murdering,

stealing, and coveting Bella), he wants this “one rule unbroken” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 454) in their bids for afterlives in heaven. Readers are left drawing the absurd conclusion that being a virgin until one is married will absolve one enough to get into heaven despite committing murder and whatever else, so the religious order presented in the series is perverse and corrupted.

Aside from Carlisle being the son of a pastor, the cross, the debates about heaven, God, the possibility of vampire souls, hell, and references to the Ten Commandments, there are no references or rituals associated with “most major belief systems.” No one attends church, has a close relationship with god (conventionally or unconventionally), or participates in charity or other good works to help those in need (Carlisle’s work at the hospital is paid work, not charity). The only reference to a religious holiday happens in the last book when Bella, Edward, Renesmee, and Jacob all spend Christmas Day with Charlie and many of the Quileutes (werewolves) (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 653), but the focus is on food, presents, and family togetherness—the religious significance of the day is not mentioned, and there is no Christmas celebration at the Cullen household or among any of their vampire guests. This again highlights a corrupted or malfunctioning religious order.

The human sense of order is defined by legal codes, parental authority, and gossip. Thus, Charlie chides Jacob about driving too young in the first book because he is the Chief of Police and Jacob is only fifteen and driving (Meyer, *Twilight* 236). In the confrontation between Edward and Jacob after Jacob has kissed Bella the first time and

Bella has cracked a knuckle hitting him for taking liberty with her, Charlie tells them he doesn't want any fighting—asking if he needs his police badge to make the “request more official” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 338-339). Again, in police chief capacity, he suggests to Bella that she call him if the Cullens' graduation party gets “too wild” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 363).

In terms of parental authority, Charlie exercises that by disapproving of Edward to varying degrees. After Bella is injured in Phoenix in the first book, Charlie sets up “rules that hadn't existed before: curfews ... and visiting hours” (Meyer, *Twilight* 483) to restrict Bella's access to Edward. After Bella's three day disappearance in the second book during which Charlie believes she was in Los Angeles while she was in fact in Italy, Edward is first banned from the house (Meyer, *New Moon* 503-504) and then allowed only during Bella's further restricted “visiting hours” which Bella describes as “house arrest” (Meyer, *New Moon* 549). When Bella is ungrounded in the third book, it is under the condition that she finds ways to balance her free time with other friends in addition to the Cullens (Meyer, *Eclipse* 11). Finally, after finding out Bella intended to go to graduation with Edward, Charlie insists on taking her and begrudgingly agrees to take them both when Edward insists that his parents wouldn't care that he doesn't go with his family (Meyer, *Eclipse* 351).

In the small town of Forks, gossip keeps most people in line. As Bella remarks in the opening of the first book, there is only one high school in Forks with a population of 358 students (including herself) whereas at her Phoenix high school there were more than 700 in her class alone (Meyer, *Twilight* 9), and Phoenix as a major city would have many

high schools, not just one. In fact, one of the things that Bella dreads about school is that all the kids in Forks will have known each other all their lives just like their parents and their parents before them (Meyer, *Twilight* 9). The Cullens, as new to Forks, stunningly beautiful, withdrawn from most of the population, and wealthy, are ready topics of conversation among high school students and adults alike. Jessica's comments about the Cullen kids being paired up except for Edward strike Bella as exactly small town gossip: "Her voice held all the shock and condemnation of the small town" (Meyer, *Twilight* 20). When Bella asks Charlie about the Cullens, Charlie immediately understands that the kids at school have been gossiping about the Cullens, mimicking in part the gossip of their parents, and he defends the Cullens to her and complains that the good people of Forks "have to talk" (Meyer, *Twilight* 36-37). Later, in the third book, when Bella wistfully wonders if anyone will come to their graduation party, Edward counters that "everyone will come" to see the "reclusive Cullens' mystery house"—all too aware of his family as the topic of town gossip and speculation (Meyer, *Eclipse* 367).

However, the Cullens and Bella continually flout human order (both legal and parental) seemingly at will and without consequence. Some of the Cullens have accidents and "fall off the wagon" which translates to human disappearances and murder. They have run from the FBI before (Meyer, *Twilight* 381). They steal cars when they need to (Edward and his family to get to Bella at the ballet studio in the first book (Meyer, *Twilight* 469-470) and Alice and Bella to get to Volterra in time to save Edward and then again to get them back to Florence in the second book (Meyer, *New Moon* 439, 492). Though Charlie attempts to keep Bella and Edward apart, the fact that Edward

“spent almost every night in [her] bedroom” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 7) significantly undermines his authority or ability to keep them apart. And the Cullens don’t really care about small town gossip because as Edward tells Bella in the third book, “after a few decades, everyone you know is dead” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 226), so there is little need for the Cullens to worry about what strangers think or say about them.

The assumed Volturi function is to create “the foundation of [vampire] peace and civilization” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 580) by “keeping the secret” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 33) of the vampire world from human knowledge. As Alice explains to Bella in the second book, the Volturi are the vampire world’s “ruling class.” “Over the millennia, they have assumed the position of enforcing our rules—which actually translates to punishing transgressors. They fulfill that duty decisively” (Meyer, *New Moon* 429-430). The Volturi are comprised of the three ancients, Aro, Caius, and Marcus, and two wives, and then nine permanent members of their guard with others as needed (Meyer, *New Moon* 429). When vampire actions are too reckless and threaten to expose the existence of vampires to the human world, the Volturi step in and destroy the transgressors. Edward’s plan to walk out into the sunlight bare-chested during the Saint Marcus’ Day Festival would have exposed him as a vampire, and the Volturi were prepared to act had he exposed them in the second book (Meyer, *New Moon* 438-439). Jasper describes to Bella the great vampire wars of the South where newborn vampire armies were created to wipe out competition and secure new territories. Jasper was part of such an army for many years before he began to develop a conscience that lead him to Alice and then to Carlisle’s family (Meyer, *Eclipse* 287-302). Some of the most intense fighting during the

vampire army wars became too conspicuous, and Jasper explains it took the Volturi a year to clean up Mexico after Benito unleashed war there (Meyer, *Eclipse* 291). The newborn army that Jasper had been associated with operated on a smaller scale and was more careful, so Maria, the creator of Jasper and her armies, was never punished by the Volturi. Victoria, however, with her inexperience in creating such an army drew the attention of the Volturi—but the Cullens (with aid) beat the Volturi to her. In the final book, readers learn that some vampires cannot be allowed. Very young children cannot be turned into vampires because they cannot control their bloodlust and thus expose the vampire world (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 33-34).

On the surface, the Volturi seem effective and responsible guardians of vampire life and culture, of the vampire sense of order; however, readers learn in the final book that the Volturi have been acting for their own self-interest for centuries. Bella and Edward conceive a child on their honeymoon when Bella is still human. The half-vampire, half-human fetus nearly kills Bella, but Edward is able to deliver the child and then transform Bella into a vampire to save her life. The child, Renesmee, is not an immortal child, a pure vampire child, but she is mistaken as one, and the Volturi come to destroy the Cullens and the child. To prevent such an outcome, the Cullens begin assembling witnesses. Among those witnesses are Tanya's family members. In Edward's discussions with Eleazar (once a member of the Volturi, and now part of Tanya's family, the Cullens' extended family and like-minded vegetarian vampires), it is revealed that sometimes the Volturi "fabricate" charges against a coven with the hidden agenda of acquiring a particularly talented member of the accused coven (Meyer,

*Breaking Dawn* 602). Eleazar further reveals that Chelsea, part of the Volturi guard, has the power to “loosen and secure” bonds between vampires (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 602). Eleazar is forced to conclude that what he had previously believed was evidence of Volturi mercy and justice is now in fact evidence of manipulation and abuse of power for self-serving ends (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 605).

The addition of the surviving two Romanians, the previous vampire ruling elite, to the Cullens’ witnesses makes many uncomfortable—particularly because they are not shy about discussing the Volturi as abusing their power to acquire and bind talented vampires to them (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 657-658). However, all the speculation about “the Volturi agenda” ends when Edward can read Aro’s mind in the clearing and confirms that the Volturi have “come to destroy and acquire” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 682)—Aro wanting Alice, Edward, and Bella from Carlisle’s family but expanding his “wish list” to Kate, Benjamin, Zafrina from the accumulated Cullen witnesses (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 729). Aro and Caius lie and manipulate others to try to achieve their goals with the Cullens and their witnesses; thus their sense of order is corrupt.

The Cullens’ sense of order is tied to the religious order. In valuing human life, they are different from most vampires. Their abstention from human blood is tied to vague religious beliefs about heaven, God, and hell (as previously discussed). Contradictions abound. How does one break most of the Ten Commandments and still retain a soul worthy of heaven and forgiveness from God? It appears that the Cullens shape a religious order to suit their own particular vampire natures instead of following a

“major belief system”—i.e. where feeding on animals counts heavily, accidents in feeding habits are forgiven, normal religious prohibitions are disregarded, and other religious values, like virginity at marriage, are elevated in importance. The manipulation of religious order to create the Cullens as good in their own views corresponds to their other manipulations. They, as immortals, easily circumvent the human conventions or order. The only forces which seem to threaten the Cullens and impose order on them are the Volturi (as upholders of vampire law) and the werewolves (through the treaty between the Quileutes and the Cullens). Though the Cullens impose more rules on themselves, their manipulations mirror the ones they condemn in the Volturi.

The most extreme manifestation of the Cullens’ corruption of senses of order (religious, human, and their own) comes in Edward’s treatment and possession of Bella. With Edward’s enhanced vampire senses (sight, hearing, smell, strength, speed, and mind-reading), he is able to monitor Bella carefully without her even being aware of it. He can hear and see changes in Bella’s breathing and heart rate. He can hear her conversations across the crowded and noisy cafeteria. He can spy on her through the thoughts of her friends from classrooms different from his own. He actively employs both his enhanced vampire senses and his vampire attracting qualities (beauty, grace, eyes, voice, scent) to win Bella. He lies to her, manipulates her, keeps information from her, stalks her, forces her to do things against her will, and intimidates her through his beauty, anger, violence, and strength. Almost no one intervenes to stop him—none of the Cullens, not Charlie (so oblivious to what is going on with his daughter that readers have to question his competence as chief of police), not her friends. Only Renee, her mother,

and Jacob guess at the unhealthy and obsessive nature of Bella and Edward's relationship. Renee, Bella easily distracts and puts off. Jacob, though identifying the disturbing aspects of Bella's relationship with Edward, seeks to substitute himself as the controlling and abusive force in Bella's life (not allowing her agency and free will to control her life and relationships any more than Edward). In fact, Edward's pursuit of Bella is just as unscrupulous and calculating as Aro's pursuit of Alice, Edward, and Bella, only Edward is allowed to "take" Bella while Aro is stopped from acquiring the prizes he seeks.

The werewolf sense of order is based on the protection of the Quileute tribe which has expanded to include the wider community of Forks. Werewolves exist because vampires do (Meyer, *Eclipse* 309). The legends of the tribe are known by all members, but only the tribal elders keep the secret that the legends are true and keep the store of knowledge about werewolf transformation and fighting techniques which they pass down father to son through the generations including on to the current pack members. Quileute legends include the Cullens because the previous pack, four generations past, forged a treaty with the Cullens because they hunted animals and left the human population alone. Like the vampire world, the werewolves are bound by secrecy. Unlike vampires who can act as individuals and must choose to bond together or become mated, werewolves are bonded to each other and the tribe and the community. The Alpha, Sam, can command the group, and individual identity is subservient to the group collective as the efficient vampire hunting mechanism. When Jacob becomes a werewolf in the second book, he is resentful that his heritage has imposed this fate upon

him. He wants to be with Bella despite her clear fixation with Edward and her attempts to keep their relationship, Bella and Jacob's, as one of friendship. In fact, Jacob goes to elaborate measures to try to win Bella even after Edward's return to Forks. The pack is its own kind of family and at first comprises the tribal elders and the current werewolves. As the pack grows, Jacob gains new brothers and a sister to supplement his pack family and his nuclear family with Billy, his father, and his sisters (one who lives in Hawaii and is married and one who is away at college). As members of the pack imprint (Sam, Jared, Quil, Paul) on mates, the pack extended family grows. Loyalty within the pack is essential and can be commanded by the Alpha. Thus, werewolf sense of order is dictated by the requirements of secrecy, commitment to protect the community from vampires, the treaty with the Cullens, and loyalty within the group.

It is when the werewolves fail to act as protectors that their sense of order becomes bankrupt. Jacob wants Bella so badly that he will not respect her wishes and forces himself on her in both of their kisses and when he licks her across the face at the joint Cullen/werewolf training session before taking on Victoria's newborn army. By putting his desires for Bella in front of her wishes for herself, Jacob attempts to take away Bella's agency, and he becomes someone trying to oppress Bella instead of protecting her. Because pack members are linked mentally in their wolf forms, all of Jacob's pack members know about his obsession with Bella and his fantasies about her. Leah chews him out about them at the end of the third book because Jacob's fantasies about Bella are infiltrating her dreams, and Leah doesn't want to be dreaming about kissing Bella (Meyer, *Eclipse* 622-623). As his pack members know Jacob's fantasies, they also must

know his elaborate schemes to force Bella to choose him over Edward. By protecting Jacob and by turning a blind eye when Jacob forces his desires on Bella, the pack fails in its role of protector; they allow Jacob to coerce Bella into doing things she does not want to do. In the final book, when the pack learns that Bella is pregnant with a half-human/half-vampire child, the immediate instinct of the pack members is to kill the child and Bella along with it despite the fact that this will break the treaty with the Cullens and begin a war. Faced with this disturbing prospect, Jacob claims his hereditary right to Alpha status (his leadership bloodline is stronger than Sam's though he has shied away from leadership up until this point), and he breaks away from Sam's pack to warn the Cullens. Seth and Leah join Jacob's pack, and by the end of the final book, the packs have realigned themselves with their proper sense of order: they keep the secret, they protect against hostile vampires (the Volturi), they respect Bella's ability to make her own choices, they maintain and even strengthen their treaty with the Cullens, and they remain loyal to each other and the communities around them.

Worse than Edward and Jacob manipulating, controlling, and abusing Bella and Charlie, the Cullens, and the werewolf pack allowing these things to happen, consciously or unconsciously, is the fact that Bella is dimly aware of the manipulation, control, and abuse—in the first book and then through the series with greater awareness—and she refuses to see the blatant lies and manipulation as forms of abuse. In the first book, Bella suspects Edward of listening to her conversations with Jessica and Tyler though that seems impossible to her, and she vaguely understands that Edward experiments with his eyes and scent and their power over her. By the meadow scene, she finally realizes that

Edward can sense elevations in her heart rate or surges of adrenaline in her system (Meyer, *Twilight* 257, 263, 279), and she continues to be aware of his ability to monitor her human reactions through the rest of the series (Meyer, *Twilight* 463, 470-472) (Meyer, *New Moon* 9, 491, 512, 515) (Meyer, *Eclipse* 30, 187-188, 440) (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 13, 79, 106, 380, 384, 385). Yet, she refuses to find his unnatural power over her disturbing or threatening. Additionally, she allows him to force her to do things: carry her to the nurse, drive her home afterward, take her to dinner in Port Angeles, take her to the prom, insist on an eighteenth birthday party, take her to Florida to keep her away from Victoria, fill out college applications, insist on a graduation party, and coerce her into agreeing to marry him. When she protests his treatment of her, he ignores her, and she doesn't mind being ignored or does mind enough to insist upon her own agency to make her decisions and to have those decisions respected by Edward.

Just as Bella becomes aware of Edward's control and manipulation of her, she is also aware of Jacob's attempts to control and manipulate her, and just like with Edward, Bella refuses to see what Jake is doing to her as abusive. The more disturbing things about the Bella/Jacob relationship are the violence of the kiss scenes (the first kiss unsolicited by Bella and the second coerced from her) and Bella's realization during the second kiss that she likes it and loves Jacob. It is rape fantasy confirmed—boys should force girls to kiss them (and by implication have sex with them) because some how in the middle of it all the girls will realize that they like it and want it!

Perhaps worse, than all these broken sets of order is Bella's inability to see her lack of agency in the futures that Edward and Jacob attempt to impose on her, so she models to millions of readers nationally and internationally a girl who is manipulated and controlled by the men around her and unable to find a sense of order through which to make sense of what is happening to her or to prevent what they are doing. Though Bella can see Aro's contrivances as corrupt and evidence of his abuse of Volturi power, she cannot see the contrivances of Edward and Jacob, so she cannot arm herself against their abuse. Even the literature that Bella turns to, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, offers no heroine strong enough or critical enough to reject societal expectations for women or extricate herself from obsessive and dangerous relationships. There is no Nora Helmer (from Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*) who suddenly sees her husband, Torvald, as the shallow and controlling man he is and rejects him, walking out of the house to find herself and her place in the world. Thus, Bella willingly isolates herself from forces or models of behavior that would allow her to be critical of the men she loves and the systems of order (religious, human, vampire, Cullen, werewolf) that support their abuse of her and strip her of her agency over her life. Forever putting the happiness of those around her above her own happiness (Renee, Charlie, Edward, Jacob), Bella is a willing victim and beyond the protection of a system of order.

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