TIME TRAVEL AND TELEOLOGY:
MORALITY, SOCIETY, AND THE LIFE OF LUCAS BISHOP

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on a rarely analyzed superhero within the X-Men universe: the time-traveling mutant and law enforcement officer Lucas Bishop. Through highlighting core narrative themes consistent throughout his various depictions in comics and animation through the lens of a constructivist approach to socio-moral development (Social Cognitive Domain Theory; SCDT), the author contends that the character's complexity and multifaceted nature potentially has implications for understanding superheroes like Bishop as subjects worthy of scholarly and pedagogical inquiry. The narrative themes examined in support of this argument pertain to (1) how different dystopian social orders or arrangements potentially inform his morally relevant decisions, (2) the distinction between the arbitrary and non-arbitrary treatment of mutants in interactions bearing on human rights, and (3) the potential parallels between Bishop's morally relevant decisions and related research on sociomoral development.

Keywords: dystopian, morality, X-Men, time travel, moralality, superhero, development, society, social convention.

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Growing up in a dystopian future where mutants were feared, hunted, imprisoned, and often killed, Lucas Bishop wished he could prevent the events leading to such an oppressive future (*X Factor #27*, 2005, 4). Although the threats and missions changed over the years, most of his morally relevant decisions have been made with this aim in mind. Through utilizing a constructivist approach to social and moral development to highlight common narrative themes throughout his depictions from childhood to adulthood, the essay situates the character as a complex individual whose diverse social experiences may have implications for scholarly and pedagogical inquiry. These themes include the (1) navigation of differing social orders or arrangements and their relationship to his morally relevant judgments, (2) distinction between arbitrary and non-arbitrary treatment of mutants, and (3) parallels between his morally relevant decisions and general expectations of sociomoral decision making capacities based on developmental research. As relevant, they are explored across comic and/or animated series narratives.

Since their debut in 1963, X-Men narratives have—through interrogating the origins of, consequences of, and ambiguities concerning fear and hatred as social facts—provided different perspectives on what it means to live in a just society (Darowski 2014, 1; Grimstead Krizner Porter and Clayton, 2024, 14; Purcell 2021, 138; Smith 2014, 66). These perspectives are articulated, defended, and challenged within a fictional universe coming to terms with robust genetic differences between mutants (individuals born with a wide array of abilities) and non-mutant humans. Collectively, the emphasis on the relationship between genetic differences and what they might mean for building and maintaining just societies animate the narratives by exploring themes related to oppression, alienation, individual and state violence, medical ethics, and the restriction or elimination of human rights (Bufficero 2016, 220–21; Grimstead Krizner Porter and Clayton, 2024, 10–11, 14; Purcell 2021, 138; Smith 2014, 66). These emphases may partially explain the wide applicability of the mutant metaphor to various social groups (Darowski 2014, 1). Thus, to the extent some of these mutants become superheroes, their missions are inherently more complex due to the nature of their powers and the challenges of using those powers to protect those who may fear and/or question the merits of their existence.

1. A Time-Traveler's Telos

First appearing in *Uncanny X-Men #282* (1991, 21), Bishop is a time-traveling mutant from a dystopian future who has spent time as both friend and foe of the mutant superhero team the X-Men, although considerably more time as the former. As a member of the mutant police force known as the Xavier Security Enforcers (X.S.E), Bishop was responsible for locating and arresting mutants deemed threats to the social order. In his time, exterminating mutants was the status quo. When a criminal mutant known as Trevor Fitzroy, who steals the energy of mutants, escapes from prison and into the past, Bishop's pursuit eventually leads him to Fitzroy who is battling the X-Men (Stewart 2023). This is the precipitating event through which he is introduced to the X-Men team.

After officially joining the team in *Uncanny X-Men* #287 (1992, 22), Bishop worked alongside and saved the X-Men (and non-mutant humans) on multiple occasions, cementing his status as a valuable member of the team. Things changed, however, when the mutant Hope Summers was born, as he believed she was the cause of the events leading to the dystopian future he grew up in as well as the unjust imprisonment and subsequent death of his parents (*X-Factor #27*, 2008, 4; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #1*, 2009, 9, 12; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #2*, 2009, 6–7). Based on this assumption, he betrayed the X-Men, and tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to kill Hope. Despite his conviction concerning her responsibility for his dystopian future, there are times where he appears to consider the moral implications of the succeeding and question if it is worth it (e.g., *Uncanny X-Men #494*, 2008, 2; *Cable, #24*, 2010, 28; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #3*,

2009, 22). Eventually, Bishop rejoined the X-Men to assist them with safeguarding their dignity while also protecting humanity (Stewart 2023).

Sixty years after his introduction, the precipitating events surrounding his travel to the past (and the X-Men's present), as well as the societal backdrop against which those events occur, were revealed in *X-Men: Legends #5* and *#6* (2023). Readers learn that Bishop is responsible for Fitzroy's escape from prison, as he sought his assistance to help break out mutants who were unjustly imprisoned. Seemingly understanding the risks of aligning with such a dangerous mutant, Bishop believed the ends justified the means, as he refused to hunt down and detain mutants who posed no threat. For Bishop, detaining dangerous mutants, which was supposed to be the job, was one thing. Going after innocent mutants was something entirely different. He was also against the use of sentinels, who are highly adaptive, cold, and calculating robots, to bring in mutants, a practice that was supposed to have ended. His morally relevant mission to defy authority proved costly, however, as aligning with Fitroy eventually leads to the escape of many dangerous mutants into the past and the death of many people, including two of his fellow XSE members and best friends, Malcolm and Randall.

The present essay explores Bishop as a complex character who is informed by and challenges his varying social orders, a perspective suggested by narrative themes that tend to link his varied appearances, portrayals, and narrative arcs. When explaining the motivation for centering *X-Men: Legends* #5 and #6 (2023) in Bishop's future, co-creator Whilce Portacio notes that he wanted to situate Bishop's character and personality against the backdrop of the maximum security prison The Pool, its prisoners, and their families. For Portacio, the sense of purpose animating Bishop's actions comes from both being born to survive in such a harsh world while also possessing a heart built for a more peaceful one (Schreur 2022). And when explaining the impetus for exploring Bishop's upbringing and its role in his mission to kill the mutant messiah Hope in the *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* (2009), Duane Swierczynski describes Bishop as a tragic hero who is committed to doing what he believes is necessary to save lives despite everyone else believing he is wrong (Richards 2009).

In line with these notions of Bishop as multifaceted and significantly influenced by particular social arrangements, the present essay utilizes a constructivist approach to the development and application of social and moral judgments, Social Cognitive Domain Theory (SCDT; Smetana Jambon and Ball 2014, 24–29; Turiel 1998, 903–909; Turiel 2008, 25–29), to illustrate how Bishop's experiences and decisions parallel the nature and nuances of the conceptual distinction people tend to make between matters of convention and morality. In this sense, the paper builds on previous scholarship exploring superheroes such as Black Panther and Luke Cage, whose morally relevant missions are coterminous with the society or community in which they live (Martin 2023a, 60–75; Martin Killian and Letizia 2023, 210–14). By focusing on the development of the convention-

morality distinction and its parallels with Bishop's experiences as a time-traveler, the essay differs from previous scholarship interrogating his role in the perpetuation of popular notions and stereotypes concerning urban crime, poverty, and the carceral state (Lund 2015, 42–51). These valid considerations notwithstanding, the essay focuses less on what Bishop may signify sociologically and more on his relevance for thinking about the psychological foundations of social and moral judgments.

Support for this kind of parallelism comes from a constructivist informed analysis of his morally relevant experiences in different social arrangements, differences in the arbitrary and non-arbitrary treatment of persons elucidated by these social arrangements, and the extent his morally relevant choices may be informed by developmental research. In keeping with previous scholarship (Martin 2021, 28–32; 2023a, 76–83; 2023c, 23–30; Martin Killian and Letizia, 2023, 219–21), the analysis concludes with some implications for a developmental analysis of Bishop that considers the relationship between moral and societal concepts across varying social arrangements. These implications are consistent with the view that superhero narratives have the potential to stimulate scholarly and pedagogical inquiry pertaining to new social arrangements. Although the origins of his dystopian future vary across mediums (e.g., Hope killing a million people versus the assassination of a political figure), both portrayals are relevant to the present analysis.

2. SOCIAL ORDER, CONVENTION, AND MORALITY

Cassandra Sharp (2017, 423) argues that people use stories to make sense of normative expectations of the legal system, and this is especially the case with comics and graphic novels due to the narrative affordances of the visual medium. Consistent with this view, in addition to accounting for the symbolic importance of X-Men narratives, understanding the relevance of a character like Bishop should also consider his differing orientations toward the social order, broadly defined as the outcome of the combined attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, behaviors, and institutions of its members who vary in their interpretations of their experiences within and the meaning of the society in which they live (Frank 1944, 474; Innes 2003, 6). Its influence on individuals' lives notwithstanding, scholars note that social order is dynamic and subject to alterations as ideas, values, assumptions, and behaviors change (Frank 1944, 474–75; Innes 2003, 6). As a time traveler, Bishop's frequent navigation of different social arrangements provides a window into how members within a society contribute to the relational norms constitutive of their wider social order. At the same time, as a mutant operating within and outside the contours of the law, his narratives often complicate and challenge the notion of social order by highlighting both the (1) relationship between a society's general conception of persons (e.g., who they are at their core, the necessary social conditions for them to change for the betterment of society, etc.) and its resultant social order and (2) societal

implications of distorting this relationship (e.g., immoral or unethical practices leading to some without a sense of purpose and feeling devalued).

On the one hand, Bishop, as a member of law enforcement and an employee of the state, participates in practices that produce social order and organization (Innes 2003, 151). The law enforcement agency, X.S.E., was founded as part of a government initiative to allow mutants to police themselves (*Uncanny X-Men #287*, 1992, 10), a social arrangement he believes is important for the safety of mutants in both time periods (*Civil War: X-Men #1*, 2006, 14; *X-Men Legends #5, 2023*, 5). Yet at the same time, he frequently challenges and operates outside the social order when he deems it morally necessary or obligatory (e.g., as a defender of innocent and persecuted mutants)—a tendency suggested to characterize human social life more broadly (Nucci 2019, 74; Turiel 2002, 288). Moreover, in line with Frank's warning of the dangers of social orders largely characterized by the inhumane treatment of some of its members (1944, 475–77), Bishop's willingness to rebel against the prevailing social order to preserve the dignity of mutants suggests a similar sentiment or belief. To the extent the social order he sometimes protests lacks or tries to eliminate spaces for its members to freely congregate and interact in contexts that allow for the exchanging and debating of different views on important matters, one could view Bishop's activities as consistent with Miczo's (2016, 3–4, 13–14) conception of superheroes: ethical agents whose morally relevant actions preserve the public sphere while also protect the vulnerable. On multiple occasions, Bishop's morally relevant missions are motivated by the preservation of individual dignity and disruption of social order.

In the two-part miniseries "Days of Future Past" (*X-Men: The Animated Series*; Houston 1993*; XMTAS*), he tries to alter his social order by traveling to the past to prevent the assassination of a politician that eventually leads to the creation of a new law and social order where mutants (and eventually other humans) are subjugated by the authorities controlling the sentinels. In a later miniseries ("One Man's Worth"; *XMTAS*, Houston 1995), Master Mold, a machine in Bishop's future responsible for producing sentinels to keep the mutant population subjugated, sends Fitzroy and Bantam to 1959 to assassinate Charles Xavier (Professor X) so that he does not form the X-Men, who subsequently influence the mutant rebels he encounters during his time. In other words, he wants to eliminate substantive challenges to the social order he upholds. Bishop learns of this plot and tries to prevent the assassination. He not only risks his life to alter social arrangements deemed unjust; he is willing to try again if the first attempt is unsuccessful (e.g., "One Man's Worth: Part 2," *XMTAS*, Houston 1995, 12:55).

In this manner, viewing Bishop as a time traveling superhero who works within his varying social arrangements to give mutants treated unfairly a place within the public sphere affords pedagogical opportunities to examine the dynamic nature of his relationship to the differing societal contexts in which he operates. In addition to differing along dystopian dimensions (e.g., present societies where mutants are considerably more free

versus future societies where they are subjugated and hunted through authoritarian governments), they differ in terms of authority relations (e.g. mutants unfairly treated in institutions where humans are in charge of mutants' daily activities and wellbeing versus institutions with state-sanctioned mutants policing other mutants). Further, these contexts are associated with varied social experiences concerning his orientation toward the law and social order.

Childhood examples include (1) attacking guards in an attempt to stop them from branding his baby sister Shard's skin with an "M" on her face (a requirement for mutants in the camp; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #1*, 2009, 11), (2) threatening to attack an X.S.E officer once arrested if they do not let him see his sister (*Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #2*, 2009, 15), and (3) stealing food and power cells to survive (*Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #1*, 2009, 20; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #2*, 2009, 1–5, 13). Adulthood examples include (1) defying his boss and the prison warden in an effort to free mutants imprisoned unjustly (*X-Men Legends #5*, 2023; *X-Men Legends #6*, 2023), (2) attacking sentinels either as a mutant tracker working for the State ("Days of Future Past: Part 1"; *XMTAS*, Houston 1993, 06:17) or prisoner ("Future X"; *Wolverine and the X-Men; WATXM*, Filippi 2009, 14:50) to prevent others from being harmed, (3) actively seeking to alter the prevailing social order in his future by preventing the assassinations of key individuals ("Days of Future Past," *XMTAS*, Houston 1993; "One Man's Worth"; *XMTAS*, Houston 1995), and (4) his apparent frustration at others for not doing enough to alter the unjust social order. Concerning the latter, when Bishop returns to the future in "One Man's Worth: Part 2" (*XMTAS*, Houston 1995, 04:38), he is initially unaware that it is now different due to his failure to prevent Professor X's murder in the previous episode. Perplexed as to why there is no mutant rebellion in this future fighting against Master Mold, Forge tells him that rebellion against Master Mold is not something mutants do. When Bishop's sister Shard urges Bishop not to take his frustration out on Forge because he is not to blame for the current social arrangements, he replies, "nobody ever is" before pushing him to the ground. Thus, different social or societal arrangements, and Bishop's beliefs about their legitimacy, often inform his diverse morally relevant judgments.

The importance of navigating different social arrangements for his moral understanding is further suggested by the juxtaposition of the Manhattan of his present (the X-Men's future) and that of his past (the X-Men's present) and an important turning point in the ongoing disagreements between him and the X-Men since his arrival to their time, as told in *Uncanny X-Men* #288 (1992). During a visit to Manhattan, he is taken back by how different the borough looks in this time compared to his, where it was a tenement for those deemed the worst of society. People didn't strive to live there, but to live elsewhere (9–10). His description of this time's Manhattan as "extraordinary" and "transformed" is not hyperbole, as the Pool, the maximum security prison he helped maintain in his time was located in this same Manhattan (*Uncanny X-Men* #287, 1992, 15).

Upon discovering one of the dangerous criminals who escaped the Pool due to Fitzroy's actions (*X-Men: Legends* #6, 2023, 9, 13–15), a fight ensues and Bishop kills him. Right before he kills him, Storm intervenes and tries to convince him that he does not have to kill him. Bishop disregards her appeal by himself appealing to the criminal's hundreds of deceased victims—both civilians and X.S.E. officers alike. Angry, Storm tells him that X-Men do not kill, prioritize the welfare of all human life to the extent possible, and that the laws of this time are different from those of his time. She also tells him that he can only blame Fitzroy and the dangerous mutants who escaped for so much of the destruction brought upon Manhattan. He is partly responsible as well (*Uncanny X-Men* #288, 1992, 14–17).

Storm's appeal, which echoes previous disagreements he concerning the merits of retributive justice (e.g., *Uncanny X-Men* #287, 1992, 6–8) is eventually successful. Presumably reflecting on the differences between the social arrangements characteristic of "future" and "past" Manhattan and what they might mean for his moral understanding, he kneels and sobs before replying, "It's all so different. So very, very different" (*Uncanny X-Men* #288, 1992, 17). He goes on to intimate that X.S.E. had so much authority and legitimacy during his time that civilians would run at the sight of them. Therefore, there was never a risk of civilian injury so it was not a consideration they factored in when apprehending criminals. *Uncanny X-Men* #292 (1992, 10) provides further evidence that the X-Men's more restrictive approach to the use of force is having an effect, as he mentions to the Warlocks during an altercation that he is not used to handling civil insurrections with only his hands.

Although not as thoroughly explored as in the comics, his juxtaposition of the differing social arrangements is also present in "Days of Future Past: Part 1" (*XMTAS*, Houston 1993, 09:44), once he time-travels for the first time. Based on the conditions of the streets and buildings, he initially believes that the time travel did not work. But upon observing an unfamiliar social interaction, children running down the street playing together in the daylight, he is convinced it did work. Collectively, these experiences contribute to the multifaceted nature of Bishop's superhero mission by highlighting his struggles with navigating the relationship between social arrangements, violence, and the morally relevant treatment of persons across two societies that, while similar in some ways (e.g., dilapidated buildings, dangerous criminals and villains), are different in others (e.g., prevalence of mutants policing themselves, presence of civilians amidst superhero activity, different beliefs concerning the use of violence, peaceful social relations as part of everyday life). Broadly speaking, he goes from a child referring to mutants as "destiny freaks" who disrupted the social order by "pushing" for new mutants to be born to reverse their dwindling population—efforts that he attributes to the birth of Hope (*X Factor* #27, 2005, 4)—to an adult balancing between the despair of his upbringing and the promise of helping build a better future for mutants.

2.1 DISTINGUISHING CONVENTION FROM MORALITY

But what are the conceptual building blocks of these social orders or arrangements? According to SCDT (Smetana Jambon and Ball 2014, 24–29; Turiel 1998, 903–909; Turiel 2008, 25–29), individuals largely make sense of their acts involving and relations between persons using conceptual domains that differ according to the nature of those acts and relations. These conceptual domains include distinguishing criteria that systematically inform their judgments about the different ways people treat and are treated by others. Judgments of acts and relations within the *moral* domain, such as those involving hitting and taking things from others, tend to be understood as generalizable, independent of rules and authorities, and inalterable. In contrast, acts and relations in the *conventional* or *societal* domain (henceforth used interchangeably), such as those involving forms of greeting, attire, and maintaining orderly traffic, tend to be understood as contextual, alterable, and dependent upon the existence of rules or authority dictates. Whereas the moral domain pertains to social interactions related to people's welfare, fair treatment, and inalienable rights, the societal domain pertains to social interactions based on the regulation, facilitation, and efficiency of social groups and systems (Smetana and Yoo 2022, 20; for discussion concerning the philosophical and social interactional bases of this distinction, see Turiel 1983, 34–49; Turiel Killen and Helwig 1987, 167–89). Considering Bishop's roles as a X.S.E. officer and mutant tracker largely responsible for hunting, apprehending, and institutionalizing mutants on behalf of the government, relatively more attention is given to the rule or authority-(in)dependence than criterion.

The importance of taking distinguishing criteria into account when trying to understand how people make sense of their social interactions is underscored due to certain symmetries and asymmetries in evaluating moral and societal events. In terms of the former, violations of both moral and societal norms are often evaluated in terms of right and wrong and both are often viewed as punishable (Yoo and Smetana 2022, 874). For the latter, sometimes conventional transgressions may be viewed as *more* wrong, serious, or deserving of punishment than moral ones (Tisak and Turiel 1988, 356). However neither instance provides sufficient evidence concerning whether individuals are *defining* or *conceptualizing* various social interactions differently. This notion is consistent with the finding from a meta-analysis that children made greater distinctions between moral and conventional acts using generalizability, inalterability, and rule or authority independence judgements, rather than judgments of the act's acceptability or deservingness of punishment (Smetana and Yoo 2022, 22; Yoo and Smetana 2022, 875, 883). Applying this to Bishop's apparent understanding of moral and societal considerations relevant to his dystopian social context, the focus should be on what his narrative journey suggests about the *qualitative* distinctions he appears to make between what's moral and what's

legal, when to obey and when to disobey regulatory authorities on societal and moral grounds respectively, and so forth.

As a law enforcement officer, Bishop engages in many social interactions that, according to SCDT, people typically classify as either societal (conventional) or moral (Turiel 1983, 34–49; Turiel Killen and Helwig 1987, 167–89). In "Days of Future Past: Part I" (*XMTAS*, Houston 1993, 03:37), viewers are introduced to Bishop as a tracker and capturer of rebel mutants, responsible for taking them to a mutant termination center in 2055 New York City. As an agent of the state, he works to uphold law and order and works alongside the sentinels to achieve such order. To the extent these acts are derived by laws and dictated by authorities, they can be reasonably understood as falling within the societal domain. Moreover, Bishop is cognizant of the non-legal aspects of conventional social interactions, as his response to Wolverine—whom he just captured—suggests. When Wolverine tells him that Sentinels want to kill all mutants, Bishop confidently pushes back, claiming they only kill rebels, and treat the "rest of us just fine" ("Days of Future Past: Part I;" *XMTAS*, Houston 1993, 04:51). Unbeknownst to Bishop, he fulfilled his mutant rebel quota by apprehending Wolverine and the two mutants. Once they reach the termination center, the sentinels escort Bishop inside with the others. The mutants attack the sentinel and when it appears it is about to kill Wolverine, Bishop intervenes and (presumably) saves his life. He similarly intervenes and saves mutants from Sentinels in a later storyline, "One Man's Worth" (*XMTAS*, Houston 1995). Acts related to the use and prevention of harm are generally constitutive of the moral domain.

Unlike empirical investigations of people's understanding of the distinction between moral and societal events, which, collectively, assess responses to various acts along three dimensions—*evaluations* (e.g., Is it OK to commit the act?), *justifications* (e.g., Why or why not?), and *criterion judgments* (e.g., Rule-Independence; Would it be OK to commit the act if there was no rule/law prohibiting it?)—one cannot know for certain whether Bishop distinguishes between societal and moral considerations in ways consonant with SCDT's research findings. Nonetheless, a set of findings spanning decades (e.g., for reviews, see Turiel 2002; Smetana Jambon and Ball 2014; Smetana and Yoo 2022) supports a reasonable expectation that generally, adults are sufficiently cognizant of criteria such as generalizability, rule or law contingency, and inalterability, and (2) frequently use one or more of these criteria to both categorize the nature of the interactions they participate in and observe, and determine the contours of their behaviors within those interactions. Moreover, as suggested throughout the following analysis, the consistency and conditions by which Bishop chooses to violate institutional authority and put his life in harm's way for the sake of others suggest that on some level, these criteria bear on his understanding of what it means to be a mutant law enforcement officer or tracker who grew up in and tries to alter the fundamental bases of social relations (e.g., between humans and mutants, the government and mutants, etc.) within his society.

3. DYSTOPIAN SOCIAL ORDER

Although he is arguably most known for his time with the X-Men in their "present," SCDT's emphasis on the primacy of social interaction and attending to the constitutive features of those interactions (e.g., how it feels, to both the victim and observer, when innocent people are harmed; Smetana Jambon and Ball 2014, 24–29; Turiel 1998, 903–909; Turiel 2008, 25–29) suggests that an adequate accounting of the character requires at least some understanding of the society he grew up in and the distorted social relations that constitute the backdrop against which his belief in both the (1) social order (2) conditions in which altering it are justified, occur. Bishop was born into and grew up in a dystopian society (*Uncanny X-Men #494*, 2008, 2; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #1*, 2009, 6) whose social arrangements largely stem from the premise that people are deeply flawed. Within these fictional societies the primacy and implications of fear coexist in tension with those of hope (Bucciferro 2016, 220–21; Smith 2014, 73). Unlike utopian societies–which are structured around assumptions of human perfectibility (and thus its members focus on creating the ideal society)–dystopian societies highlight how individuals strive to create better, albeit still flawed, societies (Sisk 2005, 606–607). Thus, the despair felt within a populace of a society that has "hit rock bottom" in terms of human rights and other abuses, is portrayed in relation to the vision of the society being altered in ways that reflect a more just and humane orientation toward social relations and arrangements.

These fictional societies reflect another tension relevant to the present analysis: between just and unjust social arrangements (Gottlieb 2001, 13, 21). As individuals (e.g., government leaders) attempt to respond to a societal crisis, they design authoritarian norms, laws, and institutions to achieve robust social stability (Gottlieb 2001, 9; Sisk 2005, 606). Moreover, these dystopian societies, explored across various comics, graphic novels, and films based on them, consistently highlight many of the themes relevant for the present analysis. Themes that, as suggested by some of those responsible for communicating Bishop's stories to the wider culture, should be considered when trying to understand and evaluate his morally relevant actions (Richards 2009; Schreur 2022). For one, dystopian societies are sometimes characterized by the use of unethical medical experiments which victimize those being controlled (Rossell 2023, 134; Rubin 2013, 87). Two, they tend to be characterized by the imposition of order through violent means (Phillips and Strobl 2022, 823; Sharp 2017, 409). Three, dystopian societies are often rife with institutionalized abuses and corruption (Cortiel and Oehme 2015, 5; Rubin 2013, 86; Sharp 2017, 410). Four, some societies are characterized by uncertainty concerning the nature of the threats posed by certain decisions or individuals (Cortiel and Oehme 2015, 18). Lastly, these societies, despite the proliferation and maintenance of extremely unjust social arrangements, also depict certain individuals, decisions, and events in a manner

that communicates hopeful possibilities and inspired imaginations for creating better, future social arrangements (Rossell 2023, 143; Sharp 2017, 410–11).

As discussed above and below, these features are evident across Bishop's narrative journey in one way or another. For instance, he is subjected to facial branding/scarring against his will (unethical medical treatment), often motivated to prevent an authoritarian future (order through violence), and challenges the state on moral grounds (institutionalized corruption). These and other events occur against the backdrop of robust ambiguity concerning the nature of the threat mutants pose to humans and society, the "best" way to address the threat—perceived or actual, and whether mutants should work on behalf of and alongside humans (uncertainty) and if so, in what manner. Lastly, whether he is viewed as a hero or villain by his peers, he is committed to the belief that there is a better way for mutants to live that includes improved welfare, fair treatment under the law, and respect for their human rights (hope).

In many ways, the contours of Bishop's morally relevant journey are influenced by governmental responses to immoral acts committed by mutants. In the comics *X-Men: Messiah CompleX* (2007–2008), a crossover event including multiple *X*-titles (*New X-Men*, *Uncanny X-Men*, *X-Factor*, and *X-Men*), and *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* (2009), the precipitating crisis is a mutant killing a million humans. In "Days of Future Past: Part 2," (*XMTAS*, Houston 1993, 04:22), a mutant assassinates Senator Kelly. These governments typically respond to (the perception of) mutant threats by deploying mutant-hunting sentinels (e.g.,"Days of Future Past: Part 2,"*XMTAS*, Houston 1993, 04:43; "Future X," *WATXM*, Filippi 2009, 02:53), and in some cases, other mutants (e.g., *X-Men: Legends* #5, 6) and army-backed superhumans (e.g., "One Man's Worth: Part 1," *XMTAS*, Houston 1995, 06:55).

When Bishop travels to the past and informs the X-Men of the events contributing to his future ("Days of Future Past: Part 2," *XMTAS*, Houston 1993, 04:22), he describes some features of dystopian societies and the social order mentioned above. Wanting protection and retribution and blaming mutants as a group for the acts of one, wider society demands decisive action. This results in the passage of the Mutant Control Law, authorizing the use of mutant-hunting sentinels. These sentinels kill many mutants who try to defend themselves and detain those fortunate to survive. In other words, there was an authoritarian response to a societal crisis based on the need to alleviate fear and restore social stability and characterized by oppressive and unjust social arrangements (Gottlieb 2001, 9, 13, 21). But the dangers of authoritarian social arrangements do not end there. Consistent with the assumed flawed nature of humanity (Sisk 2005, 606) and the warnings of distorting social arrangements in the service of social order (Frank 1944, 475–77), the authority apparatus overreaches. The sentinels eventually do the same to non-mutant humans as well and establish a sort of new world order. This is one way in which dystopian superhero media provides a cautionary tale regarding social relations (Smith 2014,

73). Regardless of the event that essentially sets the dystopian social arrangements into motion, Bishop grows up to frequently participate in maintaining social stability in response to these kinds of crises.

Similar events are depicted in *Days of Future Past* (*Uncanny X-Men* #141, 1980; *Uncanny X-Men* #142, 1981), where an assassination of a US senator leads to authoritarian laws and social arrangements leading to the limiting of mutants' human rights and in some cases, death. Consistent with the idea that the mutant metaphor is widely applicable (Darowski 2014, 1), scholars argue that the events in the comic parallel significant events throughout human history, both globally (e.g., Industrialism, World War II) and locally (e.g., Civil Rights Movement, privatized military and police and the rise of the carceral state in 1970s–1980s New York; Purcell 2021, 141; Smith 2014, 70–74). Although Bishop was not a focal character in the comic, the themes explored and the dystopian social arrangements depicted mirror those he experiences growing up.

3.1 MUTANTS, MORALITY, AND ARBITRARINESS

For Martin (2022, 76, 84), dystopian fiction affords opportunities for readers and viewers to wrestle with, consider, and examine characters' social interactions that bear on the moral and immoral treatment of others. Such an affordance is made salient through the narrative depictions of how moral (e.g., harm, justice, and human rights) and nonmoral (e.g., rules, laws, authority) concepts are applied within varying social arrangements. Similarly, Sharp (2017, 408, 411) discusses the potential of dystopian fiction for interrogations of both the nature of the law itself and the relationship between law and morality. Focusing more on group dynamics, Bucciferro (2016, 218) suggests that an important aspect of the *Days of Future Past* film (Singer 2014) is its portrayal of between group power relations informed by "othering" beliefs–beliefs that help maintain and legitimize one group's discrimination of the other. Although genetic differences set the contours of the main narrative events involving both the X-Men and Bishop specifically, it is necessary to account for the *nature* of these genetic differences and their potential implications for social order and regulation. Since these genetic differences often manifest in robust and unpredictable abilities that can alter the state of non-mutant humans' physical (e.g., manipulating magnetism, the weather), psychological (e.g., mind control), and social (e.g., creating alternate universes) reality, mutants experience some of the same "societal uneasiness" characteristic of superheroes. Scholars argue that, due to their superpowers, superheroes may be best understood as sovereign agents operating within and outside of society's legal and moral frameworks as they see fit. Their missions, while in pursuit of justice and the common good, reflect their sovereignty to the extent that they, like governments, have the ability to determine when the use of violence to maintain social order is legitimate. A related feature of sovereignty is the ability to define a social event as constituting a state of exception, understood as an event so significant or threatening to

citizens' or humanity's existence that local and national laws are suspended in order for the superheroes to deal with the threat–by any means deemed necessary (Bainbridge 2020, 70, 73; Curtis 2016, 108). Although different with their emphasis on genetic variations and the mutant metaphor, X-Men narratives are similar to superhero narratives in that they both address themes related to the relationship between law and morality.

Along these lines, a recurring theme animating the varying social arrangements that at times influence Bishop's decisions and at other times are influenced by Bishop's challenges to the prevailing social order is the *discrepancy between the moral and arbitrary treatment of mutants*. Considering the moral treatment of others concerns a belief in their inherent dignity and worth, one can argue their immoral treatment concerns the absence or suspension of such a belief. Or put another way, treating others morally is inversely related to an arbitrary view of them during relevant social relations or interactions. It is easy to treat others arbitrarily (immorally)—to objectify, devalue, and discard them—when we primarily or fundamentally relate to them in arbitrary ways. They are arbitrary in the sense that the same function can be achieved through alternate decisions (Smetana 1983, 134–35). Thus, understanding Bishop is intricately linked to what his actions suggest about treating persons as ends and not means.

For the purposes of the present essay, this discrepancy applies to social relations or interactions that have a (clear) bearing on the (dis)respect for others' human rights. The arbitrary treatment of mutants (and non-mutant humans) in terms of being denied entry into a store because it closed one minute ago (arbitrary in the sense that the store could just as easily had a store hours policy of remaining open for another 30 minutes), for instance, is not relevant to the present discussion. But if the arbitrary treatment of mutants was instead due to genetic discrimination (e.g., the store was open but refused to let them in for no reason other than their DNA), then this social interaction would be relevant to the present discussion. And considering the ubiquity of the latter form of arbitrary treatment—as suggested by the levels of state violence towards, social control of, and unethical experimentation on those deemed disposable in both X-Men and other dystopian fiction (e.g., Bucciferro 2016, 218; Phillips and Strobl 2022, 823–24, 832–36; Rossell 2023, 134; Rubin 2013, 86–89; Sharp 2017, 408–410; Smith 2014, 67–72)—Bishop's ability to operate inside and outside of these social arrangements affords unique opportunities for scholarly and pedagogical inquiry.

As suggested through the examples below, the kind of arbitrary treatment mutants in Bishop's time are subjected to (and at times he is subjected to), comes with a dual sense of precarity and vulnerability, as the way they are subjugated, abused, and dehumanized can seemingly change at the whims of the governing or authority apparatus. How easy can it be, for instance, for mutants to go from at least having the appearance of the opportunity to defend oneself against crimes alleged by the state (e.g., *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #1*, 2009, 5) to be deemed guilty (or even sentenced to death) once an

accusation has been made? Or what if one day, guards are not only given free-reign to physically assault mutants in the camps without fear of being held to account (e.g., *X-Men #206*, 2007, 1), but to kill them and/or their family outside the camps regardless if they are mutants? To treat others morally and in a non-arbitrary way, is to establish robust buffers against such "on the whim" treatment, as the person's dignity, and the consequences of violating said dignity, feature heavily in one's understanding and treatment of others.

One more clarification is worth noting. Unlike psychological forms of arbitrary social relations, which pertain to individuals' use of personal discretion (e.g., Person A choosing to associate with or befriend Person B and not Person C), social or societal forms of arbitrary relations pertain to more "group level" decisions in terms of social norms, institutions, rules, etc. Examples could be norms or policies around people congregating in particular public (e.g., parks) or private (e.g., places of employment) spaces, which can vary for a host of seemingly discretionary or non-substantive reasons. From place to place or situation to situation, it is reasonable to expect norms in these areas to vary, such as the number of people who can congregate in certain public spaces in a particular city can vary depending on the time of day (e.g., fewer at night) and number of people who can fraternize during a common area at work can vary by place of employment.

For SCDT, both forms contribute to individuals' development of social understanding (for examples of social interactions and conversations informing children's understandings in these areas, see Nucci and Ilten-Gee 2021, 9–24). The present paper, by highlighting how the authority apparatus decides to treat and not treat mutants, contends that the types of arbitrary social relations germane to Bishop's development of social and moral understanding have qualities more in line with the latter form. Moreover, the contours of these arbitrary social relations are coterminous with a conception of mutants that reduces them to powerful threats that must be subdued, stripped of human rights, and if necessary, eliminated. Whether it is the use of power dampers (e.g., *X-Factor*, *#26*, 2007, 22) used in the mutant relocation camp of Bishop's childhood or inhibitor collars used in the mutant prison of Bishop's adulthood (e.g., "Future X," *WATXM*, Filippi 2009, 06:18), to be a mutant in Bishop's future is often dehumanizing. Bishop describes the camp, which is also where he was born and grew up until he was seven, as a place notorious for being unsanitary and illegally experimenting on mutants. His parents were sentenced there after being convicted for defending themselves against a sentinel; a trial he recalls that "lasted three seconds" (*Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* #1, 2009, 5).

Another example of arbitrary treatment comes in the form of allocating resources. Once Bishop finds what he believes is the last mutant camp on earth, he is eventually reunited with his grandmother and sister, who also escaped Sheepshead Bay (i.e., the mutant camp he was born and grew up in). This camp was supported by the little money the government provided for their own schools and farms. But once the new government

decided to cut funding, they were left to fend for themselves, and his grandmother, whose ailing body could not take living on the streets, died (*Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #2*, 2009, 11).

Messiah CompleX further underscores the significance of arbitrary social relations in understanding the plight of mutants in Bishop's dystopian society by highlighting how they are viewed and treated by the guards overseeing the camp. For instance, persons presumed to be injured are worthy of assistance from guards insofar as their results from a mutant scanner are negative (*X-Factor, #26*, 2007, 9), and guards can physically assault mutants at the camp with no fear of being held accountable (*X-Men #206*, 2007, 1). What they apparently cannot do, however, is form intimate bonds with them. One might argue that the former interaction is consistent with an arbitrary treatment of mutants, whereas the latter is inconsistent with such treatment as it could lead to a guard caring about the dignity, personhood, and well-being of a mutant. When mutants in the camp revolted against the sentinels to fight for their freedom and dignity in the Summers' Rebellion during Bishop's childhood, both of his parents were killed. As he witnessed both of their deaths at the hands of sentinels, he remarks that it was as if his parents were born to die (*Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* #1, 2009, 16). Considering their (1) attempts to hide from the government, (2) subsequent trial which included procedural but not substantive due process (*Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* #1, 2009, 5), (3) treatment at the camp, and (4) the ease by which their lives were discarded during the rebellion, it is important to view these formative experiences in the young Bishop's development against a social backdrop seeped in arbitrary social relations that bear on persons human rights.

One way to view the moral-societal distinction concerning arbitrary social relations is illustrated through the discrepancy between Bishop's view of his relationship with the sentinels (and by extension, their governing authority) and how the governing authority views him. As noted, Bishop was treated like any other mutant the moment he fulfilled his "captured mutant" quota ("Days of Future Past," *XMTAS*, Houston 1993, 05:09). This meant that he was not only "relieved" of his duties as a tracker, but was not considered a mutant to be tracked, and thus imprisoned. Another mutant, the inventor Forge, experiences a similar arbitrary treatment at the hands of sentinels in "One Man's Worth: Part 2" (*XMTAS*, Houston 1995, 06:56), despite his plea that he's been "loyal to the Master."

This notion that mutants can be treated arbitrarily by regulatory authorities due to reducing them to powers and threats is also prevalent in the various depictions of mutants as coerced research subjects or victims of dehumanizing procedures. As a child, Bishop experienced such treatment through receiving an "M" inscription on his face (as did the other mutant detainees) to mark him as mutant, with the ink serving an additional function of altering his DNA (e.g., *X-Men* #206, 2007, 11; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* #1, 2009, 10). As an adult prisoner in the animated series *WATXM*, he learns of this place called the Tower where prisoners are taken to have their powers mechanically

reproduced (e.g., *WATXM*; "Future X," Filippi 2009, 13:10). And in a later episode (*WATXM*; "Badlands," Murphy 2009, 00:30), he is hunted by a new-breed of hunter-like sentinels more efficient than previous versions, partly due to the mutant antagonist Bolivar Trask capturing and studying Wolverine in the series' present (i.e., Bishop's past).

Lastly, it is worth noting how arbitrary social relations manifest when it comes to communication. One of the more interesting features of the dystopian society of Bishop's childhood is its insistence on *erasing* mutants from everyday discourse. As a guard remarks in *X-Factor* #26 (2007, 16), the government shuts down all mentions of mutants, and all print and recorded references of them are deleted. Moreover, when two mutants, Jamie Maddrox (Multiple Man) and Layla Miller visit the mutant relocation camp Bishop grew up in (*New X-Men* #44, 2007, 11), the first thing they notice is there are no mutants visible, nor are people talking about mutants.

Such treatment of mutants is broadly consistent with the notion of symbolic annihilation. Pertaining to how the poor treatment of particular minorities within popular communication can contribute to those groups' symbolic erasure, the concept is important for understanding the relationship between media and social reality (Coleman and Yochim 2008, 4922–23). Although the treatment of mutants—which include no media treatment or discourse— is more extreme than, say, poor media treatment by way of mutant stereotypes and limited discourse, both contexts share an underlying assumption relevant to the present discussion. In both contexts, there is an assumption, explicit or implicit, that it is acceptable to treat the erased group in arbitrary ways, seeing that to talk with and about them in ways that highlight their humanity necessitates interacting with them substantively (i.e., by upholding human rights). Such treatment of mutants makes the kind of participation in the public sphere Miczo (2016, 3) believes animates superheroes' decisions to help others practically impossible and thus may partially explain Bishop's insistence on altering these social arrangements.

4. DEVELOPMENTAL CAPACITIES FOR MORALLY RELEVANT DECISION MAKING

Consistent with Martin's explorations of the potential relationship between superhero media and child development (e.g., 2021a, 28–32; 2023a, 66–69; 2023b, 269–70; 2023c, 23–30), research on children's sociomoral development suggests that a young Bishop has certain capacities enabling him to evaluate various social events experienced and observed within his society while also distinguishing between their core features (for detailed discussions of relevant research, see Nucci and Ilten-Gee 2021, 35–57). Despite the general changes described below being based on everyday social interactions typical of "normal" societies, the essay contends that even in dystopian societies, broad parallels can be drawn between the features of social interactions common in these distorted societies and those typical of "normal" societies. The aim here, then, is not to argue for a 1-to-1 correspondence, but explore how the same concepts (e.g., harm, fairness, human

rights, legality, and authority) may be applied by real and fictional persons in typical and atypical societies to make sense of the varied social interactions and relationships informing their development. The second aim is to suggest a rough developmental sketch of Bishop's morally relevant judgments by drawing parallels between sociomoral competencies generally presumed to be present in children and how their changes or elaborations with age may help explain some of the decisions Bishop makes as an adult. Although the apparent emphasis on age seven and older (e.g., *X Factor* #27, 2008; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* #1, 2009; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* #2, 2009) may be merely coincidental, it is worth noting that multiple sociomoral competencies are believed to emerge or become more clearly discernible around the age of seven—a notion explored in previous work on children's understanding of superhero media (Martin 2021, 28; 2021b, 1, 3–4; 2023c, 13).

4.1 BISHOP'S CHILDHOOD

Broadly speaking, research suggests that by around age seven and older, children show changes in their social and moral understanding that may have a bearing on understanding how a young Bishop tries to make sense of his social experiences (Nucci and Ilten-Gee 2021, 35–67). In the realm of societal (conventional) understanding, for instance, third and fourth graders demonstrate a greater awareness of inconsistencies or contradictions concerning the use of enforcement of certain norms or conventions and may question their purpose altogether. In the realm of morality, second through fifth graders' moral understandings tend to include more systematic links between an agent's actions and the responses or reactions of the victim (Nucci and Ilten-Gee 2021, 37, 48; Turiel 1983, 106–108). Thus, by around seven, may begin to apply a more critical lens to some aspects of their societal and moral judgments.

Concerning the ability to distinguish societal and moral acts, research suggests that older children's distinctions are more consistent and widely applied across varying situations compared to those of preschoolers. Whereas preschoolers' applications of criterion judgments (e.g., rule or authority independence, generalizability, and inalterability) are apparently more susceptible to limitations due to general cognitive abilities and familiarity with social interactions, these limitations are overcome with age (Smetana and Yoo 2022, 24–25; Yoo and Smetana 2022, 883–85). Given the amount of violence and human rights abuses Bishop witnesses and experiences growing up, it is also worth noting that children more easily distinguish moral acts from societal acts when those moral acts include social interactions resulting in physical harm. Moreover, Nucci and Itlen-Gee (2021, 48) argue that increasing the salience of moral consequences may contribute to children's improved moral understanding. This may help explain why when older children are asked to evaluate acts in certain situations involving a conflict between moral and nonmoral considerations, they sometimes have difficulty integrating the nonmoral

elements of the situation into their reasoning and instead base their judgments of the situation on the most salient moral elements of harm or welfare (Nucci and Ilten-Gee 2021, 51–52).

A young Bishop's dystopian social context, largely characterized by social arrangements differing in both degree (e.g., level of fear experienced by and harm towards mutants) and kind (e.g., erased from various modes of communication, conceived as disposable objects instead of dignified persons), affords opportunities to explore, through scholarly and pedagogical inquiry, how some of his early social experiences might contribute to his understanding of the above-mentioned capacities. His experiences with unjust imprisonment, violence (human-mutant, sentimental-mutant, etc.), and human rights abuses, and attempts to understand these events–as suggested by his reflections on the events leading to the mutant camps, the Summers' Rebellion, the loss of his parents and grandmother, and the government's treatment of mutants (e.g., *X-Factor* #26, 2007, 22; *X-Men* #206, 2007, 1–2; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* #1, 2009, 15–16; *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop* #2, 2009, 11, 13)–could reasonably have a bearing on his moral understanding via increased salience of moral consequences (Nucci and Ilten-Gee 2021, 48). When reflecting on what he observed as a child once he escaped the mutant camp, he recalls that he had "no skills, no abilities, no frame of reference for the insanity around" him (*Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #1,* 2009, 20). A constructivist approach to understanding his relevant social interactions inside and outside of the mutant camp may elucidate both the nature of this "insanity" and what it might mean for his developing understanding of the role of societal and moral considerations in social relations.

This potential "salience effect" would likely also inform his understanding of the delta between the arbitrary and non-arbitrary treatment of persons. Combining this salience with the capacity to pay more attention to inconsistencies or contradictions concerning conventional or societal rules and norms (Nucci and Ilten-Gee 2021, 37, 48; Turiel 1983, 106–108) and the instances of his breaking the law or challenging conventional authority in other ways to survive or protect others yields interesting implications. One might, for instance, consider how a young Bishop's development under these social arrangements help illustrate his (presumed) application of the authority-independence criterion when thinking about when to deviate from or challenge conventional authorities (e.g., for reviews of research concerning this and other criteria, see Turiel 2002; Smetana Jambon and Ball 2014; Smetana and Yoo 2022).

4.2 BISHOP'S ADOLESCENCE AND ADULTHOOD

In terms of morality, Nucci and Ilten-Gee (2021 48, 54) suggests that with age, moral considerations, particularly concerning fair treatment, are more broadly applied in the sense that they are not as tied to direct reciprocal exchange (e.g., where fairness is more strictly or narrowing construed to involve tit-for-tat social interactions to repay someone in

kind)—as was the case with older children. Fairness considerations are also construed in a more nuanced or flexible manner, evident in more appeals to equity and not solely equality when evaluating certain situations. And unlike older children, older adolescents tend to both (1) account for moral and nonmoral considerations when evaluating social events that have both kinds of conflicting elements and (2) reason about those situations in ways that logically resolve ambiguities or uncertainties that may arise when weighing those competing elements.

In young or emerging adulthood, research suggests that individuals develop an understanding of conventions as necessary for the coordination of social interactions among groups of individuals living together. Such coordination is based on widely shared knowledge of the group's conventions that allow for predictable social interactions important for the efficient functioning of the social system. It is also based on individuals' voluntary participation in those conventions (Nucci and Ilten-Gee 2021, 45; Turiel 1983, 111–12).

In sum, by the time readers are introduced to a Lucas Bishop who appears to be a late adolescent or young (emerging) adult in *Lives and Times of Lucas Bishop #2* (2009), findings suggest that one should reasonably expect him to have widely applied, elaborated, and nuanced understandings of both societal and moral concepts, as well as the ability to weigh them against each other in systematic ways when experiencing social situations where they conflict. As with his childhood experiences, the social arrangements characterizing his adulthood, centered largely around the discrepancies between arbitrary and non-arbitrary treatment of mutants, provide opportunities for scholarly and pedagogical inquiry. Considering depictions of his adulthood are more numerous and varied than those of his childhood, opportunities abound for analyses that try to illuminate the relationships that potentially exist between different social arrangements and his morally relevant decisions within those arrangements.

It is evident when reading or watching these depictions that when he construes a social arrangement as unjust, he challenges the responsible authorities by trying to alter those arrangements. This theme of challenging authority for moral reasons is the basis for *X-Men: Legends #5* and *#6* (2023), and the origins of his plan point not only to his motivation but to what he is willing to risk to preserve the dignity of others. To the extent reflecting on his role in maintaining social order within the Pool earlier in *X-Men: Legends #5* (2023, 5) indicate his wrestling with the morality of his job as an X.S.E. officer, the fact that the strategic dimensions of his plan was inspired by a rat suggests he did not need much to "push" him toward rebelling against his social order. Whereas one could reasonably assume that for many people witnessing a small rodent find a way to infiltrate the Pool (*X-Men: Legends #5*, 2023, 20) may not necessarily lead to a belief that mutants could be *broken out* of the Pool, for him it was all the inspiration he needed: "... what it meant to me was *hope*." This might be what Duane Swierczynski had in mind when

describing Bishop as a tragic hero committed to saving lives no matter the cost (Richards 2009)—a notion that, for both scholarly and pedagogical reasons, warrants serious consideration regarding the relationship between societal and moral goals.

Moreover, his actions across narratives suggest that his motivations are largely or primarily moral, and thus generally consistent with the view that rule or authority independence plays a definitional role in the understanding of social and moral events (Smetana and Yoo 2022, 22; Yoo and Smetana 2022, 875, 883). This was the case when (1) he disobeyed the prison warden as a member of XSE and collaborated with a dangerous and unpredictable prisoner to free mutants detailed unjustly (*X-Men: Legends #5*, 2023, 19; *X-Men: Legends* #6, 2023, 2), (2) traveled to the past to prevent assassinations in an attempt to avoid dystopian social orders ("Days of Future Past: Part 1," *XMTAS*, Houston 1993; "One Man's Worth: Part 1," *XMTAS*, Houston 1995), and (3) attacked sentinels to protect others' welfare ("Days of Future Past: Part 1" *XMTAS*, Houston 1995; "Future X," *WATXM*, Filippi 2009). This belief that moral actions should not be bound by regulatory authorities is further suggested by his criticism of mutants who he feels are not doing enough to alter the prevailing social order ("One Man's Worth: Part 2," *XMTAS*, Houston 1995, 05:40). As mentioned above, these actions, while conceptually consistent in the sense of prioritizing moral over societal considerations, occurred across various roles and social arrangements, including Bishop as an agent of the state working with humans (*X-Men Legends* #5, 2023) and sentinels ("Days of Future Past," *XMTAS*, Houston 1993), and as a prisoner ("Future X," *WATXM*, Filippi 2009).

As noted above, however, conceptually delineating between moral and conventional considerations is just part of the story of adulthood sociomoral development. In addition to a more elaborated and nuanced understanding of the purpose of conventions within societies, adults are generally expected to acknowledge and rationally adjudicate social situations where moral and nonmoral considerations are in conflict (Nucci and Ilten-Gee 2021, 45, 48, 54; Turiel 1983, 111–12). Therefore, to the extent media depictions of social arrangements informing his morally relevant decisions include potentially conflicting moral and nonmoral considerations (e.g., working alongside or to apprehend mutant rebels, following the orders of the prison warden or conspiring to break out innocent people, killing or not killing the mutant he believes causes the events leading to his dystopian society, etc.), scholarly analyses may help to elucidate how Bishop might be weighing moral considerations around harm, justice, and human rights against societal or conventional considerations related to laws and regulatory authorities. And as his writers suggest, the social arrangements constitutive of his experiences growing up in the camps (Richards 2009) and the "micro ecosystem" known as the Pool (Schreur 2022) may play especially important roles in this regard.

5. Implications for a Developmental Analysis

Consonant with previous arguments for the use of superhero media as a context for scholarly and pedagogical activities (Martin 2021, 28–32; 2023a, 76–83; 2023c, 23–30; Martin, Killian and Letizia 2023, 219–21), the essay concludes with three tentative suggestions for using stimulus events from Bishop's narrative journey as a basis or at least a relevant supplementary context for examining theory and research related to the development of social and moral understanding. Each suggestion focuses on a specific narrative theme discussed above as it pertains to the distinction between matters of morality and matters of society or convention. As with the above analysis, the focus is on the rule or authority-independence criterion–although the suggestions can reasonably apply to the generalizability and inalterability criteria as well.

5.1 *Social Orders (Arrangements) and Morally Relevant Decisions*

SCDT contends that thought heterogeneity best explains the development and application of individuals' sociomoral understanding across varying contexts, evidenced by the interactive relationship between sociomoral events and judgments about those events, and the ability to conceptually alter the meaning of events with new information, different "background" assumptions, and so forth (Turiel, Killen and Helwig 1987, 184–89). Relatedly, Nucci (2019, 74) argues that because the person-(social) context relationship is dynamic, understanding the persons' morally relevant decisions within those contexts must account for not only the influences of the context on those decisions, but how individuals influence contexts and thus contribute to the transformation of society. As Bishop's narrative journey attests, to the extent societies consist of unjust social arrangements, some individuals within those societies should be expected to try to alter them for moral reasons (Turiel 2002, 288).

Therefore, scholarly and pedagogical investigations concerning Bishop's morally relevant decision making should account for the social conditions in which those decisions are made as well as the dynamic nature of the decisions-conditions relationship. As suggested elsewhere (Martin 2023a, 78–82), superhero narratives afford opportunities to view this dynamism "up close," as their use of their powers for the good of others can potentially affect social interactions well beyond the initial encounter. For the superhero Luke Cage, for instance, Martin notes how his superpowers allow him to initiate novel or atypical social interactions and arrangements due to being bulletproof in a manner consistent with the prioritization of the public sphere (Miczo 2016, 3–4, 13–14).

Similarly, Bishop's powers (energy absorption and redirection), coupled with his ability to time travel provides opportunities to examine how social interactions and arrangements relate to his actions to safeguard the life and dignity of innocents. When considering (1) the diverse contexts he finds himself in—in terms of location or type of society (e.g., his dystopian future vs. the past) and his position within a particular social interaction or arrangement (e.g., agent of state or prisoner, working alongside humans or

sentinels, etc.)—as well as (2) the importance of the authority independence criterion for moral understanding, inquiries and activities can examine whether altering features of these arrangements could reasonably influence Bishop's decisions and how. If mutants' human rights were still being violated within his society's prevailing social order, for instance, yet the physical harm perpetrated against mutants was substantially reduced or even eliminated, would this reasonably affect his superhero mission and if so, how? Would any aspects of his evaluation of mutants' oppressive state remain the same? Analogs to this kind of situation can be presented to participants and students alike as hypothetical sociomoral vignettes where people are asked to predict, evaluate, and justify their evaluations of Bishop's decisions in these contexts. They can respond to a vignette that describes Bishop's social context in a manner consistent with media portrayals as well as other vignettes that manipulate a feature relevant to a moral (e.g., the amount of harm caused, etc.) and/or societal (e.g., the nature or legitimacy of the regulatory authority) goal or consideration.

5.2 ARBITRARY AND NON-ARBITRARY TREATMENT OF PERSONS

Manipulations of harm and authority considerations can also inform analyses of people's understandings of the distinction between the arbitrary and non-arbitrary treatment of persons. Additionally, manipulations concerning the magnitude of the precipitating event as well as the knowledge surrounding the event can provide useful contexts for scholars and educators to explore people's understandings of the morally relevant treatment of persons. For instance, activities can examine how people's views of a fictional government's response to a hypothetical casualty event may be informed by the number of lives killed by a mutant or the act's level of brutality. As discussed elsewhere (Martin 2023c, 28), the contours of certain morally relevant decisions may be further elicited by varying how knowledgeable relevant persons are of the causes of an event. In the case of Bishop's dystopian future, this could take the form of whether governmental officials responsible for responding to the crisis and reestablishing societal stability actually know which individual or group of individuals (mutant or otherwise) was responsible.

5.3 DEVELOPMENTAL CAPACITIES FOR SOCIOMORAL UNDERSTANDING

Lastly, these two themes can be examined, either separately or together, from a developmental perspective. Focusing on Bishop's media portrayals, comparative analyses can be conducted between the features of the social arrangements characteristic of Bishop's dystopian future as a child and as an adult (e.g., how the environments and relationships are depicted artistically, stylistically, what elements are emphasized through characters' dialogue, etc.), and the potential influence of these features on his apparent understanding of the distinction between moral and societal considerations. Similar comparisons

can be investigated concerning the arbitrary and non-arbitrary treatment of mutants, either separately or in conjunction with the features of the social arrangements. In keeping with the above analyses and implications, the comparisons can focus on potential child-adult differences in understanding morality (1) as independent of regulatory authorities and (2) in situations where moral and nonmoral considerations conflict.

6. CONCLUSION

Although he has received little scholarly attention to date, Bishop's narrative journey, as portrayed through childhood and adulthood experiences navigating and trying to understand the features of and reasons for his dystopian society, offers numerous opportunities for scholarly and pedagogical activities. Through highlighting some key events in his journey from a constructivist perspective on social and moral development, the paper elucidated some of these opportunities. By trying to understand the nature of the decisions made by such a complex and multifaceted character—one who, despite occupying various positions within and outside of the law across dystopian and non-dystopian social arrangements, consistently fights to alter them in the face of injustice—we may come to a slightly better understanding of ourselves. An understanding that, hopefully, leads to a better future.

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