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GEORGE A. DUNN AND REBECCA ...

# TRUE BLOOD

## and Philosophy

We Wanna Think Bad Things with You



BLACKWELL PHILOSOPHY AND POP CULTURE SERIES



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**TRUE BLOOD  
AND  
PHILOSOPHY**

WE WANNA THINK BAD THINGS  
WITH YOU

Edited by  
George A. Dunn and  
Rebecca Housel



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# MERLOTTE'S MENU

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: For the “Supes”  
We Just Can’t Live Without ix

Introduction: “If a Tree Falls in the Woods,  
It’s Still a Tree—Ain’t It?” 1

## PART ONE

### “I USED TO HATE VAMPIRES, UNTIL I GOT TO KNOW ONE”: VAMPIRE-HUMAN ETHICS

- 1 To Turn or Not to Turn: The Ethics  
of Making Vampires 7  
*Christopher Robichaud*
- 2 Dressing Up and Playing Human:  
Vampire Assimilation in the Human Playground 19  
*Jennifer Culver*
- 3 Pets, Cattle, and Higher Life Forms on *True Blood* 33  
*Ariadne Blayde and George A. Dunn*

## PART TWO

### “LIFE-CHALLENGED INDIVIDUALS”: THE POLITICS OF BEING DEAD

- 4 Signed in Blood: Rights and the  
Vampire-Human Social Contract 51  
*Joseph J. Foy*



- 5 “Honey, If We Can’t Kill People, What’s the Point of Being a Vampire?”: Can Vampires Be Good Citizens? 65  
*William M. Curtis*
- 6 Un-True Blood: The Politics of Artificiality 79  
*Bruce A. McClelland*

## PART THREE

**“THEIR VERY BLOOD IS SEDUCTIVE”:  
EROS, SEXUALITY, AND GENDER**

- 7 Coming Out of the Coffin and Coming Out of the Closet 93  
*Patricia Brace and Robert Arp*
- 8 “I Am Sookie, Hear Me Roar!”: Sookie Stackhouse and Feminist Ambivalence 109  
*Lillian E. Craton and Kathryn E. Jonell*
- 9 Sookie, Sigmund, and the Edible Complex 123  
*Ron Hirschbein*

## PART FOUR

**“I AM ACTUALLY OLDER THAN YOUR JESUS”:  
NATURAL, SUPERNATURAL, AND DIVINE**

- 10 Let the Bon Temps Roll: Sacrifice, Scapegoats, and Good Times 139  
*Kevin J. Corn and George A. Dunn*
- 11 Are Vampires Unnatural? 157  
*Andrew Terjesen and Jenny Terjesen*
- 12 Does God Hate Fangs? 175  
*Adam Barkman*

## PART FIVE

**“OUR EXISTENCE IS INSANITY”: THE  
METAPHYSICS OF SUPERNATURAL BEINGS**

- 13 A Vampire's Heart Has Its Reasons That  
Scientific Naturalism Can't Understand 187  
*Susan Peppers-Bates and Joshua Rust*
- 14 Keeping Secrets from Sookie 203  
*Fred Curry*
- 15 Vampires, Werewolves, and Shapeshifters:  
The More They Change, the More They  
Stay the Same 215  
*Sarah Grubb*
- CONTRIBUTORS: “I Don't Know Who You Think You  
Are, but Before the Night Is Through . . .” 229
- INDEX: Sookie's Words of the Day 237

## INTRODUCTION

“If a Tree Falls in the Woods,  
It’s Still a Tree—Ain’t It?”

When Amy Burley gives Jason Stackhouse a quick tutorial on the “circle of life” (you know, squirrels eating nuts, snakes eating squirrels, and so on), using the decor of Merlotte’s as a visual aid, he exclaims, “Jesus Christ, I want to lick your mind!” Our boy Jason may be better known in *Bon Temps* for his good looks and “sex abilities,” but it’s phrases like “lick your mind” that draw fans to *True Blood*’s most earnest, if sometimes tragically misguided, seeker of life’s meaning and purpose (or at least *his* life’s meaning and purpose). In fact, “lick your mind” perfectly captures the blend of smarts and sensuality in the brilliant, sexually charged HBO series that inspired us to produce the book you hold in your hands, *True Blood and Philosophy*.

It all started with Charlaine Harris’s *Dead until Dark*, published in 2001, which launched her series of critically acclaimed, best-selling supernatural mystery novels and introduced the world to a most unlikely sleuth, an attractive Louisiana barmaid and mind reader named Sookie Stackhouse. Harris’s work caught the attention of Alan Ball, the award-winning screenwriter and director, who built his reputation on dark and daring

works like *American Beauty* and *Six Feet Under*. With a healthy dose of edgy humor and deep compassion for his characters' frailties and foibles, Ball made a career of boldly delving into taboo subjects like death and transgressive sexuality, creating works that were brazen both in their unabashed carnality and in raising tough questions about the human condition. *True Blood*, Ball's adaptation of Harris's Southern Vampire Mystery novels, takes the same mind-licking approach as those earlier works. In the world of *True Blood*, as in the pages of Harris's novels, we encounter a wonderful array of richly drawn characters struggling to make sense of their bewildering world and their own sometimes equally bewildering desires and hungers. For those of us who hunger for insight and understanding, their stories offer a lavish banquet of philosophical morsels into which we can sink our proverbial fangs and from which we can draw both sustenance and delight.

As it turns out, philosophy has a lot in common with *True Blood*. Like the vampires, shapeshifters, and other supernatural beings that pass through Bon Temps, philosophers are often regarded as deviant characters due to their habit of overturning expectations and tempting us to think outside conventional boundaries. Like *True Blood*'s mind-reading detective Sookie Stackhouse, philosophers are unafraid to venture into dark corners of the human mind, where they sometimes unearth uncomfortable truths that others prefer to leave buried. And like the indomitable Jason Stackhouse, many philosophers engage in a quest for the meaning of life that often seems quixotic, an interminable pursuit that's been known to lead us down more than a few blind alleys—as Jason himself can testify. But like *True Blood* and Harris's novels, the philosophical quest can also be one of life's most delectable pleasures. Don't take our word for it, though. You hold the evidence in your hands.

When you surrender to the lure of *True Blood and Philosophy*, it won't cost you a drop of blood, but your perception of reality may be expanded and enriched so dramatically that you'll

wonder whether you somehow ingested V-Juice. Okay, maybe that's too much to expect. But we *are* confident that your enjoyment of *True Blood* will be considerably enhanced by the time you spend with us pondering some of the more perplexing philosophical quandaries raised by the supernatural adventures of Sookie and her paranormal pals. For example, "pro-living" crusaders like the Reverend Steve Newlin denounce vampires as unnatural, but what does that really mean? If it's just another way of saying that vampires are evil, then why does evil exist in the first place? And can vampires—or any other creatures for that matter—be considered *inherently* evil?

Beyond these classic questions about the nature of evil, *True Blood* offers a fresh spin on the vampire genre that opens a rich vein of new philosophical queries. In the world envisioned by Ball and Harris, those conundrums-on-legs we call vampires have "come out of the coffin" and are attempting to live openly alongside human beings. Given the imbalance of power between human beings and vampires (who, in addition to superhuman strength and speed, also have a troubling knack for "glamouring" humans out of their free will), can humans and vampires belong to the same political community and participate in society as equals? Are the plights of gays and other minorities similar to the situation of *True Blood*'s vampires as they come out of the coffin and claim their place in the sun—um, better make that *in the shade*? The perennial evils of hatred, bigotry, and scapegoating—those not-so-supernatural scourges of our species—appear in a fresh light when their victims and perpetrators include not only ordinary human beings, but also vampires, shapeshifters, "fang-bangers," fanatical disciples of the Fellowship of the Sun, and, last but not least, a maenad as beguiling as she is depraved.

And let's not forget that the same show that stimulates our thinking with such succulent moral and metaphysical quandaries is also a wickedly sexy romp through the perilous precincts of love and lust. Could *True Blood* possibly have something to teach us

about the paths and impediments to erotic fulfillment? Granted, most of us probably have desires considerably tamer than those of the more colorful denizens of Bon Temps, but still . . .

We don't promise that *True Blood and Philosophy* will supply the conclusive answers to all of these questions—or even to Jason's classic mindblower, "If a tree falls in the woods, it's still a tree—ain't it?" Philosophers have been debating questions like these since long before Godric was a twinkle in his maker's eye, and every answer has been shadowed by some doubt. It's the questioning itself that's mind-licking good. So invite us across your threshold. We want to *think* bad things with you!

**PART ONE**

**“I USED TO HATE VAMPIRES,  
UNTIL I GOT TO KNOW ONE”:  
VAMPIRE-HUMAN ETHICS**







## TO TURN OR NOT TO TURN

### The Ethics of Making Vampires

*Christopher Robichaud*

Lorena: What more can I give? What is it you want from me?

Bill: Choice.<sup>1</sup>

Sookie Stackhouse loves Bill Compton. And he loves her. The trouble is, Bill is a vampire and Sookie is human. Well, not quite, but she's not immortal either.<sup>2</sup> That means that as Sookie ages, Bill won't. Let's suppose that despite her fairy blood, Sookie can become a vampire. Would it be morally permissible for Bill to turn her into one? This question lies at the, um, heart of the issue we'll be looking at in this chapter. The "unlife" of a vampire is often understood as something a person is *condemned* to. Many see Bill, for instance, as being *damned* to exist as a bloodthirsty creature of the night. Such an existence sure doesn't sound like the kind of thing it would be nice to bestow on another. This is one of the reasons we're