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HEROES GREAT AND SMALL: THE REBIRTH OF HONOR

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Sophia Moutafis. Her love and support not only helped to encourage its writing, but gave me a future to look forward to after its completion. While she was taken from this world much too soon, I hope that some measure of her light and inspiration will be felt through the words herein. I love you and miss you, Fia.

--Ryan “Indy” Rhodes

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ABSTRACT

I argue that our modern ethical conceptions suffer by largely divorcing ethics from the rest of human life and treating it as just one possible concern among others. Rejecting a strong distinction between moral and non-moral spheres, an ethics of honor instead embodies a holistic conception of human excellence based in worthiness and a functional moral identity in which virtues and duties proceed from who and what we are. In part by examining warrior codes through history and literature, such as Chivalry, Bushido, and those surrounding groups such as Homeric fighters, the Crow Indians, and the Marines, we can see a common pattern of ethical demands arising from a conjunction of pride, integrity, social role, and reputation. The links between these concepts form the basis for honor, which I also identify as belonging to the realms of heroism and the perfectibility of human nature. Whether in terms of warriors or other domains, what characterizes heroism in this sense is the conception of one's self as both character and author of a narrative in which one's being is self-consciously a statement of what it is to be excellent. The person of honor understands his life in terms of achieving human greatness from within a particular role in a larger, interconnected story. As an ethics of being, honor offers a superior conception of morality both in general and in terms of moral motivation, and provides a crucial framework for the realization of individual virtue intertwined with the good of a community. By reunifying the fractured pieces of honor, I argue that we restore lost connections between morality, self-worth, and the good human life as a whole.

Chapter 1: Why Honor?

What would a world without honor be like? Before answering such a question, it is of interest to note that the way in which it is posed suggests two underlying presumptions. First, that we have a clear concept of what honor is, and second, that it is present in the world in which we do live. Thus we might similarly ask what a world without religion would be like, or without science, or a particular style of painting—or indeed, without any one of a great many things that have affected the shape and history of human existence. The question seems to be a counterfactual, inviting a comparison between how life is versus what it might otherwise have been. While the form of our question above is the same, however, to pose it about honor specifically is dissimilar in an important respect, namely that it is unclear what the status of honor is. That is, unlike religion, science, schools of art, and so on, with an absence of honor it is not entirely clear what has been taken away. This is not to say, of course, that *nothing* is taken away, as would be the case with various fictional concepts. To ask: "What would a world without magic be like?", for instance, would yield the answer "Just like this one" (perhaps with a caveat explaining the distinction between the kind of magic referred to in fairy tales versus card tricks and sleight of hand). Honor is not of this sort, but neither is it such that modern society has a clear conception of what it is. Something would be taken away in a world without honor, although as of yet we may not know just what.

How then should we analyze the original question posed above? In at least some of its domains, honor has been an *ethical* concept. To say "he is an honorable man" is clearly a statement of praise, and moral praise at that. However, such a statement likely also strikes most of us as archaic; to speak of a person's moral worth in that way is uncommon, and using the word "honor" at all is not a typical part of most people's everyday discourse. When it is used, its meaning may vary from the moral context above to other seemingly non-moral contexts, such as "honoring" someone meaning to commend or celebrate him, or gaining "honor" in the sense of achieving glory for oneself. I say "*seemingly* non-moral contexts" because, as I shall go on to describe, they have more connection to morality than may be immediately apparent. In any case, because honor is in whole or in part a moral concept, a world that lacks it must have a different conception of morality than one in which it was present, and all the more so than one in which it is a primary or fundamental concept. As alluded to above, our own world is neither one in which honor is wholly absent nor one in which honor plays a key role in our ethical framework; it is a concept which we have for the most part abandoned as an artifact of history. The question to ask, then, is whether we were right to abandon it.

I believe that we were not. In broad strokes, this view can be located within a larger claim in the spirit of Alasdair MacIntyre and Bernard Williams, that a move away from virtue-centered theories of ethics is overall a mistake and a

detriment to human well-being.[1] Although a full discussion of the works of either of these thinkers is beyond the scope of this project, I believe that they are essentially correct in their assessment of modern ethical theory. Namely, that it suffers from disarray for which the remedy must be a return to older, more classical conceptions. More narrowly, I am convinced that the loss of honor as a primary ethical concept has bereaved us of a number of important connections between morality, self-worth, and society. Beyond this, our surviving concepts of honor are fractured pieces of what was once a unified whole. To reunite those fragments and restore honor to its proper place in morality is a project of immense benefit both to moral philosophy and human prosperity.

But why harbor such high hopes for a largely forgotten concept? Alternatively, it might be asked, if indeed the idea of honor has been largely abandoned, does this not suggest that some better formulation of ethics was found to replace it—or, at the very least, that the replacing formulation could address crucial weaknesses in its predecessor? There are two responses to such concerns. First, it is perhaps a happy illusion that when an idea or movement in history succeeds what came before it, the transition is unmixed progress. This is true of ethical theory to a greater degree than in most fields. Kant, for instance, in many ways anticipated the weaknesses of utilitarianism, while Mill's praise of utilitarian thought in part comprised its avoidance of many of the counter-intuitive implications of deontology. Both believed modernity to have produced a superior

[1] See especially MacIntyre's After Virtue and Williams' Shame and Necessity.

alternative to the classical conception of ethics, and as I and others are suggesting, that belief is largely in error.

Secondly, while there have been negative aspects to how honor has been conceived and applied, I am convinced that this stems largely from the misuse of what is otherwise a crucial and valuable concept. History has seen a myriad of similar cases. From concern for the souls of the departed came the deplorable exploitation of indulgences; from a call for equality for the lower classes of France rose Robespierre and the Reign of Terror; and in more modern times—although its effects are perhaps not as pronounced as television dramas might suggest—from a concern for the rights of the accused comes the guilty being freed for purely legal technicalities. That a thing may be misused does not entail its inherent lack of goodness, and in the case of honor, there are quite a few babies still left in the bathwater. The other source of honor's defects is conceiving of it in a fractured sense, rather than a unified whole. There are four main aspects that we can identify as comprising honor: Pride, Integrity, Social Role, and Reputation. When these are considered jointly, honor is properly understood as a type of morality. To excise or forget some of these components, however, may all too easily lead to moral failing. Honor, then, may have need of some reform. However, much of this reform lies in correcting our mistaken ways of thinking about it, rather than in an alteration of the concept itself. As I will go on to argue, this reform will further extend to our ideas about ethics in general, as the loss of a clear picture of honor has seriously injured our moral ideas.

The Scope of Ethics

What is the extent of this injury? To begin, modern thought has in certain respects divorced ethics from human life. By this I do not mean that ethics is *ignored*—rather, it has lost its *centrality*. People tend to see ethics not as interwoven with all that they do, but as simply one area of life among many possible others. Part of the effects of this shift can be seen in education. Colleges offer ethics classes which students may elect—or not—to take, and on some occasions, such a course might be a requirement, such as a "Business Ethics" class. Ethics is not the focus, however, but merely one aspect of such a course of study. Now, the point is not simply that we ought to require more ethical training of students, although that is a claim with which I would certainly agree. The problem is that ethics is portrayed as merely one possible course of study, rather than as an essential part of what students should learn and care about. In part this is unavoidable—there is, after all, a limit to what can be taught in any given time period or class, and thus separate courses for ethics become a necessity. The danger, however, lies in the subject matter of such courses becoming perceived as peripheral to other concerns. When Socrates considered whether virtue could be taught, his question was not whether one could present ethical issues in a formal setting. He wondered whether people could be taught to be morally good in all of their undertakings. Thus the problem with the sons of Pericles, Themistocles, Aristides, Thucydides, and other such men was likely not they had no exposure to ethics as a possible area of inquiry. Rather, they viewed such inquiry as an

ignorable alternative to their pursuit of skill in wrestling, horseback riding, and the like, instead of as a necessary part of their endeavors.[2]

A poignant example of this problem in our day is offered by Harvard's Robert Coles. He describes a student who came to him in tears, finally at the breaking point because of callous mistreatment by her fellow students. In relating their offenses, she focuses on one young man in particular, who is not only rude and demeaning, but has repeatedly approached her with unsolicited lewd advances:

> That guy gets all A's. He tells people he's in Group I [the top academic category]. I've taken two moral-reasoning courses with him, and I'm sure he's gotten A's in both of them—and look at how he behaves with me, and I'm sure with others."

Her frustration and outrage with this and other students leads her to an incisive question: "I've been taking all these philosophy courses, and we talk about what's true, what's important, what's *good*. Well, how do you teach people to *be* good? ...What's the point of *knowing* good, if you don't keep trying to *become* a good person?"[3] Coles initially has no answer to this question, and the disillusioned student soon leaves the university. Of course, one cannot *make* a student care about ethics, any more than one can make a student care about, for instance, calculus or French poetry. Notice, however, that the mere way in which that preceding sentence is constructed indicates a part of the problem. Ethics is not the same *sort* of subject as calculus or French poetry. Those and other subjects are areas in which one might, or might not, have an interest, and thus which one might decide to study. But ethics concerns *how we ought to live*—which is of such

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[2] *Meno* 93-94.
[3] Robert Coles, "The Disparity Between Intellect and Character" A68.

fundamental importance that it should be of interest to everybody. In a very strong sense, we shouldn't have to make students (or anyone else) interested in ethics. And yet, we do—or so it would seem. In analyzing what has gone wrong in the case of the young man described above and others like him, we can see that part of the problem is viewing ethics as simply one more subject among others. Just as calculus to an English major, or French poetry to a Business major, ethical inquiry may be seen as just another general education or elective subject which, as non-essential to the student's course of study, "I'm never going to *use*." Thus what seems important is not actually learning to be ethical, but simply learning various materials for the sake of a grade.

Should we say, then, that the student just didn't care how he ought to live? Perhaps, although some qualifications are in order. In a sense he did not, as evidenced by his failure to apply the ethical reasoning that he ostensibly learned to his actual behavior. In another sense, he may have cared quite a bit, just not about morality. It was clearly important enough to him to excel academically, and presumably the eventual results of such an ivy-league education were something upon which he placed a great deal of value. Thus in his mind, the question of how he ought to live may well already have been answered—but answered in a way which excluded moral concerns either entirely, or insofar as they appeared irrelevant or counterproductive to the fulfillment of his own desires. In discussing ethical problems with my own students, many of them will offer a statement like one of the following: "Well, the right thing to do would be *x*, but *y* is what I *would*

do;" or "Well, the right thing to do would be *x*, but *y* would be the *best* thing to do." By these admissions they are not typically engaged in a noble abdication of self-deception in favor of self-knowledge, nor offering an allegedly insightful distinction between the concepts of "right" and "best". Rather, the point is usually that if you want things to go well for yourself—in the situation in question if not in general—doing the right thing is often a poor strategy.

This sentiment, along with the related failure to be ethical, is not limited to education, of course, and part of the difficulty in teaching morality stems from a much wider problem in how it is typically viewed by modern society in general. In that vein, it is not the case that formal ethics classes are the only source of our ethical development; certainly people form ethical views prior to and even in the complete absence of taking a class in such. Students enter college with a more or less comprehensive set of moral beliefs, just as any typical adult possesses, student or not. Generally, barring some crisis, these beliefs will not be subject to examination, nor still less to change. One answer to whether the student above cares about ethics, then, is that he does—but under the subtext that he believes them to be already adequate. After all, in many ways he excelled as a student.

Consider, then, a different kind of example. During his second term of office, President Bill Clinton was accused of sexual impropriety with a White House intern. While the charge was true, he denied it, and a large, time-consuming investigation ensued. Eventually, incontrovertible evidence was discovered, and he was impeached for lying under oath. During the attendant media circus it was easy

to be confused on the actual issue: Was he being impeached for illicit behavior? Illicit behavior *in the White House*? For lying under oath? Further, a number of accompanying questions were raised: Did his conduct warrant the amount of time being spent on the investigation, let alone impeachment proceedings? Should he be impeached? Did the President's personal conduct truly matter in the first place? My point in bringing up this example is not primarily to answer most of these questions—excepting the final one—but to note the motivation behind many of them. A common viewpoint among political pundits and lay persons alike was that the entire proceedings involved in this case were pointless. The president's personal behavior, it was argued, had nothing to do with whether he was a good leader, and as such, was entirely irrelevant to evaluating him in that role. Most people were willing to say that he was in some sense a bad man—he cheated on his wife and lied about it. But many people also believed that for most purposes, it didn't matter what kind of man he was personally. After all, he was in many ways an effective president.

At this point, I want to raise the following question of both the student at Harvard and President Clinton: were they successful? In one sense, the answer seems obviously to be "yes". The student reached the top echelon of academic achievement; Bill Clinton was the President of the United States. From at least one kind of standpoint, it would be implausible to say that they weren't successful. In another, important sense, however, I want to suggest that these men were quite unsuccessful, because of a specific type of failing. Consider first the student. In

terms of his ethics classes, we might judge him successful due to having received 'A's. However, despite being able to satisfactorily explain various moral concepts and theories, he typically acted immorally (I am taking for granted that his behavior as described in Coles' article warrants this judgment). Thus, he arguably learned nothing at all. By way of analogy, suppose that a student of drawing performed excellently on all of her formal exams, describing in perfect detail the method and techniques of various styles. Suppose also, however, that the student was unable to exhibit those techniques in her own works. We should rightly judge that she had not learned the techniques in question, and that she was by that standard unsuccessful as an artist, however apt her descriptions might be. Whether it is feasible to similarly grade students in ethics classes at least in part on their behavior is a topic which deserves further attention. For now, however, note that the problem is not simply one of earning an 'A' without truly learning the material. What should strike us as much more disturbing is that the material in question is moral concerns, and thus that the student exhibits a certain kind of attitude toward those concerns. As such, whatever success we might ascribe to him, it is tainted and unworthy of pride.

The Illusory Moral/Non-Moral Divide

This view, that one's moral standing affects the value of one's ostensibly non-moral success, runs directly counter to the aforementioned claims that were made in light of President Clinton's scandal. Those claims were based upon a

conceptual separation between one's performance in a given role—in this case, the presidency—and one's overall moral worth. I am suggesting that such a separation is a mistake. Still further, I submit that to make a sharp distinction between moral and non-moral spheres of life in general is largely misguided. Among other things, one question we must ask is what this distinction is supposed to be and whether it is ultimately sustainable. As Williams remarks:

> It is said that we make a lot of the distinction between the moral and the nonmoral and emphasize the importance of the moral. But how far, and in what ways, is this really true of our life, as opposed to what moralists say about our life? Do we even understand what the distinction is, or how far it goes? There is perhaps no single question on which an understanding of the Greeks can join more helpfully with our own experience. We paralyse both that understanding and that reflection if simply we take it for granted that the distinction is at once deep, important, and self-explanatory.[4]

Williams' comments here relate specifically to the concept of shame (and guilt as a counterpart), a subject which I will address more specifically in later chapters. Presently, however, I want to focus on the more general notion that the domain of the moral cannot be so easily partitioned. In a similar vein to Williams, Steve Gerrard addresses the putative distinction in "Morality and Codes of Honour." After beginning with the question of what makes something specifically a moral issue as opposed to a nonmoral one, he attempts his search for an answer by way of a contrast with codes of honor: "I consider my grand question so difficult, that I am going to approach it indirectly, seeing if a look at morality's cousin, codes of honor, can help shed light on the real thing."[5] Now, as Gerrard acknowledges, he discusses one code of honor in particular, relating to the practice of dueling in the

[4] Williams, Shame and Necessity 92.
[5] Gerrard, "Morality and Codes of Honor" 69.

antebellum American South. Nevertheless, many of his observations are applicable to honor codes in general, and I will here discuss them as such. More importantly, note the depiction of honor as perhaps a *cousin* of, but not *really*, morality. Even some of its practitioners, for example, ex-governor of South Carolina John Lyde Wilson, "apparently saw morality and honour as distinct institutions although not sharply distinct institutions but ones that were perfectly consistent with each other, if not with law and Christianity."[6] (Wilson, Gerrard notes, was the author of *The Code of Honor or, Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Duelling*.) Along with the aforementioned perception of archaism, that portrayal also likely exemplifies a typically modern view of honor; that it is a component of our history which appeared and operated as something like morality, but which we have since wisely moved beyond.

In fact, however, Gerrard argues that it is not at all clear that honor and morality are truly different, a fact which comes out in attempting to delineate the boundaries of morality. Citing W.K. Frankena's "The Concept of Morality,"[7] he notes four putative criteria intended to distinguish moral from non-moral action-guides:

(A) *X takes it as prescriptive.*

(B) *X universalizes it.*

(C) *X regards it as definitive, final, over-riding, or supremely authoritative.*

(D) *It [that is X's action guide] includes or consists of judgments (rules, principles, ideals, etc.) that pronounce actions and agents to be right,*

[6] Gerrard 71.
[7] Frankena, "The Concept of Morality" 688.

> *wrong, good, bad, etc. simply because of the effect they have on the feelings, interests, etc. of other persons…*

The Southern honor code in question (and, I would add, other codes as well) satisfy all of these criteria. Hence, Gerrard concludes that it "is, at least according to Frankena's rather standard criteria, indistinguishable from a moral system."[8] Further to that observation, he provides a scenario to illustrate the practical difficulty of trying to strongly distinguish the moral and the non-moral, based on an example of Amélie Rorty's:

> "We do not just tend to our elderly parents: we do so tenderly or exasperatedly, respectfully or resentfully." I would add (and this is part of Rorty's point): gracefully or clumsily, stylishly or crudely. Some dinners are arranged in an artistic manner, with attention to colour and symmetry, and some are not. Both dinners can be served to your invalid father; whether the gracefulness of the serving is included or excluded from the moral domain is not a question that can be answered apart from a specific moral theory, even though it might make all the difference in the world to your father *how* the plate is served.[9]

He then elaborates:

> I want to return to my amplification of Amélie Rorty's example. Remember, I pointed out that one could take care of one's father gracefully or clumsily, stylishly or crudely, and I wrote that the gracefulness of serving dinner might make all the difference to your father. Here is what I had in mind: suppose your father is undergoing chemotherapy, and finds eating extremely unappealing. All the good Kantian intentions in the world, all the so-called *moral* virtues, such as courage or charity, to begin a traditional list, will not help your father eat unless you have enough skill, enough sense of style, perhaps even enough sense of humour, to make the dinner attractive. On what basis do we draw the line between charity and humour, and call one part of the moral domain, a virtue, and call the other part of the non-moral domain, a talent, or even a gift?[10]

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[8] Gerrard 74.
[9] Gerrard 75; quoted text from Amélie Rorty, "Three Myths of Modern Theory."
[10] Gerrard 83.

Now, there is a danger here of taking this point too far, and I do not see Gerrard as suggesting that there are no attributes which may be properly described as non-moral. Certainly it would be fallacious to conclude that the difficulty of drawing a distinction in some cases entails the impossibility of drawing a distinction in any case. Perhaps in the example above, an argument could be made for why what appears to be merely (non-moral) humor and creativity are really a manifestation of (moral) charity and beneficence. But that would support, rather than counter Gerrard's point: the distinction between moral and non-moral is not only often unclear, but also largely irrelevant in terms of human excellence. More importantly, the lack of a separate realm of the moral does not reduce the importance of morality, but reinforces it: "What we are left with is a world without a separable moral domain, not because morality has disappeared, but because it is spread out over the world, absorbed in every gesture and style."[11] There is no domain, no separable part of human life, where our virtue or lack thereof; our manner of achieving its ends, ceases to be important.

The Fallacy of "Too Moral"

Furthermore, even when the one making such a division does possess an appreciation for the importance of morality, the result seems inevitably to be its diminishment. For instance, such a gulf between the moral and non-moral spheres of life is explicitly assumed by Susan Wolf in *Moral Saints*, where she argues that

[11] Gerrard 84.

it is detrimental to human welfare to be too focused on being moral. A moral saint, she claims, will be

> too good—if not too good for his own good, at least too good for his own well-being. For the moral virtues, given that they are, by hypothesis, *all* present in the same individual, and to an extreme degree, are apt to crowd out the non-moral virtues, as well as many of the interests and personal characteristics that we generally think contribute to a healthy, well-rounded, richly developed character.[12]

While she does concede that "this is not to say that moral value should not be an important, even the most important, kind of value we attend to in our world",[13] she states nevertheless that "our values cannot be fully comprehended on the model of a hierarchical system with morality at the top".[14] Now, clearly Wolf does not mean to suggest that at times we ought to be *immoral*, and in that sense her view is dissimilar in an important respect to the examples I have cited earlier. She would presumably not, then, argue that the Harvard student would have himself suffered from not being demeaning and disrespectful toward others, or that Clinton's well-being would have been compromised had he not engaged in scandal. Nevertheless, the idea that one can be too moral is problematic in at least two ways. Its pull depends on a flawed (and at times, underspecified and vague) understanding of morality, and it lends itself to supporting the kind of destructive attitude that lies behind the examples above, despite not advocating such explicitly.

As regards the first issue, it is telling to note that when Wolf considers what counts as being morally perfect, she does so almost exclusively from the

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[12] Wolf, "Moral Saints" 421.
[13] Wolf 438.
[14] Wolf 438.

standpoints of utilitarianism and deontology, with virtue-based theories receiving little mention. Some of her remarks, then, I take to show not a difficulty in being too moral as such, but an inadequacy of modern ethical theory in comparison to older traditions. I will later discuss specific ways in which modern ethical theories so fail, but at present I wish to focus on the second issue. An important difficulty in regarding one's moral standing as separable from other areas of life is that it depends upon a fragmented view of the self. Suppose I think that I should not be too moral, where "being too moral" is understood as meaning "acting morally when it would be to my advantage to not act morally". The consequence seems to be that I should act morally only when it is convenient—or, more generally, that I should avoid adhering to any ethics which could potentially modify my behavior. Now, it might be objected that this is an unfair characterization of the view. It was not to say that one can simply do whatever one pleases, but rather that one should not become so consumed with doing what is right that it renders one unable to live a full, rich life which includes important non-moral goods. The problem is, to interpret the view in this way gives rise to the following question: Does it matter how we obtain and enjoy those non-moral goods? That is, Wolf and others are concerned with *whether* we enjoy certain things, but morality is concerned with *how* we ought to live. Let us grant that there are many important goods for a human life; let us also grant, for the time being, at least, that some of these are non-moral. Either it matters how we use these goods, the manner and conditions in which we acquire them, and so forth, or we will be committed to saying that what

is important is simply *that* our lives contain them. If the former, then we must admit the existence of normative standards governing the supposedly non-moral goods, which undermines the notion of being too moral. If the latter, then the alleged tension between morality and moral goods must be a fear of simple exclusion. If that is the case, however, then it seems unavoidable that the call to not be too moral is in fact as I "unfairly" described it above—that in many cases one should not be moral *for the reason that* doing so would interfere with the achievement of one's desires.

And indeed, that does seem to be Wolf's aim, to caution us against a life where morality dominates and so precludes our non-moral achievements. In light of Gerrard's arguments and others which will be shortly forthcoming, however, I think we must view this emphasis of non-moral achievements as beset with significant problems. To that end, two additional quotes from *Moral Saints* may be illuminating (the following italics are mine):

> The moral point of view, we might say, is the point of view one takes up insofar as one takes recognition of the fact that one is just one person among others equally real and deserving of the good things in life as a fact with practical consequences, a fact the recognition of which demands expression in one's actions and in the form of one's practical deliberation.[15]

> *From the moral point of view, we have reasons to want people to live lives that seem good from outside that point of view.* If, as I have argued, this means that we want people to live lives that are not morally perfect, then any plausible moral theory must make use of some conception of supererogation.[16]

[15] Wolf 436 – 437.
[16] Wolf 438.

The question we should ask now is: in light of the first quote, what is the italicized sentence supposed to mean? Given Wolf's explanation of the moral point of view, the sentence becomes: "From the point of view that our actions and deliberations ought to be guided by the recognition that other people also deserve the good things in life, we have reasons to want people to live lives that seem good from outside that point of view." Whatever *that* ends up meaning, what is clear is that it serves to render morality itself as basically devoid of content. What the good things in life *are* is determined in an unspecified, completely external way, and morality is reduced to merely the point of view—provided one elects to take it up—that one is not the only person to whom such goods should belong. Aside from the problem that it can then offer no reason why one *ought* to take up that point of view, it would also seem to entail that there are no specifically moral goods. "Non-moral goods" would be redundant on this scheme, because *all* goods would be non-moral. Morality, by contrast, would be a system of thought to which these goods are not essentially connected.

In this observation we can find the beginnings of an answer to a number of ethical questions. In asking why many people act immorally, it must be noted that such can only be expected in light of a view that ethics is just one source of value among others—not only one with no special status among them, but one which is not essentially connected to the others and may well inhibit their acquisition. If this is the case, then—like the Harvard student who acted cruelly toward his peers while prospering academically—a person may well decide that ethical failings need

not detract from his value as a person. Or, perhaps less insidiously, but harmful nonetheless, one may simply fail to consider that her ethical views are in need of scrutiny in the first place. To return to the earlier collegiate analogy, most people recognize that a certain amount of mathematical knowledge is necessary to be successful in modern life. After a certain threshold is reached, however, there is generally no need to be, say, a math *major*; greater knowledge may be useful for certain types of employment or if one simply enjoys math, but one who does not choose that path has no reason to expect that his general well-being will be threatened. In the same way, one might believe that his ethical views are good *enough*, and focus in a largely amoral sense on other objects of desire. To extend the comparison still further, just as someone who is very interested in mathematics may be seen as a nerd, and thus as missing out on certain important goods in human life, one who devotes herself too much to ethical concerns may be seen, as Wolf worries, to exclude herself from the enjoyment of other important values. I would suggest that this view is quite common—that the ethical views of most people are rarely seen as being an *integral* part of their careers, hobbies, or other daily activities. Rather, they are seen as either a set of generally minimum obligations, or as something often in tension with overall well-being, as my students who "think *x* is right but *would* do *y*" can attest. If such is the case, then the explicit or implicit posing of the question "Why should I be moral?" is both rational and inevitable.

More than anything, this type of view leads to the idea that ethics can be separated from the rest of one's life. In its most extreme form, this is a conscious

process which results in a complete compartmentalization of values, such as occurred in the minds of many Nazi officers. Less egregiously, although still destructive, is the effect of such a process on us in our everyday lives. When we begin to believe that those lives can be sharply separated into various domains, and that our evaluation along one can be achieved independently of reference to the others, we damage not only our self-concept, but our moral capacity. It is one and the same Clinton who engaged in scandal and fulfilled the role of President; one and the same student who prospered academically and demeaned and disparaged his peers. A person is not just a collection of disparate axes of values, but a unitary being whose beliefs and actions not only constitute, but jointly determine, a life. All of those beliefs, actions, and values, then, are relevant to whether such a life is well-lived.

Roles, Persons, and the Unity of a Life

At this point, however, an objection must be addressed. For we can imagine someone saying: 'Even if it is true that in the cases you describe it is one and the same *person* who performs the acts in question, that does not in itself entail that their moral failings detracted from their other accomplishments. For instance, would Clinton have been a more effective president had he not engaged in sexual misconduct and subsequent lying? Would the Harvard student have been a better student if not for his treatment of others? If the answer is 'no', then we have an explanation for why people—legitimately—view the different spheres of life as

separate.' However, I believe that both this view and the motivation behind it rest on a mistake. A strong case can be made that these individuals and others are made worse through their moral failings, not only in an overall sense, but in their particular roles. Additionally, this fact will be due to intrinsic, not merely instrumental, reasons. As aforementioned with the drawing analogy, in an important sense the student was very unsuccessful because he did not truly learn anything about the ethics he studied. Nevertheless, while this observation is correct and important, it is not specific to ethics in the sense that the same point could be made in regard to any subject. It is a particularly striking and ironic example due to the gross immorality shown by one who made 'A's in moral reasoning, of course. But we could similarly fault him for contriving to "earn" an 'A' in any subject in which he could not thereafter demonstrate proficiency. My argument, however, is that there is something particular about a failure of *ethics* that precludes real success, above and beyond the mere basic failing of hollow reward for an unlearned subject.

Similarly, one could argue that the scandal with Monica Lewinsky negatively affected Bill Clinton's presidency, because he was spending on lecherous carousing time which should have been spent presiding over the country. While this is of course true, it again is not specific to the wrongdoing in question. The president could in principle be faulted for wasting time on any number of activities if they prevented him from performing the duties of his office. Additionally, there are presumably some activities for which we would not fault

him even if the time could otherwise have been spent attending to matters of state—for instance, a certain amount of necessary leisure. Once more, I take it that there is something about the actual events in question which taint his presidency. In that vein, there are of course actions for which he would have been convicted on impeachment charges—if he had, for instance, embezzled money while in office, then likely he would not have remained president. Is the difference merely that one action is actually illegal while the other is just non-criminal sleaziness? I do not think so, because it is easy to imagine a sentiment similar to one given above, that despite a certain amount of hypothetical criminal activity, on the whole he was still a good president. And that is where our attention must turn then. The view against which I am arguing seems to be the following: that one is not rendered a worse student, a worse president, a worse *x*, through being a worse *person*.[17] Implicit to this view is that there are evaluative criteria upon which it is determined whether one has well fulfilled the purpose of a given role. Hence, the questions which must be answered are then what these criteria are, and whether it is truly plausible to view them as operating separately from overall moral judgment.

In considering Clinton, then, we must ask: What is the function of a president? At its most basic, the answer would seem to be that a president's purpose is to ensure the well-being of a country's citizens, to the extent that his or her actions are capable of bringing about that end. A good president will act in ways which improve the lives of the citizens, and a bad president's actions will

[17] With apologies to L. Frank Baum: "Oh no, my dear; I'm really a very good Wizard—I'm just a very bad man, I must admit." Adapted from The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, 189.

detract from the citizens' welfare. Suppose, then, that one were to argue as follows: By having an affair, Clinton wronged his wife, brought emotional turmoil and humiliation to her and to his daughter, and made a disgrace of the woman involved. By lying about it, he embroiled the country in a lengthy time- and resource-consuming investigation which inhibited the resolution of other issues, and furthermore diminished his own credibility, damaging his capacity to lead. As such, he harmed citizens of his country both individually and collectively, acting directly contrary to his function. Therefore, the scandal did indeed make him a worse president. What are we to make of this argument? I suspect that the objectors may not find it convincing—at least at first. Why is that? The type of worries which concerned Wolf above do not come into play. Nor is there any sort of utilitarian issue—it is not as if the scandal somehow harmed a few people in order to ensure a greater good for the country overall. In fact, if there is an unease regarding the above argument, I think the motivation has to be a feeling that I am somehow "cheating" by interpreting Clinton's private indiscretions in terms of his public responsibilities. After all, wasn't that the original contention—that his personal life had little to do with whether or not he was a good president? But that perceived separability is a mistake. Clinton could not "turn off" his presidency so that only the *man* committed a scandal; nor likewise can any of us insulate who and what we are in one part of our lives from the rest of it. The fallacious notion that our lives can be so neatly divided is in effect a denial of *personhood*; a systematic failure of integrity in terms of our own self-authorship.

Our student likewise is not two individuals—the demeaning antagonist and the diligent academician—switching between their distinct domains. He is a singular entity, writing the life story of one who abuses other people as he completes his schooling. For this and one other reason, we can see both why immorality does make one a worse student, and why other types of roles which may initially seem problematic are in fact still susceptible to the same argument. The function of a student is to learn and move toward fuller mastery of various subjects. However, it is important to notice that this is not the end of the story; it is perfectly reasonable to ask what the *point* of that learning is. Presumably we take the learning to be valuable—but for what? MacIntyre gives an example of a child who plays chess in order to win candy from his teacher:

> …so long as it is the candy alone which provides the child with a good reason for playing chess, the child has no reason not to cheat and every reason to cheat, provided he or she can do so successfully. But, so we may hope, there may come a time when the child will find in those goods specific to chess, in the achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytic skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity, a new set of reasons, reasons now not just for winning on a particular occasion, but for trying to excel in whatever way the game of chess demands. Now if the child cheats, he or she will be defeating not me, but himself or herself.
>
> There are thus two kinds of good possibly to be gained by playing chess. On the one hand there are those goods externally and contingently attached to chess-playing and to other practices by the accidents of social circumstance—in the case of the imaginary child candy, in the case of real adults such goods as prestige, status and money. There are always alternative ways of achieving such goods, and their achievement is never to be had *only* by engaging in some particular kind of practice.[18]

If the claim is that the student's viciousness is irrelevant to his academic achievement, then we are committed to saying that the learning and knowledge

[18] MacIntyre, After Virtue 188.

itself is unconnected to the human good. That is, either: the student is essentially "playing for candy" with regard to his education, valuing the external good of the eventual degree but not the internal ones of the subjects in question. Or, education itself is not related to human

well-being, and the purpose of acquiring knowledge and understanding is not the improvement of self and society. The former disjunct is assuredly true, given the student's aforementioned attitude to (at least) his moral reasoning classes. The latter, however, is false, and probably even absurd. Learning and education can be coherently defined only in relation to the end of improved well-being. Hence if there is value in the role of 'student', it lies in the goods internal to education, and entails the improved capacity to thrive as a human being. The claim that a student's immorality does not render him a worse student must also deny the existence of non-external goods in education.

But surely this isn't true of *all* roles? Even granting that presidents and students are such that their function is defined in relation to human welfare, aren't there many others for which success can be defined independently of such considerations? Part of the response to this criticism will come in the next chapter, after a discussion of honor as an ethics of being. Presently, however, I note that the more we recognize both the unity of a life, and the extent to which its 'moral' and 'non-moral' spheres are really intertwined, the less plausible that objection will seem. The great failure of modern ethics has been the tendency to try to define morality in a way which renders it merely one, conceptually separable component

of human activity. Unless matters of ethics are properly viewed as encompassing one's entire life, and as fundamental to the value thereof, we will always face the problem of ethics seeming ignorable. In an ethics of honor, such is incomprehensible. As mentioned above, honor comprises pride, integrity, social role, and reputation, unified such that a person's value and well-being are conceived in terms of his moral worthiness. To be honorable is to reject the idea that a life well-lived is simply one in which an individual achieves some amorally evaluated desires. It is to hold oneself to a standard of moral uprightness, both in desiring the right things, and in achieving those desires in the right ways. Still further, it is to conceive oneself as both part of, and as partially defined by, one's role within a community of persons for whom the achievement of a good life is a common project. Above all, it is to cultivate within oneself a commitment to virtue, to take pride in a good life just insofar as one's moral worth makes the achievement of happiness *deserved*. To the extent that such a conception of ethics seems foreign to us, we live in a world without honor. By studying past traditions of which we are the inheritors, however, we can—I submit—recapture a superior framework of ethics, happiness, and well-being. To that end, I turn now to an inquiry in the domain with which ideals of honor are most readily associated: the ethical realm of the warrior.

Chapter 2: The Way of the Warrior

This chapter's title is a direct translation of the Japanese word *Bushido*, the name for the code of conduct to which the samurai were bound. These *Bushi* shared with medieval knights, the ancient Greeks, and the warriors of many other societies, a certain conception of what it is to be a warrior. That is not to say that their codes were all identical, although there are many similarities. Rather, it is to say that in all of these cases, a warrior was defined not simply by reference to his fighting for duty or pay, but to how he conducted himself both on and off the battlefield. One who did not exemplify the right qualities in both areas was to that extent simply not a true warrior. The code of a warrior, then, is a specific kind of ethics, and it is primarily an ethics of *being*. One way in which we can understand this is to look at cases of failure to be a warrior—not in the sense of a non-warrior being incapable or unwilling to become one, but in that of an established warrior falling from grace. In history and literature, through multiple societies, we find cases where a warrior's ignoble deeds make it impossible for him to continue to be what he was. Perhaps he has directly engaged in wickedness, or through an act of folly has made himself into something ridiculous. The sanctions may come from society at large, or be self-imposed. Whatever the particulars may be, each case stems from a common ethical core: an ethically elevated station in life prescribing both virtues and duties, as well as the requirements of embodying such a role.

This core survives today to at least some degree in the modern military. For example, Mark Osiel cites an incident from the Vietnam War in which warrior

ethics are applied to a concrete moral dilemma. A Marine officer who finds a recruit with his gun to the head of a Vietnamese woman simply tells him: "Marines don't do that."[1] The charge is not for the soldier to follow an external standard of behavior, but to maintain himself as the thing that he is. Osiel sees this conception as ethically superior to its alternatives:

> This statement is surely a simpler, more effective way of communicating the law of war than threatening prosecution for war crimes, by the enemy, an international tribunal, or an American court-martial. Faced with a hard case, officers are more likely to do the right thing if they ask themselves: "What is required of honorable soldiers, here and now?" rather than "what does international law require?" or "What would the theory of justice require of anyone facing such a problem from behind a veil of ignorance?" The appeal is as much to their professional pride as to universalistic ideals. Martial honor "means doing nothing to tarnish that proud heritage" of one's unit, regiment, or branch of service, according to a recent study of Marine basic training.[2]

Shannon French, citing Osiel's words, adds:

> A warrior's code of the type advocated by Osiel cannot be reduced to a list of rules. "Marines don't do that" is not merely shorthand for "Marines don't shoot unarmed civilians; Marines don't rape women; Marines don't leave Marines behind; Marines don't despoil corpses,", even though those firm injunctions and many others are part of what we might call the Marines' Code. What Marines internalize when they are indoctrinated into the culture of the Corps is an amalgam of specific regulations, general concepts (e.g. honor, courage, commitment, discipline, loyalty, teamwork), history and tradition that adds up to a coherent sense of *what it is to be a Marine*. To remain "Semper Fidelis", or forever faithful to the code of the Marine Corps is never to behave in a way that cannot be reconciled with that image of what it is to be a Marine.[3]

What is suggested by this way of thinking is that a Marine—or, in a more general sense, a true warrior—is incompatible with moral taint. Had the soldier in the

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[1] Osiel, Obeying Orders 23.
[2] Osiel 23 – 24.
[3] French, The Code of the Warrior 15.

example above not come to his senses at the admonition but killed the Vietnamese woman, it would not have been a case of a Marine behaving immorally—rather, it would have been a case of a man *failing to be a Marine*. "Marines don't do that", and thus anyone who *does* do that is not a Marine. Such a man would be given a *dishonorable* discharge from military service, just as warriors throughout history have been reduced to non-warriors, or even been driven to suicide, because of the shame that they brought upon themselves.

Medieval Japan was rife with such occurrences, where a failure of duty was treated with extreme gravity. Robert Samuel relates a number of such cases, among them that of Sakanoue no Haruzumi. Having encountered what appeared to be a group of mounted nobles, Haruzumi and his men acquiesce to their demands that they lower their weapons and lie down in the road—only to discover that the "nobles" were in fact armed brigands. Although the thieves leave their victims alive, they steal all of the soldiers' weapons, clothing, and horses, leaving Haruzumi and his underlings naked, defeated, and humiliated. The text does not relate what sort of penalty Haruzumi might have suffered at the hand of his lord, but Haruzumi imposes one upon himself, feeling that "he had no choice but to renounce his warrior status and demote himself to a mere side-runner."[4] A more serious occasion, both in offense and in consequence, concerns one Taki Zenzaburo:

> "I was the one—no one else—who unjustifiably gave the orders to fire on the foreigners at Kobe and then a second time when they attempted to

[4] Samuel, The Samurai: The Philosophy of Victory 119.

> escape. Because of this crime, I will disembowel myself. I hope you will all do me the honor of witnessing my action."[5]

The foreign delegates relating the tale proceed to describe in detail how Zenzaburo slices open his stomach and is finally decapitated, and conclude with praise for the deceased:

> There was absolute silence in the hall. The only sound that could be heard was the sickening gush of blood from the dead man's crushed body, which, only moments before, had belonged to a courageous and dignified man. It was a horrible sight.[6]

The description of Zenzaburo as "courageous and dignified" flies in the face of the ignoble actions which necessitated his suicide. Because of his willingness and demeanor in the face of death, his shame is lifted. It was yet impossible for him to *live* honorably after what he had done, but through *seppuku* the honor of his former *life* could be restored. Thus his death was not only punitive, but in some way also redemptive. Such was not always the case, however, whether in Japan or elsewhere. The *Hagakure*, for instance, relates the story of a thieving pageboy named Shozaemon who faced his impending execution calmly only until he realized that the executioner was not the man he had expected. That was "the end of his dignified behavior, and he displayed great cowardice."[7] After being forcibly pinned down, he died as he lived—shamefully.

Somewhere in between these two cases (but certainly closer to the latter) we find Sophocles' Ajax. Although he arguably does neither, he prefaces his death with the pronouncement that "a truly noble man must either live with honour/ Or

[5] Samuel 78, citing Mitford's Tales of Old Japan.
[6] Samuel 80.
[7] Samuel 132, citing the *Hagakure*.

die with honour."[8] Hence, his motives for suicide are essentially similar to Zenzaburo's. There is a common thread shared by the two men and their societies, and it is easy to imagine Ajax's words above having instead been uttered by a samurai. Where Ajax is more akin to Shozaemon than to Zenzaburo, however, is that there is no suggestion that his death is redemptive, either in his mind or those of his peers. Odysseus may feel pity for him,[9] and all of Greece may mourn for him (again, according to Odysseus),[10] but there is no indication that Ajax's status has been restored. Bernard Williams sees his plight as essentially having become absurd, but warns that this does not entail that the problem is one merely of perception:

> The image of himself that led Ajax to conclude that he could not live as a man who had done these things is indeed founded on values that put a great weight on how you are seen... But what is already clear, I hope, is that it need not be merely some exaggerated sense of looking ridiculous, or any other value that turns simply on appearances, that leads someone to think that he or she cannot live as someone who has done a certain thing, even though it was done unintentionally or with an intention dissociated from a person's usual self. People do not *have* to think that they could not live in that situation; they do not *have* to think any such thing, and this is a type of thought as far removed as may be from the concerns of obligation. But they may sensibly think it if their understanding of their lives and the significance their lives possessed for other people is such that what they did destroyed the only reason they had for going on. Still more, they may recognise that what they unintentionally did, if it did not destroy their lives, changed them radically, and changed them because they did that thing, not just because of what happened to them.[11]

An Ajax who slays foes in battle in service of his cause and comrades, is a mighty warrior. An Ajax who slays foes in battle, helpless herdsmen, and livestock, in

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[8] *Ajax* 479-80.
[9] *Ajax* 122-126.
[10] The Odyssey Bk. XI.
[11] Williams 73 – 74.

service of a delusional vengeance, is a killer and a buffoon. The perception of others, then, while certainly negative, is not the true gravity. He can no longer be what he was, but he cannot abide what he is. Hence, there can be no Ajax.

Art Thou a Knight at All?

Perhaps surprisingly, a similar kind of tragedy befalls even the much-lauded Lancelot. Popularly (and erroneously) deemed "greatest" of King Arthur's knights, in the end he fails in chivalry. Lancelot experiences two deaths—one metaphorical, and one literal—respectively due to separation from Guinevere, and later her death. No mere result of depression, these events were precipitated in large part by Lancelot himself. Because of his love for Guinevere, Lancelot is caught one day in the queen's chambers and the two are accused of adultery and treason.[12] As a result, a chain of events is set in motion, the culmination of which sees the end of Camelot. Lancelot battles with King Arthur's knights and makes off with the queen to prevent her from being burned at the stake. Not only does this encounter ignite a war between Arthur and Lancelot, but during its course he slays two knights who were both unarmed and his own friends. (In fact, one of the victims, Sir Gareth, had been knighted by Lancelot himself). The fellowship of the Round Table is broken, and while Arthur leads an army across the sea to fight with Lancelot, his villainous son Mordred sets himself upon the throne under pretense of Arthur's death. Thus Lancelot (with Guinevere) not only causes a civil war that

[12] Le Morte DArthur 745. Interestingly, the text is ambiguous as to whether a tryst between them actually takes place at this particular point. However, the charge was in fact accurate concerning their relationship in general, as they had consummated their passion on other, prior occasions.

ravages England, but ends King Arthur's reign (and ultimately his life, as Arthur and Mordred slay each other.)[13] Furthermore, his blame is compounded by the fact that during his quest for the Holy Grail, he had been *warned* of the wicked nature of his love for Guinevere. Having arrived at a chapel with the Grail inside, he finds himself unable to enter its presence:

> And as he marvelled, he heard a voice saying, "Sir Lancelot, thou art unworthy, go thou hence, and withdraw thee from this holy place." And when he heard that, he was passing heavy, for he bethought him of his sins. ...and then he called himself the wretchedest and most unhappy of all knights, and said, "My sin hath brought me unto great dishonour: for when I sought earthly honours, I achieved them ever; but now I take upon me holy things, my guilt doth hinder me, and shameth me; therefore I had no power to stir or speak when the holy blood appeared before me."[14]

Later, having sought out a holy man, Lancelot "confessed to him, and told him all his sins, and how he had fourteen years served but Queen Guinevere only, and forgotten God, and done great deeds of arms for her, and not for Heaven, and had little or nothing thanked God for the honour he had won."[15] Having repented of his sin, he takes an oath to avoid Guinevere's company whenever possible. That oath, of course, is soon broken—leading to the evil and destruction described above. In the end, his knighthood dies along with Guinevere's favor, as she repents of their role in the tragedy:

> Through this man and me hath all this war been wrought, and the death of the noblest knights of the world; for through our love that we have loved together is my most noble lord slain. ...Therefore, Sir Launcelot, I require thee and beseech thee heartily, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, that thou never see me more in the visage; and I command thee, on God's behalf, that thou forsake my company, and to thy kingdom thou turn again,

[13] Le Morte DArthur 789.
[14] King Arthur and His Knights 294.
[15] King Arthur and His Knights 295.

> and keep well thy realm from war and wrack; for as well as I have loved thee, mine heart will not serve me to see thee, for through thee and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed; therefore, Sir Launcelot, go to thy realm, and there take thee a wife, and live with her in joy and bliss; and I pray thee heartily, pray for me to our Lord that I may amend my misliving.[16]

Guinevere sends him away, and Lancelot instead becomes a hermit—despite being as powerful as he ever was, with a war-filled England in which to prove his mettle. The man might have remained, but the *knight* had nothing more to live for, because what he *should* have lived for he had already destroyed. He betrayed his king, he betrayed his God, he betrayed his friends, he betrayed his own oath, entwining his knighthood and all his acclaim with a woman who could not be his. He was not, in the end, what a knight truly is, and the loss of his false idol in Guinevere merely removed the last vestige of the illusion. He does penance as a holy man, and finds redemption before his passing,[17] but as a *knight* he could no longer live.

Other chivalric tales were similarly replete with the idea that the station of knight must at least in part be constituted *morally*. Thus we see the sentiments of Sir Tristram in an adventure shared with a knight named Dinadan. Journeying together, the two knights meet a series of encounters in which Tristram must continually upbraid Dinadan to persuade him to join the battle. First, having learned of a plot by Morgan Le Fay to set thirty men in ambush to kill Sir Lancelot, Tristram intends to ride to their location and kill the men before they can commit their wicked deed. Dinadan, however, will have none of it:

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[16] Le Morte DArthur 796 – 797.
[17] Le Morte Darthur 798 - 802.

> "It is not possible for us to meet with thirty knights! I will take no part in such a hardihood, for to match one or two or three knights is enough, but to match fifteen I will never assay."
>
> "For shame," replied Sir Tristram, "do but your part."
>
> "That will I not", said he; "wherefore, I pray ye, lend me your shield, for it is of Cornwall, and because men of that country are deemed cowards, ye are but little troubled as ye ride with knights to joust with."[18]

Tristram refuses, however, and rebukes Dinadan:

> "Nay," said Sir Tristram, "I will never give my shield up for her sake who gave it to me; but if thou wilt not stand by me to-day I will surely slay thee; for I ask no more of thee than to fight one knight, and if thy heart will not serve thee that much, thou shalt stand by and look on me and them."
>
> "Would God that I had never met with thee!"[19]

So Dinadan is shamed into remaining with Tristram, and upon seeing Tristram's valor, he even joins the fight himself:

> Anon they came to where the thirty knights lay waiting, and Sir Tristram rushed upon them, saying, "Here is one who fights for love of Lancelot!" Then he slew two of them at the first onset of his spear, and ten more swiftly after with his sword. At that Sir Dinadan took courage, and assailed the others with him, till they turned and fled.[20]

Nevertheless, Dinadan's newfound courage is short-lived. Having arrived at a castle where a knight may lodge only after jousting with two others, Dinadan protests Tristram's desire to stay there, prompting another rebuke:

> "Shame on thee!" said Sir Tristram, "art thou a knight at all?"[21]

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[18] And in fact, just prior to this scene, Sir Bors had refused to joust with Sir Tristram, having believed him for that reason to be unworthy.
[19] King Arthur and his Knights 259.
[20] King Arthur and his Knights 259.
[21] King Arthur and his Knights 259.

Here, as in the aforementioned examples, the call to action and the moral duty is a function of the kind of thing that a knight is. If Dinadan *is* a knight, the implication would be, then his decision has already been made. To refuse is not merely to shirk his duty, but to fail to be a knight after all. These considerations also inform the frequency in which knights were called "upon their knighthood" to aid or battle someone, as well as the common epithet "false" being used to describe a knight that was wicked. For his part, the poor Sir Dinadan eventually manages to extricate himself from the company of Sir Tristram, after a rather comical scene where he bemoans both this and a previous, similar misfortune:

> And when Sir Tristram prayed him to fight, "I will not", answered he, "for I was wounded by those thirty knights with whom we fought this morning; and as to you, you are in truth like one gone mad, and who would cast himself away! There be but two knights in the world so mad, and the other is Sir Lancelot, with whom I once rode forth, who kept me evermore at battling so that for a quarter of a year thereafter I lay in my bed. Heaven defend me again from either of your fellowships!"[22]

So Dinadan casts his judgment upon Tristram and Lancelot. Yet the reproof of his words follows soon thereafter, as Sir Tristram, joined by Sir Gawain, learns of yet another ambush set by Morgan le Fay, now designed to ensnare both Lancelot and Tristram. Unlike Dinadan, Gawain unhesitatingly sets off to fight the would be ambushers (in fact, he himself suggests the course of action to Tristram) and thus exemplifies true chivalry. Literarily, the real judgment falls upon Sir Dinadan, who chose not freedom from a madness that he supposed shared by but two men, but rather cowardice and a failure of knighthood. Is he a knight at all? In an important sense, that is up to him. Later tales depict him in a more favorable light, as he is

[22] King Arthur and his Knights 261.

generally brave and even spends further time in the company of Sir Tristram. At this point in the story, however, it would seem that he is not.

The Warrior Set Apart

Citing a first-day exercise she gives to students in her military ethics course at the U.S. Naval Academy, Shannon French notes the students' own insistence on the distinction between a true warrior and a false one, and the passion with which they regard it. Given a list of five putative synonyms for the word "warrior" (murderer, killer, fighter, victor, and conqueror), nearly every student rejects all five: "The reasons they give to account for why they wish to dismiss each of these as synonyms for warrior consistently stress the idea that that a true warrior has to be morally superior in some way to those who might qualify for the other suggested epithets."[23] The students take particular care to distinguish warriors from *murderers*, for whom their remarks are "filled with contempt."[24] By contrast, a warrior is one who—while killing if necessary—does so with "honor", "a moral reason", "a noble reason", "when it is unavoidable", and never with "malice" or a way that would "take advantage of the weak." Both categories fight, and perhaps even kill. But where the murderer is despicable and evil, the true warrior is not only ethical, but set apart by his or her code of honor. This setting apart may apply not only between a warrior and a mere killer or murderer, but between the warrior and the rest of the society:

[23] French 1.
[24] French 2.

> In many cases this code of honor seems to hold the warrior to a higher ethical standard than that required for an ordinary citizen within the general population of the society that the warrior serves. The code is not imposed from the outside. The warriors themselves police strict adherence to these standards, with violators being shamed, ostracized, or even killed by their peers.[25]

The code comes from within, and is generated by the kind of being that a warrior is. As such, it not only produces its own demands, but ties those demands inextricably to the moral sanction of its adherents.

An interesting modern example of such a code comes from what may at first seem an unlikely source—the character of Batman. Bruce Wayne had dedicated his life to fighting crime after his parents were gunned down in front of his eyes. As such, his heroics were motivated not only by saving others from suffering the same fate, but also specifically by fighting against the use of guns as a means of imposing one's will. This background informs the first episode of the animated series "Batman Beyond," in which an aging Batman who suffers from heart problems is fighting a group of criminals who were about to kill their ransom victim. During the combat, he begins to suffer a heart attack and is nearly beaten to death, until in desperation he grabs one of the kidnappers' dropped guns and points it at his assailant. The criminal flees and is captured by the now-arrived police, the kidnapped woman is freed, and all seems well. Batman, however, has not survived. True, he was not killed by the criminals (and thanks to his efforts neither was their intended victim) and he manages to slip out a side door as the criminals are rounded up and order is restored. But as Bruce takes off his mask and stares at the

[25] French 3.

weapon in his hand, his expression is not of triumph, but horror. By employing a gun in battle now, he has in some way become that which he hates and has sworn to destroy. Faced with this truth, he drops the gun, and we can see in his visage the inevitable result: the next scene sees him shutting down power to the Batcave, uttering the words "Never again."[26]

This example is particularly intriguing, because in an important sense, Bruce has done nothing wrong. He saved a woman's life and subdued a group of criminals, all without bloodshed. Essentially, he has done what a police officer would do. In fact, Batman often works with the police, and certainly does not view them as morally lacking for using firearms in the service of their position. Even a fatal shooting, though regrettable, would not necessarily be viewed as immoral in his eyes. What, then, is the problem? To answer this question, we will find it helpful to ask another: Whence comes Batman's moral sanction? That is to say: what makes it moral for a man to put on a costume and operate outside of the law, interfering in police business by taking it upon himself to fight criminals? I suggest that Batman's moral sanction comes from a kind of greatness. The existence of Batman is justified fundamentally because the effect of his (super)heroism is something that the police cannot achieve. It may be unavoidable that an officer of the law shoot a criminal. But provided that it is done for the protection of the public good, such an act will be, though not ideal, morally permissible. Batman, however, operates on a higher level. His heroism consists not only in life-saving and crime-fighting, but in doing so in a way that preserves *all* life, and never

[26] "Rebirth": Batman Beyond ep. 1. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1998.

depends upon the use or threat of a deadly weapon. Unlike the police, he *can* live in the ideal, and what is morally permissible for them is unthinkable for him. Likewise, for Batman, the supererogatory is the obligatory.

Imagine, then, a Batman who continues to operate after that fateful night—perhaps one who simply carries a gun, lest the same heart condition threaten his mission again. Aside from the problem of whether he could actually pull the trigger if needed, the question must arise: What, now, is he? Certainly not the Dark Knight. Essentially, he would be just like another police officer, with the notable difference that, unlike them, he is unlicensed by the state, unsanctioned by the people, and unaccountable to anyone. Now, to be sure, he was none of those things before, either. But neither was he before simply replicating what a police officer does. Rather, as aforementioned, he was achieving something greater. By virtue of that achievement, he creates his own moral justification. Once he is no longer capable of maintaining that excellence, in an important sense the moral legitimacy of his vigilantism vanishes as well. A warrior may heroically operate on a higher level than the general populace, and the end of that service is a literal or metaphorical death. In that way, we can see why Tsunetomo begins the *Hagakure* in the way that he does: "I have found the essence of Bushido: to die!"[27] A samurai must "die every morning in advance"[28] in the knowledge that his worth depends on his ability to conduct himself according to his duty. The choice for a samurai is between either the execution of his duty or the execution of himself.

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[27] Tsunetomo, Bushido: The way of the Samurai 13.
[28] Tsunetomo 93.

Even in cases where the *man* may go on living, such as Haruzumi's above, the *samurai* has "died", having lost both the ability and the right to continue to be a true warrior.

As should be clear from preceding examples, a similar conception pervades all of the warriors above. What we can see in their analysis is that to a large extent, to fail to be a warrior is not only to lose one's moral worth, but in many ways one's worth in *general*, and indeed, to lose the very sense of self. This self can be understood only in terms of its relationship both to other warriors and the tradition which surrounds them, and thus the warrior's morality is grounded in living up to the demands of that tradition. What drives a warrior's moral life, then, is a particular sort of integrity—a necessity of action founded in an unwillingness to make of himself less than he is. Thus the warrior possesses a singularly powerful answer to a question that has vexed philosophers and laymen alike: "why should I be moral?" Before discussing more fully why the warrior possesses a superior answer, however, let us first examine why the question has been and remains so problematic for moral philosophy.

The Challenge of Moral Justification

We may first note that it can be intelligibly rendered in at least two ways, which are not necessarily equivalent. "Why should I be *moral*?" and "Why should *I* be moral?" are distinct, albeit related, questions. The first rendition springs from a view of morality as an external system which is essentially superimposed onto

one's existence from outside. That is, the view entails that there exists on one side the individual, and on the other any number of projects, values and systems—including systems of ethics—which he or she may variously choose to incorporate or refrain from incorporating into him- or herself. The task of any particular moral system then, is to construct itself in such a way that the individual will be disposed to adopt and adhere to it. The problem, of course, is that in such a conception there must always be the suspicion that the individual need *not* adhere to the system, because it cannot in itself provide a sufficient reason to do so. That is to say, the morality may be internally consistent (if not entirely then at least in most important respects), and an agent may even be predisposed to embrace the idea that human beings ought to act in some ways and not in others. Those two factors are not necessarily enough, however, to establish either: that I should accept a particular scheme of values over some other, competing scheme; nor in a more specific sense that in *this particular situation, here and now*, I should continue to adhere to a scheme I have followed heretofore. MacIntyre identifies the first of these concerns as part of a fundamental defect within contemporary ethics. Since the enlightenment, he argues, moral philosophy has been concerned with an impossible task—that of attempting to rationally justify moral rules for a human being conceived of as having no essential nature. On this view, the moral agent comes into the world as a blank slate, and an individual is "the real me" to be discovered once we have gotten underneath all the accidental contexts and relations attaching a person to the world and his society.[29] However, he insists, this view of a human

[29] MacIntyre 33.

being is not only misleading, but a core cause of why moral debate erroneously appears to be interminable and unjustifiable.

Consider first that it is unclear what reasons could be given to such a being to establish that he *must* act in a (purportedly) moral way. Many thinkers have tried, of course, and MacIntyre sees them as all advancing a variation on what is essentially the same argument:

1. Begin with premises regarding some feature of human nature.
2. Identify rules of morality based on what a being with that nature could be expected to accept.

Thus we see the pattern for Kant, Kierkegaard, Hume and others attempting to justify morality, each with a different point of origin. Hume tried to locate the basis of morality in the passions, citing the impotence of reason to motivate action. Kant abjured the passions for their contingent character, looking to reason to be universally binding. Kierkegaard, likewise, saw a failure in both passion *and* reason to provide the requisite basis, and sought to locate it in a mere act of choice in the individual.[30] As MacIntyre notes, "the vindication of each position was made to rest in crucial part upon the failure of the other two, and the sum total of the effective criticism of each position by the others turned out to be the failure of all."[31] He goes on to argue that they *had* to fail because they were all indebted to a line of thinking which had given up the notion that ethics is *goal-based*:

> the general form of the moral scheme which was the historical ancestor of both conceptions... is that which Aristotle analyzed in the *Nicomachean*

[30] MacIntyre, esp. chapter. 4.
[31] MacIntyre 49 – 50.

> *Ethics*. Within that teleological scheme there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature. Ethics is the science which allows men to transition from the former state to the latter. Ethics therefore in this scheme presupposes some account of potentiality and act, some account of the essence of man as a rational animal and above all some account of the human *telos*. The precepts which enjoin the various virtues and prohibit the vices which are their counterparts instruct us how to move from potentiality to act, how to realize our true nature and to reach our true end. To defy them will be to be frustrated and incomplete, to fail to achieve that goal of rational happiness which it is peculiarly ours as a species to pursue. The desires and emotions which we possess are to be put in order and educated by the use of such precepts and by the cultivation of those habits of action which the study of ethics prescribes; reason instructs us both as to what our true end is and as to how to reach it. ...Each of the three elements of the scheme—the conception of untutored human nature, the conception of the precepts of rational ethics and the conception of human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*—requires reference to the other two if its status and function are to be intelligible.[32]

Having lost one part of this conception, MacIntyre argues, the resulting moral conceptions could not any longer be intelligible. If there is no essential human *telos*, then ethics cannot be seen as transformative in the way that it had been. Thus in the way that I have stated before, ethics must come to be conceived as something external to a human being, and no ultimate reason can be given for me to accept ethical precepts. As long as the view prevails that nothing of what a human being ought to do can be derived from what a human being *is*, the attempt to justify rules of morality such that they are both objective and truly binding upon human beings must fail.

[32] MacIntyre 52 – 53.

Moral Identities

MacIntyre's proposed remedy for this failure—the rejection of the "no ought from is" principle and a return to the conception of 'human being' as a *functional* concept—is precisely what a warrior ethics encompasses. What a warrior possesses, and what most modern systems of ethics lack, is a sense of moral identity. To be a warrior is a source of both moral duty and self-worth. The two are intertwined and inextricable, which means also that the concept of a good life for a warrior is intrinsically concerned with a *morally* good life. The chief problem with ethics that I identified in the previous chapter was the separability of ethics from human identity. The mistreated college student's lament that her classmate had learned *about* ethics without *becoming* ethical was just of that sort. That callous young man undoubtedly conceived of himself just as MacIntyre argues is the inevitable result of post-virtue ethics: as an individual with no inherently defining attachments, and for whom ethical considerations connect in no essential way to happiness or success. My argument against that student's view of self depended on the understanding of the function of a student, and the connection of that role to human welfare. A warrior, likewise, could not coherently have such a conception, because the notion of a good warrior is inherently both functional and constitutive of identity. As such, the question of why one should be moral also cannot arise—morality for the warrior is the process by which one achieves the true greatness of the kind of being that he is.

Let us revisit our marine from the beginning of the chapter. Osiel and French assert that reminding him of what marines do and do not do is more effective a moral injunction than other sorts of ethical appeals, and we are now in a position to see why. He may rationally question whether, here and now, he should accept a putative demand of morality—especially if, as MacIntyre claims, contemporary ethics must ultimately terminate in unjustified assertion of preference—but he cannot in the same way ask whether he ought to live a worthwhile life. What it is to be a warrior is inseparable from what it is to be a *good* warrior, and what it is to be a good warrior is constituted in large part by the embodiment of virtues necessary to be worthy of martial power. Our marine's identity thus includes the notion of the thing that he is as a source of value. To reject morality, then, is to reject that value, and to fail to meet the ideals of his role is in an important sense to destroy his very being, as we have seen with Ajax, Batman, Shozaemon, and other such examples above. As long as ethics are external to what a person is, then the case in which one finds himself may always be the competing maxims for which no truly rational proof is deducible; the split of incommensurable sources of utility for which no ultimate preference can be justified; the act of mere choice for which no non-arbitrary rationale can be given. An internal ethics, however, which connects integrity with identity and moral worth with self-worth renders the question of whether one ought to be moral unintelligible. Warrior ethics, then, connect what one ought to do intrinsically with what one is, and this particular type of integrity is the first component of honor.

The other components, as well as a more general application of this type of ethics (i.e. to realms aside from that of warriors per se) shall follow later. First, however, I want to discuss some specific aspects of many martial codes, and discuss why they are independently worthy of emulation.

For at this point it may be objected: "You have argued that an ethics of honor is superior in that it possesses greater motivating power than types of ethics which you call 'external'. That may be so, but in grounding ethical motivation in a certain kind of identity, couldn't this be applied equally to identities which we would deem thoroughly *im*moral? Rather than the picture you are drawing of the 'ideal warrior', could one not specify conditions for being a terrorist, say, or a philanderer, and derive "moral" strictures from what it means to be that sort of thing as well? Instead of stories of knights and samurai, could not one just as easily seek to emulate the mobsters in *The Godfather*?" This objection is answerable, however, and part of that answer relates to an aspect of warrior codes which at first seems paradoxical. I will later argue that we all are—or should be—'warriors' in a certain morally relevant sense. For now, however, I will begin by pointing out that the objection has force only if each of the roles involved is conceived as intrinsically of equal value. But why think that is so? We can see the implausibility of this claim by way of a kind of analogy. In Norton Juster's classic story The Phantom Tollbooth, protagonist Milo and his friends Tock and the Humbug must journey through the lands of Ignorance to rescue the imprisoned princesses Rhyme and Reason. Seeking to bar their way are the numerous demons

of ignorance, among them the Terrible Trivium—an initially friendly-seeming fellow who asks the three companions for assistance:

> "Firstly, I would like to move this pile from here to there," he explained, pointing to an enormous mound of fine sand, "but I'm afraid that all I have are these tiny tweezers." And he gave them to Milo, who immediately began transporting one grain at a time.
>
> "Secondly, I would like to empty this well and fill the other; but I have no bucket, so you'll have to use this eye dropper." And he handed it to Tock, who undertook at once to carry one drop at a time from well to well.
>
> "And lastly, I must have a hole through this cliff, and here is a needle to dig it." The eager Humbug quickly set to work picking at the solid granite wall.[33]

Eventually, however, Milo begins to feel uneasy about the tasks, and expresses his concerns to the Trivium:

> "Pardon me," he said, tugging at the man's sleeve and holding the sheet of figures up for him to see, "but it's going to take eight hundred and thirty-seven years to do these jobs."
>
> "Is that so?" replied the man, without even turning around. "Well, you'd better get on with it then."
>
> "But it hardly seems worthwhile," said Milo softly.
>
> "WORTHWHILE!" The man roared indignantly.
>
> "All I meant was that perhaps it isn't too important," Milo repeated, trying not to be impolite.
>
> "Of course it's not important," he snarled angrily. "I wouldn't have asked you to do it if I thought it was important." And now, as he turned to face them, he didn't seem quite so pleasant.
>
> "Then why bother?" asked Tock, whose alarm suddenly began to ring.[34]

The interest of this scene lies in the fact that, perceptively, Juster does not have the Terrible Trivium try to persuade his interlocutors that yes, in fact, the tasks are worth doing. The demon unabashedly admits that they are *not* worthwhile, the reason being most probably because no one could possibly believe that they were.

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[33] Juster, The Phantom Tollbooth 209 – 210.
[34] The Phantom Tollbooth 212.

Simply stated, there are limits on what anyone could believe is a good use of time. It is a similar sentiment, then, that we find behind a comment by Foot in *Natural Goodness*. Arguing against strong subjectivism in ethics, she writes:

> Thus these early theories were radically subjectivist, allowing the possibility even of bizarre so-called 'moral judgements' about the wrongness of running around trees right-handed or looking at hedgehogs in the light of the moon, and so opening up limitless possibilities of irresolvable moral conflict. Nowadays it is commonly admitted, I believe, that there is some content restriction on what can intelligibly be said to be a system of morality.[35]

The putative dictates of morality are not just arbitrary commands or proscriptions on action; they must be at least believed to pertain in some fashion to human life and welfare. Hence, a crucial dimension of the question whether just *any* role could be the basis for a moral identity, is that it depends upon the concept of a whole life characterized and constituted by a certain kind of activity. Now, to be fair, the injunctions Foot mentioned *could* serve as legitimate moral commands—but only as part of a larger system which was itself meaningful, not by themselves. For example, a people who believed that to view a hedgehog by moonlight was offensive to the spirits of nature and therefore liable to endanger the success of its farmers, might well produce "Do not look at hedgehogs by the light of the moon" as a moral stricture, and possibly have people whose duty it was to ensure that no one did so. Such could potentially be a source of moral identity and motivation because it is defined by a connection to human and communal well-being, whether or not there are really any spirits of nature, hedgehog-sensitive ones or otherwise. That is, "Guardian of the Crops" could be an identity in a way that

[35] Foot, Natural Goodness 7.

"Moon-illuminated-hedgehog Concealer" could not be—*even if* in a practical sense, the two roles were in fact equivalent.

This observation is significant for two reasons. First, as exemplified above, there are some kinds of lives for which no real value could possibly be believed. The only appeal the Trivium makes for the life that he offers is based upon ease—as mentioned, there is no claim of any intrinsic worth to the tasks involved.

> "But why do only unimportant things?" asked Milo, who suddenly remembered how much time he spent each day doing them.
>
> "Think of all the trouble it saves," the man explained, and his face looked as if he'd be grinning an evil grin—if he could grin at all. "If you only do the easy and useless jobs, you'll never have to worry about the important ones which are so difficult. You just won't have the time. …Why, if you stay here, you'll never have to think again—and with a little practice you can become a monster of habit, too."[36]

To choose that sort of a life, then, would be to consciously define oneself in terms of what is fundamentally and obviously worthless. While at a particular moment it might seem tempting to just do something mindless and unimportant, one would never aspire to live a life which was *characterized* by pointless activity. Viewed in that way, the question becomes: 'What is a good life for human beings?', and there are clearly limits on what the answer could be. Furthermore, insofar as some types of lives are constituted by worthlessness, it is also possible to be mistaken in the value that we attribute to certain lives. The classic example is of course Plato's allegory of the cave, and the feature of it on which I want to focus right now is the former cave-dweller who has since been freed:

> And if there had been honors, praises, or prizes among them for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows as they passed by and who

[36] The Phantom Tollbooth 212.

> best remembered which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously, and who could thus best divine the future, do you think that our man would desire these rewards or envy those among the prisoners who were honored and held power? Instead, wouldn't he feel, with Homer, that he'd much prefer to "work the earth as a serf to another, one without possessions," and go through any sufferings, rather than share their opinions and live as they do?
>
> I suppose he would rather suffer anything than live like that.[37]

Glaucon basically takes the point for granted, but I think it is important to note why it is the case. Once the truth about the cave has been learned, no amount of potential acclaim and rewards could entice someone to return, because shadow-guessing is no longer something in which one can take pride. That is to say, it is seen to express no real excellence in light of true human potential. Remember that the objection above concerned moral motivation and whether just any specified identity could theoretically provide it. By now I think it is clear that some cannot. In order for a role to motivate action in this way, it must be seen as comprising a kind of life that is itself worthwhile. Some roles obviously do not do so—it might be possible to specify the conditions for being a maximally proficient "Carrier of Grains with Tweezers," but such could never *also* seem a potentially good description of *what I am*. Further to that point, there are some kinds of identities, like "Shadow-Guesser," which we cannot *continue* to view as doing so once we can see them clearly.

It is in these categories, then, that I place the examples given above. To be a philanderer could be said to require some measure of skill, i.e. successfully lying to many women in order to lie with many women. But the effort involved is no

[37] *Republic* 516d.

assurance of significance (as we have seen with the Trivium's tasks), nor is it proof against the essential hollowness of a life based on dishonesty and animal urges. Someone may indeed become caught up in such a life, but viewed as a whole, to say "This is the defining attribute of my existence; my worth is expressed through deception and copulation" must ultimately seem absurd.

Terrorists are a more complicated case—they seem to share similarities with warriors, and are even typically motivated by a cause. However, as French argues, while there are of course those who engage in terrorism and perhaps take pride in terrorist activities, they do not do so while conceiving of themselves *as terrorists*:

> The second part of my "Why are you different from a terrorist?" assignment required my students to try to get inside the heads of those who commit terrorist acts. It forced them to consider how easy it might be to rationalize crossing the line between warrior and murderer in the interest of what you believe to be a noble cause. As most of them recognized, terrorists do not see themselves as murderers. They believe that they are warriors. They often consider themselves "freedom fighters", struggling against those they have dubbed their "oppressors."[38]

Hence, "terrorist" is not itself a model of aspiration and motivation; those who are terrorists undoubtedly portray themselves as something else. Like any other role which is taken as a putative defining identity for a person, I am representing to myself and others that *what I am* is a mode of human flourishing; that the things I do are indicative of a well-lived life. But if this representation is itself dependent upon beliefs about the world—and it cannot help but be—then we can intelligibly ask whether I am correct or mistaken in those judgments. For instance, it is a

[38] French 237.

question of fact whether the people I kill are actually oppressing anyone or are uninvolved civilians. If my killing is religiously motivated, it is a question of fact not only whether God exists but also whether I or my leaders are correctly interpreting scripture. It is even a question of fact whether my cause is noble insofar as my means of bringing it about may or may not include purposely killing the innocent. French goes on to argue that what distinguishes a terrorist from a true warrior is restraint and a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate targets of violence:

> The essential element of a warrior's code is that it must set definite limits on what warriors can and cannot do if they want to continue to be regarded as warriors, not murderers or cowards. For the warrior who has such a code, certain actions remain unthinkable, even in the most dire of circumstances. …However they may justify their actions to themselves, if they refuse to accept any rules of war, they forfeit the right to be regarded as warriors by the rest of the world.[39]

Terrorist *qua terrorist* is not and cannot be a source of moral identity, in the sense that "killer of the truly innocent for ignoble causes" cannot be a source of moral motivation. As I have been arguing, those who are terrorists fail to see themselves as they really are, and if they did see themselves correctly, they would not continue to view such actions as a source of pride. Furthermore, they fail to be warriors, and fail to exhibit true honor, by failing to discriminate between combatants and non-combatants.

What about the example of *The Godfather*, then? In a sense it is the most difficult of the three, because not only do the mobsters follow at least a semblance of a code, they also do seem to operate under a conception of acceptable and

[39] French 231, 238.

unacceptable targets of violence. For example, when Sonny wants to send bodyguards to protect Michael on his trip into the city, Clemenza suggests that there's no need: "He'll be all right, Solozzo knows he's a civilian."[40] (This designation clearly denotes not the usual meaning of non-military, since Michael had been in the army, but specifically that he is a non-combatant in the gang wars.) A later scene also has Vito Corleone note that: "I've spent my life trying not to be careless. Women and children can be careless, but not men," implying that women and children do not face the threat of attack.[41] Nevertheless, these are largely surface appearances. Aside from the numerous betrayals and backstabbings within the families themselves, by its nature mob activity involves violence or the threat of violence directed against non-combatant targets. The different mob families may indeed distinguish between "civilian" and bellicose members of each group in their wars with each other. However, through protection rackets, intimidation, and so forth, they necessarily sustain their livelihoods by intentionally targeting civilians. In a significant way, then, the code is something of a sham. Additionally, the movie illustrates nothing so much as the undesirability of the type of life its characters live, even from the point of view of the characters themselves.

Two telling scenes in this regard come near the very beginning of the movie, and the very end. The latter focuses on the now-retired Vito Corleone, as he sits and talks with son Michael about his new role as head of the family. He intersperses smiling questions about how Michael's wife and children are doing,

[40] The Godfather scene 8.
[41] The Godfather scene 20.

with serious warnings and plans about rival Barzini's likely imminent attempt to assassinate Michael. Finally, he can no longer conceal his distress from Michael, who mistakenly interprets it as mere concern for his ability and safety:

> "What's the matter? What's bothering you? I'll handle it. I told you I can handle it, I'll handle it."
>
> "I knew that Santino was gonna have to go through all this, and Fredo, well—Fredo was—but I never—I never wanted this for you. I worked my whole life—I don't apologize—to take care of my family. And I refused to be a fool, dancing on a string held by all those—big shots. I don't apologize, that's my life, but I thought that, well, when it was your time, that, that you would be the one to hold the strings. "Senator Corleone," "Governor Corleone," or something… There just wasn't enough time, Michael. There wasn't enough time."
>
> "We'll get there, Pop. We'll get there."[42]

But of course, they don't get there, and despite Vito's assertion that he hasn't danced on a string, it is clear that he really has, and now Michael will too. The type of life now facing him is not choiceworthy even from the standpoint of one who has lived it. In Michael's case, it is a burden that has already cost him a brother, a wife, friends, peace, and perhaps most significantly, the man that he used to be. One of the first scenes of the movie sees him reluctantly relate to his fiancée, Kay, a story about his father's criminal intimidation, followed by the assurance that "That's my family, Kay. It's not me."[43] By the last scene, however, he lies to Kay (now his wife) about having had people killed, is the new head of the Corleone crime syndicate, and is perhaps an even worse criminal than his father was. The time in between shows his transformation, but one has to wonder what his reaction

[42] The Godfather scene 20.
[43] The Godfather scene 3.

would be if the Michael from the beginning of the movie could see him as he is now. Kay makes reference to that man when she tells him: "But you're not like him, Michael. I thought you weren't going to become a man like your father. That's what you told me."[44] It is not just that Michael has become corrupted; he is like one who went from the light to be shackled down in the cave. As Epictetus says of Paris:

> Did Paris' tragedy lie in the Greeks' attack on Troy, when his brothers began to be slaughtered? No; no one is undone by the actions of others. That was the destruction of storks' nests. His tragedy lay in the loss of the man who was honest, decent, trustworthy, and respectful of the laws of hospitality.[45]

Even if we view the other losses *as* genuine losses (departing from the Stoic view in that regard) it is easy to see the truth of Epictetus' main point. When Vito expresses his wish that Michael not have to enter the gangster life, it is all the more tragic because its detrimental nature is something that Michael himself had previously been able to recognize. He is a more effective gangster now, but that role is akin to terrorists, philanderers, hedgehog concealers, and the like. To select such an inferior role is to forsake human good and to condemn oneself in an important way to worthlessness. By contrast, identities which are legitimate sources of moral duty and worth are those which reflect the true potential of a human life well-lived. An ethics of honor is one which recognizes the greatness of what a human being might yet be; requires the agent to realize that end; and provides the framework for its realization.

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[44] The Godfather scene 17.
[45] *Discourses* Book I, Ch. 28, Sec. 2.

This object is what informs and justifies the aforementioned "paradoxical" feature of most warrior codes—a commitment to fairness in battle and various rules of combat whereby the warrior would risk defeat by ceding a procured advantage. The most common type of example in Arthurian tales is the numerous occasions where a knight who has unhorsed an opponent would subsequently dismount himself, rather than fight from the advantage of horseback. Other cases see a knight refusing a potential victory secured by accident, or even refusing to fight entirely against an opponent who is weary from other exertions. When Prince Galahalt unintentionally beheads Sir Palomides' horse, he not only ceases their combat but gives Palomides his own horse instead.[46] Sir Tristram protests King Mark's charge that he joust with Sir Lamorak, because

> ...it were great shame and villainy to tempt him anymore at this time, insomuch as he and his horse are weary both; for the deeds of arms that he hath done this day, an they be well considered, it were enough for Sir Launcelot du Lake... ye bid me do a thing that is against knighthood, and well can I deem that I shall give him a fall, for it is no mastery, for my horse and I be fresh both, and so is not his horse and he; and wit ye well that he will take it for great unkindness, for ever one good knight is loath to take another at disadvantage...[47]

When King Mark will not relent, Tristram follows his command, but afterward begs forgiveness from Lamorak and refuses to continue the battle on foot:

> I will not have more ado with thee, for I have done to thee over much unto my dishonour and thy worship. ...and this that I have done to you was against my will, but I was required thereto; but to say that I will do at your request at this time, I will have no more ado with you, for me shameth of that I have done.[48]

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[46] Le Morte DArthur 438.
[47] Le Morte DArthur 287.
[48] Le Morte DArthur 288.

The point of such examples is that victory is not the only point of combat—and *mere* victory is not the point at all. An honorable battle not only tests mettle and prowess but reflects the worth of one's opponent as a fellow practitioner of martial virtue. A similar example is found in Japanese literature, at once as enlightening as it is startling. Recounting a scene from Chikamatsu's *Tethered Steed and the Eight Provinces of Kanto*, Gerstle writes: "Though Yoshikado is a "court enemy", he is not painted as evil. Men face each other in battle as matters of fate or chance. Later in act four when Yoshikado is captured, Yorimitsu sparingly frees him so they may fight again."[49] Another warrior, even an adversary, is a source of value no different than oneself, and hence is due the consideration attendant to that value. Still further, to be a warrior is not to pursue victory as such, but to restrict one's wielding of power in such a manner that it recognizes that value. The integrity of honor requires a moral excellence derived from the conception that both those for whom and against whom one fights are sources of worth in their own right. The *role* of the warrior then is transformative in its adherents, reflecting in them and in others the movement from potential to actual human greatness. To the specifics of this transformation, and further aspects of its application to ethics at large, I now turn.

[49]Gerstle, "Heroic Honor: Chikamatsu and the Samurai Ideal" 319.

Chapter 3: Might and Right

According to the author of the *Hagakure*, "Most of the samurais today say, 'It is useless,' or 'It is not meritorious to cut bound men,' or 'It is foul and dirty.'"[1] Tsunetomo goes on to criticize these sentiments, charging that

> These are all excuses. In short, it would appear that their real intention is to polish their nails and keep respectability, but the truth is that they fall short of the practice of the military profession. If we inquire into their disposition, we see that they make excuses not to kill by hiding behind a cloak of words. The reason they do this is that they expect they will feel uneasy at the deed. Because it is a thing for samurais to do, Naoshige coached his son. I, myself, some years ago, cut at the execution grounds at Kase. And I felt comfortable and enlivened. Thinking of it as uncomfortable is just a symptom of inner cowardice.[2]

In the previous chapter, I advanced the view that a warrior's honor proceeded largely from his identity as a warrior, and that this conception generated a particular type of integrity. However, the above passage highlights a potential difficulty with that view. Namely, can a coherent picture be drawn of what a warrior is? Or are we left rather with various competing conceptions of what one is (or ought to be)? Tsunetomo also depicts the true samurai as devoted to the military arts alone, asserting that "Those who are skilled in even a single art (*gei*) are to be termed as geisha, not samurai. …It is not until you realize that arts and crafts of any kind are harmful to samurai that you can make the most of skills and abilities that you acquire."[3] But contrast these words with those of Musashi—considered by many to be the greatest swordsman that ever lived—that a samurai should "cultivate a wide

[1] Tsunetomo, Bushido: The Way of the Samurai 73.
[2] Tsunetomo 73.
[3] Tsunetomo 27.

range of interests in the arts"[4] and that "It is the warrior's way to follow the paths of both the sword and the brush."[5] Is refusing to cut a bound man a noble mark of prowess and respect for one's opponents, or a shameful rationalization of cowardice? Are cunning and deception a part of a warrior's arsenal, as Odysseus would charge? Or do the truly great echo Neoptolemus in the conviction that it is better "to fail with honor than win by treachery?"[6] For integrity to connect with identity in a morally relevant way as I propose, there must be a clear idea of what a warrior is, including what behaviors and attributes are or are not worthy of him. The question, then, is whether we can justifiably make such a claim—and, in a related sense, whether and how we can address disputes of conception. I argue that we can, and I will advance that position in three primary ways. First, a depiction of competing values does not entail that the author is portraying such conflict as irresolvable. Cases in which a particular author seems to present contradictory pictures of the ideal warrior may actually be consistent when properly understood. Second, discrepancies between multiple authors must be viewed in light of the social realities informing their positions. This context often reveals the underlying similarity between conceptions which may initially seem quite different. Third, the related problem in virtue ethics of conflicting virtues helps to illustrate the coherence of warrior identities. Not only do many putative dilemmas either dissolve or admit of a third way out, but even irresolvable dilemmas do not entail

[4] Musashi, The Book of Five Rings 25.
[5] Musashi 11.
[6] Sophokles: The Complete Plays 330.

the impossibility of full virtue, nor that of warrior excellence. As we shall see, it is indeed possible to paint a consistent picture of what it means to be an ideal warrior.

Bouchard, writing of knights and chivalry, argues that we cannot. Nor, she writes, is this merely a question of fiction versus reality. Historians and laymen alike may be tempted to ask whether historical knights *really* followed the code of chivalry as they do in stories. In her estimation, however, that very question is misguided because it depends on an erroneous assumption that there *was* a single code of chivalry for the historical knights hypothetically to have followed:

> It is, after all, fairly obvious that the real life of real aristocrats was quite different from that of the heroes of epic and romance. What is not obvious is the underlying assumption that there was a single ideal to which reality may be compared. It seems clear, by contrast, not only that there was no "real" code of behavior to which all knights and nobles adhered but also that there was no single "ideal" of chivalry. ...what chivalric literature reveals most clearly are a host of contradictions and opposing goals. It was truly impossible to be fully chivalrous, even for the glorious heroes of the romances.[7]

We should understand the authors of these romances and other tales, she argues, as intentionally painting an incongruent picture of chivalry. Their aim was to examine and expose inconsistencies within the various pictures held up of knighthood; it would be a mistake to view either the fiction or the reality of knightly conduct as an agreed upon, homogenous institution:

> It is vital to read the literature with the knowledge that the authors were quite deliberately indicating tensions and conflicts within even the most idealized vision of chivalry. If at different times the same author holds quite different behaviors up as models, one should not simply assume that all these behaviors or attributes may be reconciled into a single vision of chivalry, but should look for the author's indication—usually quite

[7] Constance Brittain Bouchard, Strong of Body, Brave and Noble: Chivalry and Society in Medieval France 113.

> explicit—that there were deep contradictions there. The authors of the romances were not so much describing or even creating a single ideal to which their readers might measure up, as critiquing the idea that such an ideal was feasible.[8]

In contrast, I will argue that she overstates the degree of conflict between various knightly virtues. While she is correct in saying that literary authors were challenging and exposing tensions within ideals of chivalry (whether the fictional version or any historical ones), that does not entail that they were portraying those conflicts as essentially irresolvable, nor a consistent ideal of chivalry as unachievable.

A Parallel to Virtue Ethics

Before examining some of the stories she cites as evidence, however, notice that there is an important assumption which motivates Bouchard's claim: that the existence of such tensions is incompatible with a unified concept of chivalry. But is this assumption in fact justified? Any ethical theory must face cases in which its precepts seem to clash. In virtue ethics specifically, we may ask: (a) Can different virtues conflict with each other? (b) If the answer to (a) is "yes," does this constitute a fatal defect for Virtue Ethics in terms of either its ability to provide action guidance or, more generally, its viability as a whole? One reason for thinking that an affirmative answer to (b) must proceed from an affirmative answer to (a) is that if the virtues can be at odds with each other, it would seem to preclude the possibility of a fully virtuous agent (or, more strongly, the possibility that 'fully

[8] Bouchard 113 - 114.

virtuous' is a coherent concept). No one could act 'as the virtuous person would,' because to do so would be to face the impossible task of acting from competing and jointly unrealizable character traits. Hence, the argument would go, we would seemingly have to either: argue that the virtues *cannot* conflict; develop a non-arbitrary reason why one virtue could be ignored in the face of another (along with a decision procedure for doing so?); or conclude that full virtue is simply impossible. Thus Bouchard's argument against the possibility of a coherent ideal of chivalry is similar to an objection to virtue ethics considered by Rosalind Hursthouse:

> 'The requirements of different virtues,' it is said, 'can point us in conflicting directions. Charity prompts me to kill the person who would (truly) be better off dead, but justice forbids it; so virtue ethics fails to give me any action guidance over the rightness or wrongness of euthanasia. Honesty points to telling the hurtful, even devastating, truth, kindness and compassion to remaining silent or even lying; so virtue ethics fails to give any guidance to, for example, doctors, over whether they should or should not sometimes lie to their patients. And so on. So virtue ethics lets us down just at the point where we need it most, where we are faced with the really difficult moral quandaries and do not know what to do.'[9]

A more specific version of the same problem arises in relation to tragic dilemmas, which seem to call into question the coherence of possessing all the virtues:

> Our supposedly virtuous agent is faced with a tragic dilemma. She acts, for act she must, and whatever she does is *wrong*, impermissible; she can only emerge from the situation with dirty hands. But then, how can we call her virtuous without contradiction? There was, perhaps, always a slight suspicion that the very idea of a virtuous agent was an idealization; now we see that it is an impossibility. If there are tragic dilemmas, there cannot be such a thing as a virtuous agent.[10]

[9] Hursthouse, On Virtue Ethics 43.
[10] Hursthouse 72.

The charge then is that the possession of full virtue is an impossible ideal—not merely in the weaker sense of being too perfect for anyone to realistically achieve, but the strong sense of containing an inherent logical inconsistency.

Love and Honor in Chrétien's Romances

It is this same charge which Bouchard levels against knighthood as portrayed in medieval literature. Chrétien de Troyes serves as her paradigm example that

> The creators of the medieval vision of chivalry, the authors of the romances, far from describing a single clear ideal, wrote their stories to indicate that even the most chivalrous hero would be trapped between conflicting ideals.[11]

Chrétien, she argues, was purposely portraying these ideals as incompatible, such that

> Scholars trying to extract a chivalric code from the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, for example, might take the attribute of loyalty from one tale, of mercy from another, of generosity from a third, and of gracious love for ladies from a fourth, in the assumption that one can put them all together to create Chretien's ideal knight. But this procedure does violence to the very variety Chrétien so artfully put in his characters.[12]

However, while she correctly notes that a conflict between love and honor is a common thread throughout Chrétien's works, her interpretation of Chrétien's motives and messages is in many ways suspect. Referencing his *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot*), she postulates:

> Here honor and love were even more irreconcilable than in "Erec and Enide," and Chrétien's eventual realization that he had gotten his hero so

[11] Bouchard 116.
[12] Bouchard 113.

> deeply into a dilemma that he could never get out may have been his reason for leaving the story unfinished.[13]

But Kibler offers an alternative and much better substantiated hypothesis:

> Chrétien never completed his romance, an indication perhaps that he was not in sympathy with the theme proposed to him by the Countess… love as it is portrayed in the other romances by Chrétien is different from that in *The Knight of the Cart*. In all his other romances he appears as an advocate for marriage and love within marriage, constructing *Erec*, *Cligés*, and *The Knight with the Lion* around this theme, and showing in all the disadvantages of other types of relationships.[14]

The text itself strongly supports Kibler's interpretation. *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* begins with a long disclaimer in which Chrétien attributes the theme of that story to the will of his patron:

> Since my lady of Champagne wishes me to begin a romance, I shall do so most willingly, like one who is entirely at her service in anything he can undertake in this world… her command has more importance in this work than any thought or effort I might put into it. Chrétien begins his book about the Knight of the Cart; the subject matter and meaning are furnished and given him by the countess, and he strives to add nothing but his effort and careful attention.[15]

In no other work does Chrétien include such a passage. (While *The Story of the Grail (Perceval)* does acknowledge Philip of Flanders' patronage of the story, it does not give any indication that Chrétien is trying to distance himself from its subject matter.)[16] Furthermore, in the service of his illicit, adulterous affair with Guinevere, Lancelot engages in a number of behaviors for which the term "buffoonery" would be generous. In a duel with his mortal enemy Meleagant, he

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[13] Bouchard 115.
[14] Kibler, Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances 14.
[15] Chretien, *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* 207.
[16] Chretien, *The Story of the Grail (Perceval)* 381 – 382.

fights behind his back so that he can keep his eyes unceasingly on Guinevere,[17] and when he learns that she desires the fighting to stop, he merely stands by dumbly while Meleagant "struck Lancelot repeatedly."[18] In pulling apart iron bars which prevent him from entering her bedroom, he is so overwhelmed with lust that he fails to realize he has nearly severed two fingers, and Chrétien describes his approach in terms that hint of blasphemy: "He came next to that of the queen; Lancelot bowed low and adored her, for in no holy relic did he place such faith... On parting, Lancelot bowed low before the bedchamber, as if he were before an altar." [19] At an earlier point in the story, he had tried to *hurl himself out a window* because Guinevere had passed out of view.[20]

I find it entirely incredible to suppose that the reader is meant to see these and other episodes as anything but ridiculous, or that we should view Chrétien here as genuinely depicting a tragic conflict between love and honor. Rather, he is condemning the adulterous type of "courtly love" with which his patron Marie de Champagne was so enamored. This view is further reinforced not only by his positive depiction of married love, but also other episodes in which his knights face and overcome difficulties of conflicting virtues or obligations. Consider three pairs of Chrétien's knights and ladies for whom love and honor come into tension: Lancelot and Guinevere, Erec and Enide, and Yvain and Laudine. In *Erec and Enide*, Erec is a renowned knight who, upon marrying Enide, abandons adventure

[17] *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* 252.
[18] *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* 254.
[19] *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* 264
[20] *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* 214.

and tournaments because he prefers to stay at home with his beloved bride. After learning that other knights are speaking ill of him for no longer engaging in chivalry, and mistakenly thinking that Enide herself shares their diminished opinion, he leaves his kingdom as a knight errant, with Enide accompanying him. For most of the journey he treats her harshly, both to test her love and in order to regain his lost pride. Bouchard cites this episode as evidence of the two ideals' irreconcilability, noting that "Enide herself becomes miserable at how low her husband's honor has fallen."[21] However, that assessment fails to capture the motivation behind Enide's reaction, and its crucial difference from the way in which Guinevere is represented. Enide overhears Erec's subjects and peers "say among themselves that her lord was becoming recreant with respect to arms and knighthood, because he had profoundly changed his way of life."[22] Therefore, she laments:

> 'Wretch!' she said, 'unhappy me! Why did I come here from my land? The earth should truly swallow me up, since the very best of knights—the boldest and the bravest, the most loyal, the most courteous that was ever count or king—has completely abandoned chivalry because of me. Now have I truly shamed him; I should not have wished it for anything.'[23]

Her concern is for Erec; rightly or wrongly she blames herself for his lessened renown, and her misery comes from her affection for him. Contrast this sentiment with Guinevere, who instead appears entirely selfish. After Lancelot has endured many trials, dangers, and the shame of riding in a cart in order to rescue her, she haughtily turns him away and refuses to speak to him or even be rescued (!)

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[21] Bouchard 114.
[22] Chretien, *Erec and Enide* 67.
[23] *Erec and Enide* 68.

because he had momentarily hesitated to undergo the shame.[24] Later they are reconciled, and she asks him to act as a cowardly disgrace in a tournament, apparently for no other reason than to demonstrate his devotion to her:

> From this moment until dark he did the worst he could, because it was the queen's pleasure… He would rather die than do anything unless he were sure that it would bring him shame, disgrace, and dishonour, and he pretended to be afraid of all those who approached him. …The queen was not upset by anything she heard. On the contrary, she was pleased and delighted.[25]

Guinevere, then, is presented as petty and self-serving. Her notion of love is the aggrandizement of the self through the abnegation of the other. By contrast, Enide is moved by desire for *her lover's* well being, and regrets any part she may have played in shaming him. There is also no indication given, at any point in the story, that she loves him any less than she ever did. Like Erec, who is gallant and brave as well as handsome, Enide is not only beautiful but virtuous:

> They made still more of Enide than they did of him, for the great beauty they saw in her and even more for her fine character. …She was so noble and honourable, wise and gracious in her speech, well-bred and of pleasant company, that no one ever saw in her any folly, meanness, or baseness. She had learned so well the social graces that she excelled in all the qualities that any lady must have, in both generosity and good sense. All loved her for her character; it was a cause of personal esteem to anyone who could be of service to her. No one spoke ill of her, for no one could find cause to do so. In the kingdom or in the empire there was no other lady of such quality.[26]

Enide's love for Erec is not at all the "love" that Guinevere has for Lancelot, and it is clear where Chrétien's sympathies lie. He is not depicting an impossible clash between chivalry and love. Instead, he is contrasting the false and destructive love

[24] *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* 255-257.
[25] *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* 277.
[26] *Erec and Enide* 66 – 67.

of Guinevere, which is *not* compatible with knightly virtue, with the true love of Enide, which *is*.

Resolvable Dilemmas in Chivalry

Between these two cases, a similar conflict arises for Yvain in *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)*. His friend Sir Gawain—who Chrétien consistently depicts as the epitome of knightly virtue—gives a long soliloquy in which (although Erec is not mentioned by name) he essentially persuades him not to fall to Erec's misstep:

> 'What! Would you be one of those men,' said my lord Gawain to Yvain, 'who are worth less because of their wives? May he who diminishes his worth by marrying be shamed by Holy Mary! He who has a beautiful woman as wife or sweetheart should be the better for her; it's not right for her to love him if his fame and worth are lost. Indeed, you would suffer afterwards for her love if it caused you to lose your reputation, because a woman will quickly withdraw her love—and she's not wrong to do so—if she finds herself hating a man who has lost face in any way after he has become lord of the realm. A man must be concerned for his reputation before all else! …I don't say this lightly, for if I had as beautiful a lady as you have, my dear friend, by the faith I place in God and the saints, I'd be very reluctant to leave her! I know I'd be infatuated myself. But a man, unable to heed his own advice, can give good counsel to another...[27]

Hence Yvain is urged not to forsake adventure, and he asks permission from his wife, Laudine, to fight in the tournaments. She agrees, with the stipulation that he must return within a year or lose her love. Yvain's troubles begin when, strangely, for no particular reason he fails to return within the allotted time. Other than a vague mention that Gawain "caused him to delay so long,"[28] Chrétien offers no

[27] Chretien, *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)* 326 – 327.
[28] *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)* 329.

suggestion that Yvain was incapable of fulfilling his promise, and Yvain is struck with despair when it suddenly occurs to him that he has not done so. This failure is all the more striking in light of the agreement between Yvain and Laudine that he would not be blamed if his failure to return was due to events beyond his control:

> 'I beg God that it please Him not to let me overstay my leave. Yet a man may intend to return promptly and not know what the future holds. And I don't know what will happen to me; whether illness or imprisonment will detain me; you are too exacting if you do not make an exception at least for physical hindrances.' 'Sir,' she said, 'I do make this exception.'[29]

Thus Yvain breaks faith with his lady through no fault but his own, and much of the rest of the story is driven by his attempts to regain her favor.

Laudine's concession in the passage above recognizes a distinction between a genuine failure of *virtue*, and failures brought on by external obstacles. While fate may at times thwart the noblest of goals, Chrétien's ideal knight (or even lady, in some cases) *can* realize multiple virtues. On his view, part of what makes a person good is possessing the wisdom to recognize how to do so, and there is nothing in knighthood *itself* that is inherently contradictory. Later in his story, Yvain is faced with a dilemma reminiscent of his original failing, but with some important differences. He has promised to champion a maiden named Lunete, who has been unjustly sentenced to death, and must arrive in time to prevent her from being burned at the stake. Just prior to the appointed day, however, he finds himself in a town facing imminent attack from a cruel giant who has besieged and ravaged the land. Unless someone is found to defeat the giant in combat the next day, the lord of the town must choose between watching his four captured sons be

[29] *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)* 327 – 328.

executed in front of him, or turning his daughter over to the giant to be carried off and despoiled. Yvain agrees to face the giant, but he includes a provision:

> 'Dear good kind sir, I will gladly face the perilous adventure, if the giant and your sons arrive early enough tomorrow not to cause me too great a delay, for I must be somewhere else tomorrow at noon, as I have given my oath. …There is no need to beg me further as long as the giant arrives early enough so that I won't have to break my promise elsewhere; for nothing will prevent me from being tomorrow at midday at what is truly the greatest venture I could ever undertake.' He did not want to give them absolute assurance, because he was afraid that the giant might not come early enough for him to still return in time to rescue the maiden who was imprisoned in the chapel.[30]

By the time Yvain needs to leave on the next day, the giant has not yet come, so Yvain regretfully announces that he must depart. Out of compassion for the people, however, he nevertheless delays leaving, not wanting to abandon them to their wretched fate. The giant eventually arrives, and after a grueling battle Yvain slays him and frees the town from his terror. Departing immediately, he reaches his destination just in time, and rescues Lunete as well. As before, he was faced with an oath to return on one hand and a competing goal on the other. Unlike the earlier situation, in this case he possessed a truly worthy reason for the conflict. Whereas before he merely allowed his desire for glory to keep him from fulfilling his promise, in the latter instance he was moved by the will to defend the helpless. His delay in this instance is not punished but rewarded, as not only is he able to fulfill both of the noble goals, but by saving Lunete he also manages to regain his wife's favor. That it was features of circumstance, and not a character flaw, that generate the latter conflict is a point to which I will later return.

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[30] *The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)* 344 – 345.

Even Lancelot, who is portrayed more positively when not directly involved with Guinevere, faces and overcomes a conflict of virtues. Having defeated a villainous knight in combat, he must choose between the knight's cries for mercy and a maiden's (just) request to cut off his head:

> He wishes to content them both: Generosity and Compassion demand that he satisfy them both, for he is both generous and merciful. Yet if the girl carries off the head, Compassion will have been vanquished and put to the death, and if she must leave without it, Generosity will have been routed. Compassion and Generosity hold him doubly imprisoned, with each in turn spurring him on and causing him anguish.[31]

In the end, Lancelot offers to battle the knight a second time, with the understanding that if he is once again victorious, he will decapitate his opponent regardless of any new cries for mercy. This is deemed an acceptable compromise, and in this way he upholds both his commitment to mercy and his promise to grant the maiden's request. Thus Chrétien portrays his dilemma explicitly in terms of one knightly virtue seeming to clash with another, and the result is neither inaction nor being forced to spurn one in favor of the other. The knightly decision here comprises action which, despite the apparent tension, expresses and maintains both ideals.

In *Erec and Enide*, the resolution of conflict takes a different but related form. Having been sternly ordered by Erec not to speak to him unless spoken to first, Enide faces a series of tests in which she must weigh that command against the need to warn Erec of an ambush. Each time she decides to speak, and each time

[31] *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* 242.

Erec threatens not to forgive her should it happen again, while secretly being glad of her words:

> 'If I don't warn him soon, this knight spurring this way will have him killed before he gets his guard up, for he seems full of evil intentions. Wretch, now I have waited too long! He has indeed forbidden me to speak, but I shall not let that deter me: I can see that my lord is deep in thought, so much so that he forgets himself; therefore it is quite right that I should tell him.' She spoke to him; he threatened her, but had no wish to harm her, for he perceived and knew full well that she loved him above all else, and he loved her with all his might.[32]

Thus Enide chooses rightly; though she cannot fulfill both aims of protecting Erec and following his command not to speak, she is wise enough to recognize which takes precedence. It is worth noting that both horns of the dilemma, i.e. respecting Erec's wishes versus ensuring his safety, are expressions of love or beneficence, rather than representing a clash of two separate virtues. One rightly solves (or dissolves) some dilemmas by acknowledging the possibility of events beyond one's control (as in the exceptions within Yvain's oaths to return), or recognizing what a virtue truly requires, as does Enide. Thus Chrétien suggests that the force of a dilemma is often due to blind or extreme adherence to a goal (and here an additional parallel can be drawn to the common medieval theme of the hastily given oath). Erec is wrong both when he forsakes chivalry entirely to be with his wife, and when he mistreats and ignores her to devote himself solely to prowess. As Bouchard rightly states:

> Chrétien was certainly not advocating such treatment of women any more than he was advocating that knights stay home, enjoying their wives'

[32] *Erec and Enide* 83.

> company and forgetting adventure, for eventually a repentant Erec asks Enide to forgive him for the way he has treated her.[33]

However, her subsequent analysis that "the reader is nevertheless left, as Chrétien certainly intended, wondering how a man can be a renowned warrior when he has just told his wife he wants to live "'entirely at her command'"[34] is mistaken. The conflict between love and honor is ultimately illusory, and once Erec and Enide are reconciled, Erec *both* spends time happily with her *and* continues to seek adventure. The wise person sees his or her way through apparent dilemmas, and the ideal knight can and does uphold multiple ideals.

Nevertheless some questions remain, and one cannot help but think, for instance, that the aforementioned dilemma in *The Knight With the Lion* could have turned out much differently than it did. Was Yvain truly expressing virtue in waiting for the giant to arrive? The implication seems to be "yes"—after all, he manages to save both the town and Lunete—but is this not in some way a matter of luck? Suppose that the giant had not arrived when he did, or that the battle with him had taken so long that Yvain could not reach the condemned maiden in time. Alternatively, suppose he had simply left when he said he must, fulfilling his vow to her but regrettably abandoning the town? Assuming (for the moment) that the decision to wait was deemed virtuous in the story as written, does it remain so in counterfactual variations? What does a true knight do here, *qua* knight? This question is obviously a specific version of what can be a broader one about any warrior or, still more broadly, virtuous agent. Here our questions about a warrior's

[33] Bouchard 114.
[34] Bouchard 114.

identity—and, more generally, the possibility of any coherent, morally-laden functional identity—have brought us back to the problem of competing virtues in Virtue Ethics.

Virtue Ethics, Emotion and Action

What we must ask is whether the kind of triumph over dilemmas that Chrétien's heroes represent is merely, as Kristjánsson says, a "true but rare" subset of most conflicts of virtue.[35] She argues that virtue ethics fails to solve the conflict problem in general, not only in terms of action-guidance, but in *emotion*-guidance—traditionally thought to be one of virtue ethics' strengths. Furthermore, she alleges that failure in this latter domain undermines virtue ethics' ability to address the former and, by extension, its viability as a theory altogether:

> By avoiding common examples of mundane but tragic emotional conflict, and concentrating on far-fetched examples of morally competing actions, virtue ethicists are able to lessen the thrust of the standard action-guiding objection. But the force of an e*motion/action-guiding objection* lies exactly in such common examples. … if the emotion part of the e*motion/action-guiding objection* cannot be rebutted, the value of *VE* seems to be more or less reduced to that of a spectator sport.[36]

Kristjánsson provides her own example of an everyday conflict which, she argues, virtue ethics is unable to deal with. Because there are two conflicting and justifiably virtuous emotional reactions, along with their attendant and equally conflicting potential actions, virtue ethics allegedly can give us no guidance in solving the dilemma. This example then is supposed to be indicative of moral

[35] Kristjánsson, "Virtue Ethics and Emotional Conflict" 199.
[36] Kristjánsson 203 -204.

dilemmas in general, leading her to conclude that "'What should I feel?' is not a question that *VE* is fit to answer in cases of the small conflicts and minor tragedies of everyday life, that is, when there is more than one potentially virtuous emotion on the moral menu."[37] Additionally, she asserts that a tempting response to this problem (and one to which I have appealed in some of the examples above)—the idea that most such tensions are only apparent—will be irrelevant in the majority of cases:

> "Many of the putative conflicts under discussion are merely apparent, resulting from a misapplication of virtue or vice terms." So, for example, what at first sight seems like a conflict between kindness and honesty, when considering whether to reveal a hurtful truth to a person, may resolve itself once we realize that one does the person no kindness by concealing this sort of truth from him. Strict adherence to a doctrine of the unity of the virtues would make this maneuver a compelling one. However, most contemporary virtue ethicists do not embrace that doctrine; Hursthouse for one does not, implicitly acceding that this maneuver is only of minor importance.[38]

If such conflicts cannot generally be dissolved in that way, then virtue ethics is left in need of a solution for how to adjudicate between the incommensurability generated by conflicting virtues, in terms of both emotion and action. Given my portrayal of warrior identity as holistic and generative of moral duty, integrity, and motivation, Kristjánsson's objection also speaks to the heart of my project. Contra her objections, I argue that virtue ethics can indeed guide us productively in terms of both actions and emotions, and that Kristjánsson's own example illustrates the superiority of virtue ethics to utilitarianism in this regard. Some dilemmas can indeed be resolved via the proper application of virtue and vice terms. More

[37] Kristjánsson 204.
[38] Kristjánsson 199.

importantly, however, the existence of irresolvable moral conflicts does not entail the incoherence of full virtue nor the impossibility of functional moral identities. In many cases what is most important, and morally useful, is the question of how a good person or warrior would address such a situation—not the often pointless search for an illusory, singular "best" state of affairs or action.

To begin, I believe that Kristjánsson somewhat misconstrues Hursthouse's view on the above maneuver. I read her as more plausibly saying not that it is *unimportant* as such, but rather that it is *incomplete*:

> So far, I have described one strategy available to virtue ethics for coping with the 'conflict problem', a strategy that consists in arguing that the conflict is merely apparent, and can be resolved. According to one—only one of many—versions of 'the doctrine of the unity of the virtues', this is the only possible strategy (and ultimately successful), but this is not a claim I want to defend. One general reason is that I still do not know what I think about 'the unity of the virtues' (all those different versions!); a more particular, albeit related, reason is that even if I were (somehow) sure that the requirements of the particular virtues could not conflict, I suspect that I would still believe in moral dilemmas. I have been talking so far as though examples of putative dilemmas and examples of putative conflict between the requirements of different virtues (or deontologists' rules) coincided. But it may seem to many, as it does to me, that there are certain (putative) dilemmas which can only be described in terms of (putative) conflict with much artifice and lack of relevant detail. Let us, therefore, consider the problem of moral dilemmas without bothering about whether they can be described in the simple terms of a conflict between two virtues (or two deontologists' rules).[39]

Some (though not all) dilemmas are not describable in those terms, and Hursthouse elsewhere argues that some dilemmas are inherently irresolvable, but that that fact does not count against the adequacy of virtue ethics as a moral theory. I think that she is correct on both of those points. Before addressing that argument and how

[39] Hursthouse, *Normative Virtue Ethics* 30.

honor-based ethics can deal with such irresolvable dilemmas, however, I want to defend the above strategy in the cases where it does apply—those dilemmas which can fruitfully be set in terms of a conflict of virtues—as well as rebut Kristjánsson's other conclusions. Despite her claims first that virtue ethics falls to the conflict problem, and further that utilitarianism is a superior, "untapped source for the moral justification of particular emotions,"[40] she fails to produce a convincing case and, I maintain, instead demonstrates just the opposite. Let us turn then to her own "mundane and tragic" example.

She asks us to consider a hypothetical case of a co-worker being promoted over oneself:

> I fail to get a promotion in my company because the high-ranking job for which I was vying goes to the boss's nephew. He was, on all accounts, a much less qualified candidate for the post than I, and the only plausible reason anyone can see for his being promoted over me is sheer nepotism. To complicate matters, the nephew happens to be a colleague and good friend of mine. Moreover, he has recently had to cope with tragic family events and everyone agrees that he deserves a break.[41]

Thus, the emotional conflict which virtue ethics is supposedly unable to address:

> Now, the question arises: should I be *happy for* the "break" he got, or should I be *envious* and *resentful*? The problem is that both these emotional responses seem to be potentially justifiable if we look at the situation from different angles. (I am assuming here, somewhat controversially, that envy and resentment can in certain cases constitute a proper moral reaction, and I ask the reader to grant me that point; if not, he can simply envisage some other everyday case of emotional conflict: between anger and gratitude, grief and joy, etc.) Yet these responses incorporate conflicting evaluations and imply conflicting wishes: the former, a positive evaluation and the wish that the *status quo* be maintained; the latter, a negative evaluation and the

[40] Kristjánsson 204.
[41] Kristjánsson 194.

> wish that the post which the nephew got be, ideally, taken away from him and given to me.[42]

Now, to begin with, her claim that envy and resentment are potentially morally proper reactions is, by my lights, thoroughly *un*controversial. Just as righteous indignation is counted among Aristotle's virtues, there are clearly times when "negative" emotions are the right (even obligatory) reaction to, say, an injustice or outrage. That is not the problem. Rather, there are at least two notable difficulties inherent in this example and its analysis. First, the supposed inclusion of a "wish that the post which the nephew got be, ideally, *taken away from him and given to me*"[43] (emphasis mine) adds an additional feature to the case which is not necessarily entailed in the original conflict. That is, there is a significant difference between wishing that I *had been given* the promotion instead of him *in the first place*, versus wishing that an *already granted* promotion be *reversed*, as Kristjánsson portrays it. The latter causes harm to my co-worker in a way that simply not having been chosen to receive a promotion would not, and hence the two situations are not equivalent. Even if a virtuous person (rightly) believed that it would have been more just had I received the promotion instead of the co-worker, that does not necessarily mean that it would be virtuous to retroactively undo a promotion that had already been granted. Additionally, there is a lack of specificity in Kristjánsson's case concerning the target of the subject's emotions. While envy might be applicable to my co-worker, in the case of resentment, at least, it would appear that the proper object would be the *boss*. It is less problematic to imagine

[42] Kristjánsson 194.
[43] Kristjánsson 194.

feeling happy for one person while resentful toward another, even if the two cases are related or one feeling serves to mitigate the other.

More importantly, I maintain that there is a correct answer to the emotional conflict, one which Kristjánsson barely considers. To the question "should I feel happy or envious and resentful about this promotion?", the most plausible response may well be "both." Insofar as my friend and colleague received good fortune after a period of suffering, I am happy for him. Insofar as I legitimately could have expected to receive that good fortune myself, I am envious of him and resentful toward my boss. There are multiple dimensions of the situation upon which I may react, and I see no reason to assume that I cannot feel *all* of these things at once. The only attention that Kristjánsson gives to this response comes in the form of a single endnote, where she appeals to an essay by David Pugmire:

> Such emotional conflicts involve not only a psychological problem and a moral problem but a conceptual one as well. D. Pugmire argues convincingly against the possibility of true emotional ambivalence (i.e., "the simultaneous focusing of opposed emotions on the very same feature of the same thing" in "Conflicting Emotions and the Indivisible Heart," *Philosophy*, vol. 71 (1996), pp. 27–40. It is hard to understand (conceptually) how I could rejoice at a friend's good fortune and, in the midst of my rejoicing, also hope that he comes to grief; see esp. pp. 32-33.[44]

Note again the conflation of "hop[ing] that he comes to grief"[45] with merely feeling envious, a point about which I will later say further. More significantly, Pugmire himself raises the same point about our emotions which I fault Kristjánsson for neglecting, regarding a crucial difference between actions and emotions:

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[44] Kristjánsson 205, note 8.
[45] Kristjánsson 205, note 8.

> The second problem bears on the relation that discordant emotions would have to action. It was suggested earlier that a person's divergent appraisals of a situation (and of the choices it may present) need not lend themselves to being weighed together and reconciled in a single verdict for the best. Yet while there may not always be a single verdict as to what is for the best, there always is but one action that can be taken. A person cannot both do something and not do it or perform two alternative actions.[46]

Unlike emotions, actions require a singular response from us. There is an ontological difference between the two. As it happens, this fact would legitimize any action-based "bias" in discussions of the conflict problem in virtue ethics, undermining Kristjánsson's claim that virtue ethicists are somehow taking the easy way out by addressing actions instead of emotions. Hence, her claim that by "ignoring cases of emotional conflict (or, for that matter, the conflict of more everyday-like courses of action), *VE*'s problems are systematically trivialized"[47] is a non-starter. Whether any such bias exists or not, however, it also justifies the type of response I have given to (at least some) emotion-guidance objections. If actions are focused on, it is because only one of two or more possible actions in a dilemma can actually be taken, while it is not only possible but often proper to feel multiple emotions corresponding to different aspects of the situation in question.

But what of the claim that disparate emotions are problematic because they entail conflicting *wishes* or *hopes*? Pugmire does present such a problem:

> It is hard to understand how I could rejoice at the prospect of a friend's unexpected good fortune and in the midst of my rejoicing also hope that he comes to grief... On what basis can my emotion of anticipation count as *rejoicing* if I don't hope for what I am supposed to rejoice at? And how could my attitude to the possibility of his coming to grief be *hope* if I am filled with joy at the thought of his prevailing and not coming to grief?

[46] Pugmire, "Conflicting Emotions and the Indivisible Heart" 33.
[47] Kristjánsson 197.

> How could one and the same thing at once give joy and blight it? How could I hope for something that I am already in a condition to rue if it happens?[48]

Now, I think that this particular sentiment is correct. However, it is important to realize that while Kristjánsson's example is clearly *derived* from Pugmire's words, it is actually changed from his such that she is unwittingly drawing a different (and wrong) conclusion. While he is speaking in general terms of the impossibility of wishing for the same state of affairs to both obtain and fail to obtain, her example adds features such that, as aforementioned, there are actually multiple (but related) states of affairs in question. Would the "I" in her example hope that she would not receive her expected promotion? No, and certainly she could not do so while simultaneously wishing to receive it. But she *would* presumably hope that her co-worker receive a "break" out of friendship and concern for his welfare. There is no inherent incompatibility between those two states of affairs, nor their associated emotional states. What is incompatible would be for her to hope that both she and her co-worker receive one and the same promotion—which she obviously does not. The reason why there is an *apparent* incompatibility is because of the *method* in which, regrettably, the co-worker's break was achieved. At this point, then, we have a conflict, based (as I have argued above) upon different aspects of the situation. Kristjánsson posits that now one would be torn between feeling happy-for and envious-of the co-worker. While she is right on that count, that does not, as she claims, entail that one would be torn between two conflicting *wishes*, nor still further that virtue ethics cannot tell us what emotion(s) we ought to feel in that

[48] Pugmire 33.

situation—which brings us back to what it would mean for envy to be potentially virtuous.

For we can ask, then: 'Would a virtuous person hope that a friend comes to grief, or that a friend's good were taken away from him?' Obviously not, and so if envy is ever to count as a morally appropriate emotion, we cannot understand it as entailing such a wish. If instead we define envy as something like 'wishing for oneself a good that one recognizes as good in the life of another', then we can see how it could be consistent with virtue. (Which is not, of course, to preclude the possibility or even preponderance of thoroughly *un*virtuous forms of envy.) Once this fact is realized, it is clear that a truly virtuous person not only would not be faced with incompatible emotions, but that virtue ethics provides real action-guidance in this dilemma as well. Interestingly, according to Kristjánsson the same *cannot* be said for utilitarianism. For while she cites utilitarianism's potential for dealing with such conflicts, she neglects to offer any solution to her own dilemma, stating that:

> Even a strict decision procedure, such as the utilitarian one, would not be able to determine whether I should properly feel envious and resentful or happy for my colleague in the example as I sketched it in Section II. Utilitarianism would require a much richer description of the facts of the situation in order to guide us productively toward its solution. However, such context-dependent empirical facts are what utilitarianism thrives on, what the utilitarian decision procedure is all about.[49]

But specifically what additional facts would be needed for a utilitarian decision? Kristjánsson gives no hint of just what these would be. Within the confines of the example, however, (i.e. barring additional facts like "He didn't *really* deserve a

[49] Kristjánsson 204.

break after all" or "He's actually not my friend but my sworn enemy") it is unlikely that new information will really alter the fundamental conflict. Furthermore, supposing that it did, there is no reason to assume that virtue ethics could not incorporate it just as readily. Hence, if utilitarianism cannot handle the dilemma as stated, it is merely indicative of its own weakness. By contrast, I assert that not only is there enough context given to (at the least) "guide us productively", but that virtue ethics generates a real solution. As stated, a virtuous person would not desire that a friend's good be taken away from him and given to oneself. That kind of envy is not virtuous. Since it is this unvirtuous form of envy which generates the conflict, however, the dilemma in question is, ironically, susceptible to just that kind of response which Kristjánsson had dismissed—it depends on a misapplication of virtue and vice terms! The attendant action as well—complaining to the boss and attempting to persuade him to give the promotion to me instead—is of course also ruled out. In fact, that choice reminds me of nothing so much as of Ajax, who vowed vengeance on Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus after being deemed less deserving than the last to receive Achilles' armaments. Even assuming that he truly was greater and more fit than Odysseus to bear the dead hero's equipment, he did not promote but rather diminished his own worth in his ill-fated campaign of rectification against his "bosses" and his rival. What then is left? Merely accepting the status quo? Perhaps, but there is yet an even better, third alternative. To be truly honorable is to promote one's own worth while simultaneously maintaining and respecting the worth of others. Hence, the

height of acting well in this dilemma would be to seek one's own advancement in a way which did not depend on the denigration of the friend and co-worker. As such, I posit that the best response would be to approach one's boss with a proposal for the creation of a new position to which one would also be promoted—or, barring that, to establish one's credentials as justifying a raise and change of title. In such a way one would correct the injustice suffered by oneself, while still maintaining the coworker's well-being.

As some final thoughts on Kristjánsson and utilitarianism, it is worth noting that her mistake is similar to that made by Brad Hooker in his *Does Moral Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent?* He argues that we do not regard moral virtue as a fundamental human good, because given a comparison between two lives which are identical other than either the possession or lack of moral virtue, we allegedly would not feel sorrier for the person who was vicious.[50] There, as above, the argument goes astray partially because of a failure to appreciate multiple dimensions upon which one can experience differing emotions and evaluations, e.g. that we feel sorrier for 'Upright' in the sense that he deserves more happiness, *and* sorrier for 'Unscrupulous' in the sense that he is spiritually as well as materially bankrupt. This unfortunate single-mindedness of perception—especially when coupled with a utilitarian assumption of a uniquely optimal (and rightness-determining) potential state of affairs—not only as Hursthouse says "misrepresents the texture of our moral experience,"[51] but depends on a view of

[50] Hooker, *Does Moral Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent?*
[51] Hursthouse, On Virtue Ethics 67.

morality as only instrumentally, not intrinsically, good. Hooker's argument is comprehensible only if morality is seen not as inseparably constitutive of a worthwhile human life but as merely one good among others—which, I have been arguing, is a fundamental defect in much of modern ethics. Likewise, Kristjánsson's misguided search for the singular, right emotion to get us to a putatively best state of affairs all around serves to blind her to the much more conceptually rich, and ethically relevant, question of what counts for our agent as truly *living and acting well*.

It also runs afoul of a problem that I briefly mentioned earlier, that of irresolvable dilemmas. For while it turned out that Kristjánsson's example really *was* resolvable by a correct understanding of the putative virtues involved, such will not always be the case, as Hursthouse convincingly argues. Following Foot, she says of the claim that there are no irresolvable dilemmas:

> In fact, if the claim is put in a different, unexpected, context, few people are convinced of it. …Suppose I must give my daughter a birthday present; it would certainly be very mean not to, given our relationship, her age and hopes, my financial circumstances, and so on. But I am faced with an *embarrass de richesse*; giving any one of a whole range of things is equally desirable and acceptable. So there is an irresolvable dilemma—not one that worries us, not one where the final decision matters, but there all the same—providing a clear case where practical rationality simply runs out of determining moral grounds. So does the conviction that practical rationality *cannot* run out hold only of the distressing dilemmas? That does look very odd.[52]

Just as there is no ultimate determining ground in a case like this between various good options (which does not particularly bother us), some dilemmas by their nature admit of no truly good decision (which does), however wise one may be. I

[52] Hursthouse 66 – 67.

am reminded of martial arts classes where students learn how to escape from various holds, when invariably one pupil will ask: "But what if they get you in a hold like *this*?" and proceed to demonstrate some particularly nasty position. Every instructor that I have encountered has answered some of those queries in the same way: "Don't get into that hold." The point is both that there are some occasions where excellence consists in precluding certain states of affairs from obtaining, and, significantly, that in some unfortunate cases there is no amount of excellence sufficient to achieve an ideal (or even a good) outcome. This is as true for moral excellence as it is for martial excellence, and henceforth I will follow Hursthouse and Foot, taking it as established that there are irresolvable dilemmas. Similarly, to seek a *uniquely* "best action" for every circumstance can often lead us astray, as compared to the superior question of what it means for an agent to act wisely and well.

The Coherence of Warriors, Revisited: Creation and Reformation

Does this realization then provide a way out of our problem of incoherent pictures of a warrior? Yes and no. A warrior who finds himself faced with an irresolvable dilemma is not therefore necessarily committed to incompatible virtues, nor for that reason does he fail to be a warrior. Still further, it is not evidence that to be a true warrior or to be fully virtuous is "an impossible ideal" as alluded to earlier. Rather, it may simply be impossible to achieve all such aims given a particular context. Yvain, for example, could easily have been unable to

save both Lunete and the town, but that would have been due not to a conflict in his fundamental commitments, but to a conflict of time. However, the concern with which we began the chapter *was* of the fundamental sort, that is, how we can deal with putative constitutive values of a warrior which are themselves incompatible. What we need is for the term 'warrior' (or, at the least, individual classifications like 'knight', 'samurai', etc.) to fit a functional model of the sort discussed by MacIntyre. Consider both of the following arguments:

1. This watch is grossly inaccurate and irregular in time-keeping
2. This watch is too heavy to carry about comfortably
3. This is a bad watch.

1. He gets a better yield for this crop per acre than any farmer in the district
2. He has the most effective programme of soil renewal yet known
3. His dairy herd wins the first prizes at the agricultural shows
4. He is a good farmer.[53]

Both of these arguments are valid because 'watch' and 'farmer' are functional concepts, such that the definition of what they are is inseparable from the definition of what is a *good* example of each. If 'warrior' too is such a functional concept, then we can understand both the connection between moral worth and self worth attendant upon warrior identity, as well as the foundation for the "Marines don't do that!" sort of moral injunction discussed in the previous chapter. So, the problem we are faced with now is how to deal with cases where there is disagreement as to the premises. That is, do we start with:

1. He serves his lady no matter what she asks; -or-
1. He never puts love before glory

[53] MacIntyre 57 – 58.

1. He forsakes all arts besides the martial ones; -or-
1. He seeks mastery of both the sword and the brush

1. He achieves his objective through both force and cunning; -or-
1. He is forthright and free from all trickery

to derive "He is a good knight/ He is a good samurai/He is a good Greek hero," and so on. In order to solve this quandary, we must pay attention to the fact that these roles were *constructed*, and, still further, that the conflicting conceptions took place in a context of creation, reformation, and social change. Consider the time at which Tsunetomo wrote his *Hagakure*. In the early eighteenth century, the Warring States period was long over, and Japan had since known more than a hundred years of the stability of the Tokugawa shogunate. Thus Minoru in his introduction to the *Hagakure* tells us that the samurai:

> began to neglect their military practices and the mastery of Bushido, the Way of the Samurai, and gave more and more of their time and attention to personal accomplishments rather than the military arts and the traditional loyal service of their Lord. They did this knowing they were supposed to be efficient bureaucrats in the service of the Lord and clan, and, as a result, tended to become tender and effeminate. They began to act out of their own self-interests. No definite ideal prevailed among the samurais at this time.[54]

Musashi, by contrast, lived and wrote before and during the beginning of the Tokugawa state, at a time where the relative peace was much newer, and practitioners of various schools of swordsmanship "would often challenge a samurai from another school to a match, to see whose technique was better, and, of course, to test their blades."[55] Hence Tsunetomo's injunction to forsake arts and crafts in the service of bushido must be seen in the context of reforming samurai

[54] Minoru, Bushido: The Way of the Samurai xiv.
[55] Brown, The Book Of Five Rings xv.

who had "gone soft" and to some degree abandoned their heritage; not necessarily as contrary to the holistic development of the self and the sword advocated by Musashi. Callahan as well, in discussing the works of Saikaku, notes the difficulties generated by Japan's changing political realities:

> Much of the morality enjoined by *bushidō* and *giri* had been forged in an age of warfare. These feudal values from which the *bakufu* had been born now clashed with the regime's altered nature, for what had started as a tough military administration had developed into a centralized bureaucratic government. The Tokugawa period offered few opportunities for a dramatic display of *giri*, and when writing about the samurai in his *Buke Giri Monogatari* Saikaku was forced to choose a pre-1600 setting for nearly half his tales. …the successful *bushi* in the late seventeenth century was a bureaucrat, and there was no arena in which the average *bushi* could sacrifice himself for *giri*. The resulting frustration led to bloody fights to the death over trivial matters and to a dramatic increase in the popularity of *kataki-uchi*.[56]

Hence when we examine the samurai tales that Saikaku penned, we find samurai life the subject of both praise and criticism. In "A Surprise Move: The Heir's Killer Replaces Him", two teenage boys, Hachijuro and Dennosuke, fight to the death for no other reason than an accidental bump where "each boy accused the other of insulting him by jostling his sword sheath, and they drew their swords and dueled heroically."[57] The winner, Hachijuro, is chastised by his father and turned over to Dennosuke's father Densaburo as punishment. When Dennosuke's mother tries to avenge her son, her husband stops her:

> 'You cannot just kill this boy in cold blood when his father acted so honorably by sending him here. As a matter of fact, although he is only thirteen, he is much better at the military arts than our own fifteen-year-old

[56] Callahan, "Tales of Samurai Honor: Saikaku's Buke Giri Monogatari" 3.
[57] Saikaku, *A Surprise Move* 10.

> son was. So I am going to ask that Hachijuro be made my heir and successor. If you do not agree, I will divorce you.'[58]

So Hachijuro is adopted by his slain rival's parents, never again sees his original family, and even changes his own name to "Dennosuke", replacing the original as completely as possible. Callahan sees this as clearly a parodical exaggeration: "Naturally it was in a *bushi*'s best interest to have the best possible heir—but this amount of calculation strikes the reader as ridiculous, and this of course was Saikaku's intention."[59] Aside from mere visceral shock at the severe coldness of the two fathers, the characters' actions would be seen in light of their striking antipathy toward the Confucian ideal of the moral importance of familial relations. The bond between parent and child was the second of the five fundamental relationships of Confucian morality, and As De Bary and Bloom note:

> As a text emerging from the family school of Confucius in the Han period, the *Classic of Filiality* maintained quasi-canonical status down into the twentieth century… It became especially influential in Japanese thought of the Tokugawa period (1603 – 1868) and figured prominently in nationalistic ideologies of late nineteenth- and early twentieth century Japan.[60]

Thus Callahan's analysis is particularly compelling. In addition, Saikaku elsewhere explicitly condemns petty duels of the sort described in "A Surprise Move." For example, "Inspiration From a Gourd" begins with a passage that not only directly alludes to the other play, but seems clearly intended to inspire reform toward what he sees as a truer expression of samurai excellence:

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[58] *A Surprise Move* 11.
[59] Callahan 4.
[60] De Bary and Bloom, Sources of Chinese Tradition, Vol. 1: From Earliest Times to 1600 325 – 326.

> The present age has brought about a drastic change in the behavior and attitude of samurai. In bygone days, proving one's mettle was the paramount consideration and life was held cheap. If the sword sheathes of two men accidentally clashed together, they would rail at each other, and then begin a profitless duel which would result either in both their deaths or else the emergence of a victor who would stride away from his slain opponent. This type of behavior was praised for it was said to reflect the true samurai spirit. In fact, however, this kind of bravado is completely contrary to the way a samurai should live. In order to be prepared for the worst eventuality, a lord bestows on his retainers a considerable stipend. Any man who ignores the obligation thus incurred and casts his life away over a selfish, personal quarrel is a villain, deaf to righteousness. Consequently, no matter how outstanding a samurai's achievements may be in his private battles, his lord will understandably fail to be impressed by such exploits.[61]

The message then is that by taking an ideal to an extreme, one actually sabotages one's honor and misses the mark instead of hitting it. Such a fate nearly befalls the two main characters, Takitsu and Takeshima, friends who almost fight to the death over a misunderstanding and an imagined insult. By contrast, real virtue is exemplified by an older samurai, who correctly discerns not only who has stolen Takeshima's sword, but the nature of its theft and how to retrieve it. As payment for this service, he insists that the two friends abandon their quarrel and reconcile, which they do, describing him as a "'man with uncanny intuition'" who "'notices things that the average person misses.'"[62] Hence, there is praise for the samurai as well, here presented in terms which contrast with a problematic degeneration within that class.

Like the elderly samurai above, whose ability coupled with age and wisdom make him a model of true excellence, the character of Jubei in "A Mole on the

[61] Saikaku, *Inspiration From a Gourd* 12.
[62] *Inspiration From a Gourd* 15.

Remembered Face" comes to a good end by his dedication to duty over appearance. Jubei had been engaged for some time to be married, but when the girl's good looks are marred by smallpox, her parents secretly endeavor to substitute her still-beautiful younger sister for the matrimony. Jubei, however, discovers the switch, and insists that it is only right that they abide by the original arrangement:

> After that, he kept away from her, not even going to see her a second time. When she returned to her parents' home, Jubei sent with her a letter in which he related all the details, and added 'Thus the elder sister is the one whom I received as a wife. Grievous illness is a part of life, and I beg you to send her to me even if she is no longer beautiful. I would have her as my wife even if I had to give my life in return.[63]

Thus Jubei refuses to marry the younger sister instead of his now disfigured betrothed, and his integrity is rewarded. He is not only happy but successful, as his wife

> had a natural sense of strategy, and she often pointed out things which had not occurred to Jubei. From the beginning of their life together, she kept him constantly thinking about military matters, and, as a result, Jubei later became a famous general, and his name was praised throughout the world.[64]

The characters who devote themselves to duty, and do not become caught up in appearances or petty personal vendettas, bring success both to themselves and to those around them. They are truly capable of being useful to their lords, and maintaining the good of society. Hence Saikaku serves as an example of critique and reform of warrior mores, and as Callahan states,

> That *Buke Giri Monogatari* is not a panegyric of *giri* and the *bushi* does not mean that it is a bitter social satire. Saikaku was basically neither a didactic

[63] Saikaku, *A Mole on the Remembered Face* 9.
[64] *A Mole on the Remembered Face* 10.

> nor a polemical writer. …Saikaku likes to show virtue working to its practitioner's advantage. In other words, *giri* pays.[65]

Similarly, I have argued above that Bouchard was mistaken to state that Chrétien and others were intentionally portraying chivalry as contradictory and impossible. Where she was right, however, is in the view that such authors were challenging putative ideals of knighthood. The mistake is the conclusion that those authors must have been treating those conflicting views as on equal ground. Literature has always been a vehicle for moral critique, and I think we must see the authors of stories in many cases as using their characters to argue for what truly is (and is not) worthy of a person. In Chretien's case, there was obviously a view of courtly love shared by Marie de Champagne and others which glorified an often adulterous and basically subservient form of devotion. We should see Chrétien as saying, essentially, "that isn't love," just as we can see Saikaku's tales as sometimes saying "that isn't adhering to duty." As Baker remarks, "Like other aspects of chivalry, which were in reality frequently undermined by the corruption of their practitioners, courtly love eventually degenerated into an excuse for promiscuity."[66] Such stories do not paint a picture of incommensurable virtues; instead it is the incommensurability of a genuine virtue with what is actually a vice.

What about Philoctetes, then? Can we read his tale in the same way, as a portrayal by Sophocles of the unworthiness of deception in achieving one's ends? I believe that we can, although here things are somewhat more complex. Certainly Sophocles here and elsewhere was concerned with exploring moral conflict, but it

[65] Callahan 5 - 6.
[66] Alan Baker, The Knight 65.

is not immediately obvious what the ultimate end of that conflict is supposed to be. MacIntyre, for instance, sees the central tension of *Philoctetes* as remaining unresolved:

> Odysseus behaves in the play according to precisely the same canons which govern his behavior in the *Odyssey*. He does good to his friends, harm to his foes (thus satisfying one of the definitions of justice which Plato rejects at the beginning of the *Republic*). If he cannot get the bow by open means, his cunning will devise deceitful means. In the *Odyssey* that cunning is treated unambiguously as a virtue; and it is of course for his exercise of the virtues that a hero received honor. But Neoptolemus sees Odysseus' stratagem to deceive Philoctetes as dishonorable. Philoctetes had been grossly wronged by the Greeks who had left him to suffer for nine long years on Lemnos; Philoctetes has nevertheless received Neoptolemus and Odysseus with trust. Even though he now refuses to come to the aid of the Greeks at Troy, it is wrong to deceive him. Sophocles uses Odysseus and Neoptolemus to confront us with two incompatible standards of honorable conduct, two rival standards for behavior. It is crucial to the structure of the tragedy that Sophocles offers us no resolution of this conflict; the action is interrupted, rather than completed by the intervention of the semi-divine Heracles, which rescues the characters from their impasse.[67]

Hence we are confronted once again with seemingly incommensurable virtues. The bow of Heracles is necessary for victory at Troy, and thus Odysseus is willing to procure it from Philoctetes by any means necessary. But Neoptolemus, despite a brief period of wavering, is unwilling to feign friendship and violate Philoctetes' trust, seeing it as ignoble despite the importance of the aim to which it would be in service. When Heracles comes to resolve the impasse, he does not condemn Odysseus's methods nor his original abandonment of Philoctetes; neither does he paint Philoctetes' heretofore refusal to rejoin the Greek forces as unjustified. He simply commands Philoctetes to go to Troy, noting that in so doing he will also be healed of the affliction that led to his original exile, as well as gain glory and riches

[67] MacIntyre 132.

for himself. The tale comes to a close, but the question of values has not—and perhaps *cannot*—be resolved, which in MacIntyre's view expresses what Sophocles takes to be an inescapable and tragic component inherent to the structure of human life.

Nevertheless, whether we accept that such was Sophocles' view (or still more strongly believe that it is correct), I think that we can still read the *Philoctetes* as praising Neoptolemus' integrity and friendship toward Philoctetes, contrasted with its negative depiction of Odysseus' duplicity. Tessitore also notes that Heracles' appearance leaves the dramatic tension unresolved, "Like a statue temporarily lifted from the depths of the sea to sink once again,"[68] but he sees the fundamental conflict as existing between Odysseus and Philoctetes—representing respectively the imperfect but necessary world of politics and the unfulfilled demand for divine justice. On this view, the main drama unfolds around whose ideal will garner Neoptolemus' ultimate allegiance, and both of his would-be mentors are partially in the right. While Tessitore perhaps somewhat overstates the level of sympathy toward Odysseus' motivations, his main point yields an important insight about the nature of Heracles' appearance. Consider that Heracles is, while a god, also connected to the mortal world and in particular to Philoctetes himself. Originally half-mortal, he ascended to godhood in part with Philoctetes' help, and so

> Sophocles creates an opportunity for Heracles to return the favor shown him by Philoctetes. Whereas Philoctetes delivered Heracles from unbearable suffering, Heracles' intervention brings with it the promise of Philoctetes'

[68] Tessitore, "Justice, Politics and Piety in Sophocles' 'Philoctetes'" 83.

> deliverance from affliction and reintegration into the human world of politics. Every aspect of Philoctetes' terrible predicament—initial cause, central action, and future resolution—is framed with reference to the gods.[69]

Odysseus—the model of political success and (in terms of the war at Troy) the will of the gods—is capable of devising a scheme to procure Philoctetes' bow, but can never persuade Philoctetes to leave Lemnos. Neoptolemus, embodying justice and friendship, convinces him to leave his exile, but cannot effect Philoctetes' return to the Greek community. Heracles alone can restore Philoctetes to Greek society, because he alone represents both the friendship and loyalty of community as well as the prospect of divine justice. The absence of the latter is, indeed, the chief obstacle toward the existence of the former:

> As we have seen, Philoctetes' longing for a world that is clearly and consistently just is in some sense the wound that is wasting both his body and his soul. If Heracles' final intervention suggests divine concern for human justice, it is a concern that in some important sense continues to resist human comprehension. The most egregious problem concerns the absence of any justification for Philoctetes' protracted and unmerited afflictions. …Sophocles' *deus ex machina* calls for piety but provides no adequate answer to the human demand for justice. Indeed, the price to be paid for healing includes not only the unjustified horror that makes healing necessary, but also return to a political world in which injustice flourishes.[70]

An interesting parallel can then be seen with Plato's *Euthyphro*. When Socrates maneuvers Euthyphro into asserting that piety is a part of justice which takes the form of service to the gods, the problem comes with the question of what form that service could take. The gods do not need anything from us and are not benefited by what we give them, and hence the possibility of the proposed relationship between

[69] Tessitore 74.
[70] Tessitore 84.

them and us does not seem to be coherent.[71] The figure of Heracles can restore justice and its attendant failed human connections precisely because he had stood in that kind of relationship to (and partially as) a mortal. He is not *now* benefited by any act of Philoctetes, but he *had been*, making that conception of justice between them comprehensible. The human longing for justice must likewise be fulfilled by human agency.

As such, I follow Tessitore in his assessment that

> Sophocles, much like his contemporary Plato, wished to encourage a salutatory concern with *eusebia* while, at the same time, suggesting that the human world unfolds in accord with less consoling necessities that constrain the problematic but necessary attempt to live together in political society.[72]

The divinely-induced affliction and human-caused isolation had previously made Philoctetes a non-person; not only in light of his status as an outcast, but due to his being viewed as an expendable tool defined only in relation to victory or defeat at Troy. Now with Heracles' promise first of healing by Asclepius, and then the glory of winning the war, he is restored to the status of human being. MacIntyre notes that "In Homer the question of honor is the question of what is due to a king; in Sophocles the question of honor has become the question of what is due to a man."[73] In that light, we can see the *Philoctetes* as portraying the nobility of Neoptolemus' original stance over the Odyssean cunning which subordinates all scruples to victory. The latter is associated with the absence of justice and the callous caprices of the gods, while the former represents the harmonious living of

[71] *Euthyphro* 11e – 15a.
[72] Tessitore 88.
[73] MacIntyre 133.

citizens and communal enterprise. Sophocles is addressing what it means to live well and achieve aims as one person among others, and his answer to that question rejects the trickery of Odysseus as a kind of weakness born of the breakdown of human community. This is not necessarily to say that cunning is condemned wholesale—it is important that Philoctetes was undeserving of his treatment, unlike the Cyclops or Penelope's suitors in the *Odyssey*. Nevertheless, Sophocles is saying that Neoptolemus' integrity, not Odysseus' trickery, seeks the human good in a way in which one can truly take pride.

As we have seen, a foundation for a functional moral identity can be maintained even in the face of competing conceptions. An author who presents an apparent conflict of ideals is not necessarily thereby painting them as incommensurable, but rather may be distinguishing between genuine and counterfeit virtues. Chrétien, Saikaku, and Sophocles can all be seen as making a literary statement about what true excellence entails. Likewise, a *prima facie* tension between different sources must be viewed within the social contexts that inform them. Just as Musashi's and Tsunetomo's true samurai appear much less different in light of the political realities of their days, seemingly varied portrayals of a good warrior may really aim at fundamentally similar models. Finally, the existence of irresolvable dilemmas does not threaten the viability of virtue ethics, which is equipped to give us useful guidance in terms of both how to act and how to feel. The realm of warrior virtue thus furnishes both moral motivation and the grounds for excellence as a specific kind of human being. To be honorable is to

take on an identity such that one's self is worthy of the potential of human greatness. The further significance of pride, reputation, and social role as constituents of that identity will be the subject of our next inquiry.

Chapter 4: Pride and Place

Previously I have stated, I believe uncontroversially, that pride and concern for reputation are two of the integral components of honor. What is more likely controversial is that these are positive features, for perhaps the most common type of objections to honor-based ethics relate to these aspects. Consider the following historical encounter between an English knight and a French squire, Nicholas Clifford and John Boucmel.[1] The two men had many times prior spoken of a jousting match between them, but as of yet had been unable to follow through. On the occasion in question, Clifford was traveling with a group of knights through France on their way to Cherbourg, and they stopped at an inn to rest for the night. As it happened, John Boucmel was with a group of knights lodged at the nearby castle of Vannes, who came to the inn to greet the visiting English. When he saw that Nicholas Clifford was among them, he approached Clifford about their past discussions, saying that since they at last had the opportunity to perform their joust, "I therefore demand from you three courses with a lance."[2] The joust does take place eventually, but not before Clifford three times attempts to refuse. He says first that he is not in a position to stay for a joust, because the other knights with whom he is traveling cannot wait for him. Boucmel counters by offering to escort him to his destination himself. Secondly, Clifford notes that his company is traveling without weapons and armor, to which Boucmel replies that he has many arms at his disposal, and still further, will allow Clifford the first choice of which to

[1] Baker 13-17.
[2] Baker 14.

use. At this point, "it became quite clear to Nicholas that it would not be honorable to refuse the request, so passionately was it made, and especially since the other knights had heard the entire conversation."[3] Nevertheless, he notes that it may not be possible for him to joust if the senior knights he is with do not allow it. Thus he offers, if such should be the case, to joust with Boucmel as soon as possible after the completion of his current journey. However, as Baker relates:

> Boucmel would not yield an inch, and replied: "Seek not for excuses: I have offered you such handsome proposals that you cannot in honor depart without running a tilt with me, according to the demand I make." Nicholas now grew angry at the young squire's manner of speaking to him; the lad had clearly overstepped the mark, for although he himself had considered that it would be dishonorable to refuse the request, for the younger man himself to make such an assertion was another thing entirely.[4]

The next morning, Boucmel and Clifford indeed had their joust, and Boucmel died tragically when a piece of Clifford's lance pierced his neck. While Clifford was distraught over this turn of events, the rest of the knights, including Boucmel's lord, assured him that he had done nothing wrong, and had conducted himself as he must in jousting with Boucmel, despite its unfortunate ending.

Of particular interest in this account is the role played by the witness of the other knights. Both Clifford and Boucmel seem to accept that, at least after his first two reasons for refusing are addressed, honor demands that Clifford accept Boucmel's challenge. However, Clifford also judges that the fact that the other knights had *heard* the request gives the situation additional gravity. The implication is that Clifford's reputation plays a role in determining his moral

[3] Baker 15.
[4] Baker 15.

obligations. More generally, if the "demands" of honor are the demands of *morality*, what one ought to do in the moral sense depends at least in part on how one will be judged by other people if one engages in, or refrains from, some behavior. To a large degree, this idea is likely foreign or distasteful to thinkers in modern times, and it seems *prima facie* to be vulnerable to criticism. For many of us, our thoughts on this topic would first recall Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Praise and reputation depend upon others and their perception of us, while our moral worth would seem to depend instead on our own character and actions.[5] Thus a number of objections begin to arise, located within two main clusters of issues: those relating to one's appearance (both in itself and as contrasted with reality), and those relating to matters of an individual's worth and status (both in one's own case and in the relative worth and status of others).

For example, the *Hagakure* relates a story of "The Loyal Samurai Cook" who helped preserve his lord's reputation:

> When Lord Katsushige entertained his guest with some dishes of crane, Kichizaemon Fukuchi acted in the following manner:
>
> A guest said: "Your honorable host, I hear that you can taste the difference between white cranes and black cranes, etc. Is this true?"
>
> The lord replied, "It is true."
>
> The guest went on, "Then, how have you tasted the present dish?"
>
> Katsushige answered, "That was a white-naped crane."
>
> The guest replied: "I don't understand how you can tell the difference. Please send for the cook, I want to ask him."
>
> "Let Kichizaemon Fukuchi come," the Lord said.
>
> Kichizaemon, who had overheard the discussion, quickly went into the kitchen and drank, in succession, several big bowls of sake (rice wine). He was repeatedly requested to come (before the Lord). After some time, he went into the presence (of the Lord and guest). Then the guest repeated

[5] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095b 24 – 25.

> his question. Kichizaemon's tongue tripped and he lisped in a foolish manner: "White-black crane, nay, pure-white crane or black crane."
>
> The Lord scolded him, "You are drunk. Get out of my sight." (Thus the Lord's face was saved.)[6]

Katsushige's reputation is upheld, but in an undeserved way—his claim is clearly nonsense and puffery. While Kichizaemon is portrayed positively for his loyalty, the result is not really the well-being of the clan or some sort of greater good, but merely his lord's aggrandizement.

We have seen also in the preceding chapter that one of Saikaku's concerns was the readiness of samurai to duel each other over real or imagined insults, and the general quickness to violence over even trivial slights. Similarly, Nisbett and Cohen offer compelling evidence that higher rates of violence and homicide in the American South and West, compared to other regions of the United States, are attributable to the historical presence of an honor culture.[7] Much of the action in *The Iliad* is driven by status and complaints about it. Agamemnon's worry that his own worth is diminished if he returns his prize leads him to dishonor Achilles, who in turn refuses to fight and so nearly dooms the Greek expedition. Still further, Thersites' attendant criticism of Agamemnon appears to be both accurate and just:

> How shameful for you, the high and mighty commander,/ to lead the sons of Achaea to bloody slaughter!/ *Sons*? No, my soft friends, wretched excuses—/ women, not men of Achaea! Home we go in our ships! Abandon him here in Troy to wallow in all his prizes—/ he'll see if the likes of us have propped him up or not./ Look—now it's Achilles, a greater man he disgraces,/ seizes and keeps his prize, tears her away himself./ But no gall in Achilles. Achilles lets it go./ If not, Atrides, that outrage would have been your last![8]

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[6] Tsunetomo 74 – 75.
[7] Nisbett and Cohen, Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South.
[8] *The Iliad* 272 – 281.

However, Odysseus rebukes and strikes him for his words, seemingly on the basis of his low rank:

> What a flood of abuse, Thersites! Even for you,/ fluent and flowing as you are. Keep quiet. Who are *you* to wrangle with kings, you alone?/ No one, I say—no one alive less soldierly than you,/ none in the ranks that came to Troy with Agamemnon./ So stop your babbling, mouthing the names of kings…[9]

Despite the fact that Achilles had leveled almost exactly the same charge at Agamemnon as did Thersites, even using some of the same *phrases*, Thersites' words are scorned because of his inferior reputation. In this instance, at least, his (lack of) worth is seemingly pre-established and taken as given, regardless of any merit to what he has said. Arthurian legend, too, contains depictions of relative worth which appear problematic. After a battle against the Emperor Lucius, we are told that "the Britons returned in triumph to King Arthur, having slain more than ten thousand Romans, and lost no man of worship from amongst themselves."[10] Men were indeed felled in battle, but since they were of low worship their deaths seemingly are treated as unimportant. Perhaps more egregiously, consider an encounter between Sir Lancelot and a knight named Sir Pedivere:

> And as he rode through a valley, among many wild ways, he saw a knight, with a drawn sword, chasing a lady to slay her. And seeing Sir Lancelot, she cried and prayed to him to come and rescue her.
>
> At that he went up, saying, "Fie on thee, knight! Why wilt thou slay this lady? Thou doest shame to thyself and all knights."
>
> "What hast thou to do between me and my wife?" replied the knight. "I will slay her in spite of thee."
>
> "Thou shalt not harm her," said Sir Lancelot, "till we have first fought together."

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[9] *The Iliad* 285 – 290.

[10] King Arthur and His Knights 141 – 142. "Worship" is used here to mean esteem and reputation.

> "Sir," answered the knight, "thou doest ill, for this lady hast betrayed me."
>
> "He speaketh falsely," said the lady, "for he is jealous of me without cause, as I shall answer before Heaven; but as thou art named the most worshipful knight in the world, I pray thee of thy true knighthood to save me, for he is without mercy."
>
> "Be of good cheer," said Sir Lancelot, "it shall not lie within his power to harm thee."
>
> "Sir," said the knight, "I will be ruled as ye will have me."
>
> So Sir Lancelot rode between the knight and the lady. And when they had ridden awhile, the knight cried out suddenly to Sir Lancelot to turn and see what men they were who came riding after them; and while Sir Lancelot, thinking not of treason, turned to look, the knight, with one great stroke, smote off the lady's head.
>
> Then was Sir Lancelot passing wroth, and cried, "Thou traitor! Thou hast shamed me forever!"[11]

While he does send the wicked knight to Camelot to be punished, the fact that Lancelot's *first* reaction involves his own reputation, and not the slain damsel herself, at the very least suggests a skewed sense of priorities. While failing in his promise to protect her may indeed reflect badly on him as a knight, one cannot help but feel that the primary motivation for outrage really ought to be the fact of the lady's murder.

An emphasis on pride and reputation, then, seems liable to engender moral failings in a number of significant ways. By caring too much about appearance, one may value illusion over truth, violence over peace, pre-established status over actual merit, and reputation over people's welfare. An additional worry is that a strong sense of one's reputation may leave one compelled to engage in destructive—even *self-destructive*—courses of action, which otherwise could have been avoided. A fascinating and tragic illustration of this last problem may reside

[11] King Arthur and His Knights 180.

in Saddam Hussein and the war in Iraq. James Bowman argues that were it not for the former's concern for appearance, and the West's failure to recognize that concern, the war might possibly have been avoided altogether. By his lights, President Bush honestly believed that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq:

> The result was fury when the WMDs were not found, and subsequent and frequent repetitions of the charge that the administration had "lied" in order to go to war. …Yet to believe this accusation, you would also have to believe that when, before the war, the president mentioned the WMDs as a reason for it, he already knew in fact that there were no such weapons in Iraq. Not only does this seem implausible in itself, since it would have been a lie that he himself was about to ensure would soon be found out, but his claims about the WMDs were seconded not only by his own intelligence services but also by those of other Western countries, including France, Germany, and Russia, which opposed the war. But if his belief in the threat of the WMDs was sincere, why, as many commentators have asked since, did the Western intelligence services allow such a belief to persist—George Tenet of the CIA reportedly told President Bush that the existence of the WMDs was a "slam dunk"—when there was so little evidence to support it? I believe the answer lies in the Western inability to understand the Arab honor culture and in particular the "tyranny of the face." Simply put, Saddam Hussein lied because he was part of an honor culture that demanded he lie. …A better understanding of this honor culture might or might not have made American intelligence analysts more alert to what turned out to be the reality of the situation, namely that Saddam was far more likely to keep hidden the fact that he didn't have WMDs than that he did, but there can be little doubt that the failure to understand just this was responsible for the West's mistake.[12]

Now, one might be skeptical of this interpretation. After all, didn't Saddam have a lot to lose by lying, and potentially quite a bit to gain if he had told the truth? Dick Cheney expressed just these sorts of sentiments in defending his continued belief in the existence of the WMDs. During a September 14, 2003 interview on *Meet The Press*, he told Tim Russert:

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[12] Bowman, Honor: A History 28, 30.

> How do you explain why Saddam Hussein wouldn't come clean and say, "I haven't got a program. Come look"? Then he would have sanctions lifted. He'd [have] earned $100 billion more in oil revenue over the last several years. He'd still be in power. The reason he didn't was because obviously he couldn't comply and wouldn't comply with the U.N. resolutions demanding that he give up his WMD.[13]

However, Cheney's conclusion is warranted only if the potential gains of "coming clean" were not offset by what Hussein would consider to be other, unacceptable losses. Bowman argues that in fact, that was almost certainly the case:

> If this seems unlikely as an explanation for the Western intelligence failure, we have a concrete example of Saddam Hussein's doing precisely this. In his interview with Dan Rather just before the war, he denied that he had any al-Samoud missiles and denied that he would have destroyed them if he did. Yet he *did* have them and was already on the point of destroying them! We can make sense of this strange reverse hypocrisy—pretending to be more bad and intransigent than you really are—only by understanding that to Saddam, it was impossible to admit that (a) he had the al-Samoud missiles and (b) he was willing to destroy them, even though this was in fact the case, since it would involve a loss of face. Either to have acknowledged them, and so admitted that his enemies were right, or to have acknowledged their destruction, and therefore his capitulation to U.N. demands, would have been an unthinkable confession of weakness. And looking strong is what he, like most of those brought up according to Arab and Muslim ideas of honor, cared about more than anything else—more even than the continuation of his rule or, indeed, life itself. In other words, about his power and even his life he cared enough to destroy the missiles—and maybe, for all we know, many other weapons besides. But he did not and could not *say* that he was going to destroy them and so do the bidding of his enemies.[14]

If Bowman is right, then this example would seem to illustrate everything that is *wrong* with an ethics that gives a strong amount of weight to how one is perceived. Aside from the fact that it is embodied here not by a putatively noble warrior but a wicked dictator, we have someone who cares so much about how he appears to

[13] Bowman 30.
[14] Bowman 29 – 30.

others that not only does he act against his own self-interest, so doing leads to wide scale destruction and loss of life which easily could have been avoided.

Plato and Austen: Justice, Injustice, and Reputation

Given these considerations, it is easy to understand the tendency in much of ethical theory to excise the influence of other people, which is depicted either as a hindrance or, at best, irrelevant. The ideal agent is presented as essentially free of preconception, bringing nothing to her judgments save the universal light of reason applied to the situation at hand. Bernard Williams portrays this view in terms of reaching convictions through the purity of one's autonomous deliberations:

> The conception of the moral self as characterless leaves only a limited positive role to other people in one's moral life. Their reactions should not influence one's moral conclusions, except by assisting reason or illumination. If what others think of me plays an essential role in my moral determinations, then morality is thought to have skidded into the heteronomy that at the beginning of the chapter we recognized as a familiar charge against the mechanisms of shame.[15]

Shame as applied to ethics is an appropriate contrast here. In the context of honor, shame is the contrary of pride, and both concepts bear a strong connection to one's worth and relation to others—whose regard is specifically given moral weight, as we have seen above. Properly understood, this regard is indeed morally relevant, and there are crucial differences between it and the simple heteronomy with which it is charged in the objections we have been considering. These differences illustrate the legitimate moral value of pride and concern for reputation as essential constituents of a virtuous character.

[15] Williams, Shame and Necessity 95.

Although the objection above is obviously at home in modern utilitarian and deontological theories, Williams notes that it is also found as far back as Plato, in the *Republic* especially. While he is correct in his overall criticism of this view, part of the problem in Plato's thought experiment—and a vindication of the role of others in our moral lives—is not for the reason that Williams lists. Speaking of Plato's just but reviled man, he writes:

> A great deal is assumed in the formulation of this thought experiment. When we are presented with it, we are simply told that this man *is* just and that he is misunderstood by a perverse or wicked world. This is something we are supposed to understand from outside of the imagined situation. We are given the convictions of the just man himself, and these are taken to be true and unshakable. But suppose we decline to stand outside and to assume the man's justice. Suppose we change the terms of the solipsistic experiment and arrange it from the agent's perspective, rather than from ours or from Plato's; suppose we make it, in effect, an exercise in ethical Cartesianism. Then we should describe the situation in these terms: this is a man who thinks that he is just, but is treated by everyone else as though he were not. If he were merely given that description of himself, it is less clear how steady his motivations would prove. Moreover, it is less clear how steady we think they should prove. For given simply that description, there is nothing to show whether he is a solitary bearer of true justice or a deluded crank.[16]

However, this last claim is not really accurate. There almost certainly would be evidence available to our just but unfortunate man which would prove that he was a victim of circumstance, and not somehow confused about justice. Among the advantages which Glaucon ascribes to the perfectly unjust man, with his reputation for perfect justice, are that "he marries into any family he wishes; he gives his children in marriage to anyone he wishes; he has contracts and partnerships with

[16] Williams 99.

anyone he wants," and so on.[17] Presuming that these very things must then be denied to our just man, he would undoubtedly hear: "What, shall we now buy from you, that you might swindle in Athens as you did in Thessaly?" and, "Ha! You had your fill of Luscia, and now you would despoil *my* daughter with a false promise of marriage!" and other such aspersions. Hence, in light of other people's words and explanations of their behavior toward him, he would not be left wondering in self doubt whether he has misunderstood justice or failed to comprehend society. Rather, he would surely know that he is just, but despair at his ill fortune at being constantly misperceived. Quite likely, his own assessment of his situation would be captured by R. E. Ewin's words in "Pride, Prejudice and Shyness:"

> It is clear that one can stand up against the multitude and be pilloried as a matter of honour—how can that be if honour is a matter of reputation? There are at least two ways that can be. …as a matter of earning or deserving honour, I might have to court bad reputation—these people do not honour me, I might recognize, but they would honour me if they really knew what was going on.[18]

And indeed, Darcy and Wickham can be seen for much of *Pride and Prejudice* as a modern embodiment of the *Republic*'s two characters. As Elizabeth eventually remarks: "There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of those two young men. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it."[19] The comparison to Glaucon's scenario is not exact, both because the truth is ultimately revealed and, more importantly, because Darcy's initial poor appearance in the eyes of Elizabeth and others is due at least in part to his own failings.

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[17] *Republic* 362b.
[18] Ewin, "Pride, Prejudice and Shyness" 150.
[19] Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice 302.

Nevertheless, it is clear both that Darcy is a good man who is misperceived as vicious, and—to a large extent *because* of that misperception (a fact whose significance will later be apparent)—Wickham in turn is presumed to be virtuous despite his actual degeneracy. Having read Darcy's letter of explanation, Elizabeth re-evaluates her opinion of Wickham, reflecting:

> His countenance, voice, and manner had established him at once in the possession of every virtue. She tried to recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence, that might rescue him from the attacks of Mr. Darcy... But no such recollection befriended her. She could see him instantly before her, in every charm of air and address; but she could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the whole neighborhood, and the regard which his social powers had gained him in the mess.[20]

Ultimately, the conclusion is inevitable: Wickham's favorable reputation is undeserved, and Darcy's unfavorable one is almost equally so:

> every line proved more clearly that the affair, which she had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent as to render Mr. Darcy's conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make him entirely blameless throughout the whole.[21]

Of her three objections to Darcy, two are exposed as unfounded; his treatment of Wickham is just, and his separation of Bingley from Jane was based mainly on an honest and well-intentioned mistake. What remains, and that for which Darcy is yet blameworthy, is the rudeness and self-centeredness he had displayed at their first meeting. This poor showing colored all subsequent opinion of him, masking and even derailing the genuine virtues of whose expression he otherwise would have been capable. It is this fact which provides a key to the true *moral* value of

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[20] Pride and Prejudice 276.
[21] Pride and Prejudice 275.

reputation, and points to an answer to the objections we have been considering. It is not just that "had Darcy been a little more forthcoming, Wickham would have caused far less damage and certainly would not have eloped with Lydia and made the whole Bennet family vulnerable," although that is certainly part of it.[22] More importantly, it is the fact that a positive standing in the eyes of others is necessary for the exercise of excellence within a community. As such, the loss of such a reputation is a real loss, both for the agent himself and for others.

Daniel Lee: The Injustice of Reputation

A recent and disheartening illustration of how a negative reputation can effectively ruin a life can be seen in the case of Korean rapper Daniel Lee, or "Tablo," whose impressive talents and achievements were essentially dismantled by a prolonged and undeserved campaign of hostility against him. Joshua Davis describes a meeting between Lee and one of his few remaining friends, in the midst of widespread animosity:

> Lim met with his old friend at an out-of-the-way coffee shop in July. Lee looked exhausted and said he hadn't been sleeping. He was depressed and his emotions were getting the better of him. Only months earlier, he had played sold out concerts and was besieged by requests for autographs on the street. Now, he had to sneak around just to meet a friend. "I was contemplating whether my life was actually worth living," Lee says.[23]

These were the words of a man who by a number of measures had lived a life replete with incredible success. Before the age of 30, Lee had: released multiple hip hop albums, five of which reached number 1 on Korean charts; broken through

[22] Ewin 148.
[23] Davis, *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 6.

to the United States market where his group also reached number one in sales; wrote a best-selling collection of short stories; and married a popular movie star. His hard work and considerable talent had brought the Stanford graduate considerable blessings and, until the summer of 2010, happiness.[24] The idea that a person in that situation could wonder whether his life is worth living seems *prima facie* to be unbelievable, or perhaps demonstrative of some kind of mental illness. In fact, however, it was a natural consequence of having a deservedly good reputation replaced by an outpouring of public disdain and hatred. Due in part to his unusually rapid completion of a master's degree, as well as an unfortunate confluence of bad circumstances, people began to portray Lee as a liar and a fraud:

> In the summer of 2010, Korea was reeling from a streak of fake diploma scandals. It began in 2007, when the chief curator of a modern art museum in Seoul was found to have fabricated her Yale PhD. (It didn't help that Yale initially confirmed the degree.) She was jailed for 18 months on forgery charges, and a nationwide hunt for other offenders ensued. Prosecutors investigated at least 120 cases of diploma fraud, ensnaring celebrities, politicians and even a monk. …While this was happening, Lee regularly appeared on Korean television shows and was asked about his credentials. He said that he had not only graduated from Stanford in 3½ years, but that he also had received a master's degree in that time. He said that he had written his book, *Pieces of You*, while he was an undergrad and that he had received a creative writing award for one of the stories from author and Stanford professor Tobias Wolff, MA '78.[25]

Lee was telling the truth about himself, and his educational background ought to have only added to his admiration. However, many people took his claims as suspect, both due to wariness in light of the aforementioned scandals—and perhaps also because of something more ugly.

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[24] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 2.
[25] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 2.

> Many students struggled extraordinarily hard to get into a top school and then worked even harder to do well once they were there. Lee appeared to have breezed through Stanford in a short amount of time and come away with a master's on top of it. His story had the power to make people feel stupid.[26]

Mere skepticism about Lee's time at Stanford could be seen as natural, of course, and if his educational claims really had been fabricated, then backlash against him would be both understandable and justified. However, the fact that people may have felt personally inadequate in comparison to him may well explain why they refused to believe Lee's claims even in spite of all the evidence in his support:

> In May 2010, a group of Internet users created an online forum titled "We Request the Truth from Tablo," better known by its Korean acronym TaJinYo. The group didn't buy Lee's story. They started to refer to him as "God-blo" because only God could have accomplished as much as Lee. The members of the group participated anonymously and attacked Lee from behind user names such as Whatbecomes and Spongebobo.[27]

Hence, due likely in part to a hatred born of jealousy, these and other attackers continually denied that Lee was who he said he was, regardless of what Lee said or did. Among other things, Lee provided his transcript to a newspaper, and both the registrar of Stanford and Lee's former professor, Tobias Wolff, confirmed his degrees. Since his citizenship had also come into question, he released his Canadian citizenship certificate as well. All seemed to be in vain. Not only did the attacks against him continue, but they grew to include his mother, brother, and wife. His record label refused to publicly support him, and he was accused of both forgery and identity theft.

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[26] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 7.
[27] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 2.

Needless to say, Lee's music career came to a screeching halt, but that was a mere fraction of his sufferings. "On the streets, strangers would shout at him, calling him a liar and a cheat. 'It was like I had stepped into the middle of a modern day witch hunt,' he says." Even more disturbing was the threat to his family:

> In the midst of the controversy, Lee's wife gave birth to their first child. It was a moment of joy, but as Lee walked the corridors of the hospital, he saw people looking at him coldly and he panicked. "Since my attackers were all anonymous, there was no way for me to know who was after me," Lee says. "I didn't know if the doctor, who's putting needles into my baby, is one of those people. It was terrifying."[28]

Eventually, Lee was vindicated. A national TV special documented a trip to Stanford, where he proved the veracity of both his degrees and his identity. Korean courts ordered TaJinYo to divulge the real names of its members, and Lee has since filed suit against the ringleaders in the attacks against him.[29] Nevertheless, that victory does not undo the torment he had suffered, nor that of his family. Lee was harmed psychologically by his persecution, and in its wake, his struggles continue:

> Lee, however, still hasn't recovered. He's still afraid to go out in public and doesn't know if he'll ever be able to perform for an audience again. This May, he returned to Stanford to give a speech to the Asian American Students' Association. It was his first public appearance since the controversy erupted and even though it was a friendly crowd, Lee was paralyzed by stage fright, something he'd never experienced before. He felt nauseated throughout the talk and periodically had to pause to catch his breath. It reinforced his fear that he'd never be able to dominate a stage as he once did.
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> "Honestly, I'm damaged," he says. "And I don't know if I'll ever be better."[30]

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[28] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 4.
[29] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 7.
[30] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 8.

Lee's unfortunate case demonstrates the importance of reputation not only in its own right, but as a foundation for the expression of both moral and non-moral excellence. Aside from his material losses and inability to continue performing, Lee's destroyed reputation made at least three virtues impossible for him to display. The most obvious of these is truthfulness. Initial doubt combined with conspiracy theories meant that Lee's accurate self-descriptions were always, and increasingly, interpreted as puffery and boasting. He lost not only the ability to portray himself as he was, but the ability to defend himself from being depicted as much *less* than he was. Truthful self-justification was continually perverted into further accusations against him. Friendliness, too, became impossible, because he was so distrusted and hated. In a general sense, any disposition toward warmth and camaraderie must be undermined in a world where strangers met his gaze with cold stares or shouted invectives. On a more personal level, his ability to make new friendships and to sustain existing ones was also largely demolished. While Lee's aforementioned friend Sean Lim did indeed stand by him, he describes his hesitation in doing so:

> Lim himself admits he struggled with the decision to help. He had a job in broadcasting and relied on public goodwill. He could endanger his career if he spoke out. "I'm ashamed to say that I thought twice about helping Dan," he says. "I saw what they were doing to him and I was scared."[31]

While he was able to overcome that fear to support Lee, not everyone displayed the same strength. His record label was wishy-washy, the Stanford Club of Korea would not issue a statement, and even most of the press ceased examining the

[31] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 6.

credibility of the accusations. In the latter two cases, Davis notes that club members "were afraid their reputation as Stanford alumni in Korea would be tarnished if they erroneously vouched for the rapper,"[32] and that

> Reporters and their managers who published stories disputing TaJinYo claims about Lee were flooded with outraged e-mails, calls and demands for the reporter's resignation. Nobody wanted to be threatened so, according to [TV Producer Ki Yeon] Sung, reporters stopped adequately questioning the validity of the claims. As the story became one of the top news items in the country that summer, she saw that the mob was having a chilling effect on the coverage.[33]

To be friends with Lee, or even to publicly entertain the idea that he *might* not be thoroughly undeserving of friendliness, was to make of oneself a target. In the face of his ill-repute, justified or not, friendship with Daniel Lee became increasingly impossible.

Perhaps most striking, however, is the effect of reputation on courage. In an ordeal like Lee's, such a cardinal trait either becomes impossible to exhibit, or must be *always* displayed to a superhuman degree. That is, Lee's life had reached a point where he had to live in a nearly constant state of fear. Both he and his family received anonymous threats. Merely leaving his house was to invite ridicule and verbal assault. Everyone he met was potentially an enemy. As the saying goes, "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you," and in Lee's case, many of them really were out to get him. Aristotle describes courageous acts as done "for the sake of what is fine,"[34] but that should not have to include the mere possibility of going about one's daily existence. With his whole

[32] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 6.
[33] *The Persecution of Daniel Lee* 7.
[34] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1115b13.

life a source of justified fear, it could not help but destroy even much of the courage he used to possess. As related above, Lee had never before experienced stage fright, nor struggled to perform for a crowd. The sheer scale of the assault against him had served to cripple his well-deserved former confidence, rendering his once impressive abilities all but gone.

Reputation as Social Good

The importance of reputation, then, is much understated if we consider it merely in terms of reward, or even insofar as it is required for justice. It is an essential underpinning of the ability to possess and exercise virtue. Furthermore, virtue is by its nature public. The virtuous person not only flourishes him- or herself, but also so acts as to effect the well-being of others. Positive standing in the eyes of the community is necessary in order for this beneficence to be possible. In other words, one's reputation is not only an individual but a social good—a point which Robert Bellah emphasizes in relation to modern cases of libel:

> Yet in a recent study of some 900 libel cases between 1974 and 1984, Bezanson, Cranberg, and Soloski report that of the 114 libel plaintiffs they interviewed, only about twenty-five percent reported that they brought suit primarily to win money damages. Most of these libel plaintiffs were public persons, highly visible to their communities, more than half of whom had lived in their communities for more than thirty years. ...As Bezanson et al. make clear, the purpose of the suit for most plaintiffs was to vindicate the plaintiff's reputation. The outcome, including financial reparation, was secondary. As they put it, few plaintiffs "sue to win"; rather, they "win by suing."
>
> What these facts suggest is a rather different and, partly at least, less individualistic meaning of reputation among those in public life. It is true that their career chances would be damaged by libel; yet, their chief concern is with their standing in the community, as their public effectiveness is

> dependent on the favorable reputation they enjoy in their communities. One should not, of course, discount purely egotistical motives, among which a desire to be reelected is obviously central. Nevertheless, if they have any desire to carry out their public trust in an effective way, as many public officials obviously do, then favorable reputation is an essential resource in effective performance. Such favorable reputation is thus a public good, not merely a private possession.[35]

This insight exposes a key flaw in Plato's thought experiment. Note that when Glaucon insists on denying good reputation to the just man, it is because "a reputation for justice would bring him honor and rewards, so that it wouldn't be clear whether he is just for the sake of justice itself or for the sake of those honor and rewards."[36] But this stipulation at least partially mischaracterizes not only the *function* of others' esteem, but the *desire* for it. Since to be truly virtuous is to manifest goodness not only in one's own life but also toward the world at large, it is not only necessary to possess, but right to *value*, a good reputation. Given this fact, we can see that what Glaucon has removed from the just man is not only, as intended, a potentially ulterior motivation, but also inadvertently the opportunity to exercise justice itself, insofar as it can no longer be really expressed. As Williams notes:

> The members of the lower classes in the city, we are eventually told, do not have self-supporting motivations of justice; only the Guardians, who have attained the self-revealing state of knowledge, have those. If the other classes could ethically survive at all when not subjected to the actual power of the Guardians—and that is a deeply ambiguous issue in the *Republic*—they *would* need an internalized other: an inner Guardian.[37]

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[35] Bellah, "The Meaning of Reputation in American Society" 744 – 745.
[36] *Republic* 37.
[37] Williams 99.

Our just but misunderstood man, then, is in effect a moral Cassandra; possessed of righteousness and concern for the good of others, but doomed to fail in his attempts to benefit, inspire, or lead them. It is not a *thing* that he has lost, but a *connection*: "although we think of a person as "having" a reputation, reputation is not a property or possession of individuals—it is a relation between persons."[38] Understood in these terms, we can see that some of the objections to a strong emphasis on reputation are undermined by the realization that, like Darcy, we may be at fault for placing too *little* importance on the perception of others.

Integrity, Reputation, and the Significance of Moral Self-Conception

Still further, it becomes clear that an individual's character, far from being antipathetic to our moral deliberations, must form an essential part of them. In that regard, an imagined scenario by Edmund Pincoffs is illuminating:

> I have made a promise, one of those promises encountered so frequently in the literature and so infrequently in life. It is to meet a friend to attend a concert. That is to say, I have solemnly averred, using the words, "I promise", that this time I will not disappoint him, as I did the last time; and that I will indeed be on hand at eight at the theatre. Meantime (back at the ranch) a neighbour calls to remind me of my agreement to attend an eight o'clock school board meeting to argue that a proposed desegregation plan is inadequate. What is the correct thing to do? How shall I decide? What is and is not relevant in my deliberations? Roughly: What is supposedly relevant is the agreements I have made; and what is supposedly not relevant is any personal wants or desires or characteristics I may have. …What is relevant must have nothing to do with *me*, but only with the situation: a situation in which anyone could find himself.[39]

[38] Bellah 743.
[39] Pincoffs, "Quandary Ethics" 557 – 558.

Thus we again see the typical picture of modern theories, in which the ideal moral agent is supposed to act not according to reasons which depend on anything particular to him, but only for reasons which might equally apply to anyone. In contrast to this picture, however, Pincoffs continues:

> Suppose that I have devoted my life to the cause of desegregation: that all of my spare time and energy and means are devoted to it. Suppose that I have taken a particular interest in the development of school policy in my town. *Suppose that it is simply a part of my self-conception, and a part of the conception that others have of me, that I could not miss an opportunity to press the cause of desegregation: that if I did so I would have to question my own integrity as a person.* Suppose that I know that this particular meeting of the school board is a crucial one: one at which the final decision on a plan will be made. *Suppose that I am recognized as the chief spokesman for the cause of meaningful desegregation. Suppose that I have built a deserved reputation with others and with myself for persistence and courage in the face of obstacles, for being a man of principle, for sensitivity to the needs of others.* Then what would be right for anyone in a situation in which a solemnly given promise conflicts with an agreement to attend a meeting might well not be right for me. If my personal ideals and my conception of myself as a moral person are to be excluded from consideration as merely personal; if nothing is to remain but considerations which have to do with the situation as it would appear to anyone regardless of his former character; then the decision-process has been distorted in the interest of a mistaken conception of ethics.[40] (Italics mine)

There is much to be said in light of this claim, and I want to begin by approaching it in terms of an example of my own. Once game shows become reasonably well established, they tend from time to time to have "celebrity" episodes. Unlike regular contestants, the actor, singer or whoever plays on behalf of the charity of his or her choosing, with a brief time given toward explaining who will be benefited should each of the contestants win. Most of us have seen such game shows, and perhaps some of us have also at times found ourselves—initially, at

[40] Pincoffs 559 – 560.

least—thinking something like the following: "Oh, that's what she's playing for? That's nice, I guess, but aren't there a lot more important causes?" The sentiment is that it's all well and good to, for instance, fund after school art programs, but surely it's more important that we find a cure for cancer or feed the homeless. So, the thought continues, perhaps if the celebrity were truly being responsible, she'd be playing on behalf of something else.

What are we to make of this kind of reaction? Viewed from a purely neutral position, one might indeed conclude that some ills are more serious than others, and hence that whatever resources we have ought first to be devoted to the most severe types of maladies. In this instance the idea is cashed out as a function of utility, but it is part of the broader claim that what ought to guide our aims morally are features of life or a given situation that bear on any potential agent equally. From that standpoint, there is obviously a sense in which the above criticism seems entirely reasonable. With Pincoffs, however, I contend that this is a wrong-headed way of looking at things. Even aside from the practical difficulty of truly ranking the relative importance of goods (if such is even possible in any meaningful way) there are several reasons why this is so. First is that this view of the ideal agent as characterless seems to deprive a human life of much of its meaning and purpose. What I mean should become clear in light of some further hypothetical considerations. Suppose our celebrity conveys that in a time of darkness, she found in painting a path back to spiritual and mental tranquility. Alternately, perhaps she herself, or one of her loved ones, was stricken with a

certain disease, giving her firsthand knowledge of its specific kind of suffering. Maybe one of her siblings or cousins has a particular type of disability, or she lost a friend to an uncommon form of a normally less serious condition. Or, perhaps she even merely recognizes the fulfillment and joy she received from a pastime like horseback riding, and wants to give others the chance to experience it, too. I maintain that these are not only reasons, but *good* reasons, for her to support *those* causes in particular. More generally, features of individual character matter, morally. It is not only that there are a multitude of various goods and ills that may attend a human life, and that they are not neatly commensurable. These and other things are part of what for each of us makes me *who I am*, part of what gives *my* life identity and meaning. I have a special relationship to those factors that have shaped me and my time on Earth, which in turn represent disparate types of value which may attend a human life. To fail to accord weight to these differences in favor of a homogenous non-subjectivity, is to lose sight of the distinctive goods of individual persons. Along those same lines, to do so could not help but to largely exclude certain kinds of good from consideration. If the ideally charitable agent contributes to medical research rather than art programs, then morality would seem to require us to systematically ignore art as a source of value, and therefore to deny something important to human well-being. (In fact, in terms of the poor emphasis on the arts in most public schooling, this particular example is sadly not even all that hypothetical.) There are a variety of goods which comprise well-rounded life

and experience, and this standpoint would tend in a practical sense to rule many of them out.

Most significantly, however, there is an important insight to be gleaned in the way that individual character affects and influences others within the community. We have seen in much of the preceding remarks how important reputation is for one's own good. It is also in many ways crucial to the good of others, insofar as one may bring that good about. Specifically, there is a link between one's moral self-conception and one's reputation as such, in terms of moral influence, inspiration, and leadership. By choosing to live in some ways and not others, each person's life is implicitly a statement about what it means to be a human being, an expression of what is or is not of value. To stand for certain principles and ideals, to hold some types of commitments as crucial for human good, is not simply an expression of individual will. It is a claim and an illustration of what one takes to be a model for a well-lived life, a call on others to emulate us insofar as our own traits and actions are worthy of a person of excellence. In the quote from Pincoffs above, I have emphasized not only that it is part of the *speaker's* self-conception that he is dedicated to desegregation, but also, significantly, that *he is recognized as such by others*.[41] Why this is so important I will address partly in terms of another example.

Let us imagine that a piece of legislation comes before Congress, relating to regulations of the use of animals in laboratory testing. Now, suppose that PETA makes no statement whatsoever concerning the bill in question. In this scenario, I

[41] Pincoffs 559 – 560.

think we should rightly convict PETA of a moral lapse. By dedicating itself to animal welfare, *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals* has taken upon it a certain role in society, in which its members stand not only for the importance of that cause, but as a call upon others to embrace it as well. To give no public assessment of a bill which bears so directly on that issue would constitute a failure of integrity on its part as an organization. Two further points are of interest in this regard. First is that it would *not* necessarily be a failure of integrity in *others*—there is a duty that attaches to PETA in particular because of what it is and stands for. Second is that, nevertheless, the particularity of such a duty is compatible with the moral precept in question being universally applicable. That is, while certain kinds of duties, sources of value, and even excellences may attach specifically to some individuals or organizations because of who and what they are, this need not entail that the good in question is not universal in scope.

Returning to Pincoffs' example, the speaker has a particular duty to attend the meeting because he is a *champion* for the cause of desegregation. This fact is, it would seem, due to his own choice in dedicating his life to that ideal, and insofar as he has done so, he is the locus of any movement toward desegregation in his community. Hence, he has a special duty to advocate desegregation, but desegregation is also a cause which all people ought to adopt. Cheshire Calhoun suggests similar points as she rightly describes the social and not merely individual nature of integrity:

> To the extent that integrity is, indeed, a personal virtue, this account of the significance of standing by one's principles and values rings true. What

> drops out of these accounts, however, is the centrality of standing *for* principles and values that, in one's own best judgment, are worthy of defense because they concern how *we*, as beings interested in living justly and well, can do so. …not standing up for one's best judgment about what would be just or what lives are acceptable forms of the good suggests that it does not really matter what we as a community of reasoners endorse. The person of integrity, one might plausibly think, is precisely the person who thinks this does matter. Integrity here seems tightly connected to viewing oneself as a member of an evaluating community and to caring about what that community endorses. That is, it seems to be a social virtue.[42]

In this way we begin to see the connection between pride, social role, integrity, and reputation. Additionally, by now it should be clear that the last of these is far from a selfish preoccupation or morally irrelevant indulgence, but rather can bear a crucial importance for both one's own good and the moral welfare of society in general. In chapter one I suggested that honor's perceived failings tend to arise when its constituent aspects are fractured from one another. Here we find part of the reverse—when these features are united, we can see the person of honor as right to take seriously how others perceive him. He acts so as to illustrate and embody how one ought to live as a human being—a task in which he views himself as co-constructor with others. Thus, to reject reputation as morally irrelevant may often be, as Ewin recognizes, "to draw a crude distinction between appearances and reality; in the important sense, these appearances are part of reality."[43] Here Ewin was again referring to Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, but the point is generally applicable. The favorable regard of others is something we ought to care about for specifically *moral* reasons, because it enables one to engage and lead those others in the quest for greater human excellence. As with the man perceived as the chief

[42] Calhoun, "Standing For Something" 254.
[43] Ewin 140.

advocate for the value of desegregation, the connection between one's self, one's values, and others' *recognition* of the same, is critical to furthering the public virtue.

Pride and Worth in One's Self and Peers

This connection can also operate in the other direction, in terms of one's regard for other people insofar as they likewise embody ways of being which are worthy of respect. That is, their approval or disapproval is valuable not *simpliciter* or for mere esteem, but because it reflects an assessment of oneself in terms of what is taken to be truly noble and worthwhile. Jonathan Lear describes this phenomenon as it pertains to the Crow Indians:[44]

> Courage requires that one be able to regulate a sense of honor and shame. In a traditional community like the Crow, the standards of honor and shame were rooted in the community's values—and in ritual practices of ridicule and honor. In terms of ridicule, it was typical for a person from one's father's clan to be assigned as one's personal joker. …By the time a courageous person emerges in the society, the standards of courage have become standards of *self*-regulation. The courageous Crow warrior didn't avoid shameful acts because he was afraid of getting caught and shamed by his fellow tribesman. He avoided them because they were shameful. Part of what it is to be a courageous person is to have an internal sense of what is shameful—and to rule out such acts as impossible. That is, one needs good judgment about which acts are fine and which are disgraceful. In philosophical terms, one needs to be tracking shame; but one also needs to be internally motivated to turn one's back on the shameful. This is one's second nature: the ability to recognize the shameful, find it repulsive, and rule it out as impossible helps to constitute what it is to be a courageous person.[45]

[44] I follow Lear in using the term "Indian" rather than "Native American," which he states to be in accordance with the preference of the Crow themselves (n. 1).
[45] Lear, Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation 84 – 85.

This internalization of the standards of pride and shame, then, points to the value placed on actually being *worthy* of honor, rather than a focus on appearance as such. What matters is that one's life expresses what is fine, and that those who might observe one—whether actually or hypothetically—would be *correct* in their favorable assessment. The failure to understand this relationship lies behind what Williams categorizes as a "silly mistake" in analyzing pride and shame:

> Suppose someone invites us to believe that the Homeric Achilles, if assured he could get away with it, might have crept out at night and helped himself to the treasure that he had refused when it was offered by the embassy: then he has sadly misunderstood Achilles' character… If everything depended on the fear of discovery, the motivations of shame would not be internalised at all. No one would have a character, in effect, and, moreover, the very idea of there being a shame *culture*, a coherent system for the regulation of conduct, would be unintelligible.[46]

Achilles *must* refuse the embassy, because material loss or gain was never what was at issue. The true stakes were much higher, because at its core the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles concerned matters of personal worth. We can see this clearly, first in Agamemnon's complaint:

> Agamemnon—furious, his dark heart filled to the brim,/ blazing with anger now, his eyes like searing fire./ With a sudden, killing look he wheeled on Calchas first:/ "Seer of misery! Never a word that works to my advantage!/ Always misery warms your heart, your prophecies—/never a word of profit said or brought to pass./ Now, again, you divine god's will for the armies,/ bruit it about, as fact, why the deadly Archer/ multiplies our pains: because I, I refused/ that glittering price for the young girl Chryseis./ Indeed, I prefer *her* by far, the girl herself,/ I want her in my own house! I rank her higher/ than Clytemnestra, my wedded wife—she's nothing less/ in build or breeding, in mind or works of hand./ But I am willing to give her back, even so,/ if that is best for all. What I really want/ is to keep my people safe, not see them dying./ But fetch me another prize, and straight off, too,/

[46] Williams 81.

> else I alone of the Argives go without my honor./ That would be a disgrace. You are all witness,/ look—my prize is snatched away!"[47]

Secondly, in his boasting and threats toward Achilles:

> What do you want? To cling to your own prize/ while I sit calmly by—empty-handed here?/ Is that why you order me to give her back?/ No—if our generous Argives *will* give me a prize,/ a match for my desires, equal to what I've lost,/ well and good. But if they give me nothing/ I will take a prize myself—your own, or Ajax'/ or Odysseus' prize—I'll commandeer her myself/ and let that man I go to visit choke with rage!/ …I will be there in person at your tents/ to take Briseis in all her beauty, your own prize—/so you can learn just how much greater I am than you/ and the next man may shrink from matching words with me,/ from hoping to rival Agamemnon strength for strength!"[48]

And finally in Achilles' many invectives against him:

> "My honors never equal yours,/ whenever we sack some wealthy Trojan stronghold—/my arms bear the brunt of the raw, savage fighting,/ true, but when it comes to dividing up the plunder/ the lion's share is yours, and I go back to my ships,/ clutching some scrap, some pittance that I love,/ when I have fought to exhaustion./ …Staggering drunk, with your dog's eyes, your fawn's heart!/ Never once did you arm with the troops and go to battle/ or risk an ambush packed with Achaea's picked men—/ you lack the courage, you can see death coming./ Safer by far, you find, to foray all through camp,/ commandeering the prize of any man who speaks against you."[49]

Achilles portrays Agamemnon as a coward and a bully who fails to give other men their proper due. That this assessment is probably accurate is made more likely by the fact that, initially, Achilles was objecting not to Agamemnon's treatment toward *him*, but was actually speaking on behalf of others:

> But the swift runner/ Achilles answered him at once, "Just how, Agamemnon,/ great field marshal… most grasping man alive,/ how can the generous Argives give you prizes now?/ I know of no troves of treasure, piled, lying idle,/ anywhere. Whatever we dragged from towns we plundered,/ all's been portioned out. But collect it, call it back/ from the

[47] *The Iliad* 121 – 141.
[48] *The Iliad* 156 – 164, 217 - 221.
[49] *The Iliad* 193 – 199, 264 - 269.

> rank and file? *That* would be the disgrace./ So return the girl to the god, at least for now./ We Achaeans will pay you back, three, four times over,/ if Zeus will grant us the gift, somehow, someday,/ to raze Troy's massive ramparts to the ground."[50]

Agamemnon subsequently takes his anger out on Achilles, but this was in response to Achilles' defending the need to maintain the status of the "rank and file." Thus, while Agamemnon does personally wrong Achilles in particular, there is a deeper conflict in terms of what it means to be worthy of honor, and the recognition or lack of recognition accorded to one's compatriots. What Agamemnon is really guilty of, among other things, is the vice of vanity:

> Those who lack virtue but have these other goods are not justified in thinking themselves worthy of great things, and are not correctly called magnanimous; that is impossible without complete virtue. However, they become arrogant and wantonly aggressive when they have these other goods. For without virtue it is hard to bear the results of good fortune suitably, and when these people cannot do it, but suppose they are superior to other people, they despise everyone else, and do whatever they please.
>
> They do this because they are imitating the magnanimous person though they are not really like him. They imitate him where they can; hence they do not do actions expressing virtue, but they despise other people. For the magnanimous person is justified when he despises, since his beliefs are true; but the many despise with no good reason.[51]

Agamemnon plays at being greater than he is, and his further willingness to ignore or sacrifice the deserved status of others is what leads Achilles to rightly describe him as "armored in shamelessness."[52] A true sense of shame ought to have prevented him from dishonoring others, and two features of the conflict and his eventual attempt to regain Achilles' favor are worth noting in this regard. First is that in trying to pay off Achilles with bounty, Agamemnon is essentially offering

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[50] *The Iliad* 141 - 152.
[51] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1124a27 – 1124b5.
[52] *The Iliad* 175.

the same bargain that he himself had earlier refused. As quoted above, Achilles offered on behalf of the army to repay Agamemnon three or four times over for his loss, once Troy was sacked and there was new treasure to allot. Secondly, this parallel is *dis*similar in that no *man* was responsible for depriving Agamemnon of his prize; giving her up was necessary to appease Apollo and save the army from its plague.[53] Thus, Agamemnon's offer is implicitly another assertion of Achilles' inferiority; he deemed such a proposal beneath himself, but it is supposed to be good enough for Achilles. Add to this the fact that Agamemnon committed an outrage against Achilles and the army specifically, whereas Achilles had not initially sought to dishonor Agamemnon, and it is clear that for Achilles to accept the offer would be unthinkable. To do so would be to place a price on his own self-worth. Achilles' refusal to accept Agamemnon's attempted peace offering of gold and treasure, then, constitutes a certain kind of integrity. Its relationship to how one is perceived by others also serves to vindicate the other dimension of this aspect of honor; the nature of pride. For viewed in terms not of an individual contrasted with others, but as an example of excellence within a community, its operations become expressive not of a self-centeredness antagonistic to morality, but the insistence on proper respect for what is truly deserving of value.

In this way the concern for one's reputation, and the essence of one's pride, springs from the reality of who and what one is. For instance, what our

[53] *The Iliad* 1 - 118. One could make the argument that a man *was* responsible insofar as Chryseis' father appealed to Apollo to send the plague. But the point remains that no one in the Achaean army had tried to assert his superiority over Agamemnon; it was the latter's poor reaction to the circumstance which framed the dispute in those terms.

aforementioned Crow warrior cares about is not to be thought courageous whether in fact he is or not, nor a baseless regard which is unattached from his own being. His aim is to be a good member of his community; to exercise the *virtues of a Crow*. In Aristotelian terms, there is no difference between the function of a Crow and the function of a *good* Crow, and he strives to be a model of the shared conception of that kind of excellence. One's reputation is important here in the sense that one takes pride in being the sort of person that other people can respect, for the right reasons, and where the other people are themselves worthy of respect for those same reasons. The specification that the other people are themselves respectable is significant, and further justifies the place of reputation in moral deliberation. Part of the objection to considering the view of others morally relevant depends on the notion that it represents a basically unqualified popularity. But Williams rightly points out the importance of

> the identity, and attitudes, of the other whose gaze is in question. Shame need not be just a matter of being seen, but of being seen by an observer with a certain view. Indeed, the view taken by the observer need not itself be critical: people can be ashamed of being admired by the wrong audience in the wrong way. Equally, they need not be ashamed of being poorly viewed, if the view is that of an observer for whom they feel contempt. Hector was indeed afraid that someone inferior to him would be able to criticize him, but that was because he thought the criticism would be true, and the fact that such a person could make it would only make things worse. The mere fact that such a person had something hostile to say would not in itself necessarily concern him. Similarly, on the Greek side of the war the opinions of Nestor carried weight, and those of Thersites did not.[54]

This observation has brought us back to one of the problems raised at the beginning of the chapter, but with an added wrinkle. It seems entirely reasonable that if

[54] Williams 82.

someone reprehensible scoffs at my behavior, it may well be a cause for pride, let alone not productive of shame. If I strive toward excellence, it is the regard of the excellent that counts. That being said, however, could not a hero and a villain both assess me in the same way? Whether in theory or in practice, if each makes the same claim, then it must be equally accurate or inaccurate whichever one happens to convey it. This was the point of the earlier example of Achilles and Thersites. If we take the same criticism of Agamemnon seriously when uttered by the former, but dismiss it when heard from the latter, is this not to commit the genetic fallacy? How can we reconcile this worry with the seemingly correct notion that in terms of shame, the identity and worth of the one who praises or disparages me ought to matter?

Pride, Shame, and the Moral Community

I think the answer lies in certain features of hypocrisy. Discussing the nature of that vice, Christine McKinnon notes that:

> Moral assessments are things we take seriously, and we do so, I contend, because they provide content to our notion of the perfectibility of man and to the idea of human excellences towards which persons ought to strive. Part of what is involved in the concept of human excellence is an understanding of what traits are worth cultivating and what things are worth desiring.
>
> …The reasoning of the hypocrite is incompatible with her being a genuine member of a moral community in which judgements presume certain minimal connections between desires, intentions, and actions. By divorcing motive and action the hypocrite distorts the psychology of action and the kind of reasoning employed in such a moral community, and by manipulating the evidence upon which judgements are based the hypocrite shows contempt for its practitioners.[55]

[55] McKinnon, "Hypocrisy, with a Note on Integrity" 327.

All this is indeed true of Thersites who, if nothing else, seems to be at least as bad if not worse a man than Agamemnon. Homer conveys how while most of the army was brought back to order under Odysseus' urging:

> one man, Thersites, still railed on, nonstop./ His head was full of obscenities, teeming with rant,/ all for no good reason, insubordinate, baiting the kings—/anything to provoke some laughter from the troops./ …Achilles despised him most, Odysseus too—/he was always abusing both chiefs, but now/ he went for majestic Agamemnon, hollering out,/ taunting the king with strings of cutting insults./ The Achaeans were furious with him, deeply offended.[56]

Again, though, we may ask, does this matter? As aforementioned, should not his assessment of Agamemnon stand or fall on its own merits? In an important sense, however, his and Achilles criticisms are *not* really the same. When Achilles disparages Agamemnon, it is as one who shares a conception of excellence for a warrior, and he convicts Agamemnon of not living up to standards that putatively, at least, they both accept. His motivations concern worth and recognition, according to shared ideals that both men take seriously. Thersites, on the other hand, is motivated only by the desire to cause trouble, sow chaos, and get a laugh. He is not an ally of Achilles, a champion for anyone's deserved recognition, nor even concerned as a soldier. Thus, he is not really insulting Agamemnon, or more precisely, he is not insulting *only* Agamemnon, and not for the reasons he professes. Rather, his actions display contempt for the entire Greek army, and serve not only to undermine its cohesion as a unit, but to denigrate the values its members stand for. When Achilles rages at Agamemnon it is motivated by a

[56] *The Iliad* 246 – 249, 256 - 260.

respect for martial virtues, whereas Thersites' own remarks trade on their disparagement. On this last point, then, when Odysseus says "Who are you to wrangle with kings, you alone?/ No one, I say—no one alive less soldierly than you," it is actually quite telling, and justifies the reaction toward him.[57] What Odysseus rejected was not the justified outrage of a sincere but low-ranking soldier, but an attempt to sow discord and insubordination from a man who disgraced the station of warrior and tried to incite others to do likewise.

In similar fashion we may also find Lancelot in the earlier example to be less blameworthy than he initially appeared. I noted before the seemingly skewed priorities involved in his concern for his own shame as compared to the fact of the slain damsel. This type of objection to shame is aptly described by Jennifer C. Manion:

> Shame is often classified as a narcissistic emotion. Since the "object" of concern is the entire self or entire aspects of the self… Theorists surmise that shame not only locates but locks attention on the self so that others, and one's effect on others, drop out of consideration.[58]

While that certainly appears to be what takes place in this example, it should be remembered that Lancelot's initial rebuke concerned not his own honor *per se*, but that of knights in general. His claim is that by attempting to kill the lady, "thou doest shame *to thyself and all knights*," (italics mine) and we might be curious how this is meant to be so. Why should the actions of some other knight reflect badly on Lancelot, let alone all knights everywhere? The reason becomes clear once we understand the two men as embodying a certain role, with specific duties and goals

[57] *The Iliad* 287 – 288.
[58] Manion, "The Moral Relevance of Shame" 80.

related to the well-being of the larger society. Felicia Ackerman describes how in addition to fighting for their lords and king, knights of the Round Table were

> quasi policemen and keepers of the peace, who prevent and investigate crimes, rescue victims and potential victims, pacify rebels, and (unlike policemen in our society) lawfully sometimes mete out summary, even capital punishment. …The goals of upholding the kingdom, doing justice with honor and without brutality, and protecting the vulnerable are vitally important.[59]

As essential as those duties are, the knights' role takes on an even greater importance with the understanding that they were obligated not only to *enforce* justice, but in a sense to actually *create* it:

> Nowadays we are apt to take for granted our modern system of criminal justice, where the guilt or innocence of someone is determined by presenting evidence to an impartial jury of his peers. In Arthur's kingdom, however, guilt or innocence is determined in a trial by battle between the accuser (or a knight fighting on his behalf) and the accused (or a knight fighting on his behalf). In a sense, the judge is God, who is expected to "speed the right" by providing victory to the side of the accused if he is innocent and to the side of the accuser if the accused is guilty.[60]

She notes, however, that while it was generally expected that God would indeed speed the right, such was by no means a foregone conclusion, nor did any delusion prevail that it was one. Bouchard similarly states of both history and literature that:

> The problem with trial by battle, as everyone in fact knew even at the time, was that the wrong man might win. Even in the romances the "right" person did not always win; in [*The Song of*] *Roland* Ganelon almost had to be freed because no one dared face his formidable champion. The church hierarchy, indeed, withdrew all support of trials by ordeal, including trial by battle, in the thirteenth century. But in spite of the doubts raised both in literature and in real judicial discussions, there was a sense throughout the

[59] Ackerman, "'Never to Do Outrageousity or Murder': The World of Malory's *Morte Darthur,"* in French, The Code of the Warrior 119.
[60] Ackerman 118.

> late Middle Ages that he who won must have right and probably God on his side, not just his strength and his sword.[61]

For a knight to knowingly fight on the wrong side, then, is more than a personal failing. It is in effect a subversion of all truth and righteousness, as a knight's strength of arms is supposed to be not only the instrument but the guarantor of goodness, justice, and God's will on Earth. Hence, one who forsakes or ignores this responsibility instigates villainy which is not merely local, but systemic and far-reaching:

> The possibility of such wrongful victory in Malory's world is part of what makes the oath's final stricture a stricture against an offense that is more dangerous socially than merely wasting time and energy in a futile battle.[62]

The oath in question, in fact, explicitly outlines the duties and station and their connection to the end of a harmonious society. Early on in Malory's tale, he writes that King Arthur

> …charged them never to do outrageousity nor murder, and always to flee treason; also, by no means to be cruel, but to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of King Arthur for evermore; and always to do ladies, damosels, and gentlewomen succour, upon pain of death. Also, that no man take part in no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no law, nor for no world's goods. Unto this were all the knights sworn of the table Round, both old and young. And every year they swore at the high feast of Pentecost.[63]

As such, it begins to become clear why a knight's individual action bears implications for the status and abilities of both other knights and the citizenry at large. Like the aforementioned modern figures who need the public trust in order

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[61] Bouchard 129.
[62] Ackerman 119.
[63] Le Morte Darthur 87. "Outrageousity" refers to a gross moral violation, as in "committing an outrage."

to effectively carry out their duties, knights must have a reputation for both fairness and strength. Unless they are seen, as a class, to possess both the good faith of acting for what is right and the power to enforce it, then the community cannot depend on the provision of justice or order, and the fabric of society breaks down. Hence, Sir Pedivere's disgraceful actions have consequences for knights in general and Lancelot specifically. Given the nature of a knight's duties, the confidence of the populace in counting on their deeds and abiding by their words is an essential condition of the excellence particular to their role.

Further to that point, we can see that Lancelot's initial words function in much the same way as the "Marines don't do that" rebuke discussed in chapter two. What Lancelot tries to evoke in Sir Pedivere is the realization that his rage-born action is incompatible with who and what he is. He is—or at least, can and should be—something better than that; one whose power is wielded in service of justice and prosperity, not as a means to overpower the defenseless. Even were he right about his wife's lack of fidelity (and while the text is compatible with that possibility, it seems we are meant to believe that he is not) he would still be in the wrong by seeking to slay her himself. He was clearly beyond the point of caring whether it was wrong to kill his wife, as evidenced by the fact that he was trying to kill her at all. But he might yet have been brought back to his senses by the notion that he was doing something shameful in general. Hence, Lancelot's focus on the disgraceful nature of Pedivere's activities, and even the fact that the latter has wronged him personally, need not be indicative of self-centeredness or a lack of

regard for the lady. The crime against her is what *makes* Pedivere's actions shameful. Rather, it is an attempt to induce Pedivere to view himself in the larger context of what knighthood represents: first to inspire him to give up his unworthy course of action, and later in response to an outrage committed against more than just his intended victim. Pedivere had violated the ideals of knighthood almost as completely as possible, and the story ends with him no longer a knight but doing penance as a hermit instead. As Lancelot declares, "In a shameful hour wert thou born," for Pedivere had utterly failed to live up to what he should have been, the excellence for both self and society embodied by his former role.[64]

Thus, we have seen the importance of pride, reputation, and a sense of shame in the moral life, as well as the connection between those concepts and the integrity born of one's social role. What the preceding discussion has made clear is that an ethics which places emphasis on how one is perceived need not for that reason be narcissistic, deliberatively heteronymous, nor concerned with appearance over reality. In contrast, once we recognize the social nature of integrity and the requirement of good reputation in exercising virtue, the force of these objections begins to fall away. While these may be real dangers, they arise contingently, and not as an inevitable component of honor. One who cares not for moral excellence to begin with will of course want to hide his wickedness beneath a veneer of acclaim, exhibiting the vices described. But the truly honorable person rightly cares about being viewed favorably, both in terms of his own good, and because he cares about the values his life stands for and their relation to the good of other

[64] King Arthur and His Knights 181.

people. That is, he wants other people to recognize the genuine virtues that his life displays. Just as Plato's perfectly just man could not actually demonstrate his justice with a reputation for injustice, so too is the esteem of others necessary for our own virtuous activity. To be honorable is to care about expressing and endorsing true human excellence, and to value a good reputation is a necessary pre-requisite of that endeavor. Some further questions concerning models of such excellence will provide the backdrop for the final chapter of this treatise on honor.

Chapter 5: Heroes Only Need One Reason

In the preceding chapters I have emphasized that honor is an ethics of being, and argued that one of its strengths is its connection to a sense of moral identity. To be a person whose life and role embody something worthwhile generates an integrity which links moral worth and self-worth, justifying both pride in what one is and a concern for reputation among others. The person of honor, I have argued, stands as a model of excellence to which others might also aspire. Some questions remain, however, and to conclude the picture of honor it is necessary now to address them. In developing this treatise, I have held up a number of examples both fictional and historical, as putative illustrations of what a sense of honor entails. Given my argument that we ought thus to be inspired by these examples and adopt an honor-based ethics ourselves, then, there are three difficulties that must be addressed concerning their suitability. If the identity in question is tied in part to one's role, how do we handle cases where societal change renders that role either impossible or irrelevant? Furthermore, does an ethics of being require that its exemplars be fully virtuous, or at least free of serious defect? Finally, are fictional cases such as ones I have presented appropriate models for the behavior of real people? I will defend the notion that we can derive genuine moral illumination from both real and literary examples, and that such examples can illustrate aspects of honor in spite of the moral flaws of past societies. Additionally, the insights provided can fruitfully inform and transform our own lives, despite changes in the world which alter or remove the place of a given social

role within it. These related points are also connected through the nature of heroism, understood in terms of transforming oneself and one's world for the better.

The Crow: Honor Amidst Societal Collapse

We have previously analyzed the life of honor in terms of maintaining an identity, where what one is both embodies and demands a continued excellence. There is a given ideal of greatness for an individual situated within his or her community, and the challenge is to continue to be the sort of person who lives within that ideal. In those terms we saw a conception of what it was to be a warrior, through the lens of what it meant to *fail* to be one. That is, the successful warrior exhibits a personal virtue sufficient to meet the challenges that his or her role requires. On these grounds the question of honor is in an important sense straightforward. It is primarily a function of one's own uprightness, fortitude, and resolve; success or failure in continuing to be honorable is determined by one's own character. We encounter a problem, however, when we consider a different sense in which one may fail—a sense in which "fail" is not even a wholly accurate term, because it largely bypasses personal virtue altogether. The problem arises when the world itself changes such that the role one embodied is no longer comprehensible. We have seen small glimpses of this difficulty previously in the case of the samurai, when waning opportunities to fight for one's lord amid relative peace and stability led to frustrated warriors seeking excuses to fight over foolish

matters. Nevertheless, the model of rendering service to one's lord remained, and the concept of duty which the samurai class embodied was still possible to display. Therefore, it also remained possible to criticize the samurai for failing to live up to that duty, along the same dimensions upon which they would have been judged before, and according to values they continued to accept. The problem I want to address now, however, is different and worse, because it involves the dissolution of a very framework of values.

This holistic kind of calamity is what Jonathan Lear describes as having happened to the Crow. As he relates, the Crow were nomadic hunters and warriors, for whom battle and courage served as a focal point for all aspects of society:

> During the period of vibrant nomadic life, everything was somehow related to hunting and war. All the rituals and customs, all the distribution of honor, all the day-to-day preparations, all the upbringing of the children was organized toward these ends.[1]

As such, an observer of Crow community might fairly conclude that

> every event in Crow life—even cooking a meal—gained its significance within the larger framework of Crow meaning. Such a witness would insist that in traditional Crow life there was no such thing as the bare cooking of a meal. Every meal was in effect the cooking-of-a-meal-so-that-those-who-ate-it-would-be-healthy-to-hunt-and-fight. …in traditional Crow life, *everything* counted either as hunting or fighting or preparing to hunt and fight.[2]

The specific form which Crow honor in battle took related to the concepts of *coups* and *coup sticks*. "Counting coups" referred to both the performance of, and post facto retelling of, exploits demonstrative of bravery. These included striking an enemy in battle *before* harming him (letting him know in advance that he was

[1] Lear 35 – 36.
[2] Lear 40.

doomed), taking an enemy's weapons while he was still alive, striking the first enemy to fall in battle; and similar deeds in war. The coup sticks themselves represented a metaphorical line which an enemy could not cross; by planting it in the ground a warrior eliminated retreat from the realm of what was possible. A Crow who planted his coup stick thereby committed himself to hold that ground or die.[3] Thus, warfare and bravery provided the basis for honor and meaning in Crow society, and coups formed the basis of warfare and bravery.

The tragedy that befell the Crow, however, was reaching a point where their old way of life, as well as the former sources of honor and self-understanding, were no longer possible. From 1851 – 1882 the beleaguered Crow found their enemies encroaching, the buffalo disappearing, and their lands diminished through treaties—first to thirty-three million acres, then eight million, then only two million. Eventually,

> In the period 1882-1884 the Crow—their resources depleted, threatened by disease, cold, and starvation—moved to a reservation. Intertribal warfare was forbidden by the U.S. government. Hunting became impossible, both because all the beaver and buffalo had been killed and because the Crow were now forbidden to pursue a nomadic life. There was also devastating mortality. As Hoxie points out, nearly one-third of the 2,461 Crow recorded in the 1887 census died in the 1890s, as a result of a confluence of poor sanitation in new conditions of confinement, lack of ability to resist diseases spread by white settlers, and malnutrition. The younger generation was all but wiped out. Not surprisingly, those who survived suffered massive disorientation. Ambitious young men, wishing to establish themselves in the tribe, could think only in terms of warfare—but warfare had been forbidden. There were sporadic intertribal attacks, but overall the young men had a sense that they had come too late to participate in the Sioux wars.[4]

[3] Lear 13 – 21.
[4] Lear 26 – 27.

The most telling part of this account is the observation that the young men had no way to establish themselves in the tribe. As alluded to above, they did not face a challenge to their abilities, where failure would result if they were found lacking but success would follow on the heels of skill and bravery. What confronted the young and old Crow alike was the lack of a way to even *test* that ability. A sad example of this changed reality surrounds an incident centered around a young man named Wraps His Tail:

> In the summer of 1887, members of the Blackfeet tribe had stolen horses from the Crow, thus inflicting a tribal insult. A group of young Crow, led by Wraps His Tail, set out to get revenge and count coup. On September 30 they returned exultant: they had captured Blackfeet horses and were parading them through the camp. On some earlier occasion, this would have been a classic example of counting coups. There was, apparently, much shouting and shooting of guns into the air. At one point, Wraps His Tail, who was then twenty-five, rode up to the agency interpreter, Tom Stewart, and stuck a gun into his belly. He then pulled it away, and fired into the air. In another time, and *if* the whites had been their enemy, this would have counted as a further coup. It is not clear whether the much-hated agent, H. E. Williamson, came out to confront the crowd or whether Wraps His Tail rode up to him; but in any case, shots were fired in his presence, going over his head, over the rooftops of the houses, but hitting the bricks of a chimney. The young men then rode away.
>
> What began as a traditional celebration to count coup went badly wrong. Williamson reacted to this outburst by declaring that the original act of taking horses from the Blackfeet was "horse-stealing," and he ordered the young men arrested. …Wraps His Tail was angry about the overall threat to the Crow way of life, but he was also upset about meaning: "They call us 'thieves'… They, the palefaces, who make treaties only to break them, who have stolen our buffalo and our land, they call us 'thieves.'

Thus, the Crow lost not only land or certain types of opportunities, but in an important sense a *meaning*. The kinds of actions which had previously served as the grounds of excellence could no longer be intelligible as such. That is, the categories by which Crow excellence had traditionally been derived had seemingly

ceased to exist. Counting coups was no longer possible—not because of a lack of brave men, but because the kinds of acts which traditionally exemplified bravery no longer possessed that significance. There was no place for that form of life in the world in which the Crow now found themselves. Tragically, Crow excellence was essentially circumvented altogether. As Lear continues, the threat concerned the very nature of Crow identity:

> If the traditional Crow experienced devastation in things they might do, they also experienced a terrible attack on what they might be. If we consider a vibrant culture, it is possible to distinguish:
>
> 1. *Established social roles*. These will include socially sanctioned forms of marriage, sexual reproduction, family, and clan; standard social positions such as warrior, squaw, medicine man, and chief; ceremonial rituals, and so on.
>
> 2. *Standards of excellence associated with these roles*. These give us a sense of a culture's ideals: what it would be, say, to be really outstanding *as a chief, as a squaw, as a warrior, as a medicine man*.
>
> 3. *The possibility of constituting oneself as a certain sort of person—namely, one who embodies those ideals*. I shall call such a person a *Crow subject*. This is what young Plenty Coups aspired to: to be a chief, to be outstanding as chief, and thus to be a living embodiment of what it was to be a Crow.[5]

Similarly, the question must arise whether an ethics of honor is equipped to deal with the possibility of changes such as what happened to the Crow. Honor is an ethics of being, where one's sense of worth and moral motivation stem from the value inherent to what one is. But the type of calamity described above threatens it in every facet. For example, one's reputation is important, we have seen, because it allows one to lead and inspire others to greater excellence. But if the criteria of

[5] Lear 42.

excellence are no longer comprehensible, then both esteem and moral inspiration fall away as well. If the world changes such that the place one had in the world no longer truly exists, then it is unclear what it can mean to maintain one's self as what one is. Thus, for honor as an ethics of being to be a viable ethical conception, it must be possible for a sense of honor to transcend the local character in which it may be based.

In the case of the Crow, this is exactly the challenge that had to be met by Plenty Coups. His achievement consisted of discovering and creating a new paradigm of being excellent as a Crow, in a way which nevertheless utilized and paid homage to traditional Crow values. In particular, he sought wisdom through the medium of dreaming. As a mere boy, he had experienced a dream which was taken by the tribe to be oracular in foretelling the coming of the white man and the end of the Crow way of life, but also providing instruction on how to survive:

> In the dream, Plenty Coups was visited by a Buffalo-bull person who turned into a Man-person. It was this Man-person who pointed out to him the radically new future he would have to face. The Man was a teacher figure, who exposed Plenty Coups to a new world and asked him whether he understood it. Whatever the ultimate spiritual source of this Man-person, we need to think of him as one of plenty Coups's internalized others.
>
> …The Man-person gave specific though enigmatic advice: *listen to the Chickadee person!* The Chickadee-person has that special capacity to listen to others and learn from them. "He is willing to work for wisdom." He is thus the bird-philosopher—in the sense that Plato gave that term: he knows that he lacks wisdom, but he yearns for it; and thus he is led to seek it from others. In psychological terms, the internal figure of the Man-person instructed young Plenty Coups to cultivate the development of the Chickadee-person as a new, but crucial, ego-ideal. Suppose young Plenty Coups were to succeed at this imaginative task. Then he would have an internalized other under whose gaze he would never feel shame when learning from others. Indeed, it would be an ego-ideal who would be encouraging him to listen and never miss a chance to learn with others.

> Suppose, too, that in these radically disruptive circumstances courage required one to face this new culture with openness and a willingness to learn. If that were the case, then young Plenty Coups would have dreamed himself into the new virtue of courage. And he would have done so using a traditional icon, the chickadee.[6]

In large part because of this dream, the Crow decided to ally with the U.S. government against other tribes. This was the way of the chickadee—they would learn from the white man, use his knowledge in order to go forward, and in so doing survive the cultural devastation and form new ways of being for the Crow. While they did still suffer some losses as a result of this partnership, history seems nevertheless to have vindicated their decision. As Lear conveys:

> And the U.S. government did treat the Crow as an ally. This fact did not stop the United States from repeatedly revising treaties at will and from encroaching on Crow lands. But, unlike other tribes, the Crow were not displaced from their lands, they were not put on a forced march, they did not have to walk a "trail of tears"—and they could correctly say of themselves that they were never defeated.[7]

Additionally, from 1917 – 1920, the Crow led delegations which eventually resulted in the Crow Act of 1920, which protected their lands, allowed them to retain the mineral rights to it, and prevented further attempts to allot it, ending seventy years of government land grabs. Additionally, Plenty Coups himself was instrumental in preventing further land sales of the Pryor and Big Horn mountains[8], fostering the development of a new, closer school for Crow children to attend[9], and setting his home as a national park in Montana for both Crow and white people.[10]

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[6] Lear 89 - 90.
[7] Lear 136.
[8] Lear 138 - 139.
[9] Lear 98.
[10] Lear 144.

Perhaps most significantly, Plenty Coups led his people in a transformation of identity, where amidst an irrevocably altered world they could find new ways of being, which nevertheless continued to embody distinctively *Crow* ideals. As mentioned, the wisdom of the chickadee is instrumental to this process in a general sense, and Plenty Coups admonished his people to utilize its virtue.

> Plenty Coups laid down an enduring collective ideal for the tribe as it faced new challenges. He drew upon ancient tribal beliefs—the chickadee has long been respected among the Crow—and put them to new use. He insisted that his people learn the white man's ways, but he idealized neither the white man nor his own tribe. …At feasts, he would lecture them: "You who were once brave have turned into pigs. I am ashamed of you. Self-pity has stolen your courage, robbed you of your spirit and self-respect. Stop mourning the old days, they are gone with the buffalo. Go to your sweatlodges and cleanse your bodies… then clean out your dirty lodges and go to work!" Yet he hoped that a new generation would be able to hold onto traditional Crow values and customs while synthesizing them with a white man's education.[11]

More specifically, he was able to translate the warrior virtues specific to Crow life and integrate them into a new conception in the changed world:

> Plenty Coups was also able to preserve some of the traditional warrior ideals in this radically new context. As we saw in the first chapter, at the dedication ceremony of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Plenty Coups laid down his coup stick and his headdress. But he also declared a new role for the Crow warrior… If one visits the Veterans' Memorial at the Crow Agency today one will see a list of distinguished Crow veterans who have served with or in the U.S. Military from the original Sioux wars, through World Wars I and II, the Korean War, Vietnam, Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq. On the wall there is a plaque, "Warrior's Homecoming" …There follows a description of how to perform the ceremony as well as advice about how to think about its meaning in these new historical circumstances. Thus a direct link is made between the ancient warrior values and the new and available role of combat veteran. And Plenty Coups's words paved the way.[12]

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[11] Lear 139 – 140.
[12] Lear 153 – 154.

As we have seen, then, what Plenty Coups was able to accomplish is to retain the meaning and power of traditional Crow excellence, transformed into a new incarnation for a world that had changed around his people. While events beyond the Crow's control threatened to bypass and undermine the grounds by which excellence was measured, that did not have to mean that the old roles were entirely lost, nor irrelevant in the face of the future. Despite some loss—even *great* loss—and some necessary alteration, there were still ways to maintain themselves *as Crow*, and thus to found ideas of excellence in terms of a pride and worthiness of maintaining what they were. An ethics of being was still possible, and still possessed vital power despite the collapse of the world to which the roles in question were initially attuned.

Honor Real and Fictional

Plenty Coups' example shows us that a sense of moral identity can survive and remain applicable to times and contexts beyond its original incarnation. As such, there is an additional significance to be seen in its relation to the realm of mythology. Joseph Campbell writes in The Hero With a Thousand Faces that

> The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man—perfected, unspecific, universal man—he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore (as Toynbee declares and as all the mythologies of mankind indicate) is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed.

> …Whether presented in the vast, almost oceanic images of the Orient, in the vigorous narratives of the Greeks, or in the majestic legends of the Bible, the adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit above described; a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return.[13]

It is perhaps striking to note both that Campbell's words describe precisely what Plenty Coups seems to have actually done (seeking a source of power through dreaming, and transforming the conception of what it meant to be a Crow through the otherworldly figure of the chickadee) and that they were written as a point about *narratives*. Only "perhaps" striking, because the resemblance between life and literature would be unremarkable if, in fact, life embodies the same forms and structures that characterize story-telling. Campbell himself certainly stressed that connection. MacIntyre, too, sees stories as fundamental to both human life and self-concept:

> I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories about wicked step-mothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mis-learn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama to which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in the original sense, is at the heart of things. Vico was right and so was Joyce. And so too of course is that moral tradition from heroic society to its

[13] Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces 19-20, 35.

> medieval heirs according to which the telling of stories has a key part in educating us into the virtues.[14]

In illustrating honor, I have made both implicit and explicit use of such a thesis. Examples of each of its parts have come at times from real life, but have in addition drawn heavily from the domain of fiction. Such examples have included tales of knights and samurai, fiction conceived for both adults and children, movies, and even a cartoon version of a comic-book character. In so doing I have depended on the premise that such stories are legitimate sources of genuine moral knowledge and illumination; such characters appropriate exemplars of what it means to exhibit honor. It is necessary now to defend that claim against some potential objections. Still further, I will argue that stories possess a power which in many ways makes them *more* suited to enlightenment than are non-fiction forms of inquiry. Seeing through these characters an example of how we might be, we can find in the heroism of stories a model for honor in life.

First, however, I want to briefly speak to a basic type of objection to the idea that literature can be a source of knowledge, moral or otherwise. Specifically, this objection concerns the metaphysical status of its components. Much ink has been spilled in disputation of whether fictional entities exist, what it means to refer to them (if, indeed, they can be referred to meaningfully), whether and what sorts of properties they have, and whether statements about them can rightly said to be true or false. For instance, Van Inwagen spends considerable effort in specifying just how "creatures of fiction" and their properties are to be understood in terms of

[14] MacIntyre 216.

predicate logic,[15] and Plantinga devotes several pages of The Nature of Necessity to the status of fictional characters across possible worlds.[16] My own view is that these sorts of endeavors tend to obfuscate rather than illuminate, and that they have little bearing on the question of literature's ability to edify. Although his interest does lie in the former types of questions moreso than the latter, Urmson's remarks are of note in this regard:

> Let us suppose I tell a story to a child and begin in one time-honored style; "There was," I say, "many years ago a little girl who lived with her grandmother on the edge of a forest." One can scarcely deny that this, if anything, is fiction, but is it false? Perhaps we do not know for certain, so let us ask ourselves whether it is likely that many years ago a little girl lived with her grandmother on the edge of a large forest. If we do ask ourselves the question, the only answer can be that there is an overwhelming statistical probability that it is true. …But it is surely too clear to need argument that in raising the question of truth, and resorting to statistical probabilities as the only way of answering the question, we have fallen into utter absurdity. If you ask me whether it is true that a little girl lived many years ago with her grandmother on the edge of a forest, I shall say "true" rather than "false"; but in the imagined context the question should not be raised. …If a story is told and it is asked whether it is true there are three possible answers: "It is true," "It is false," and "It is fiction," and the third answer is a way of saying that the question does not arise.[17]

Urmson states from the outset that he is not concerned with the sorts of truths about life that fiction may impart, but the observation is nevertheless important to understanding that end. To modify his example somewhat, imagine that I tell a group of children the story "The Three Little Pigs," and afterward ask them, "Now, which little pig made the wisest choice in building his house?" Suppose that a child replies: "That is a meaningless question—none of that really happened, and

[15] Peter Van Inwagen, "Creatures of Fiction."
[16] Alvin Plantinga, The Nature of Necessity sections 3 and 4 of chapter 8.
[17] J.O. Urmson, "Fiction" 155.

moreover, pigs can neither talk nor build houses and wolves can't blow houses down." While we might be impressed that the child could make such an observation in the first place, still we would surely conclude that she had missed the point. The pigs illustrate some truths about life; the importance of hard work, the dangers of taking shortcuts, and so on. Unlike our hypothetical child, most children and adults throughout history have learned such lessons in just this way:

> Reading stories and contemplating virtue are, in a manner of speaking, intertwined from the outset, not only in the history of literature, but also in the experience of beginning readers. We are recruited into the practice of reading fiction from the start, so to speak, under the presumption that tracking virtue is an appropriate aspect of appreciating fiction. There are no grounds to think that this alertness to virtue ever disappears in our reading or that it should disappear.[18]

In a similar vein, Carroll also reminds us, "it is probably no accident that we use the same word—"character"—to refer to fictional beings and the ensemble of virtues of existing persons."[19] Stories enlighten and tell us about ourselves in the world, and we can find examples of truth and honor amidst the verses and pages of fictional imaginings.

Carroll identifies three typical arguments against the idea that literature is a source of moral knowledge and education. The *banality argument* argues that the kinds of truths implied and conveyed by works of literature are, on the whole, trivial and already known by the audience. The *no evidence argument* claims that fiction provides either no or insufficient evidence for the putative truths it is supposed to convey. What evidence there is is either a too small number of cases

[18] Noel Carroll, "The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge" 17.
[19] Carroll 16.

to make generalizations, or such that the fictional cases have been contrived in advance so as to support some thesis or other, and thus are unreliable as examples. The *no-argument argument* objects that artistic works merely present themes without actually arguing for them; they exist to provide unity to the piece, not for the purpose of discussion and knowledge-building. Hence, determining the truth or falsity of the claims in literature is not part of literature's function, and so literature itself has little to do with imparting knowledge.[20]

Each of these arguments is flawed, and in what follows I will make some specific observations of why they fail. Before turning to those points, however, Carroll's own argument against all such arguments *collectively* is instructive:

> Rather than confronting these skeptical arguments one at a time, I would like to introduce a consideration that simultaneously problematizes each of these arguments in different ways. These arguments, we must remember, are philosophers' arguments. And yet it is extremely peculiar that philosophers should raise these particular objections against literature, since philosophy employs a gamut of techniques to produce knowledge and learning that are analogous to those found in literature. What I have in mind here specifically are thought experiments, examples, and counterexamples that are often narrative and generally fictional in nature. Such devices are frequently employed by philosophers to defend and/or to motivate their claims, moral and otherwise. Thus, if these strategies are acceptable forms of knowledge production in philosophy and literature contains comparable structures, then if philosophy conducted by means of thought experiments is an adequate source of knowledge and education, then so should literature be.[21]

Thought experiments clarify our intuitions, instantiate theoretical claims, and *show* us something that we are otherwise only *told*. Similarly, stories show us something about ourselves, suggesting and revealing truths in an important sense from the

[20] Carroll 4 – 7.
[21] Carroll 7.

inside out. We see ourselves in stories, as we for a time inhabit their world and experience it along with their characters. In so doing, we are confronted with decisions, ideas, and pictures of the world on a level that is often more powerful than what is conveyed by "pure" argument. A striking example is the visit of the prophet Nathan to King David, in the wake of David's great transgression. David has committed adultery and impregnated another man's wife, attempted (and failed) to cover up the deed, and then arranged the man's death by sending him to the front lines of battle to be abandoned. These events are the backdrop against which Nathan tells David a tale:

> [1] The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. [2] The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, [3] but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. [4] "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." [5] David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! [6] He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."
>
> [7] Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. [8] I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. [9] Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.'"
>
> …[13] Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."[22]

[22] 2 Samuel 12: 1 – 9, 13 *NIV*.

Presumably, in a propositional sense David knew already that what he had done was wrong. The impact of the parable, however, lies in having forced him to truly confront that fact and, more importantly, to see himself as he was. A story simultaneously imparts both a subjectivity and an objectivity that are otherwise absent: subjectivity in that we immerse ourselves in the story's world, vicariously living it along with its characters; objectivity in that going in, we don't know who those characters are and can judge them free of the rationalizations which so often color our views of ourselves. Although the story in question here was recited orally rather than read, Nussbaum's description is fitting when she says that we

> "read for life," bringing to the literary texts we love (as to texts admittedly philosophical) our pressing questions and perplexities, *searching for images of what we might do and be*, and holding these up against the images we derive from our knowledge of other conceptions, literary, philosophical, and religious. (Emphasis mine).[23]

David's reaction to the character of the rich man is an immediate and heartfelt outrage, illustrative of his base level moral commitments. Upon learning that he *is* that character, he cannot avoid the condemnation—leveled by himself, upon himself—of what he was. The power of stories is to engage us on the fundamental level of our questions, and putative answers, of what it is to be a (good) human being. What David saw—as so many others have seen—was his true ethical face reflected in a fictional mirror.

With this phenomenon in mind, I would like to return to the objections presented above. According to the banality argument, the sort of truths imparted by literature are such as are already known by the reader, and thus are trivial.

[23] Nussbaum, *Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature* 29.

However, in addition to what has already been said, there are at least two reasons to reject this idea. Both Carroll and Nussbaum emphasize that there is an important distinction to be made in determining what is trivial. Carroll reminds us that "What the philosopher discounts as trivial may in fact be revelatory to the plain reader and, for that very reason, can have a fair claim to being informative and educative for the intended audience."[24] Nussbaum takes the point further as she argues for the place of literary style in philosophical discourse:

> Most professional philosophers did not, I found, share the ancient conception of philosophy as discourse addressed to nonexpert readers of many kinds who would bring to the text their urgent concerns, questions, needs, and whose souls might in that interaction be changed. Having lost that conception they had lost, too, the sense of the philosophical text as an expressive creation whose form should be part and parcel of its conception, revealing in the shape of the sentences the lineaments of a particular sense of life.[25]

If we as philosophers are serious about the value of our discipline in improving the world, then we must be careful not to dismiss as trivial such truths as may be meaningful and newly-realized to the general public, our students, or others for whom we hope a similar love will be kindled. Beyond that observation, however, we must also be careful not to take this distinction too far, nor assume that, as philosophers, we are immune to blind spots or self-deception. Just as David saw through the vehicle of the parable a truth he on some level knew already, so we too may find in stories an unexamined facet of our lives or ethical insight. Hence, I by no means wish to suggest that the banality argument fails simply *in relation to*

[24] Carroll 10.
[25] Nussbaum 20.

non-philosophers, although that is an important observation. It also fails because the literary form is particularly suited to the expression and examination of certain important kinds of ideas.

The beginning of Fear and Trembling is a notable illustration of just this point, and Kierkegaard motivates the work by employing a narrative structure on two levels:

> There once was a man: he had learned as a child that beautiful tale of how God tried Abraham, how he withstood the test, kept his faith and for the second time received a son against every expectation. When he became older he read the same story with even greater admiration, for life had divided what had been united in the child's pious simplicity. The older he became the more often his thoughts turned to that tale, his enthusiasm became stronger and stronger, and yet less and less could he understand it. Finally it put everything else out of his mind; his soul had but one wish, actually to see Abraham, and one longing, to have been witness to those events. …What he yearned for was to accompany them on the three-day journey, when Abraham rode with grief before him and Isaac by his side.[26]

"Johannes de Silentio" is attempting to understand the story of Abraham, but that attempt can only be made from within the structures of story itself. What he endeavors to provide us is not just a question or an argument, but an experience—or rather, multiple attempted experiences of Abraham, of which one is reproduced below:

> It was early morning. Abraham rose in good time, embraced Sarah, the bride of his old age, and Sarah kissed Isaac, who had taken her disgrace from her, was her pride and hope for all generations. So they rode on in silence and Abraham's eyes were fixed on the ground, until the fourth day when he looked up and saw afar the mountain in Moriah, but he turned his gaze again to the ground. Silently he arranged the firewood, bound Isaac; silently he drew the knife. Then he saw the ram that God had appointed. He sacrificed that and returned home… From that day on, Abraham became old, he could not forget that God had demanded this of him. Isaac throve as

[26] Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling 44.

> before; but Abraham's eye was darkened, he saw joy no more. …In these and similar ways this man of whom we speak thought about those events. Every time he came home from a journey to the mountain in Moriah he collapsed in weariness, clasped his hands and said: 'Yet no one was as great as Abraham; who is able to understand him?'[27]

Could the same point have been made, the same sense of dread and confusion conveyed, the same sense of what it would have been to *be* Abraham have been imparted in a different style? I submit that it could not, that Kierkegaard's stylistic choice was necessary in order for the reader to grapple with the questions asked at the appropriate level. To truly ask what it was to do what Abraham did, to take on the dreadful burden—that requires us to go with Abraham, as Johannes tried to do, and to similarly collapse with weariness after returning from the mountain. Nussbaum writes that "any style makes, itself, a statement… about what is important and what is not, about what faculties of the reader are important for knowing and what are not."[28] In these examples we can see the truth of that claim, as well as a way in which the no-argument argument above is undermined. The story of Johannes and, more importantly, the imagined versions of Abraham and Isaac, of course provide themes and unity to the work. But in their form of so doing they also *say* something, something which would be lost in another form of speaking to us.

In similar fashion, the heroes of tales such as those I have appealed to and others also speak to us, and they engage our ethical reflection by providing pictures of what it means to live well. In this sense, it is unimportant whether a story is

[27] Kierkegaard 46, 48.
[28] Nussbaum 7.

fictional rather than historical, because what matters is the ideals with which a character either explicitly or implicitly asks us to identify. French advocates this position overtly:

> Modern warriors can forge admirable models for their own behavior by picking and choosing the best from among these historical and mythical warrior ideals. It makes little difference whether the men and women they hope to emulate ever lived and breathed. Some warriors of today may even feel that they have more in common with fictional figures such as Sigurd or Sir Gawain than with certain of their real-life civilian counterparts.[29]

Several points are notable in this regard. First is the inadequacy of the no evidence argument above. By standing for a way of living and meeting challenges, by confronting the question of what is worthy or shameful of a human being, these characters *are* the evidence. As Nussbaum notes, "literature can show us in rich detail, as formal abstract argument cannot, what it is like to live in a certain way."[30] Stories paint a picture of life and what it is to live it as a particular type of person, a picture that we must accept or reject. Most significantly, they suggest to us a sense of what is *admirable*, and if we find their characters to be so, we are answering for ourselves a question of what it means to live as a worthy human being. Reflection on our heroes has a direct and intimate implication to the question of what we shall choose to be.

In this regard I am reminded of two examples. The first will likely seem surprising, as it comes from a modern sitcom: the television show "The Big Bang Theory." In the scene in question, Sheldon—an extremely devoted superhero fan who is wearing a Superman T-shirt—is chatting with Penny in the laundry room.

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[29] French 232.
[30] Nussbaum, *Sophistry About Conventions* 227 – 228.

Suddenly, Leonard comes to tell them that their friend Howard's mother has had an accident, and they all need to meet him at the hospital. Leonard and Penny start to leave, and notice that Sheldon is just standing there.

Leonard: Come on, Sheldon, let's go!

Sheldon: To a hospital? Full of sick people? Oh, I don't think so.

Penny: Okay, well, your friend and his mother are there. We're going.

Sheldon: I can't.

Penny: Oh, don't tell me you're afraid of germs.

Sheldon: Not all germs. Just the ones that can kill me. The same way I'm not afraid of all steak knives—just the ones that might be plunged in my thorax.

Leonard: Uh, fine, I'll just tell Howard that you won't come because you're more concerned about your own well-being than his.

Sheldon: I would think he would know that!

Penny: Okay, you know what? You are unbelievable. You buy all these superhero T-Shirts, but when it's time for you to step up and do the right thing, you just *hide* in the laundry room!

Sheldon: …Fine. I'll go.[31]

Now, this scene and subsequent ones are of course played for laughs, and in a general sense "The Big Bang Theory" is not a work I would posit as a source of great moral insight. Nevertheless, Penny's argument and fictional appeal from *within* the show exemplifies the way in which fictional characters connect to our sense of what moral and personal commitments we hold, and whether our conduct

[31] "The Engagement Reaction": The Big Bang Theory seas. 4, ep. 23. Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., 2011.

truly bears these values out. Penny argues that if Sheldon really admires the characters whose emblems so often adorn his chest, then his own conduct should reflect that fact insofar as their standards are applicable to his life. Essentially, she shames him into acting by pointing out a dissonance between his endorsement of ideals of brave action in service of others, and his own willingness to allow fear to keep him from supporting a friend. Thus Sheldon is motivated to moral improvement, through values he in some way already accepts, personified in the form of characters whose lives he holds as worthy of emulation.

It is this same sort of appeal that we can see in the second and presumably less surprising example, namely Socrates' defense at his trial. He cites the character of Achilles as a justification for his own conduct, as well as an admonishment to some of the jury members, lest they believe that his status as capital defendant shows that he ought to be ashamed:

> But perhaps someone will say, Do you feel no compunction, Socrates, at having followed a line of action which puts you in danger of the death penalty?
>
> I might fairly reply to him, You are mistaken, my friend, if you think that a man who is worth anything ought to spend his time weighing up the prospects of life and death. He has only one thing to consider in performing any action—that is, whether he is acting rightly or wrongly, like a good man or a bad one. On your view the heroes who died at Troy would be poor creatures, especially the son of Thetis. He, if you remember, made light of danger in comparison with incurring dishonor when his goddess mother warned him, eager as he was to kill Hector, in words such as these, I fancy: My son, if you avenge your comrade Patroclus' death and kill Hector, you will die yourself—'Next after Hector is thy fate prepared.' When he heard this warning, he made light of his death and danger, being much more afraid of an ignoble life and of failing to avenge his friends.[32]

[32] *Apology* 28b – d.

Socrates makes an overt reference to someone widely regarded as heroic, charging the jury members to examine him and themselves with respect to their views of Achilles. His listeners may well have believed Achilles to be a historical, rather than mythical figure; Socrates' own view is perhaps less clear. But it is worth noting that the question is irrelevant in regard to the value of the claim. In citing *The Iliad*, he makes use of a story that forms part of the collective consciousness of his community; its values and arcs serve to shape and delineate the moral and intellectual categories by which he and his listeners understand themselves and the world. Thus again, we see moral argument and justification proceeding along the most fundamental levels of self-conception. In the sense described by MacIntyre above, Socrates sees himself as part of a story in which one must stand at one's post, doing one's duty to god and man The image of who he is, based in the story he sees his life as embodying, is the well-spring for notions of what is worthy according to the role he inhabits.

A Justification of Roles and Exemplars

Is this how we *should* view our lives, however? Samantha Vice is amenable to the idea that art can mirror life, positing that "all good art tells us *something* about ourselves and the world we live in."[33] Nevertheless, she worries about thinking of ourselves as characters and objects to MacIntyre's conception specifically:

[33] Samantha Vice, "Literature and the Narrative Self" 108, fn. 31.

> Rather than thinking of myself as an author, I may think that I am a character in a story already written for me, that I have a certain 'role' to play because the 'plot-lines' of my life are set down. In thinking in this way, we risk mythologising, restricting possibilities, misinterpreting events and people as we see them as irrevocable elements of a larger story of which we are protagonists. But stories are, precisely, artificial; their elements are arranged in the interests both of verisimilitude and aesthetic form. We may give our lives such form retrospectively, but it is far from apparent that we really do so as we live them, or that we should.[34]

She reinforces this sentiment by remarking of roles:

> ...it is arguably a sign of maturity to outgrow 'role-playing', to stop defining ourselves essentially with any role we may happen to take on and to become comfortable with or resigned to the kind of person we broadly are and to our inescapable limitations. Thinking of ourselves *as if* we were characters in stories presses us to think of ourselves in ways that are potentially dehumanizing and falsifying. Human beings are not always predictable; they do not fit into patterns, they are not exhausted by roles or plots.[35]

However, it seems to me that Vice's concern is misguided, and furthermore, that it is not entirely coherent. Part of her objection seems to be founded on an emphasis on freedom; a fear that the narrative view entails a pre-definition of a person's life into an externally generated box. She wants to preserve the possibilities and potential in a life that by her lights the narrative view must preclude. But how is that motivation captured by the idea that we ought to become "resigned to the kind of person we broadly are and to our inescapable limitations?" This would seem merely to replace a feared tyranny of a plot-line with a (not feared?) tyranny of chance, circumstance, and what is simply given—an inevitability of how I *find* myself, rather than what I *choose*. In addition, her closing remark warns us that

> The narrative view wishes us to think about ourselves in lesser, rather than greater works of fiction. In so doing we risk seeing ourselves and others

[34] Vice 103 – 104.
[35] Vice 105.

> falsely, of ignoring their irreducible individuality and ultimate impenetrability, through the consoling veil of our need for unity and meaning.[36]

However, the lines immediately prior to this claim tell us a hallmark of the greatest kind of literature:

> Characters that move us the most, that we care about most deeply, are those that transcend their role in the plot, that break into personhood despite the artifice of the world. We forget that that they are not actually persons because they remain mysterious, they grow beyond the words on the page and live on beyond their written end. I suggest that such characters are 'true to life'; that great art does, in he end, imitate life.[37]

While she is indubitably correct in this assessment, it is unclear how it can fit with the worry she has been describing. If characters have the power to transcend their roles in the plot in this way, to achieve a reality in spite of a constructed world, then the same considerations should apply to a real person viewed under the narrative conception. That is, if this possibility can be realized by fictional characters, then viewing one's real life as a story or one's self as a character need not be a straitjacket either. While some roles may be such that we are born into them, we can realize a greater potential by choosing to take on others.

We might see her, then, as protesting a narrative self-conception as antithetical to being one's true self. Specifically choosing to embody certain attributes is problematic, she writes, because

> if we really do try to think of ourselves as characters, we run the same risk as Isabel [from Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*], of too consciously 'moulding' or 'fashioning' our characters and decisions in a way that is not always conducive to real virtue or authenticity. The aim to be a certain kind of person, one that is aesthetically interesting or ethically commendable,

[36] Vice 108.
[37] Vice 108.

> may have tragically unintended results. The logic of motivation is such that self-consciously trying to be virtuous is not the same as *being* virtuous and such attempts may have the paradoxical consequence of undermining virtue. To try to have character is certainly not necessarily a bad thing but can, with the purest of motives, impair virtue. It is a matter of bad moral luck for the morally conscientious, that certain positive character traits may require spontaneity and self-forgetfulness, rather than self-awareness and conscious moral fashioning.[38]

Vice provides no examples of the kind of traits she has in mind (although a sense of humor may be a probable candidate; someone deliberately trying to be funny seldom actually is). Aside from that oversight, there are several reasons to reject this idea. While it is true that trying to be virtuous is not the same as being virtuous, this truth is part and parcel of the classical view that virtue must be *cultivated*. That is, simply performing a virtuous act or even a number of virtuous acts is not identical to acting *from* virtue, which requires practical wisdom and habitual activity. The fact that this process takes time, however, in no way entails that the seeker of virtue is inauthentic; he or she deliberately tries to develop traits of character in order to *become* an authentically good person. Thus, Vice's worry is similar to a mistake that is sometimes made about moral exemplars. By trying to emulate the exemplar, it is argued, we live someone else's life instead of our own, undermining our autonomy. However, this objection misunderstands the nature of emulation. The exemplar helps us to recognize virtuous traits, but those traits are *expressed* in ways particular to one's own life, abilities, and role. Socrates' commitment to practicing philosophy despite the threat of execution was akin to but not identical with Achilles' commitment to avenging Patroclus despite foretold

[38] Vice 103.

demise. Sheldon's supporting his friend despite his fear of hospitals is inspired by, but not identical to, the actions of the superheroes he admires. And a modern warrior such as French discusses who sees a model in Sir Gawain can embody a sense of courtesy and justice without seeing himself literally as a knight-errant.

In a similar sense, in taking on roles we do not thereby ignore or subvert our true selves, but choose what our true selves are going to be. We have seen in the previous chapter that integrity and pride in a role are compatible with one's having individual projects and commitments. By choosing to live in that particular way, one makes a statement about what sorts of things have value to a life well-lived, and what we should hold as important. Insofar as a fictional character inspires this choice, it is because through participating in his or her story we are led to reflect upon our own:

> The ethical effects of engaging with narratives are felt by everyone, not just some special group of victims or beneficiaries. No human being, literate or not, escapes the effects of stories, because everyone tells them and listens to them. …The questions we ask about such stories, and the innumerable other kinds that fill each day—Should I believe this narrator? Am I willing to be the kind of person that the storyteller is asking me to be? Will I accept this author among the small circle of my true friends?—these might well have been asked about any story from the beginning of time. And whether or not a given culture ever asks the questions openly, their implicit answers have determined to a surprising degree what that culture was to be.[39]

To return to Nussbaum's phrase, we are searching for images of what we might do and be, and in the heroes of such stories we find a call to excellence. An honorable character, whether fictional or not, can and should be the inspiration for the type of story we write ourselves.

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[39] Wayne C. Booth, "Why Ethical Criticism Fell on Hard Times" 289 – 290.

The Challenges of Ignorance and Relativism

In noting these effects, however, we are brought to a final difficulty. Our putative examples of honor may be such that, while admirable in some regards, we cannot help but find aspects of them or their culture to be morally objectionable. Thus a question arises as to whether they are truly suited to providing moral guidance, or still stronger, whether the attribution of honor to them might be fundamentally undermined. French raises but swiftly dismisses a version of this issue, arguing that the flaws of past warriors need not impede our adoption of their genuine virtues:

> Some educators, politicians, and members of the media fear that encouraging young warriors to associate themselves with the warrior traditions of the past will somehow lead them to become mindless, Rambo-like brutes with various outrageous bigotries and out-of-date values. Granted, some of the qualities that ancient warriors or warrior archetypes possess do not play well in the twenty-first century. But is it really so great a challenge to separate the wheat from the chaff? The key is to select for preservation only what is consistent with the values cherished by contemporary warrior cultures. Modern American warriors should only resurrect those traditions that cohere with the letter and spirit of the Constitution they have sworn to uphold and defend. For example, they can emulate the humility, integrity, commitment to "might *for* right," courtesy, and courage of a Round Table knight without taking on board his acceptance of an undemocratic, stratified society (where most of the population is disenfranchised and women and serfs are treated as property) or his dedication to "pursue infidels."[40]

However, we might wonder whether the objection can be resolved this quickly and simply. I have advanced the claim that a hallmark of honor is its holistic nature. The honorable person sees his self-worth and moral worth as linked throughout all areas of his life, and rejects the idea that the realm of the moral is separable from

[40] French 232.

the rest of his endeavors. Consequently, a person's excellence in embodying a given role is not independent of whether he is virtuous or vicious within other domains. If this is the case, then it seems that insofar as a warrior or his culture holds certain values and institutions that we find unjust, we would either have to conclude that to that extent he is *not* honorable, or else be committed to some form of relativism.

However, I believe that this is a false dichotomy, and we need not accept either of those conclusions. Michael Slote has raised a similar concern about virtue generally, suggesting that it may be a mistake to view anyone as virtuous in light of certain historical realities. For example, most people in Aristotle's time (including Aristotle himself) took slavery for granted, which we now view as horribly unjust. But if those subject to slavery were treated with such gross injustice, it hardly seems correct to attribute justice, and by extension, virtue, to Aristotle and his contemporaries.[41] Importantly, however, Slote does not apply this reasoning only to past societies, but to our own as well:

> I have no intention of being thus smug about current values and conceptions of morality. I have, for example, harped on the wrongness of slavery and the unavailability of that moral fact, and others, to the ancients, but I too admire Greek moral philosophy, and that very admiration causes me to wonder whether virtue is any more accessible nowadays than it was in classical antiquity. I assume that we now see aspects of right and wrong that the ancient world missed; may we not also fail to see things that the Greeks were able to see, and, more significantly, may there not be other moral issues on which both the ancients and ourselves are blind?[42]

[41] Slote, "Is Virtue Possible?" 71 – 72.
[42] Slote 74.

It seems to me that this is the correct way to approach the issue, in that our task as human beings is to draw from the collective understanding—and challenges to that understanding—of all stages and places of our mutual quest to realize the good of a human being. To ask whether it is correct to ascribe full virtue to a given person or society at any stage of history is undoubtedly to yield a negative response, but this does not mean that we cannot recognize the extent to which they do approach virtue, nor that in praising such aspects we must condone the ways in which they do not. In our own case, one can believe in an objective and holistic morality while recognizing the likelihood that some of our moral beliefs and actions stand in need of revision. In the same way, we can recognize the moral insights of past exemplars without committing ourselves either to relativism or undue criticism. As MacIntyre writes of rival moral traditions:

> It will thus sometimes at least be possible for adherents of each tradition to understand and to evaluate—by their own standards—the characterizations of their positions advanced by their rivals. And nothing precludes their discovering that these characterizations reveal to them features of their own positions which had hitherto gone unnoticed or considerations which by their own standards they ought to have entertained, but have not. Indeed nothing precludes the discovery that the rival tradition offers cogent explanations of weaknesses, of inabilities to formulate or solve problems adequately, of a variety of incoherences in one's own tradition for which the resources of one's own tradition had not been able to offer a convincing account.[43]

The recognition that a life well-lived is one in which we strive toward a true conception of human excellence is one that of necessity acknowledges the possibility of imperfections in that striving, yet seeks to reform and strengthen itself through the example of other aspirants to that virtue.

[43] MacIntyre 276 – 277.

In this way, an ethics of honor reforms and strengthens our modern conceptions of ethics by reintroducing a number of abandoned links in our moral understanding. To remember the concepts we have lost is to repair not only our moral ideas, but our moral selves. As I have argued, honor comprises pride, integrity, social role, and reputation, unified in terms of a whole life conceived as a narrative. In this way, the person of honor embodies a kind of heroism—the sense of one's self as both character and author of a story in which one's being is self-consciously a statement of what it is to be excellent. As previously mentioned about the word "character," the word "hero" is similarly used to denote both the protagonist of a story and one who exemplifies great virtue. To live with honor is to collapse these two definitions. Conceiving of ourselves in this way, we no longer wonder why we should be moral, because morality is rightly seen as derived from the good of a human being, rather than as an external system superimposed onto something with no essential nature.

The honorable person embodies one or more roles within a community of persons for whom seeking the good is a shared project. Some of these roles we are born into, some we take upon ourselves, as frameworks within which that good may be realized. As we have seen, there are rational standards on what can count as such a role; what can be legitimately conceived as a good description of *what I am*. As such, to answer that question well gives rise to an integrity born of moral identity, and a pride in one's specific expression of the good for a human being.

Both of these are possible because of the conceptual link between who I am as a person, my good as an individual, and the good of society as a whole, of which I am a part. In that respect, reputation is both an individual and a public good. Individual in that it is necessary to effectively exhibit virtues and to sustain certain classes of goods; public in that it allows one to inspire others to emulate oneself insofar as one's life contains genuine excellence. As part of an evaluative community for whom our answers to questions of value matter, our mutual task is to live in a way that stands for our best and most defensible conceptions of what is admirable in a human being. To do so is to abandon the illusory divide between moral and non-moral, and recognize the inseparability of moral worth and self worth. In that way we write of a unified life, as a protagonist who is worthy of imitation. Once we strive so to ascend, we are heroes, great and small—we are beings of honor.

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