“Lower than the Angels”:
The Unalienable Dignity of Human Imperfection

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ABSTRACT

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The Unalienable Dignity of Human Imperfection

A thesis presented to the Department of Classical Studies and B.A. Program in
Classical Archaeology & Ancient History

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In reflection upon the endless utopian social experiments to which humanity has turned
its thought for millennia, a re-evaluation of the human being’s true (constrained and imperfect)
nature and resulting worth must be undertaken. The most important contribution of Western
thought to human civilization is that each unique, imperfect human being is of moral, spiritual,
philosophical, and sentimental importance (i.e., is noble, of interest, and lovable). Through
review of the caste-based, impersonal system of ancient India, then proceeding through a salient
history of Western socio-political utopianism from Plato to Marx, a contrasting prologue is
formed in order to highlight the historical Euro-American value of the individual in opposition to
the impersonal emphasis present in the Hindu-Buddhist-Jain and Platonic-Marxist systems. This then is opposed by the cultural roots and evolution of the individualist tradition through review of the human-divine moral struggle of the Hebrew Bible; the Homeric, Sokratic, and tragic traditions of ancient Greece; the *Tristan* and Grail romances of the Middle Ages; the “Constrained” Enlightenment of Locke, Smith, Burke, and the American Founders; and finally the ironic, comically affirmative literature of James Joyce and Thomas Mann. The result is a body of evidence which leads to the sobering and ennobling truth that man is imperfect and denied earthly paradise, but in his imperfection, individual human triumph in spite of such folly is revealed to be the heroic sign of a creature which is both lower than the angels but higher in worth than any other.
“LOWER THAN THE ANGELS”:
THE UNALIENABLE DIGNITY OF HUMAN IMPERFECTION

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“The human being, the human baby, is a mosaic of animal and angel,” says the late scientist Jacob Bronowski, in reference to human physical development. This majestic statement signifies the burning-point of human existence — namely, our inherent duality. Made in the image of God, we are blessed with spiritual and moral wisdom (our “subtle” body); so, too, we are made with the (“gross”) body and instincts of the animal — the simple urges to survival, progeny, and material gain. Visually, we are a primate-sphinx: the distinctly human face imprinted upon a hairless simian body. This irrevocable distinction between the “human” and animal natures which, mixed together, inhabit each of us, thus, is the source of our human imperfection.

In reflection upon the endless utopian social experiments to which humanity has turned its thought for millennia, however, a re-evaluation of the human being’s true (constrained and imperfect) nature and resulting worth must be undertaken. Deviation from a norm, or “mold,” is the fount of individuality; those imperfections and faults the source of both what is evil and

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1 The title is an homage to the title of the first episode (or cinematic “essay”) of Dr. Jacob Bronowski’s seminal 1973 BBC television series, later released in companion book form, *The Ascent of Man*.

contemptible, as well as what is dear and charming. Such deviation, such imperfection, is the basic reality of human existence. The “godly” (or “angelic”) faculties, then, serve to bring us into balance, or ratio, with the reality of our creation. Our rational, spiritual, and moral abilities are but one side of our being, opposed by the clawing urges and cravings of the animal half which our higher faculties precariously straddle. This imperfect state of finite ability and limited moral, rational, and spiritual capacity is likewise the root of human folly, but also, equally, glory. Human moral capacity, for example, is heavily limited by the natural inclination to self-preservation and enrichment. So much so that one, if not God, should look on in awe of the range of human achievement in spite of such oppressive flaws — “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?”

is said on the one hand, humanity’s occasional meeting of the divine challenge highlighted on the other. We suffer the painful truth that indeed evil is normative: cruelty, violence, and dishonesty the most effective and efficient means to success. That any have seen fit to behave differently, let alone achieving success through such action, is truly a marvel. The human’s capacity for evil therefore highlights the capacity for goodness; human triumphs over the demons of sloth, avarice, and hubris would be of no note whatsoever if goodness, as in Rousseau’s view, were the default state of human nature. Likewise, also, that men and women have so masterfully explored the labyrinths of the human mind and the physical sciences as to have come to such extraordinary understandings of the nature of reality. In other words, that human beings have achieved so much in spite of such an equal and opposite capacity for evil and weakness is the first step towards recognition of the awe in which we should truly behold such achievement. The suffering to which we are condemned by our living is the source of our uniquely human strength, as well as dignity. Neither is there growth of character nor of fortitude

3 Psalms 8:4 (KJV).
without suffering, the world of pain to which we are bound being the basis for the development of human virtue and moral responsibility.

The most important and everlastingly precious realization and tenet of Western civilization is the interest in and respect for humanity as dignified in its imperfection: moreover, that each human being is unique and irreplaceable. Departures from this ethic surely do checkerboard history, often quite shamefully, but most often it is this wisdom which bubbles up to break through all other ethics. The greatest artistic summation of this understanding came with the Renaissance, wherein the Western world developed these truths, not only in the literary and philosophical spheres as it had done during the Middle Ages, but in the area of the visual arts to a level never before seen. The most famous works of the true Early Renaissance are the wall freschi decorating the Capella Brancacci in the Carmelite basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence by Masaccio (1401 – c. 1428). Of these, the scene which depicts The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (see p. viii) is the greatest and most representative of the understanding of mortal human dignity in vulnerability. As art historian Sister Wendy Beckett explains,

Everything, really, reverberates through the story through these two images. The beautiful male nakedness of Adam, and the sexuality of Eve, and their immersion in the truth. The angel [above them] isn’t really driving them out, they’re driving themselves out. It’s that human guilt. And this, I think, is terribly important. Because we think of the Renaissance as seeing humanity as sort of god-like. No! They saw humanity as dignified, as able to stand up and take responsibility. But they bore the weight of all the grief that mankind had ever known, all the guilts and the fears. They stand on the earth and they cast their own shadows. That’s what the Renaissance was about. Humanity as upright, suffering but responsible.4

It is this idea of individual freedom in mortal moral responsibility. As the primal ancestors (therefore, mainly symbolic characters) Adam and Eve are not precisely individuals; however,

they are here metaphors for the condition of our existence. Made in the image of their Creator, but also of the earth, they sinned, though through their choice to exit Paradise, they are the masters of their own destiny. As vision is only possible via the presence of both light and shadow, with their self-expulsion from the world of eternity, they cast their own shadows, providing the world with the basis for all which is dolorous and evil, but also intriguing and worthy of compassion. As aforesaid, it is a person’s faults which distinguish him or her from another, and therefore ultimately both what we loath or love in the other. Perfection, reminiscent of the Snow Queen of Hans Christian Andersen fame, is cold and non-human, if not indeed deathly so. A spectrum of “faults” exists, ranging from simple deviations from what is common to outright vices, but the entire umbrella of human imperfection is, via this discrimination, what brings dignified uniqueness, as well as simple variety to life. To restate a point once again, the human being is a mixture of the divine and the animalistic. Our consciousness is not common to other animals, therefore it is, one could say, our divine inheritance. The fact of our creation in God’s Image is, thus, the ultimate source of our worth; in the sage words of the late John Paul II,

Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence… At the same time, it is precisely this supernatural calling which highlights the relative character of each individual’s earthly life. After all, life on earth is not an “ultimate” but a “penultimate” reality; even so, it remains a sacred reality entrusted to us, to be preserved with a sense of responsibility and brought to perfection in love and in the gift of ourselves to God and our brothers and sisters.5

This Biblically-based relationship with a life-giving, morally-judging God is the stage which sets itself for a drama in which humanity strives to, in its imperfection, match itself to its Creator’s moral and spiritual requirements. The perfection of which the pontiff speaks is not general, unspecified, human perfection; rather, “perfection” of attitude brought about through affirmation of the imperfect world and life which is God’s gift. Our heroism, then, lies in our attempt to affirm and mold ourselves to the state of communion with them — to, through faith, see that the only perfection is in the imperfection of earthly reality. Our earthly creation, too, is in itself the source of our dignity; creation in the Image of the Creator the source of our value. For example, in the beginning, “Why did God create only one Adam and not many at a time?” asks the Talmudic Agadah (אַגָּדָה):

He did this to demonstrate that one man in himself is an entire universe. Also He wished to teach mankind that he who kills one human being is as guilty as if he had destroyed the entire world. Similarly, he who saves the life of one single human being is as worthy as if he had saved all of humanity.

God created only one man so that people should not try to feel superior to one another and boast of their lineage in this wise: “I am descended from a more distinguished Adam than you.”

Lastly, He did this in order to establish His own power and glory. When a maker of coins does his work he uses only one mould and all the coins emerge alike. But the King of Kings, blessed be His name, has created all mankind in the mould of Adam, and even so no man is identical to another. For this reason each person must respect himself and say with dignity:

“God created the world on my account. Therefore let me not lose eternal life because of some vain passion!”

All human life is precious in this view, stemming from the single human origin of the original couple, created in their Creator’s divine Image. That humanity be a multitudinous inflection of that ancestral oneness is the reason for our Biblical descent from a single human pair: the endless

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variety of human individual life is of unprecedented worth in view of its direct blood roots to the
very life-giving Breath of its Creator.

The fact to be discussed, however, is that such respect for the individual person, as
glorious and dignified in his or her folly and limitations, is a peculiarly Western value. While the
value of the individual is recognized in other societies, especially tribal hunter-gather
communities wherein the exact quality of one’s ability is what sustains the life of the tribe,7
many of the greatest and most sophisticated cultures, from Asia to Central and South America,
actively reject this emphasis. The most eloquently-stated model for the system valuing the
impersonal way of life is that of India (I.1), this study commencing with discussion of this socio-
religious model. The value of Hinduism — its most important tenets common also to Buddhism
and Jainism — is of elimination of ego. To be one with the cosmic consciousness which informs
all things, one must dissolve. One’s very “self” is to be discarded through submission to social
duty and observance of religious instruction. Release and enlightenment is achieved when all
attachment is let go to what one is expected to see as the delusions of this world. One’s action is
based upon the past action of others, thus the critical, responsibility-accepting faculty of the ego
is not to be nurtured. Life is a response to and an upholding of duty, rather than the actualization
of a choice, saddled with the responsibility to act ethically. This dichotomy, then, is the basis for
the ensuing comparison, namely of the strengths of the impersonal as opposed to the personal
value of the human person. The late scholar of mythology Joseph Campbell explains the
contrasting Western expectation for human development and life:

…[The Western spirit]… prospered in a manner that at that time was unique in the

world: not in the way of the compulsive “I want” of childhood (which is the manner and concept of ego normal to the Orient), but in the way of self-responsible intelligence, released from both “I want” and “thou shalt,” rationally regarding and responsibly judging the world of empirical facts, with the final aim not of serving gods but of developing and maturing man.8

The Indian, impersonal system equates the psychological identity of “I” with the simple id desire of immaturity. Therefore, such desire for individuation and independent, personal fulfillment is suppressed.

Once having explained the nature of the Indian view of the individual’s place in both the society and cosmos, the emphasis is shifted to the Western phenomenon of political utopianism (I.2). While the religions native to and having dispersed to other societies from India seek, so to say, to perfect the individual holistically, and then the society through spiritual and moral instruction, Western utopianism seeks to perfect society in order that the individual conform. The attraction seems to be two-fold: the lure of every material need being met, and then, most importantly, the bliss inherent in the loss of ego — of life lived impersonally, without self-directed moral responsibility. To actualize this dream, from the French Revolution to the Marxist idyll — this nonexistent earthly paradise born of human fantasy — human nature, indeed experience, must be forgotten, then changed. The reality that the human being is idle and avaricious is no obstacle along the Yellow Brick Road toward the magical land of Utopia; with the carrot of fraudulent material gain and the stick of looming terror, man is expected to bend to the needs of the all-powerful, ego-erasing state. The state, however, unwilling to accept the truth that its (fallible) leaders’ dream is an impossibility, press on, eliminating by gulag and gas chamber all those whose natural faults stands athwart the vain hope of perfection. Human reality

is the obstacle to fantasy, one which is utterly beyond human capability to create. This is hardly at its core to suggest that Indian civilization in its nearly infinite totality is worthy neither of awe nor of praise; simply that such luminous ideas, when mixed with Western rationalism, in view of history, often logically provide the incentive for grave evils.

The contrast, then, is made between these ideas and five other truly epochal and significantly representative modes of thought: the Biblical Jewish, Classical Greek, medieval European, Enlightenment, and twentieth-century literary. The most inclusive criteria for judging whether these traditions indeed represent the idea of the dignity of human imperfection is if in each one of them the reader may perceive the human being to be (1) noble, (2) of intellectual interest, and (3) lovable.

Firstly, the aforementioned Biblical tradition, especially that of the Jewish canon (II.1), wherein it is emphasized that man, made in one ethically-discriminating God’s Image, lives to struggle with his animal tendencies and learn to embrace, to the best of his abilities, however poor, the light of God’s Law and truth. The Jewish understanding of humanity is that human perfection is beyond absurd in its impossibility. That we strive through our God-given free will is what makes us great, not even that we succeed. The story of humanity, then, is of sarah (שָׂרָה), or struggle with God — or Yis’ra’el (יִשְׂרָאֵל). The depth of virtue but also folly and immorality depicted creates portraits of characters who never cease to intrigue. All are flawed, and yet also noble and worthy of philosophical inquiry. In addition to this, the Greek tradition (II.2) is discussed, its values eventually giving rise to a true respect for the individual, as opposed to the more communal emphasis of the Biblical canon. Here the individual is a citizen rather than a subject, and one’s chosen relationship to the reality of life is the source of one’s happiness and
ultimate success. From Odysseus’ choice of his human wife Penelope over the immortal goddess Kalypso, to Oidipous’ insistence upon finding the truth, to Sokrates’ relentless questioning of the world around him, mortality’s heroism and fragility capture our wonder, intrigue, and pity. Exploration of the medieval phenomena of courtly love leading then to the Tristan and Grail romances (II.3) sheds light upon a European tradition, melded together from both the Greek and Biblical spheres, which emphasizes the individual quest for both love and personal fulfillment in opposition to a society which did not value the intricacies of human reality. The sociological angle is brought to fruition with discussion of the philosophers who forged the basis for the American Revolution, as opposed to the French (II.4), wherein a free market society which not only respected but utilized human imperfection came to be. Then, finally, the highest artistic manifestation of such affirmation of the imperfect nature of human reality, the works of James Joyce and Thomas Mann: that we are indeed perfect in our imperfection — partly of, but lower than the angels — namely, noble, intriguing, and lovable. Level-headed respect for the undeniable facts of human existence leads to conditions of spirit, mind, and society wherein the individual is truly free (within all expectable historical limitations) to follow his or her unique, untraveled path.

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9 The philosophical and literary advances of the Middle Ages lit the original spark which ignited the explosion of the Renaissance — thus, these seminal medieval ideas are discussed rather than their Renaissance reincarnations.

10 All of our achievements are worthy of praise in view of our faults; therefore, ironically, says Seneca the Stoic, “... do not require [one] to be on a level with the best of men, but merely to be better than the [wicked]...” Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Of a Happy Life, Book XVII in Minor Dialogs Together with the Dialog “On Clemency” (Bohn’s Classical Library Edition), trans. Aubrey Stewart (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900). Wikisource. Accessed April 28, 2016. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Of_a_Happy_Life/Book_XVII.
THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTED IMPERSONALITY
1. **India: A Contrastive Microcosm**  
(SUBMISSION TO *Dharma*)

I.1.1 **Hindu India: The Pursuit of Moksha**

To embark on a journey to behold the full majesty of the West’s enthronement of the lovably ungodly individual, we must begin in India, the motherly point of origin for much which is great east of Suez, and the most iconic realization of the ultimate contrasting philosophy.¹ A civilization based upon rejection of personalized existence as its ideal, in opposition to the Euro-American cultivation of uniqueness and originality, is herein perfectly exemplified. The native religion(s) of India laboring as methods for the sublimation of the individual to a greater, undifferentiated consciousness embody this doctrine.²

The ultimate pursuit for any Hindu is that of *moksha*, “release,” but not simply release from worldliness or suffering; it may be characterized further as “release from delusion.”³ Namely, ones’s specific self: the physical and psychological vehicle of the cosmic consciousness being the ultimate delusion. “Release” from *being* any one or any thing — indeed from the very

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¹ The great Asian civilizations of China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, *et al.* are of no less note, but do not as neatly present a case study of an anti-individualist society as traditional Hindu India. The common religion, too, of the Asian world, Buddhism, in coming from India, embodies much of the traditional Indian view of humanity and consciousness, much of its doctrine arguably also explainable in Hindu terms.

² Hinduism, the most ancient of all major religions, as well as those of India, is the tradition most representative of Indian civilization, its tenets, in varying but important ways, informing the other native religions of Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism.

concept of being itself — is the mokṣa for which every Hindu strives through countless incarnations. Of importance to this vein of thought, once again, is the oneness of what in Freudian terminology are two concepts, namely the ego and id. The id is the psyche’s animalistic mechanism of desire for that which is immediately and superficially beneficial to the ego, the ego, the individual’s conscious concept of him- or herself in the present moment. Cultivation of the ego and its critical faculties — including itself, with the disciplinary moral assistance of the superego, managing the impulses of the id — comprises much of the Western process of maturation. The Hindu aim in maturation is the expunging of individual self-concept from the psyche. Regarding the “four ends” which govern Indian life, as well as this principle, Campbell explains further:

In the classic Indian doctrine of the four ends for which men are supposed to live and strive — love and pleasure (kāma), power and success (artha), lawful order and moral virtue (dharma), and, finally, release from delusion (mokṣa) — we note that the first two are manifestations of what Freud has termed “the pleasure principle,” primary urges of the natural man, epitomized in the formula “I want.” In the adult, according to the Oriental view, these are to be quelled and checked by the principles of dharma, which, in the classical Indian system, are impressed upon the individual by the training of his caste. The infantile “I want” is to be subdued by “thou shalt,” socially applied (not individually determined), which is supposed to be as much a part of the immutable cosmic order as the course of the sun itself.4

The conflation of the undisciplined animal desire of the id and the focusing self-assertion of the ego informs the Sanskrit phrase ahamkāra, “making the noise I.”5 In this way, individuality is made equivalent to emotional and moral immaturity,6 dharma (“duty”) — Freud’s superego —

4 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p. 64. As Campbell explains, “In the Orient, ‘I’ equals ‘I want.’”
being the required method for achieving maturation, full humanization, and finally *mokṣa*. The intended result of all religious devotion, spiritual doctrine, indeed every act of life, is this end, namely the elimination of “I.” The journey which is life (namely one’s current incarnation), through complete submission to *dharma*, is to cleanse the person of attachment to the things of this world, namely one’s “self.” The Sanskrit word often translated as “self,” *ātman*, does not in fact relate at all to the linguistic sense of consciousness enclosed within an individual person and psyche.7 The word *brāhman*, specifically translating to “holy power,” but connoting “a metaphysically conceived ground of all being,”8 is the power to which the concept of *ātman* is directly related. All things and all beings are manifestations of *brāhman*; as Campbell interprets it, “…all is the manifestation of a self-giving power (*brāhman*) that is transcendent and yet immanent in all things as the self (*ātman*) of each.”9 The *ātman*, then, is the word for undifferentiated consciousness clothed in the delusions thrown up by the cycle of creation (*saṃsāra*). Thus, in yoking the *ātman* consciousness to the cosmic power of *brāhman*,10 the Hindu unwraps the layers of attachments and delusions from his or her own psyche to reveal nothing but the beatific realization of undifferentiated oneness with the energy of the universe.

Just as walking persistently through a strong and unrelenting wind, for better or worse ruffling the hair and certainly the spirit, the devotions and caste positions of each incarnation similarly are to untangle and strip away the person’s attachments to the delusion of unique consciousness, namely its unique physical and psychological casing. The culmination of this

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7 Namely the Western psychological understanding (shared by Freud, Jung, Adler, Maslow, et al.) which speaks of the “self” as consciousness differentiated by individual psychological uniqueness.


10 The goal of yoga (from the Sanskrit root *yuj*) being the “yoking” of the personal consciousness to the cosmic.
metaphysical outing being the very release from it, the lessons learned in its process preparing and conditioning one for eventual worthiness. In this way perfection is to be achieved.

1.1.2 **Dharma & Caste:**

**Impersonal Life Action as Fulfillment of Cosmic Duty**

The dominating force of all Indian life is *dharma*. Its etiological origin, as well as ultimate method for its explanation, are natural and cosmic rather than human. The principle of “as above, so below” guides and is mandated: the sun rises in accordance with its duty to light the world and sets to lull the world to sleep; the moon waxes and wanes signaling the passing of the months; the plants grow, bear fruit, then die. Just as nature performs its duty, so must earthly man and woman.\(^{11}\) Every action of life is to be carried out in accordance with *dharma*, all decisions informed thereby. From the root *dhr*, meaning “to hold up, support, carry, bear, sustain, or maintain,”\(^ {12}\) in performing one’s *dharma* one joins all things in literally and metaphysically holding up the universe. Neglect of one’s *dharma* leads, thus, to obvious cosmic consequences. (The cosmological and metaphysical interpretation of *dharma* thus creates powerful incentive for its upholding — none wishing to be laden with the guilt of cosmic chaos.)

*Dharma* is experienced by the Indian person via the caste system. The bounds of the castes — *brāhmaṇas* (also spelled *brahmin*), *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*, *śūdras* — are the bounds of each person’s existence. One’s duty is mandated and dictated by and from birth, to be accepted without question and without criticism.\(^ {13}\) There is nothing which can be done, felt, or

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\(^{11}\) Campbell, “The Individual in Oriental Myth,” in *Myths of Light*, p. 62. “Dharma is the order that supports the universe, and therewith every being and thing within it according to kind.”


\(^{13}\) Campbell, “The Mystical Traditional of India,” in *Myths of Light*, p. 39.
experienced which does not comply with the dharma of one’s birth caste. Individual desires, let alone impulses to a career or personal attachments not proscribed by one’s caste, are to be entirely eliminated. In Jungian terms, where the expectation generally is that the individual not completely identify with his or her social role (persona), in India, this “mask,” as Jung calls it, is precisely that with which the Indian must fully identify. The brāhmaṇas, the priests, lead the community in the rituals of sacrifice and through them interpret the will of the gods; the kṣatriyas, the warriors, rule the kingdom and administer justice; the vaśyas, the merchants, conduct their business and maintain the kingdom’s economy; the śūdras — all ranging from common tradesmen and artisans to peasants, beggars, servants, and slaves — serve the other three in the poverty to which they have sentenced themselves through their actions in previous incarnations. Karma (“action”) determines one’s caste station in life. One who has lived a life of virtue and perfect submission to dharma in one life will be reborn as a noble brāhmaṇa or prince in the next; a life of vice, sloth, and egoism dooms one to rebirth as a stinking śūdra to be duly loathed and derided. (As karma determines caste, all ignoble beings — śūdras — are not to be the objects of Christian-style compassion but of disgust, for their impurity of soul is the reason for their vile squalor. Those whose sins in previous lives are even more heinous are relegated to those below śūdras, namely the “untouchables” — those too spiritually and physically polluted to be touched by any other person. Those so evil as to be below even “untouchables,” are reborn as lice, weeds, stones, or anything else of equal indignity.) Complete submission to dharma demonstrates, produces, and releases a virtuous soul, whereas any personal conception of one’s  

14 Carl Gustav Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, trans. Richard Francis Carrington Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 190. “...[A] kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual.”  

15 If not specifically a woman of that caste. See I.1.3 – 4.
own individual sovereignty sends one to a hell in the interim between death and rebirth,\(^\text{16}\) never-ending rebirth, and progressively loathsome incarnations. That the law of the universe should be the law of man and woman is never to be questioned. A complete acceptance of an all-encompassing oneness of the law of custom and the cosmos to be adopted.

### I.1.3 STORY: THE PROSTITUTE BINDUMATĪ

Among the most vivid Indian depictions of (complexly) heroic submission to \textit{dharma} is the popular story of the prostitute Bindumatī, recorded in a second-century B.C.E. Buddhist work, the \textit{Milindapañha}.\(^\text{17}\) Not only is it a story of \textit{dharma}, but also of \textit{sat}. \textit{Sat}, from the verb “to be,” is the root of \textit{satya}, meaning “truth” (the female participle of \textit{sat} being \textit{satī}).\(^\text{18}\) It is popularly believed that one who has performed one’s duty perfectly and flawlessly may perform magic. A so-called “Act of Truth” is performed whereupon one, upon drawing inward, says to oneself that if one has performed one’s \textit{dharma} perfectly and flawlessly, then whatever is desired should be so — and be so it shall be if impersonal perfection has indeed been achieved.\(^\text{19}\)

During the reign of the Buddhist emperor Aśoka (c. 269 – 232 B.C.E.), the monsoon rains had fallen inordinately heavily, so much so that the holy Ganges began to rise with such swiftness as to threaten to flood the emperor’s capital of Pāṭaliputra (modern Patna). As a result, all of the city, including the emperor himself, had gathered along the riverbank to stand aghast at the source of the ensuing disaster, the desperate people calling to their ruler and begging

\(^{16}\) See I.1.5.


\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 110.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 111.
guidance in the face of the city’s destruction. As the water rose to a critical height, Aśoka called out to his subjects, “Is there none here who can perform an Act of Truth that the waters of the most holy Ganges may flow back upstream?” In answer to their ruler’s question, the brāhmaṇas consulted their hearts, but of all of them, not a single one could perform the necessary Act of Truth. (Their high status as brāhmaṇas had been secured via perfection of heart and action in previous lives, but in this life, none was of sufficient virtue.) Every man and woman of the kṣatriyas, not excluding the very emperor himself, vainly attempt the feat as well; each of the vaiśyas, too, finally joining their betters in failure.

At the very bottom was an elderly prostitute; Bindumatī by name, she began to mutter to the effect of “I believe I can perform an Act of Truth.” To this her neighbor, standing beside her, replied, “Oh, Bindi, for all our sakes, hurry!” Bindumatī, therefore, drew herself inward and did indeed pronounce her Act of Truth; and, thus, the river did indeed begin to flow back upstream.

All those gathered along the riverbank broke out into cheers of excitement, gossiping amongst themselves in speculation as to just who had performed this wonder of spiritual magic. The emperor ordered to be told who had performed the Act of Truth, and after some time the facts finally filtered up through the gossip. In shock that among the most repulsive and base of his subjects had rescued the city from destruction, Aśoka angrily called for the lowly Bindumatī to be brought to his presence. Upon appearing before him, the emperor insulted her at length and inquired incredulously as to whether indeed it was she who had performed the Act of Truth.

The humble crone replied, “I have an Act of Truth which would turn the world of the gods upside down if I so wished.”

“What, then, loathsome and aged whore, is your Act of Truth?” the emperor asked.
“It is thus: if in the performance of my lowly dharma I have never once fawned upon the handsome, the wealthy, and the noble, nor refused the foul, the unsightly, or the destitute, duly providing service to all, let the waters flow back upstream.”

As Campbell interprets this, “There was nobody there. She was gold; she had no judgement, she was doing her duty.” Bindumati’s heroism is in her total submission to her duty. Comically, complexly, and ironically, she is the perfect Hindu: identifying entirely with her dharma, never questioning the squalor of her station and profession, and divesting herself of any critical opinion of her situation. So pure of heart is she that, indeed, she could perform any Act of Truth. Nevertheless, she is still of her despised, filth-coated caste. Jesus would certainly have lauded Bindumati as a woman of honor and virtue, as would, possibly, a like-minded Christian, or even Jewish king. The shame that none of a higher caste could perform the Act of Truth would have offended Ashoka equally as much as the identity of its true source, once it had been performed. The words of Christ in Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth,” let alone, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3), do not apply here in the slightest. Though those within her caste may praise her, she, despite her accomplishment, is to be derided no less than before by those above. In the following incarnation, assuredly, she would be blessed with a great reward — possibly queen of Benares — but not then. As Campbell explains,

She was a śūdra; that is her function — mice cannot become lionesses. This is something to remember with respect to the caste system. By performing his duty no matter where, the individual participates in the glory and power of the universe

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20 Ibid., p. 112.

21 Though far more likely in lore than in reality.

22 King James Version (KJV).
and becomes a conduit of that power. Nobody chooses to do anything; everybody is doing what he ought, and so this grand thing, the universe, spins on.\textsuperscript{23}

Regardless of her actions, Bindumatī is still a prostitute of the śūdra caste, and she is to be treated accordingly. That she has vacated herself of individual character in oneness with her dharma is her achievement; it is thus the source of her future reward and that which is to be admired and pursued by all. The impersonal life she has lived is the key to her symbolic heroism.

\textbf{I.1.4 SAT & SATĪ: IMPERSONAL SACRIFICE IN MARRIAGE}

That a man and woman should choose each other in marriage is unthinkable to the traditional Hindu. As one chooses neither to be born nor to die, one does not choose one’s spouse. Along with the Act of Truth, marriage may be opined to be the ultimate act of upholding dharma. In marriage, the Hindu man and woman (impersonal metaphors for the male and female cosmic powers) are united for the purpose of bringing forth the next generation and preparing it for the upholding of its dharma. Sat and satī (man and woman, one could say, in their full righteousness and dharma-obeying impersonality) are made one and sanctified in their roles as the guardians of civilization and dharma itself. In obedience to the dharma of one’s caste, marriages are arranged by the families and brokers based upon who is appropriate for whom with respect to caste, wealth, and connections. (To this day, marriage brokers are advertised in Indian newspapers and on Internet sites.\textsuperscript{24}) Neither spouse sees the other until the lifting of the veil, when all, including one’s dharma from that moment on, is revealed.\textsuperscript{25} Though modern India is

\textsuperscript{23} Campbell, “Hinduism: The Pursuit and Escape of Dharma,” in \textit{Myths of Light}, p. 112.

\textsuperscript{24} For example, see the aptly-named http://www.freesathi.com.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 114.
changing socially, culturally, and morally before our eyes, traditionally, a marriage based upon mutual romantic, personal, and sexual attraction is unthinkable. Any such match would be an utter flouting of dharma, for any number of reasons, though probably most importantly, because, as aforesaid, “mice cannot become lionesses” — specifically, if one is born to a certain caste, one’s ancestors performed their dharma a certain way, and one’s elders insist upon the way of the ancestors, then one is bound by countless bonds to obey one’s betters. For a mouse to become a lioness would be for a kṣatriya to marry a śūdra, or any other combination; as love knows no concepts, fusion of the sons and daughters of different castes would be far more than the unholy pollution of bloodlines. If, however, two vaiśyas wished to marry of their own accord, then it would be equally unacceptable. Referring again to the Indian fusion of “I” and “I want,” for one to desire — let alone to seek to fulfill, not to mention legitimize, one’s desire for anything other than eventual release — in this or any other way is an unconscionable flouting of dharma. A mature, virtuous person upholds his or her dharma, while an infantile, immature, indeed selfish, person abandons it in favor of pleasure and gain. Kāma, “desire” for pleasure, is forever in opposition to dharma, by which it must be controlled: to embrace kāma rather than dharma, as the pursuit of any love marriage would be characterized, is only to be discouraged and ruthlessly punished. Such disgraces on the part of women are often the source of so-called “honor killings.”

None of these characterizations are to insult this system, frivolously labelling it “loveless.” Though the love of the troubadours, so to say, is in complete antagonism to the Indian norm, this is not to say that the Indian experience of love is bankrupt. As Professor Campbell noted in the second of the three famous interviews with journalist Bill Moyers which became the television series and book The Power of Myth,
…[T]o say a word for the other [system]… one has to recognize that in domestic life there grows up a love relationship between the husband and wife even when they’re put together in an arranged marriage. In other words, in arranged marriages of this kind, there is a lot of love. There’s family love, a rich love life on that level. But you don’t get this other thing, of the seizure that comes in recognizing your soul’s counterpart in the other person. …[T]hat [is what] has become the ideal in our lives today.26

This love, however, is meant to be all-consuming. The rite of satī (often Anglicized as suttee) — that a widow either throw herself in her loving grief upon a dead husband’s funeral pyre or into his grave to be burned or buried alive — is a pure and, to many, horrific, manifestation in ritual form of the trans-personality expected of the Indian wife.

The goddess Satī (also known as Dākṣāyaṇī), a consort of the god Śiva, immolated herself in a great fire to uphold her husband’s honor after her father ferociously disapproved of their marriage. The feminine word satī derives, as aforesaid, from the root sat (“to be”), the root also of satya (“truth”); a-sat, meaning “un-real” or “untrue” also connotes “wrong,” “wicked,” and “vile.”27 Satī, the feminine particle of sat, as Campbell writes,

…is the female who really is something in as much as she is truly and properly a player of the female part: she is not only good and true in the ethical sense but true and real ontologically. In her faithful death, she is at one with her own true being.28

The feminine participle of a-sat, likewise, is a-satī, connoting an “unfaithful, unchaste wife.”29

The woman — citing, perhaps, a lack of romantic and sexual attachment to her late spouse and wishing to live on in pursuance of her own life ends — who refuses to die in agony in the flames

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
of her husband’s funeral pyre or the earth of his grave is as “unchaste” as if she had committed physical, sexual adultery. The English idiom for the action often related to the satī ritual is “to commit” satī; the Sanskrit connotation most closely fits “to become” satī. In doing so a woman “becomes” something, “is” something; the woman who refuses (a-satī) is “nothing.”

The French Indologist Jeannine Auboyer gives an eloquent and comprehensive description of the history of the practice:

Although condemned by the brāhmaṇic caste, suicide by a widow was becoming increasingly fashionable during the period which is the subject of this study [c. 200 B.C.E. – 700 C.E.], especially among the kṣatriyas, where it was perhaps the consequence of polygamy. The first dated mention of this custom goes back to AD 510, …the custom [becoming] widespread subsequently, especially in southern India. …This act was considered the supreme sign of conjugal fidelity, which is why a woman who performed it was named a satī or ‘true wife’.

Concerning the fate and expectations of those wives who refused such “fidelity”:

The lot of the widow who survived her husband was far from enviable. The disappearance of her husband placed her in an inferior position, legally as well as socially. Not only might she no longer take part in the family’s sacramental life, she had also to remain absent, thenceforward, from social reunions and ceremonies, where her presence would have struck a note of ill omen… Her fate was simply to live a chaste and austere life, sleeping on the ground, taking only a single meal each day, one without honey, meat, wine or salt, dividing her time between prayer and religious rites, and possessing only one hope: to be married to her husband again in a future life, and meanwhile to satisfy his soul by her faithfulness and good conduct until the moment of her own death. Furthermore, she was now subject to the direct authority of her eldest son in his capacity as head of the family. There was no question of her leaving her home and settling down elsewhere, for, by her marriage, she had become part of her husband’s gotra [“clan”]…

The fate of young childless widows — sometimes scarcely nubile when married — was particularly cruel, for they were obliged to submit to exactly the same rules, and, consequently, normal life ceased to exist for them. They could look forward to one possible amelioration of their lot: the head of the family might ‘enjoin’ them to remarry, so as to ensure a male descendance; not with a

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man of their choice, certainly, but with their deceased husband’s closest relative, usually his brother — even if he already had a wife. This was remarriage ‘by assignation’ (niyoga), and was probably a survival of the ancient custom of compulsory marriage with a childless brother’s widow (levirate), but by the sixth century it was already becoming a thing of the past.\(^{31}\)

The brutality of the treatment of the living widow is a testament to the social and religious encouragement of satī over refusal of it. With the death of her husband, the woman has fulfilled her duty as his wife and bearer of his children, her very existence from the moment of their marriage being specifically and only as his wife. A vivid example of the scriptural justification for the satī rite is collectively outlined in the Parāśara (IV.32.33) and the Brahmāpurāṇa (Gautamīmāḥātya) chapter 10.76 and 74:

\[Śaṅkha and Aṅgiras say ‘she who follows her husband in death dwells in heaven for as many years as there are hair on the human body… Just as a snake-catcher draws out a snake from a hole by force, so such a woman draw her husband from (wherever he may be) and enjoy bliss together with him. In heaven she being solely devoted to her husband and praised by bevyes of heavenly damsels sports with her husband for as long as fourteen Indras rule. Even if the husband be guilty of the murder of a brāhmaṇa or of a friend or be guilty of ingratitude, the wife who dies (in fire) clasping his body, purifies him (of the sin). That woman, who ascends (the funeral pyre) when the husband dies, is equal to Arundhatī [the goddess of chastity and wifely devotion] in her character and is praised in heaven. As long as a woman does not burn herself in fire on the death of her husband she is never free from being born as a woman (in successive births).\(^{32}\)

This provides grounds to restate the aforesaid: that a widow is a woman who has fully completed the performance of her dharma, and must, on pain of the aforementioned disgraces and miseries,

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\(^{32}\) Sharma, *et al.*, pp. 31 – 32. It is important to note that opinion of the practice of satī was never entirely uniform: “A. S. Altekar points out that this passage [from the Parāśara], to which he refers as IV.31 – 32, ‘is an interpolation, because two verses earlier, Parāśara permits a widow to remarry,’” n. 195, p. 101. (See Anant Sadashiv Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* [New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962], p. 126, cited in Sharma, *et al.*) Furthermore, for the sake of fairness, “It should be borne in mind here that ‘there were old commentators who were opposed to the practice of satī,’” n. 196, p. 101. (See Dr. Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmaśātra, Vol. II*, part 1 [Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 1941], p. 631, cited in Sharma, *et al.*)
become one in death with her husband. Being born as a woman at all, of whatever caste, is a form of punishment and perpetual suffering in itself, the object being to teach the soul towards the acceptance of dharma through the misery of womanhood. The husband’s death ends her commitment to her own life, and in their mutual death they both achieve the bliss of immortality, she purifying him of all sin and past misdeeds. Her honor is maintained in her obedience to him, and the upholding of his honor in her sacrifice. In marriage, man and woman are one life joined, and the woman “carrying on” with her life in the Western sense subsequent to his demise is as ignoble as it is unheard-of. Marriage as the voluntary, choice-based joining of two individuals who through their attachment enter into a relationship of trans-personal union is, simply, an act of intolerable immaturity. Life in marriage is to be lived symbolically, rather than “personally.”

I.1.5 THE PURGING FIRES OF TORTURE:
“Purgatorial Hell”

“Hell” is not an eternal destination for those souls who have broken the commandments of a supreme Deity; neither is Purgatory the place where souls, though eligible for eventual admission to Paradise, are purged of their reversible sins. The factor of reincarnation being the key difference between cross-cultural conceptions of death, what one could term “purgatorial hell” serves the purpose of punishing the soul for failing to respond to the ego-eliminating intentions of religious and social instruction. In other words, its purpose is to further rid the “individual” of “individualism.” After death, the soul, on the basis of the deceased’s action in the past life, is carried via its own readiness to a specific heaven or hell. Furthermore, the following

33 See II.3.

34 In other words, purely for the sake of argument, as with the ego and id in Freudian parlance, the Judeo-Christian concepts of Hell and Purgatory are “fused.”
life itself is considered a form of purgatorial punishment — the suffering of another lifetime’s dharmato divest one of egoism. Campbell explains:

The idea is that reincarnation is the counterpart in the Orient of purgatory in the West. When you die, and are so bounded by your ego and its intentions and desires and fears that you can’t open to the transcendent revelation of the beatific vision which would annihilate egoism, then you have to be purged (purgatory) of your ego. ...In the Oriental tradition, you would be reborn to have another chance. So you keep getting reborn until you are cleansed of ego. But in between reincarnations you will go either to a heaven or to a hell, depending on how you behaved. If you responded as well as you could to the disciplines of your life, you will go to a heaven for which you are ready. If you resisted, you will be sent to a hell where real tough deities will small you up and make you sorry for yourself.35

One’s ego, as noted, is the ultimate thing to be erased, and the greatest sin is that of holding to it. Each visit to the hell appropriate to one’s sin is an ego-destroying experience, wherein one is purged of attachment to one’s self and made ready to begin a new life of accepting the selflessness taught by dharma. As release from the cycle of life, suffering, and rebirth (samsāra) is the soul’s highest desire, rebirth is its own kind of purgatory. Whether one is reborn as a human or as the most repulsive of animals, the suffering of life and the doctrine of dharma is meant to liquidate the ego and eventually bring about mokṣa upon a longed-for death far in the future. Where Dante’s Hell, for example is eternal, this concept is purely “purgatorial.”

**I.1.6 THE GIVEN PATH:**
**THE ROLE OF THE GURU**

Unlike the Western teacher or professor, properly one who is to communicate information and guidance, the Indian guru is, instead, a precise model. Where the Western student is expected to approach the teacher’s ideas with an open but critical attitude, the Indian student submits fully

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to the doctrine dispensed by the guru. The guru is a vehicle of dharma, with whom the student is to identify completely, as the guru identified with his guru, and so forth in either temporal direction. The guru accepts complete responsibility for the student’s moral and spiritual life, attempting, through the doctrine and advice communicated, to prepare the student to be as himself, down to the smallest detail. Most importantly, the student is to accept his teacher’s words with śrāddha (“perfect faith”) in study of the Vēdas and other holy Hindu scriptures. Development of self-responsible judgement and original thinking is entirely discouraged. The student seeks a guru to become a guru; the doctrine clothed in the dharma, it is communicated (perfectly) from guru to student along the chain of knowledge-bestowing. Where in Western scholastic maturation the student has been expected to mark out his or her own unique path, the Indian student follows a given path. The one path linking all gurus, past, present, and future, which leads to the ultimate knowledge that all is brāhman (in other words, all separateness is a delusion which bars one from the release of mokṣa).

There is a story of a student who arrived late one day for his lesson with his guru. The guru inquired sharply as to the reason for the student’s lack of punctuality and was regaled with a marvelous tale.

“I could not arrive here immediately. My home is across the river, which is in flood,” the young man said in apology and explanation, “and the ferry failed to arrive when expected, and the fording-place was far too deep for me to cross.”

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36 Girls’ education was relatively common among the higher castes — even venturing into the study of Sanskrit literature — but study of the Vēdas was often culturally relegated to male children, even though, despite some stigma, women going off to study with a guru was never prohibited. See Auboyer, p. 178.


38 See Campbell, Myths of Light, p. 113.
“How, then, did you arrive?” asked the now interested guru. “Did the ferry finally come? The flood abate?”

“No,” said the student, shaking his head. “Nothing changed.”

“Then how did you come here?” replied the mystified guru.

“I thought of my guru,” the student said. “‘My teacher is the vehicle of truth,’ I thought. ‘He is my highest god, my oracle, my holy guide. I will think of my teacher and I shall walk across the rushing water.’ This I thought, and behold, I did walk across the water. I thought, ‘Guru, guru, guru,’ and thus I am here.”

The guru sat in awe. “I must attempt this miracle,” the guru thought, and at the conclusion of the lesson, the guru went to the edge of the river. After surveying the banks and spying no one in sight, he placed his feet into water and thought as did his student, “Guru, guru, guru…” Only, he thought of himself ("I, I, I…"), and sank like a stone as he walked out into the river, drowning hopelessly in the swollen torrent.

The student’s śrāddha, having reduced him to nothing but spiritual wind (prāṇa), brought him across the water, for he, as mandated, had divested himself of his ego. The foolish guru, tempted by the student’s tale of his (the guru’s) own supposed power, had regressed to full egoism and died pathetically and comically for his folly. If the guru had thought of his guru, then he would have been able to imitate his student’s achievement, but pride sank him. The moral of the story is that the guru is properly to be the pure bestower of divine wisdom, and the one to be followed and made the student’s idol for life action and experience, eliminating the delusions of egoism. One is to become as the guru, not as “oneself.”
1.1.7 The Bhagavād Gītā & Karma Yoga:
The Lord Kṛiṣṇa’s Words to Arjuna

Apart from the Védas, the fundamental text of Hinduism is the Bhagavād Gītā. A separately revered portion of the monumental epic, the Mahābhārata, it is popularly believed to date to the fourth or third millennium B.C.E., though a more likely second-century date has been suggested. The main text is in the form of a dialogue between the Pāṇḍava prince Arjuna and his charioteer and friend the Lord Kṛiṣṇa (the most beloved and revered incarnation of the great god Viṣṇu) at the outset of Kurukṣetra War, a great battle between Arjuna’s clan and their cousins, the Kauravas, for the throne of Hastināpuram. The text explains four types of yoga, or paths of yoking consciousness to transcendence — jñāna, rāja, bhakti, and karma — however, the most important of the four explained is karma yoga, namely the discipline of selfless action in accordance with dharma.

In the story, Prince Arjuna has bidden Kṛiṣṇa, his divine friend, to drive his chariot out between the assembled battle lines. “I want to see those who desire to fight with me. With whom will this battle be fought?” he says. As Sanjāya, the narrator, tells it,

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40 “However, the claim by Hindu traditionalists that the Gītā is a product of the third to fourth millennium BC cannot be taken seriously.” The Bhagavad-Gītā, trans. Georg and Brenda Feuerstein (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2011), p. 16.


42 The story fits into the greater Mahābhārata through the narrative being told to the blind enemy king Dhrītarāṣṭra by his loyal charioteer, Sanjāya.

43 For explication, see Campbell, “The Confrontation of East and West in Religion,” in Myths to Live By, pp. 97 – 99. Jñāna is the yoga of wisdom and, one could say, psychological meditation; rāja of control over the mind and emotions; bhakti of devotion to (or worship of) one’s highest god (Īśvara); karma of moral action in time and space.


45 The lead charioteer of the opposing army, playing the direct opposite role to Kṛiṣṇa.
…Arjuna, standing between the two armies, saw fathers and grandfathers, teachers, uncles, and brothers, sons, and grandsons, in-laws and friends. Seeing his kinsmen established in opposition, Arjuna was overcome by sorrow. Despairing he spoke these words:

**ARJUNA**: O Kṛṣṇa, I see my own relations here anxious to fight, and my limbs grow weak; my mouth is dry, my body shakes, and my hair is standing on end. My skin burns, and the bow of Gāṇḍīva has slipped from my hand. I am unable to stand; my mind seems to be whirling. These signs bode evil for us. I do not see that any good can come from killing our relations in battle. O Kṛṣṇa, I have no desire for victory, or for a kingdom or pleasures. Of what use is a kingdom or pleasure or even life, if those for whose sake we desire these things — teachers, fathers, sons, grandfathers, uncles, in-laws, grandsons, and others with family ties — are engaged in this battle, renouncing their wealth and their lives? Even if they were to kill me, I would not want to kill them, not even to become ruler of the three worlds. How much less for the earth alone? O Kṛṣṇa, what satisfaction could we find in killing Dhrītarāṣṭra’s sons? We would become sinners by slaying these men, even though they are evil. The sons of Dhrītarāṣṭra are related to us; therefore, we should not kill them. How can we gain happiness by killing members of our own family?⁴⁶

To this timidity and ethical sensitivity, the Lord Kṛṣṇa replied (in summation), “Whence this ignoble cowardice?”⁴⁷ He admonished his friend in uncompromising terms:

To that which is born, death is certain; to that which is dead, birth is certain: be not afflicted by the unavoidable. As a noble whose duty it is to protect the law, refusing to fight this righteous war you will forfeit both virtue and honor. Your proper concern is alone the *action* of duty, not the *fruits* of the action. Cast then away all desire and fear for the fruits, and perform your duty.⁴⁸

As a *kṣatriya*, it was Arjuna’s born duty to wage war and fight for the succession of his clan. As previously and repeatedly demonstrated, *personal* judgement of whatever kind is a mark of the flouting of duty, thus of moral and spiritual immaturity — therefore, indeed ignoble and cowardly are Arjuna’s words.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1:26 – 37, pp. 80 – 81. (Diacritics added.)
⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 99 – 100. Campbell’s own translation and emphasis.
Following this stern philosophical scolding, the Lord Kṛṣṇa clears Arjuna’s crest-fallen eyes, leaving the young warrior to stand in awe, beholding his charioteer and dear companion thus transformed. The light of countless suns, a thousand heads, burning eyes, endless arms brandishing weapons, and seas of fearsome tusks guarding wave after wave of ravenous mouths baying for the blood of all things held Arjuna’s gaze. And at that moment, both of these great armies began to pour forth, directly into the flaming mouths of this terrible and majestic beast, all perishing with the dignity of crushed grapes upon the great lord’s shining tusks.

“Who are you, great lord?” asks Arjuna in amazement and terror.

“I am Black Time,” the monster who had once been his friend answered, “come here for the slaughter of these great armies. Regardless of your weak and disgraceful absence from the fight, those who are here fated to die shall be destroyed. Now, advance! Rise to your duty, Lord Arjuna! Appear to slay those whom I have just devoured. Do your duty and conquer fear, and all which is unbecoming of you, just as you conquer your enemy.”

To perform one’s duty, as aforesaid, is to perform one’s caste-mandated dharma entirely without question. Dharma, as shown, is a cosmic, rather than simply social, power and good. Detachment from the ideas and tenets of one’s dharma is to regress, rather than progress, spiritually and morally. For Arjuna, a warrior, to in such a moment say, “I am not a warrior” is an ahamkāra of the most unacceptable kind. The human being is not precious in the Western sense, for every life is the precursor to another. Oneness with the universe must be maintained with a due fierceness which requires the complete annihilation of the individual soul, mandating that the unique impulses of the unique person be dissolved and eliminated.

49 Ibid., p. 100.
2. Western Utopianism: Submission to the Collective “Good”

I.2.1 The Search for the “Good Society”

Having described the non-Western philosophical roots of impersonal, transcendental human perfection, account must be taken of their application in the social and political realms. This application is hardly confined to the Western culture zone; nevertheless, the philosophical origins of what can be called “political utopianism” are native to Europe. Human societies based upon the submission of the individual to terrestrially realized cosmic truth exist and have existed organically throughout Asia, reaching into Central and South America, but not in Judeo-Christian Europe. The curious, outward-pushing, self-directed, rational impulse of the Greeks laid the foundations for European civilization, one which was, despite its own shortcomings, a society which largely knew that, if not even to any other person, every individual man and woman from the Dark Ages forward was uniquely precious to his or her Creator and Judge. The bases for Western utopianism are complex, but can be generally characterized as a highly liberal translation of the bliss of religious self-annihilation and social conformity into a political philosophy.

Many attempts at constructing the “good society” have been made throughout the history of Western culture — all, whether in theory or in practice, have led to the totalitarian outdoor
prison, if not the accompanying mountains of nameless dead. These attempts are theories — “scientific” theories (as opposed to traditions) — which the old minds of the past created to develop a seemingly better world, which those of that future studied and advocated, attempting to prove them to be in line with fact, their inevitable self-destruction initiating some of the darker periods of human history. The aims of Western utopianism are superficially straightforward and simple, while always belying depths beneath of doomed absurdities and logical dead ends. The promise is of a paradisiacal society, a Godless heaven at our earthly fingertips, wherein all suffering is annihilated and human labor ceases in favor of unending, well-fed felicity. These aims most often are — whether proclaimed by Robespierre, Marx, Lyenin, Mussolini, Hitler, Máo, or Castro — “bread and peace,” the results being war, destitution, terror, and gas chambers. As any voluptuous marble masterpiece stands unscathed by any human blemish upon her marble skin, so must the perfect society be freed from the irritants of reality’s dissent from it.

The impossibility of political utopianism is outlined firstly in mere etymology: the Latin term formed from the Greek οὐ (“not”) and τόπος (“place”). That utopia is not a place is the crux of the entire idea of a heaven having descended to earth via human will. The utopian walks a hairline tightrope between belief and cynicism, the wish to remake the world in the orderly image of the child’s blissful doll house and vicious tyranny beneath the mask of amiability at either side. The facts of human nature are irrelevant to the needs and promises of “no-place”; life must be bent to its grandeur in lieu of the society molding itself to human inevitabilities.

1 Though originating from the Greek, the term was first coined in Sir Thomas More’s 1516 Latin work Utopia, describing a supposedly ideal society, though his own sincere desire for its realization has been heavily debated — namely whether the fact that he christened his society “No-place” denotes that he in fact wished it was in existence, or was lending his creative abilities to discrediting such an idea, perhaps in criticism of the religious and political policies of Henry VIII, is not known for certain. For further analysis, see Mark Reed Levin, “Thomas More’s Utopia and Radical Egalitarianism,” in Ameritopia: The Unmaking of America (New York, NY: Threshold Editions, 2012), pp. 37 – 49.
“Utopianism,” says Mark Levin, “substitutes glorious predictions and unachievable promises for knowledge, science, and reason, while laying claim to them all”\textsuperscript{2} — meaning that the logic which would otherwise render it pure insanity, if not mendacious evil, is perverted and dyed to perpetuate the fraud.

\textbf{1.2.2 PLATO’S REPUBLIC  
(THE NIGHTMARE OF THE “GOOD”)}

Kallipolis, the subject of Plato’s most famous work, \textit{The Republic (Politeia)}, is the perfect society. Composed \textit{c. 380 B.C.E.}, a dialogue between his dear late teacher Sokrates\textsuperscript{3} and a number of dinner guests, the \textit{Republic} is a treatise on the meaning of justice, examining whether the man who is just is happier than he who is unjust through the consideration of a series of hypothetical \textit{poleis}, or city-states. Though great care is taken in the figurative construction of this paradise, what Plato (\textit{c. 429 – 347}) in fact created was a totalitarian state. His precise opinions and intentions relating to its writing are subject to much debate, though it is undoubted that the \textit{Republic} is a cornerstone not only of Western philosophy but also of theoretical totalitarianism.

In that the city of Kallipolis is the perfect society, it is also perfectly controlled. One of its rhetorical forerunners is realized as little more than a civic, all-powerful landlord: it provides food, drinking water, clothing, shelter, footwear, and military protection based on what Sokrates and his companions believe is a “true and healthy” form of perfect existence.\textsuperscript{4} The state distributes labor based on the individual’s skills, and all work is expected to be done on the

\textsuperscript{2} Levin, “The Tyranny of Utopia,” p. 5.

\textsuperscript{3} See II.2.2.

condition that all the workers’ other needs are already met — competition, too (that great Greek passion) having been expunged from the citizens’ list of concerns. Nevertheless, to ensure industriousness and strength among the citizens, the first city is constructed to be devoid of luxuries, including fine food such as meat, household furniture, and musical and theatrical entertainment. Still, the human desire for comfort is finally seen as fit to be tolerated, as the debating drinkers acknowledge that few would wish to live in such a society. Plato instead invents another Kallipolis, wherein the foible of human desire is accommodated. The specifics of this city are discussed in far more detail than the previous ones, the state controlling marriage, private property, medical care, the city’s workforce, the housing of the citizenry, education, and all aspects of economic life. A class system far stricter than that of the contemporary Athenian variety is established, the state utilizing eugenic controls upon the population’s reproduction, euthanasia of those whose continued life is deemed undesirable, and state education in the form of normative indoctrination for the purpose of producing identically developed citizens who will be one with the state which has been their all-encompassing benefactor.

The three classes into which the people of Kallipolis are divided are the Guardians, Auxiliaries, and Producers. The aristocratic ruling class consists of the Guardians, those who guard and guide the society which they rule, distributing its resources and maintaining its laws. Given that war with other city states shall be inevitable, the Ideal City must possess warriors,

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6 Ibid., II.373a, p. 61.
7 Ibid., II.372e, p. 60.
8 There is, of course, nothing to prevent these detached élites from abusing their power, the Guardians envisioned to rule only with dutiful reluctance — the assumption being that the educational system by which the Guardians are prepared for rulership, not to mention the Guardians themselves, are perfect at the outset and will not take advantage of their privileged position.
namely the Auxiliaries. The Producers include the remainder of the citizens who perform the manual labor necessary to support its economy, although, as in most instances of this portion of the social pyramid, they amount far more to slaves than to “free” men and women who work.

The nature of the people to be born into this perfect society is also to be pre-determined and carefully contrived, not to mention actively shaped by government mandate. As Levin describes,

Plato takes his class structure very far. He invents the “noble lie” — a contrivance taught from the earliest age that each person is born from the earth rather than from a mother. Moreover, each individual is said to be born with a particular metal — gold, silver, or bronze — intermingled in his or her body. The metal determines the person’s status and relative worth in the City — the gold-souled citizens are the Guardians, the silver-souled citizens are the Auxiliaries, and the bronze-souled citizens are the Producers (although they are treated more like slaves) (415a).

The City’s unity and stability, essential in the Republic, require that its citizens be conditioned to accept their positions and surrender their personal desires to the needs of the City. The individual’s happiness is secondary to the general welfare of the City. Individuals are conditioned to suppress their personal desires in favor of acting for the common good. “The noble lie,” therefore, is supposedly necessary because it promotes universal acceptance of the individual’s class status. Citizens will feel more kinship with the City, eliminate political factionalism and civil strife, and promote patriotism (415d).9

The human element of life removed from Kallipolis’ residents, they are left only to devote themselves (“selves” only used by way of linguistic requirement) to the service of the state which has replaced both the father and mother of each child. The state, too, manages the relations of marriage for the purpose of its eugenic mission of creating a “pure race.”10 As Plato writes,

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10 See Ibid., p. 26. Marriages are arranged by the state, not even by the groom and the bride’s father as was Athenian traditional custom, the preservation of the classes (a “lie” rather than cosmic fact of creation as in India) being essential to the City’s existence. “The Guardians have among their most important duties the strict regulation of the birth of children and, hence, the sexual activity of adults (415b). Only gold men may mate with gold women, and so on with the other classes. Sexual partners are chosen based on a phony lottery system, the outcome of which is arranged in advance by the Guardians. If somehow a bronze child manages to be born to a gold parent, the child is removed and sent to live among the bronze people (415c).”
...[T]he first and most important of god’s commandments to the Rulers is that in the exercise of their functions as Guardians their principal care must be to watch the mixture of metals in the characters of their children.\textsuperscript{11}

The Guardians are to be selected from the best of the original people brought to live in the City at its inception, and the state must “mate the best of our best men with the best of our women as often as possible, and the inferior men with the inferior women as seldom as possible, and bring up only the offspring of the best.”\textsuperscript{12} In the further interest of the creation of “purity” within the biological character of the citizenry, the institution of the nuclear family is dissolved, a communal arrangement for the bringing up and education of children devised.\textsuperscript{13} Children are removed from their natural mothers at birth by state order and sent to be raised communally as civic “brothers born of the same mother earth”\textsuperscript{14} — the extended family thus created being the City. Private property, though not forbidden to the remainder of society, is abolished for possession by the Guardians, as they must live without the desire and corruption engendered by such indulgences.\textsuperscript{15} The thorough indoctrination of the populace is essential, and censorship of many more kinds than simply regarding information is universal.\textsuperscript{16} The worth of an individual is entirely determined by way of his or her value to the state, engendering a highly specific rationing of medical care. Those whose illnesses are seasonal or occasional are to be treated; those, however, whom the medical officials of the state determine thoroughly diseased to an irreversible and hopeless degree — of unpromising and sickly infancy, of advanced and

\textsuperscript{11} The Republic, III.415b, pp. 116 – 117.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., V.459e, p. 171.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., III.423a, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., III.414d, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., III.464d, p. 179.

\textsuperscript{16} Levin, “Plato’s Republic and the Perfect Society,” p. 28.
convalescent age, and of idle and weak physical character — are left to die, if not euthanized by
Guardian edict.\textsuperscript{17} Then, as Levin summarizes,

\begin{quote}
With the City’s construction completed, Plato explains his program for educating the Guardians and developing from their ranks the wisest and most just “philosopher” kings.

Underlying Plato’s ruling philosophers and the Ideal City is the notion of “Forms” and “the Good.” The Theory of Forms guides Plato’s search for the Good. Forms are by their nature independent from the sensible and physical world and are a sort of ultimate, perfect example of a thing or being. The idea of “the Good” is similar to the biblical concept of God or ultimate truth. It is the cause of knowledge and truth, but is beyond them both (508e). The Good is not being but is beyond being. In Plato’s \textit{Republic}, the Good governs all aspects of life. In his view, however, contemplating the Good and understanding the Good are far beyond the capabilities of the vast majority of people. Consequently, the City must be ruled by philosophers for they are the only people who are able to discern the Good. Only the philosopher can make judgements about what constitutes a “good person,” a “good life,” or a “good death.” Good is synonymous with quality and is measured by an individual’s contribution to the City.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Plato’s highly sophisticated conception of the nature of reality creates a disturbing paradox, however. Though reality is not arbitrary, it can only be truly known, perceived, and determined by philosophers such as Plato, Sokrates, and others believed worthy of the “Good” whose study is forbidden for the general population of their Ideal City. And again, for the Guardians (it being taken for granted that Plato saw himself as one of them), there are no checks implemented to ascertain whether future Guardians do not proclaim the Good to be whatever they see fit. In other words, the Good is of \textit{such} a remote and unknowable character that indeed no one (not even the great author of this rhetorical exercise himself) can truly absorb its nature. The wellbeing of an entire miniature country lies in the hands of men, despite their rigorous training and education,\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] Ibid., III.406b, 407d – c, pp. 104 – 105.
\item[18] Levin, “Plato’s \textit{Republic} and the Perfect Society,” p. 29.
\end{footnotes}
who are ultimately human, limited, and incapable of knowing the unknowable.

For these and other reasons,\(^\text{20}\) Plato rejects his dream. It is not clear whether he did so out of genuine distaste for what he had created or simply acceptance of its impossibility. He understands that his Ideal City could never be, given human imperfection, and resigns himself to the fact that far too many variables terminate its fruition. The inherent instability of Athenian democracy, especially post-Perikles (429 – 338 B.C.E.), is a possible source of Plato’s yearning for a society of such a rigidly placid nature. It is a great irony, nevertheless, that Sokrates is the main protagonist of Plato’s dialogue, the undeterred questioner whose unending criticism of the norms of Athenian social custom brought him to the goblet of hemlock. Still, a symposium of brilliant men devising how their own personal ideals can be made real in the form of an actual society should be an unsettling image for all and any who value their own liberty. Fancying themselves Guardians of the Good and its ideals, they devise the life conditions for the many with an attitude far more casual than that with which they would require in order to live them. Still, the gruesome and tragic naïveté of the Ideal City and its hopes for the correction of human folly\(^\text{21}\) indict Plato’s own detachment from the very ultimate moral reality he believed he could strive to know. That it is from the so-called “ivory tower” that such sweeping decisions shall be made — by those whom, by their own logic, cannot truly grasp the supposed source of their wisdom — is the fundamental hypocrisy of the Platonic utopia. As regards the impossibility of the Ideal City’s construction and all else so beautifully and foolishly dreamed by Plato and other

\(^{20}\) See Ibid., VII.540e, 541a, VIII.545d, 546a – b, 549b – d, 555c, 557c, pp. 274, 278 – 279, 282 – 283, 290 – 291, 293.

\(^{21}\) “Tyranny, broadly defined, is the use of power to dehumanize the individual and delegitimate his nature. Political utopianism is tyranny disguised as a desirable, workable, and even paradisical governing ideology.” Levin, “The Tyranny of Utopia,” p. 3. This is the most concise definition of utopianism’s appeal and ultimately thoroughly immoral nature.
utopians, Milton Friedman’s immortal question is their most poignant summary: “…And just tell me, where in the world you’d find these angels who are going to organize society for us?”

1.2.3 RousseaU and the “Unconstrained” Enlightenment (Robespierre’s Great Terror)

“…[M]an is naturally good,” proclaimed Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778) in an ecstatic letter to his friend Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes in 1749. A delightful assertion indeed, lending itself to all of our greatest hopes and finest, gentlest aspirations; those who espoused this doctrine raised around forty thousand heads, however, far beyond the mere number of the powdered, before Robespierre’s baying mobs in the service of this virtue. Why? Where Plato had ignored and sought to control human nature in his wish for a society obeying every golden ratio, Rousseau made specific and glorious assertions. If the human being is created virtuous, then what is the source of his or her virtue, and likewise his or her vices?

Rousseau’s idea of man as innately good falls in line with what economic and social philosopher Thomas Sowell christens the “unconstrained vision” of human nature. In speaking of the later English philosopher William Godwin, whose work quite concisely describes the “unconstrained vision,” he says:


Where in Adam Smith moral and socially beneficial behavior could be evoked from man only by incentives, in William Godwin man’s understanding and disposition were capable of intentionally creating social benefits. Godwin regarded the intention to benefit others as being “of the essence of virtue,” and virtue in turn as being the road to human happiness. Unintentional social benefits were treated by Godwin as scarcely worthy of notice. His was the unconstrained vision of human nature, in which man was capable of directly feeling other people’s needs and therefore consistently acting impartially, even when his own interests or those of his family were involved. …Unlike Smith, who regarded human selfishness as a given, Godwin regarded it as being promoted by the very system of rewards used to cope with it. The real solution toward which efforts should be bent was to have people do what is right because it is right, not because of psychic or economic payments — that is, not because someone has “annexed to it a great weight of self-interest.”

In this view, man is not beset by permanent failings and weaknesses built into our birth; folly is a learned and acquired trait, immorality of action and desire resulting from the influence of external forces. Rousseau believed that, as the shades of the prison house close upon the growing child, the society impresses its vices upon the person, resulting in artificial vice on an individual level. His famous hypothesis was that the human being without society is noble, compassionate, and free of the sinful, selfish tendencies with which the (non-natural) social system’s corruption infuses him or her. Man without society, namely the “idea of the noble savage,” say Bronowski and historian Bruce Mazlish,

stemming from the age of Thomas More and the New World discoveries, was an ideal current in Rousseau’s time. According to the travel reports, the savages of North America, for instance, despised gold and silver. They lived freely and happily in the forests, dwelling harmoniously in small groups. They needed no laws or social restraints, and ordered their lives by instinct rather than by reason…

As interpreted by Rousseau and others, the noble savage was the man who, with a

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25 Thomas Sowell, “Constrained and Unconstrained Visions,” in A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles, revised second edition (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2007), pp. 15 – 17. The later work of Godwin as expounded in his Enquiry Concerning Political Injustice (1793) puts this idea in different and much clearer language. Where Adam Smith in his Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776) had argued that man was incapable of pure altruism, and true social and economic good must be based upon the harnessing of man’s self-interest for the benefit of others, Godwin responded with the opposite. For the “constrained vision,” see II.4.
wonderful set of emotions, and rejecting entirely his intellectual gifts, achieved for himself the simple and perfect life which civilization has since destroyed.\textsuperscript{26}

Setting aside Rousseau’s ignorant understanding of native peoples,\textsuperscript{27} it is imperative to demonstrate his shortsighted view of the joy of human innocence. The innocence of the child is the source of much of one’s joy, as one taps into it occasionally in later life; however, one could say, human moral maturity involves putting innocence to rest in order that, in part, the innocence of the next generation may be responsibly protected. No mostly nude Amazonian native is “innocent” as regards the customs and rules of his or her tribe, traditional crafts, and highly developed survival skills, let alone environmental adaptations. Such a person is equally as well-versed in the trappings of his or her society as a European of Rousseau’s time. It is certainly true that basic morality does possess a footing in emotion: the instinct and wish to protect one’s parents or children, to avoid the terrible sight of a lovable animal in pain, or to punish the perpetrator of a crime. There is no reason at all why any war-painted American Indian could not be “noble” — these instincts are common to the human race, and all peoples, from whatever culture, are possessed of introspection and compassion. Nevertheless, the simplistic foolishness of Rousseau’s belief that Nature itself was the source of man’s goodness was to be tried in the merciless court of historical application.

The idea of the “general will,” too, originates with Rousseau — the democratic idea that majority opinion constitutes a moral action or decision, as opposed, of course, to the dictation of

\textsuperscript{26}Bronowski and Mazlish, “Rousseau,” p. 292.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., pp. 292 – 293. “There are some obvious flaws in [Rousseau’s] picture. For example, Rousseau, like many people before and since, was deceived by the fact that savages wear very few clothes into supposing that savages have very few laws. In fact, the written and unwritten laws of savage societies are many and complex. However, in Rousseau’s day, the South Seas were virtually unexplored territory, and a world like ‘taboo,’ which comes from South Sea customs, had hardly been brought into the European languages. The “noble savage” was thought to live in a careless rapture. His life, at the same time that it was socialized, was supposed to be a ‘natural’ life.”
the monarchic one. He wrote in 1755 in his *Discourse on Political Economy*:

> The body politic is also a moral being, possessed of a will, and this general will, which tends always to the preservation and welfare of the whole and of every part, and is the source of the laws, constitutes for all the members of the State, in their relations to one another and to it, the rule of what is just or unjust.²⁸

Rousseau did endorse as well the idea of government by consent — a concept held dear by the English since Runnymede, and fundamentally embraced also by the American Founders — however, consent given by the majority (the opinion of the majority being the basis for moral decision-making) differs greatly from consent given on the basis of empirical moral standards. As to distinguishing the “general will” from the “will of all,” Rousseau “was not clear and consistent on the matter,” say Bronowsk and Mazlish,

> …the gist of his views seems to be that the general will is an “ideal construct,” representing what is best for the state, and that the will of all, or the will of the majority, is not necessarily what is best for the state.²⁹

In short, Rousseau’s political philosophy seems to be a wholeheartedly anti-individualist one. The moral objection of one at the actions of the many does not seem to enter his thinking. Indeed, it is simply by means of counting heads that he expects to arrive at the closest approximation of this elusive “ideal construct.” From his *Social Contract* of 1762:

> There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will; the latter considers only the common interest, while the former takes a private interest into account, and is no more than a sum of particular wills: but take away from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel one another, and the general will remains as the sum of the differences.

> …The constant will of all the members of the State is the general will; by virtue of it they are citizens and free. When in the popular assembly a law is proposed, what the people is asked is not exactly whether it approves or rejects the proposal, but whether it is in conformity with the general will, which is their

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²⁸ Quoted in Ibid., pp. 297 – 298.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 298.
will. Each man, in giving his vote, states his opinion on that point… and the
general will is found by counting votes. When therefore the opinion that is
contrary to my own prevails, this proves neither more nor less than that I was
mistaken, and that what I thought to be the general will was not so. If my
particular opinion had carried the day I should have achieved the opposite of what
was my will; and it is in that case that I should not have been free.30

Rousseau’s confusing language comes finally to two ultimate interpretations: a democratic, vote-
based system on the one hand, and a totalitarian, wherein the nature of the general will exists
Platonically, and is only accessible to the superior intellect of a Kallipolitan-style philosopher-
king on the other.31 Rousseau could most closely be characterized politically as a democrat,
being opposed to the total overthrow of aristocracy and centralized, despotic rule — but never
did he foresee the eventuality that despots would use his democratic ideas and rhetoric to woo
the ordinary people with whom Rousseau so romantically identified.32 If man was perfect in
nature, then society must be remade to be worthy of human perfection.

Eleven years after his death, the Revolution began; however, though “pedantic and
confused,” as Lord Kenneth Clark says, the early, “…constitutional, [and] one might almost say
the American, phase of the French Revolution belonged to the Age of Reason.”33 Political change
was initially sought, for the most part, non-violently, via law and debate. Though by 1792 — the
year a gaggle of citizens of Marseilles undertook the sweltering summer march the entire
distance to Paris, singing the soldier Rouget de Lisle’s new hymn, Chant de guerre pour l’Armée

30 Quoted in Ibid., pp. 298 – 299.
31 Ibid., p. 299.
32 Ibid., p. 300. As relates to so-called “Platonic” interpretation of general will, “…Germany in 1935,” say
Bronowski and Mazlish, “was filled with hordes of people shouting ’Sieg heil!’ in unison, in order to give
themselves the impression that, somehow, they were consenting to a general will which was interpreted for them by
one man,” Ibid. pp. 300 – 301.
du Rhin (later renamed La Marseillaise) — the fires had been lit. The famous Abbey of Clugny and Saint Denis, birthplace of the Gothic style, were vandalized and robbed in the efforts of some to replace Christianity with a Rousseauian cult of nature (it was even suggested that the great cathedral of Chartres be demolished and replaced by a so-called “temple of wisdom”). This was all in furtherance of the precept that the past must be dissolved for the purpose of erecting the future upon its smoking ruins.

The one to erect that very future was Maximilien de Robespierre (1758 – 1794). As had Cromwell before him, Robespierre stood forth as the leader of France beside the cadaver of the headless monarch, putting himself forward as the interpretational authority for whom the people had been waiting. As Bronowski and Mazlish explain,

> The totalitarian implications of Rousseau’s doctrine now began to appear in full force. Robespierre, taking advantage of the dismay and confusion produced by the revolutionary war without, and the civil war within, instituted “government by terror.” His strategy was constantly to accuse his opponents of being in the pay of [prime minister William] Pitt and the English. His tyrannical methods Robespierre justified as the reign of virtue advocated by Rousseau. The “incorruptible” leader of the French Republic in 1793 even went beyond his philosophical predecessor and expounded the totalitarian principles of “a revolutionary government[.]”

As a utopian dictator, Robespierre was to lead his country to that earthly paradise which he and Rousseau before him had promised — by weeding out those treasonous, stubborn thorns in the noble flesh of a maturing utopia. Though the “natural rights” of individuals supposedly checked the power of the revolutionary state, such rights (free speech among them) were soon suspended, if not eradicated, for the public good — by Robespierre, director of the Committee for Public

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34 Ibid., p. 296.
35 Ibid., pp. 296 – 298. This was unsuccessful, but demonstrated some of the firm belief in Rousseau’s idea of the “natural man” held by some supporters of the Revolution.
Safety. The Great Terror (1793 – 1794) was the means by which such irritants would be exterminated, and on the basis of nothing more a whispered *J’accuse*, thousands were dragged to their deaths and as many as half a million to the dungeons. The revolutionary government would only convert to “constitutional rule” once the Revolution was completed — and man remade in the image of Rousseau’s romantic prose. Once completed, Plato’s philosopher king was to be installed. Napoléon I was that king, who was to bring Rousseau and Robespierre’s unconstrained “new man” to the world.

### 1.2.4 The Poverty of Historicism

Building upon Plato’s perfect society and Rousseau’s perfect man, we confront the utopian conception of history itself into which these two prior sets of ideas are to fit in the equation which leads to their modern forms. The result being that there is to be a trajectory which transports human society to such theories of governmental models. In his *Poverty of Historicism*, the Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper (1902 – 1994) said of utopianism that

> Any social science which does not teach the impossibility of rational social construction [i.e., historicism] is essentially blind to the most important facts of social life, and must overlook the only social laws of real validity and of real importance. Social sciences seeking to provide a background for social engineering cannot, therefore, be true descriptions of social facts. They are impossible in themselves.  

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37 Ibid., p. 404. As with all revolutions, vicious Robespierre, too, fell victim to the monster he had nursed to fruition. By this logic, Lord Clark, who believed that, “No one has ever explained, in historical terms, the September Massacres [of 1793],” was wrong in his assumption, though partially correct he may have been in adding that “… perhaps in the end the old-fashioned explanation is correct, that it was a kind of communal sadism. It was a pogrom — a phenomenon with which we have since become familiar. And it was given fresh impetus by another well-known emotion — mass panic. In July 1792 the Committee for Public Safety had officially proclaimed *La patrie en danger* — ‘the country in peril’; which was followed by the usual corollary: *Ils nous ont trahis* — ‘there are traitors among us’. We know what that means.” Clark, p. 298.

The state-utilized “science” of which Popper speaks originates with the work of the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), among the first major theorists of history. Like his twentieth-century student Spengler,\textsuperscript{39} Hegel was among the most famous to form history into an equation of events connected to and specifically influenced by human nature; however, unlike Spengler, his ideas led not to asymptotic pessimism but to naïve statist optimism. As Bronowski and Mazlish describe,

Hegel thought of history as the working of a universal spirit. The spirit [\textit{Geist}] is reason, and cannot be wrong: and the institution in which this spirit expresses itself is the state. The state has to be accepted as the practical realisation of cosmic reason; it is secular but it is not therefore evil. “That harmony which has resulted from the painful struggles of History, involves the recognition of the Secular as capable of being an embodiment of Truth; whereas it had been formerly regarded as evil only, as incapable of Good — the latter being considered essentially other-worldly.” More than this: the state becomes the fulfillment of the mystical spirit of the people, and history works providentially to make it so.\textsuperscript{40}

The Hegelian (often self-contradicting) “dialectic,” partially derived from and his answer to Kantian metaphysics, details the process of thought by which apparent contradictions (termed “thesis” and “antithesis”) are seen to be part of a higher, all-encompassing truth (“synthesis”).\textsuperscript{41} A simple idea this is not; however, the road which leads to the (in Hegel’s case, ecstatic\textsuperscript{42}) state-centric naïveté described by Bronowski and Mazlish, too complicated for one to explained in its entirety, stems, it could be said, from Hegel’s conception of the nature of truth:

\textsuperscript{39} Oswald Arnold Gottfried Spengler (1880 – 1936) postulated in his monumental two-volume \textit{Decline of the West (Der Untergang des Abendlandes)}, published in 1918 and 1922, that all civilizations undergo a seasonal cycle of a thousand years and are subject to growth and decay analogous to biological species, a society being a super-organism with a limited and predictable lifespan.

\textsuperscript{40} Bronowski and Mazlish, “Kant and Hegel: The Emergence of History,” p. 487.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 483.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p 484.
…Hegel’s dialectic broke down even [Kant’s] distinction between the knower and what he knows. He denied that there is any thing-in-itself [Ding an sich]. To Hegel, there is no reality until we know it. We exist by virtue of knowing the outside world — but the world also exists only by virtue of knowing it. “The real is the rational and the rational is the real,” said Hegel: and he meant that things exist only because the mind thinks of them, just as the mind exists only because it thinks. Descartes had said long ago, Cogito ergo sum. Now Hegel went further. He said that my thinking does more than prove my existence: it creates it — in Hegel’s phrase, “Being is thought” — and it also proves and creates the existence of the world. In the dialectic, Hegel claimed, “the opposition between being and knowing” is ended. The knower and what he knows, thesis and antithesis, are fused in a single thesis of the experience.43

At first glance, there seems to be relatively little with which to disagree. No one is foolish for following the precept that an unheard tree deep in the forest has not fallen — that the senses are the only empirical proof of both the existence of oneself and that which, via one’s existence, is experienced via the stimuli of the senses.44 Nevertheless, the consequences of this break from Kant45 result in possibilities as to the nature of reality which nurture the seeds of the totalitarianism later advocated by Marx fewer than two decades after Hegel’s death:

But when this [set of ideas] has been acknowledged, man in Hegel’s conception becomes [an even more] curiously vague and amorphous creature. If the outside world owes its reality to the mind, then all matters become somewhat unreal; and the human body itself, and the human senses with it, become as thin, as much a construct of the mind, as the rest of the world. This leaves us with no center and no anchor other than an intangible spirit. And Hegel built up an elaborate and mystical devotion to the spirit, which is made more elusive by the ambivalence of all his terms. At the drop of a hat, Hegel’s mysterious spirit can turn into something harsh and dictatorial, because after all the spirit is what expresses itself in the concrete world. “Out of the dialectic rises the universal spirit, the unlimited

43 Ibid., p. 483.
44 The leap to be taken — a parodied leap of faith indeed — is to bring oneself to believe the voice of self-appointed authority in place of one’s “lying eyes.”
45 Kant who believed that all our thought, all our conceptions and perceptions, are locked into the human ability to perceive only of discrete, concrete chunks of a fuller reality — the Ding an sich — namely, that we are intellectually imprisoned by what he called the a priori forms of sensibility — his Western version of the Hindu concept of Māya, Mother Cosmos Herself, that which must be transcended at the apex of yogic meditation and bound-shattering.
world-spirit, pronouncing its judgement — and its judgement is the highest — upon infinite nations of the world’s history; for the history of the world is the world’s court of justice.” A few quick steps, and spirit becomes the world-spirit, the world-spirit becomes the world-soul, and the world-soul becomes the Emperor Napoleon passing judgement on the petty world by violating it. Like some other sensitive men (like Leonardo), Hegel was fascinated by violent authority, and in his most mystical moments longed to be dominated by it.46

Hegel’s ecstatic response to the beholding of the great Napoléon galloping through his home streets of Jena in 180647 is not an aspect of his philosophical postulations;48 it seems to be, however, an expression of the ironically pessimistic light in which Hegel saw moral principle. If reality is merely the construction of the mind, then it is not only permissible but natural for one to place audacious hope upon whoever embodies the power of “spirit” to the fullest. In the plainest of terms, that a megalomaniac dictator who perhaps exhibits the virtues of “spiritual” vitality” is to be followed without question. If Hegel had trembled in sublime terror at the fierce countenance of Saddam Hussein, Ayatollah Khomeini, Vladimir Putin, or any other modern-day dictator, then the dark wisdom of the past regarding those of Trotsky, Mussolini, Stalin, and Hitler, among others, would be of no importance. If, as Schopenhauer termed it, “energy” and “image”49 are the driving forces of the world, then morality is as much a temporal illusion as its logical justifications. With this zealously present-centered mental emphasis of Hegel’s placed upon an historical stage, his statist romanticism becomes far clearer. “The world begins today,”

46 Ibid., p. 484.
47 See Ibid., pp. 480 – 481. “He wrote to a friend: ‘I saw the Emperor, that world-soul, riding through the city to reconnoitre. It is in truth a strange feeling to see such an individual before one, who here, from one point, as he rides on his horse, is reaching over the world, and remolding it.’”
48 It is neither responsible nor relevant to speculate as to the psychological, let alone sexual, implications of such a reaction to militaristic authoritarianism.
49 Schopenhauer’s magnum opus, Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (1819), is most closely translated as “The World as Energy and Image” as opposed to “Will and Representation,” let alone “Idea.” Schopenhauer’s work is mentioned purely for this linguistic example alone.
says the spirit: heeding the lessons of history is optional, for objectivity is as contrived by the mind as any of its distortions. If the earthly entity which rules over the people is the fulfillment of the “world-spirit,” then it is permissible for the state to pursue its pleasure, its subjects subject to “the Will.”

Utopianism, *per se*, is not the only specific outcome of Hegel’s self-contradictory, insightful-though-foolish postulations. What is birthed by this disregard for less spiritual facts of human existence is simply the pitiable results of a sweeping and morally naïve theory which attempts to dabble in scientific understandings of human nature and causality. History viewed through lenses of directionality is problematic in itself. Paths exist and directions have been followed, but to assert that history — unmoved by a Divine hand — is molded by structural forces which could have written the story of humanity before the creation of the world if asked is to petition for far more than the study of history can provide. The reduction of the species’ story to the dialectic is a disservice which wrote many a death warrant. “These arguments,” says Popper, “have taken us to the very body of the arguments which I propose to call ‘historicism’, and they justify the choice of this label,”50 namely naïve arguments for a selective view of history which discounts those concatenations of chance which created an amount of the “progress” for which the ideologue works through such analysis. He continues:

> Social science is nothing but history: this is the thesis. …The kind of history with which historicists wish to identify sociology looks not only backwards to the past but also forwards to the future. It is the study of the operative forces and, above all, of the laws of social development. Accordingly, it could be described as historical theory, or as theoretical history, since the only universally valid social laws have been identified as historical laws. They must be laws of process, of change, of development — not the pseudo-laws of apparent constancies and conformities. According to historicists, sociologists must try to get a general idea

50 Popper, p. 40.
of the broad trends in accordance with which social structures change. But besides this, they should try to understand the causes of this process, the working of the forces responsible for change. They should try to formulate hypotheses about general trends underlying social development, in order that men may adjust themselves to impending changes by deducing prophecies from these laws.

…We know Utopian systems, for instance, which are impracticable simply because they do not consider such facts sufficiently.51

Though further explanation is necessary, required, and (it is hoped) of considerable interest, herein is historicism’s proposed poverty. Setting aside its moral absurdities — and absurdities they are, as it is for moral purposes that historicists and social scientists support their arguments and glossy predictions with such simple distortions of long-term facts52 — rationally, our thought-pockets are left far poorer by a view of history which ignores its own crucial complexities. These complexities, then, of course, are the fact-based irritants which plague a utopian society, leading to the ability of the state to discover any crime within the heart of any subject as its hundred eyes rove to blame. Moreover, it can be noted, so-called “historicism” deprives its human agents of agency. If it is neither the Hand of God which guides the life of the world, nor historian of science James Burke’s random chain of serendipitous discoveries and failures,53 then an amorphous “spirit” must move the events of history — though with a Will which can only be discovered by élites of significant education and cultivation and proclaimed to

51 Ibid., pp. 40 – 41.

52 Namely that historicism’s simplistic assertions either ignore moral variables or reject objective moral standards while attempting to support their ideas via appeals to their audience’s sense of morality — e.g. socialism is fair because it advocates “equal” distribution of resources.

53 James Burke’s landmark ten-part BBC television series Connections: An Alternate View of Change, airing in 1978 after more than fourteen months of filming across nineteen countries, contends that one cannot consider the development of any particular piece of the modern world in isolation: rather, the entire gestalt of the modern world is the result of an infinitely complex web of interconnected events, each of which consisting of a single person or group acting for reasons of his, her, or its own self-interest with no concept of the final, modern result to which the actions or those of their contemporaries would lead. The interplay of the results of these isolated events is what drives history and innovation, and is also the main focus of the series and its two sequels, Connections² (1994) and Connections³ (1997).
the “masses” for the purpose of their own edification. The logical and moral implication is that
the third path, devoid of both Providence and chance, is based entirely upon the opinions of those
very theorists themselves. If reality is whatever happens to be perceived by the (academic) mind,
then that authoritative powerhouse, unconfused by facts, is free to dictate the meaning of all
things — even if it is only to those of like persuasion.

I.2.5 Marx
(Equal Misery as the Price of Justice)

Marxism is the self-proclaimed inevitable consequence of historicism’s poverty —
poverty\(^54\) being that which it is to be fairly distributed. “The history of all hitherto existing
society,” proclaims the Communist Manifesto (1848), “is the history of class struggles.”\(^55\) History
in all its aspects has culminated, Marx and Engels believe, in a single, brutally simple model:
class warfare.\(^56\) Communism is the culmination of Plato’s perfect society, Rousseau’s perfect
man, and Hegel’s amorphous universal spirit of history. Marx (1818 – 1883) trumpets what
Hegel’s spirit had before simply implied: “The world begins today!” History’s movement had
brought the world to the glorious and violent brink of the cleansing Marxist apocalypse;
therefore, Marx commands his readers to let go of the history which has oppressed them and to

\(^{54}\) Economic, as well as intellectual poverty. Furthermore, part of the strength of Marx’s rhetoric stems from the
values of communal civility and responsibility present in the Abrahamic tradition; he, however, uses them against it.

which the first sentence of the Manifesto’s first chapter, “Bourgeois and Proletarians,” refers is written history. As of
1848, the archaeological revolution (for lack of a better term) being little more than a decade around the corner,
precious little was known beyond the written records of ancient societies.

\(^{56}\) Class warfare which is to come to a head with the worldwide acceptance of Marxist doctrine; the struggle to come
casts that of the previous millennia in the light of a cold war relative to the fire to explode upon the society in the
future. “Our epoch,” writes Marx, “the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has
simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into
two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.” Ibid., p. 61.
embrace the new day in which the very nature of man shall be transformed. The vehicle of history which had brought humanity to its moment of emancipation is to be discarded once (momentary, pamphlet-sized) note has been taken of its lessons.\textsuperscript{57} The soot and change of the Industrial Revolution had brought about the conditions under which Marx’s atheistic Armageddon would take place. Among the most famous of the Manifesto’s passages reads:

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is last compelled to face with sober senses, his real real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.\textsuperscript{58}

The pistons of economic and technological progress had dislodged all which held before, allowing the Revolution to use this period of social dislocation and plasticity for its own ends. For the sins of history to be corrected, history itself must be forgotten entirely: “In bourgeois society… the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past.”\textsuperscript{59} It is said that opponents of Communism at the time accused the Communist League of attempting to go through with this very feat:

“There are, besides, eternal truths, such as Freedom, Justice, etc., that are common to all states of society. But Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience.”

What does this accusation reduce itself to? The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs.

But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, \textit{viz.}, the exploitation of one part of society by the other.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{57} Sowell, “Constrained and Unconstrained Visions,” p. 22. “Marxism... was a special hybrid [ideology], applying constrained vision to much of the past and an unconstrained vision to much of the future.” The past constrained man to a certain mode of behavior, but the future which Marx promises an unconstrained, perfect man, free of the chains of past reality.

\textsuperscript{58} Marx and Engels, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 76.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 81.
Marx offered no contest to such charges — rather, highlighting them. To forget the past is to free oneself from its moral responsibilities.

Few discount the suffering which was the price of Euro-American industrialization, interlocked with the soot-blasted destruction of an old agrarian way of life. Nevertheless, its technological advancements, emerging international free market, and resulting products and services laid the foundations for a brutally slow and fluctuating but definite rise in the living standards and wages of the poor between Marx’s day and c. 1960, only to increase explosively through to the present day. Marx and Engels — however understandably — claim that economic advancement, as judged by “capitalists,” is a sham at the very best — further inviting the destruction of so-called bourgeois society. This society of property-owners must be

61 Prime examples are the washing machine and dryer, products which liberated women more than any other group.


63 Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom, fortieth anniversary edition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 170. “The chief characteristic of progress and development over the past century [c. 1860 – 1962] is that it has freed the masses from backbreaking toil and has made available to them products and services that were formerly the monopoly of the upper classes, without in any corresponding way expanding the products and services available to the wealthy. Medicine aside, the advances in technology have for the most part simply made available to the masses of the people luxuries that were always available in one form or another to the truly wealthy. Modern plumbing, central heating, automobiles, television, radio, to cite just a few examples, provide conveniences to the masses equivalent to those that the wealthy [throughout history] could always get by use of servants, entertainers, and so on.” In short, free market capitalism, though increasing the standard of living of the poor at a noticeably slow rate before the twentieth century, wherein with technological innovation this process quickened significantly, democratizes services and products on a scale impossible in a socialistic command economy. See pp. 168 – 172 for capitalism’s service to the poor; for the growth and impact of private charity during this period, see pp. 190 – 191.


65 Marx and Engels, pp. 63 – 64. “[The bourgeoisie]… has left standing no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment,’ … It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade… Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.”

66 Ibid., p. 64. “All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify.”
eliminated: the prevailing doctrine of this realization being “negative determination,” wherein the very possession of property is ultimately deemed the ill to be rectified. For example, if one or a few peasants’ ancestral farm houses are fitted with glass windows, or stoves rather than open hearths, negative determination dictates that the majority of that peasant community, who are without these relative luxuries — in the way of Rousseau’s “general will” — should feel themselves free to relieve their neighbors of such possessions, in order that full proletarian equality be instituted throughout the community. The rescue? “…[T]he theory of the Communists,” it is written, “may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property!” The third step? The institution of the family — not to mention of marriage — is to be utterly liquidated. “…[T]he family structure [as Marx characterizes it],” says Levin, “grew out of bourgeois material needs and must be dissolved for the greater good of the community.” On this Marx and Engels could not be clearer:

Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists.

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution. The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with vanishing of capital.

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67 Friedman, p. 161. Relating to the political development of such economic and social resentments, “A central element in the development of a collectivist sentiment in [the twentieth] century, at least in Western countries, has been a belief in equality of income as a social goal and a willingness to use the arm of the state to promote it.” Therefore, such state promises are never to be trusted.

68 Marx and Engels, p. 75. Further, “Property, in its present form, is based on the antagonism of capital and wage labor.” And, regarding individual national identities, “The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality. The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word,” p. 80.

69 Ibid., pp. 79 – 80.

70 Levin, “Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto and the Class Struggle,” p. 70.
Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty.\footnote{Marx and Engels, pp. 78 – 79.}

The idea of the family as a microcosm of society aside (the parents the government, the children the citizens), its abolition is the most personal of Marx’s assaults upon individual identity. Every person’s father and mother are different, every other relation likewise; by eradicating one’s unique roots within a specific, nurturing home environment, one is to be transplanted — quite Platonically — to the following social “adjustment”: state upbringing and education.

Where Plato had proposed that the children of the Ideal City be educated to live simply as members of their social class, Marx proposes, as Levin summarizes, “that communist indoctrination replace education.”\footnote{Levin, “Karl Marx’s \textit{Communist Manifesto} and the Class Struggle,” p. 71.} Being simply taught the ways of a Guardian, Auxiliary, or Producer will no longer do. As Marx has proclaimed that the system of \textit{bourgeois} production has used the pitiable proletarian laborer, the Communist movement shall use the pitiable proletarian laborer through indoctrination for the sake of the World Revolution:

But, you will say, we destroy the most hallowed of relations, when we replace home and education by social.

And your education! Is not that also social, and determined by social conditions under which you educate, by intervention, direct or indirect, of society, by means of schools, \&c.? The Communists have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class.\footnote{Marx and Engels, p. 79.}

Marx’s horror at the “exploitation of children” is revealed for the absurdity it is by this aspiration: that children should be robbed of their youth for the furtherance of the destruction of \textit{bourgeois} society. From the Hitler Youth to the Interahamwe, the youth of the nation have been
kidnapped by totalitarianism to do its vicious bidding. Removed from the natural bosom of family and those already disposed to care for their needs, emotional health, and moral development, they are put out to work, to work as slaves in the soldiery of the Workers’ Paradise.\textsuperscript{74}

The final step in the chain of Communist destruction of \textit{bourgeois} civilization is the eventual erasure of the individual:

…[T]he abolition of this state of things is called by the bourgeois, abolition of individuality and freedom! And rightly so. The abolition of bourgeois individuality, bourgeois independence, and bourgeois freedom is undoubtedly to be aimed at.\textsuperscript{75}

Individuality, in the \textit{bourgeois} sense, says Marx, is a lie: a lie to draw the unsuspecting worker to his or her own mousetrap of unending capitalist exploitation. Each step in the chain inevitably leads to the next: from the demonization of free market capitalism, to the collectivization of private property, the abolition of the family, state care and education of the young, to the individual person’s very extermination.\textsuperscript{76} From the glorious dream of a utopia in which all will

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{74} It is a valid argument to assert that Proletarian children were robbed of their childhood themselves by use as workers in factories, for example; therefore, why should any be accorded such a luxury as the absence of such enslavement? This is an issue which cannot be fully addressed here as far as solutions are concerned, though a point may lie in how such hardship is viewed. It is an immensely unfortunate thing for a child to work \textit{rather} than be educated, for example (as opposed to receiving both benefits), however, such conditions are hardly unique to Europe and America. “Child labor,” as it is called, in varying forms, is all but the natural state of the life of “underclass” people in nearly all societies. Proper distinctions may certainly be made, for example, between assisting a parent in a shop and being exposed to the peril of highly dangerous factory machines against which a helpless child is in no position to defend him- or herself. Still, rational, piecemeal alleviation of such ills is morally preferable to the spiteful project Marx advocates, whereby \textit{all} children’s lives are to be used by the state to further its own existence. This is not to say that Marx consciously advocates such demonic exploitation of youth; it is, however, a calculable result of his own \textit{naïveté} in insisting upon state-run and -sanctioned education and care. Moreover, the argument that supposedly “compassionate” institutions such as the churches of the Industrial Revolution abandoned the youth of the era to abuse is entirely correct. Yet another instance of the infinite fallibility of even those appointed to be the custodians and preachers of the \textit{most} moral of doctrines, Christian institutions, for the most part, remained silent when confronted with the abuse of children who worked in mills and factories of the period. This fact, however, does not lend credence to Marx’s misplaced humanitarian aims.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 76.

\textsuperscript{76} Friedman, pp. ix – x. By the end of his life, Friedman saw the holy trinity of a free society to simply be civil, economic, and political freedom — all three Marx orders destroyed.
work even more vigorously for a collective than for themselves stems the dark inevitability that human dignity must be destroyed for the greater purpose of vanquishing the capitalist society whose slowly-acquired fruits have sustained such ne’er-do-wells as Marx himself.\textsuperscript{77} The only way by which the working men of all countries may unite\textsuperscript{78} is by way of complete self-annihilation — by being remade in the image of the selfless class warrior of Marx’s imagination (reminiscent of Plato’s Auxiliaries and Producers). Envy is to be bred; unrest to be fanned, no matter the cost, as human costs are irrelevant in the face of the dash to perfect human nature through indoctrination and state terror.\textsuperscript{79} In the end, when the “capital” produced via the bourgeois “means of production” is finally spent, it is misery, not former bourgeois wealth, which Marx wishes to redistribute to his dependent poor. By way of the law of negative determination, the equality of complete destitution is preferred to any (so-called) citizen possessing anything peculiar to him- or herself.

Perfection exists in an identical collective standard of living, and with the abolition of religion and objective moral standards (standards not set by the all-powerful state)\textsuperscript{80} removed, it is to be proven here on earth that man does live by bread alone. Through his unconstrained

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{77} He is reputed to have lived on the charity of friends, family, and Engels for much of his life; though it seems not too much more of a parasite than Plato and Rousseau who are known to have lived in relatively indigent manners for portions of their lives, Rousseau abandoning his own children.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 96.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 82. Even Marx himself admits that mass dislocation and misery shall pervade in the wake of the World Revolution: “Of course, in the beginning this [revolution] cannot be effected except by despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production.”}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{80} See Levin, “Karl Marx’s 	extit{Communist Manifesto} and the Class Struggle,” pp. 73 – 74. In a way reminiscent of Robespierre’s “revolutionary government,” the iron-fisted Communist state is eventually to disappear once the revolution is completed. Only the revolution is never complete, and the state shall never disappear, for, as in the 	extit{Republic}, no checks or balances exist to screen out those who are not of sufficient “virtue” to be the society’s leader, let alone to diffuse the demagogue’s power — the revolution’s continuance, too, is far too lucrative to halt.}
nature, he may be molded to be of whatever nature is desired by the self-appointed, supposedly
angelic masterminds who are deemed of sufficient wisdom to organize his society. Many of their
ideas, one could say, are too outrageous to be accepted and obeyed by fully independent
individuals; thus, said individuality must be removed. They must be reconstructed into the one-
dimensional clones required to build the perfect world. Once an individualistic society is relieved
of such character, it is then ripe to be raped by those who institute such collective magic, often
without working it upon themselves, they replacing the God derided as an opioid. It is a type of
apotheosis which the utopian mastermind desires, and that proverbial demagogue’s power which
electrifies “the masses.”

Finally, science, that chaotic but eloquently systematic sanity, is the justification for such
insanity. To quote Bronowski once more, speaking as he stood before the pond at Auschwitz into
which the ashes of the countless Jews murdered in Crematorium IV were flushed:

> There are two parts of the human dilemma. One is the belief that the end justifies
> the means. …The other is the betrayal of the human spirit: the assertion of dogma
> that closes the mind, and turns a nation, civilisation, into a regiment of ghosts —
> obedient ghosts, or tortured ghosts.
>
> It is said that science will dehumanise people and turn them into numbers.
> That is false, tragically false. …When people believe that they have absolute
> knowledge, with no test in reality, this is how they behave. This is what men do
> when they aspire to the knowledge of gods.

Science is a very human form of knowledge. We are always at the brink of
the known, we always feel forward for what is to be hoped. Every judgement in
science stands on the edge of error, and is personal. Science is a tribute to what
we can know although we are fallible.

…I owe it as a human being to the many members of my family who died
at Auschwitz, to stand here by the pond as a survivor and as a witness. We have to
cure ourselves of the itch for absolute knowledge and power.\footnote{81}

The “itch” toward a perfect world — in addition to the god-like power which perfect knowledge

\footnote{81 Bronowski, “Knowledge or Certainty,” in *The Ascent of Man*, pp. 370 – 374.}
would give us — is the ultimate source of that pond. The gleaming, hopeful road of the unconstrained vision of human potentiality promises Heaven on earth, with all its joys within our reach; the road, however, shrivels to tracks, the tracks leading to the gates of Hell.
II

THE PURSUIT OF GOOD WITHIN THE CONSTRAINTS OF HUMAN REALITY
2. The Biblical Hero:
Flawed Ones Revered by All

II.1.1 Free to Choose:
God-Given Moral Responsibility

The pre-eminent contribution of Judeo-Christian religion to Western thought and faith is the concept of man’s God-given moral responsibility in the form of free will. In no other tradition, either, is man created in any deity’s Image, let alone that of the principal Creator. The association between God and man is a relationship, governed not only by God, but by the manner in which human beings, endowed by their Creator with moral reasoning and rational judgement, see fit to act. The pagan, polytheistic relationship between god and mortal — for example, the Sumero-Babylonian mythologies out of which the Jewish religion emerged — is defined by two factors: human action on the one hand, and divine capriciousness on the other. Just as nature moves with neither reason nor depth of motive, gods — personifications of the powers of nature and the psyche — do the same. Lust and wrath, typically, are the main reasons for a god’s

1 Nahum Mattithias Sarna, “Creation,” in Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History, third printing (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 17. “Anyone who reads the Enuma Elish [the creation myth of the Babylonians] is struck by the moral indifference of the gods, and much the same is true of the Homeric epics. The pagan worshipper had no reason to believe that the decrees of his god must necessarily be just, any more than he could be convinced that society rested upon a universal order of justice. According to the pagan world-view the fate of man was not determined by human behavior. The gods were innately capricious, so that any absolute authority was impossible.” Sarna is mostly incorrect concerning the Greek tradition, however, for (see II.2), whether in myth, epic narrative, or tragedy, the gods, though themselves hardly embodiments of many human virtues, are certainly not morally indifferent to the conduct of mortals. Custom was believed to be divinely-given; thus the decree of any god, whether Zeus or any other, as to what was good was accepted as universal law, for instance in the Antigone, wherein it is the law of the gods that familial responsibility as relates to burial rites supersedes the political law of a human king.
behavior and decision-making, both often resulting from a level of simple pettiness. No codified, standardized, revealed, or even stated divine law is present in the Greek tradition, and that presented in the Mesopotamian, including the famous of Codes of Hammurabi (c. 1754 B.C.E.), are presented as the laws of the ruler, backed by divine mandate. The moral law of the Jews and Christians, however, is derived directly from the one God of Holy Scripture, specifically and clearly laying out the ethical tenets of a good society. This system, ethical monotheism, is a revolutionary idea, for it turned the concept of not only divine multiplicity but divine authority upside-down. Rather than many gods giving at times confusing and conflicting moral commands, as well as occasionally battling amongst themselves for a greater share of power, the one God of the Biblical tradition entirely transcends such pettiness and establishes Himself as an unquestionable authority from which a fully standardized moral law emanates. Man fits into this relationship thus: rather than relating to multiple authorities, some hostile, others less so, humans are judged by a single authority — allowing for no second opinions — who is their Creator. No member of the main Greek pantheon is responsible for the creation of humanity, thus possessed of full interest in or responsibility for its well-being and action. If humans are God’s children, then, as our Father in Heaven, He is directly connected to those who bear His Image.

Humans are possessed of free will in other systems and religions, but in no other does God specifically bestow it upon them — that very free will being the vehicle by which good or evil may be done and judged. Free will enters human experience before the expulsion from Eden,

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2 This relates specifically to the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1 – 17), rather than the New Testament, or the great plurality of the 613 commandments of the Torah, which concern God’s edicts applying exclusively to Jews. This is not to say that the Decalogue binds non-Jews in a different manner than Jews, in other words, rendering the other 603 irrelevant for Christians; it is binding in the same way, though for Christians, to obey the first ten is sufficient in the face of following those of Christ.

3 Genesis 2:7. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (KJV)
but it is only with the first sin that Adam and Eve bring it to the forefront of human moral existence — it being the means by which humans, now mortal and no longer under divine control, may eventually achieve redemption. With the eating of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and all duality, man and woman are free to choose the manner in which they shall act, that freedom and power being the reason for their expulsion from Paradise. Once outside of the divine womb of Eden, God may no longer control human behavior and will, thus it is the job of man and woman to hold dominion over themselves in order that they may earn the mixed blessing of their freedom — to be as God via their own human goodness.

The revelation of the moral law upon Mount Sinai is hardly the first appearance of such expectations of human conduct. Instances of the moral dimension of God’s authority are peppered throughout Genesis — the murder of Abel, the wickedness of humanity as justification for the Flood, the switch of Leah for Rachel in Jacob’s tent for his deception of his father Isaac, etc. — but never is such law specifically communicated until Exodus 20. This law, that of the Ten Commandments, the Hebrew Aseret ha-D’varim (הַדְּבָרִים עֲשֶׂרֶת) or “Ten Statements,” is the unequivocal revelation of moral law to man in the form of the Jewish people. The fulfillment of

4 Ibid., 3:4. The serpent, the tempter, ironically, is the source of this truth: “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (KJV)

5 Sarna, “The Garden of Eden,” in Understanding Genesis, p. 27. “Yet God Himself testifies that ‘man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil’ (3:22). In other words, man does possess the possibility of defying the divine word, and therein lies the secret of his freedom.”

6 Ibid. “Now the imitation of God is indeed a biblical ideal. Man was fashioned in the divine image and ‘to walk in God’s way’ is a recurring admonition of the biblical writings. But true godliness is an expression of character, an attempt to imitate in human relationships those ethical attributes the Scriptures associate with God. The deceptive nature of the serpent’s appeal lay in its interpretation of godliness which it equated with defiance of God’s will, with power, rather than with strength of character.”

7 Genesis 4:8 – 16.


Abraham’s covenant with God, it is God’s covenant with the People of Israel, once they are chosen as His people, though it is almost entirely universally relevant, regardless of its tribal audience. The First Commandment,\textsuperscript{10} for example, states the fact that God Himself is responsible for the Israelites’ freedom from their former status as slaves in Egypt. God does not, as in Job 38:1 – 41,\textsuperscript{11} boast of His majesty in terms of the creation of the world. God instead proclaims to Moses that He is the one who brought the People of Israel out of slavery in a foreign land, and that in return for this act of divine mercy, His people shall follow these central laws that they may construct a society more just than the one they left behind, the one which enslaved and dehumanized them. This statement demonstrates that God cares not only about His chosen people, but also about human freedom in general, however complicated that attitude may be.\textsuperscript{12}

The Second Commandment, prohibits the practice of producing and actively worshipping visual representations of gods,\textsuperscript{13} though its deeper significance pertains to the worship of any thing which replaces God at the center of one’s spiritual life — other gods, money, sex, power, beauty,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] Exodus 20:2. “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” (KJV)
\item[11] The Book of Job, יְוֵ֢ו (יְוֵ֢ו), is believed to be a later work, one which contradicts the main canonical narrative of human suffering being the result of human wickedness. It is, of course, a subject in itself; given its outlying status, it is not discussed here.
\item[12] It is a perfectly legitimate observation and criticism to note that the ancient Israelite view of those outside this holy community, goyim (גְּוִ֑ים), would not be recognized as “human” in the same way as those within, am (אָם), the “people.” The distinction is quite literal and surprisingly rational, namely that those who do not observe the Laws of God are literally not as “good” as those who do and are part of the people which God has chosen to be His “light unto the nations” — or la-goyim (לַרְאוֹיִם), Isaiah 42:6 — the goodness of this people enlightening all others to the higher morality of the God they do not themselves worship. Therefore, Israelites are permitted to enslave those outside their holy community, as well as kill them with impunity, as in the case of the pagan Canaanites; nevertheless, they may not mistreat those slaves, and such killing is never arbitrary, for the Canaanites were to be specifically punished for the practice of religious infanticide. On the larger question of slavery, it could be said that though God disapproves of slavery, He knows that His people’s full adherence to His Law is an immensely gradual process, and some leeway must be granted. Nevertheless, prohibitions against the mistreatment of slaves is revolutionary in itself, and perhaps it is the seed of greater advances to come. Cf. II.4, p. 149, n. 51.
\item[13] This was for centuries interpreted as a prohibition against artistic representation of created images of any sort, but diversity of opinion arose in truly epochal manners during the Hellenistic era and Middle Ages, resulting in production of many lavishly illustrated illuminated manuscripts and synagogue decoration, in addition to the Persian and Mughal Islamic traditions allowing for such depictions, normally forbidden by mainstream Arab Islam.
\end{footnotes}
etc. By loving God entirely and before all earthly attachments, one, by analogy, graciously loves the principle of freedom and dignity which God has given humanity. The Fourth Commandment, to keep the seventh day of the week as a day of rest, of shabat (שַׁבָּת), though seemingly insignificant and only relevant to observant Jews and church-going Christians, this commandment is one which codifies human dignity in a truly revolutionary fashion. Every day of most humans’ lives beforehand, with the exception of religious festivals, had consisted of unending days of punishing labor of some nature. In a sense, humans were equal to the domesticated animals alongside whom they tilled the fields, ground grain, and hauled building materials. All men and women were slaves in this view, relegated by human greed and hardheartedness to the status of the animals over whom God had given them dominion and pre-eminent status. The addition of the day of rest to the week freed men and women from their slavery to never-ending labor and status as beasts of burden. A slave was a beast of burden, a sub-human machine extant for the unrequited benefit of others; a slave’s ceasing of work was at best at his or her master or mistress’s discretion, and none was ever weighted with the obligation to allow a slave to rest. This commandment, therefore, recognizes the humanity of slaves — the sub-humans whom Israelites had been the eyes of the Egyptians — and reaffirms the precept that human beings are meant to be free, that freedom being their path to moral redemption. The Sixth Commandment, forbidding murder, relates to man being made in God’s Image. For one

14 See n.12. Though the Israelites are permitted to own slaves, the specific complex of dehumanization, in other words, is to be removed.

15 Redemption in the form of a paradisiacal life after death is a Jewish belief which seems to be subsequent to the codification of Exodus and the other four books of the Torah.

16 Exodus 20:13. “Do not commit murder.” (REB) The more famous King James Version (KJV) translation, “Thou shalt not kill,” was appropriate at the time of its writing (1604 – 1611), namely the word “kill” meaning the taking of any form of life in any sense or situation. The original Hebrew, however, Lo tir’tzach (לֹּא תִרְצָח) is far closer to the English Revised Bible translation, the verb ratzach (רָצַח) meaning “to murder.”
human to slay another is equivalent to the smashing of the face of God, the closest thing in the
human world to deicide.\textsuperscript{17} Still, there is another level: the giving of life is God’s ultimate ability
and prerogative; likewise its taking. To take the life of another human being is the ultimate
hubris: namely to wrench from the Creator that prerogative, depriving that other person of his or
right to life and freedom.\textsuperscript{18} Finally, the following four commandments — against adultery, theft,
giving fraudulent testimony, and coveting — all outlaw other forms of theft. Just as in murder
one steals another’s God-given life, in the Seventh Commandment one steals another’s spouse,\textsuperscript{19}
in the Eighth another’s property,\textsuperscript{20} in the Ninth one steals justice,\textsuperscript{21} and in the Tenth one wishes to
steal another’s property or spouse.\textsuperscript{22} As aforesaid, though God cursed Adam and Eve to labor,
suffering, and death for their sin, several of His words to Adam in Genesis hold the key: “and
only by the sweat of your brow will you win your bread…”\textsuperscript{23} Man is told that he must earn his

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} A later Christian analogy for this idea is an image from the ninth-century Byzantine Chludov Psalter, an
illuminated manuscript depicting the Crucifixion, wherein the centurion pierces Christ’s side with his lance above a
scene of an identically-dressed iconoclast — one who subscribed to the belief that the making and veneration of
Christian art was an act of the very idolatry forbidden by the Second Commandment during the period of 726 – 843
— defacing with whitewash a circular icon of an identically-dressed, apparently risen Christ. The message: that
those who destroyed artistic representations of Christ, the created image of Him, during the dark years of
Iconoclasm are equal in their wickedness to those who crucified him.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} This is embodied in the concept of \textit{piku'ach nefesh} (נֶפֶשׁ יְקֻוָחַ פּ)
“saving a soul,” among the most important tents of
Jewish ethics, its origin in Leviticus 18:5 (“Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man
do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD” [KJV]), its significance being that Jews should live by the law of the Torah
rather than die as a result of it. This also relates to the famous Talmudic phrase, “Whoever saves one life saves
the world entire” (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:9, \textit{Yerushal'mi Talmud}, Tractate Sanhedrin 37-A) dating to many centuries
after the codification and editing of the Torah. The presented reason for the preciousness of human life is that the
entire universe is uniquely contained within the consciousness of each person, and to destroy or save one’s fellow
human being is equivalent to the destruction or rescue of the universe itself. This eloquent Talmudic idea, though an
interpretation of Mosaic law, differs from the more ancient sense of it, namely that each person is a member of the
community, and that membership through the keeping of the covenant is the main source of that person’s value, as
one who is either righteous or not.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Exodus 20:14. “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” (KJV)
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 20:15. “Thou shalt not steal.” (KJV)
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 20:16. “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” (KJV)
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 20:17. “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his
manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.” (KJV)
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Genesis 3:19 (REB).
\end{itemize}
property, through the positive use of his free will; through the negative use, namely laziness, he and Eve would starve. The second five commandments pertain to adult humans’ treatment of each other — how they should use their free will towards their brothers and sisters in God — where the first five describe how humans, both as children and adults, should relate to God, and to the family as the private microcosm of loving divine authority.

Where in the past pagans were required to do much to directly glorify their gods, the God of the Bible is ultimately served by human beings treating each other decently: the Ten Commandments come together to set the basis for a society in which human dignity is respected, preserved, and upheld. Both the People of this Covenant, namely the Jewish people, and all those who through Christianity and Islam accept such law, are blessed by the wisdom of a moral law which elevates human dignity to the state of all-consuming divine concern.

II.1.2 FATHER ABRAHAM: HOLY, THOUGH BUT A MAN

“The Jewish tradition, I think, does not allow for heroes,” says Alan Dershowitz. He cites the examples of arguably the three most famous figures of Biblical literature: Abraham, the

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24 The legitimacy of private property can be justified by this, in that it is God’s intention that men and women earn their sustenance and possessions, the Eighth Commandment protecting them against theft by others.

25 Exodus 20:12. The Fifth Commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” (KJV)

26 This God certainly requires elaborate worship, but the observance of the moral law towards others is paramount.

27 Though at the price of fully conforming to the Law, violation of which, even minor, is to be punished severely (see Numbers 15:32 – 36).


man honored by half the world and father of a great nation; Moses, the leader of a people and
giver of the Law; and David: warrior, king, murderer, adulterer, and penitent. He says in
reflection,

...[H]eroism, you know, it’s interesting... the difference between the Jewish
tradition, and the Muslim tradition, and the Christian tradition really can be
summarized that way... In Christianity, Jesus is flawless; in Islam, Mohammed is
flawless; in Judaism, everybody has flaws because Judaism is a very human
religion.  

These three men — and no more than men they are — form the literary basis for a faith
constructed upon specifically human values and rooted in the flawed human’s relationship with a
moral God, those flaws, and virtues, making it a forever revered and intriguing text populated by
distinguishable, unique characters. Firstly, it is necessary to define a “hero.” The Greek definition
is generally a boundary-breaking doer of great deeds who is either deified with his death, or is at
least worshipped posthumously in some fashion. Campbell’s more universal definition is of

...[Someone] who has found [or achieved] or done something beyond the normal
range of achievement and experience. A hero [properly] is someone who has
given his or her life to something bigger than oneself.  

Neither definition specifies moral or spiritual perfection as a requirement for hero-hood.
Nevertheless, Dershowitz’ idea is worth putting to the test.

To begin, Abraham, the man from Ur, was born a pagan, named Abram, to a man named
Terach, an artisan who carved and sold idols of the gods. At the age of seventy-five, however,
once he and his family had moved from Ur to Haran, God said to him: “Get thee out of thy

30 Ibid.


32 Hebrew: Avraham (אַבְרָהָם), born Avram (אָבְרָם).

33 Genesis 12:4.
country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee…”\textsuperscript{34}

And unto him God made a promise:

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.\textsuperscript{35}

This promise made, Abram built altars in worship of this one God and departed for Canaan. Once there, he saw that the land at that time was suffering from a famine so severe that he had no choice but to travel via the Sinai to Egypt, where the land was always fertile, to live there until the rains returned to Canaan.\textit{En route}, he said to his wife Sarai that the Egyptians would likely kill him if they knew that she, a beautiful woman younger than he, was indeed his wife; therefore, he asked her to pass herself as his sister, that if another should take her as his wife, there would be no need to kill him.\textsuperscript{36} When found by the pharaoh’s courtiers, she was taken as one of his wives, and Abram, her supposed brother, was allowed to live in Egypt, wherein he became a rich man.\textsuperscript{37} God, however, rained down plagues upon the House of Pharaoh on account of his taking of Sarai as his wife, when in fact she was the wife of Abram. For this, Pharaoh expelled Abram from Egypt with Sarai for such dishonest violation of his hospitality. The two returned to Canaan with Abram’s other relatives. Of this Sarna says:

The famine in the land of promise and the physical danger that threatened to engulf Abraham and Sarah exemplify one of the characteristic features of the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 12:1 (KJV).

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 12:2 – 3.

\textsuperscript{36} Genesis 12:11 – 13. “And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.” (KJV)

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 12:16.
patriarchal stories. The hopes generated by the divine assurance of nationhood and national territory seem to be in perpetual danger of miscarrying. Reality always falls short of the promise. Yet the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, and the hand of Providence is ever present, delivering the chosen ones. Hence the recurring theme of peril and reaffirmation of the promises throughout the Book of Genesis.38

Twenty-three years later,39 God appeared before Abram once again and said,

As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.40

For his part, God said, Abraham would circumcise himself and all males within his household and so, too, would his seed circumcise their sons upon their eighth day of life as a sign of this covenant.41 Likewise, He renamed Sarai Sarah,42 and promised that she, ninety and hitherto barren, would herself bear him a son, to be named Isaac.

Shortly afterward, God proclaimed that he would destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham drew near to God and asked if He would indeed destroy the cities if even fifty innocent residents resided there. The Lord agreed. Nevertheless, Abraham tested his God. He asked if for five fewer innocents, God would not destroy the cities; God again agreed. Then Abraham asked if for forty innocents God would stay His Hand; God conceded. Then, for thirty,

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38 Sarna, “From Mesopotamia to Canaan,” in Understanding Genesis, p. 104.
39 This includes the temporary departure from his nephew Lot and the miraculous birth of Ishmael to Hagar.
40 Ibid., 17:4 – 8 (KJV).
41 Ibid., 17:9 – 14.
42 Hebrew: שָׂרָה.
and for twenty Abraham bargained with God to know the Lord’s intentions. Finally, Abraham settled upon ten, to which God agreed. Then, however, a group of Sodomites attacked Lot, who had come to live there, and attempted to kill him and his family when Lot refused to assist them in attempting to gang-rape two of his males guests. The cries of Lot’s family and guests waxed great before God, and once they finally escaped with the assistance of angels, fire and brimstone rained down from Heaven upon the cities of sin and as dawn rose, the smoke of their burning greeted the shocked Abraham, consoled only by the Lord having saved his nephew Lot.

Abraham once again claimed Sarah to be his sister when they moved between Kadesh and Shur in the land of the Philistines. He feared Abimelech, the Philistine king, who indeed did take Sarah for his harem, but released her when God sent him a vision proclaiming that she was not Abraham’s sister but his wife. Abimelech called Abraham before him and, as Pharaoh, rebuked Abraham for his deception. Abraham defended his lie by stating that Sarah was indeed his half-sister. Abimelech sent him away, agreeing on a property settlement. Once again, Abraham’s main character fault appears: though a righteous man, he is also a man of fear, this fear leading him to sacrifice the safety of his beloved wife two separate times in favor of his own. Rather than trusting in God, he yields to his fear, fear which jeopardizes the main earthly focus of his love, forcing God to intercede and retrieve the ancestress of Israel and put the result of Abraham’s foolishness right.

Isaac was born in Abraham’s one hundredth year; but Sarah came to resent Ishmael who

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43 Ibid., 18:20 – 33.
45 Hebrew: Avimelekh’ (אֲבִימֶלֶךְ).
46 Hebrew: Yitz’chak (יִצְחַק).
had been born to her maidservant, and ordered that both he and his mother Hagar be henceforth
sent from their household. This gave Abraham great grief, but God reassured him by saying
that Isaac would be the one through whom his name would perpetuate, and through Ishmael
another nation would come. Some time later, the Lord put Abraham to the test. One morning,
God said to him:

Abraham… Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get
thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of
the mountains which I will tell thee of.

This famous episode, known as the “Binding,” or ha’Akeidah (הָעֲקֵידָה), displays Abraham being
brought to the point of the ultimate decision as to life priorities — testing his love for his son by
his wife against his love for his God (whether he was truly worthy of God’s many promises
which had coaxed him to press on in life to this point). Abraham did as bade by his God, and
took his beloved son to the top of the mountain, the wood for the burnt offering upon his son’s
back, and prepared to perform the painful duty. Upon raising the knife to slaughter his son,
however, whom he had bound upon the alter as if an animal, an angel of the Lord descended to
Abraham and stayed his hand. Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a nearby bush and, as
instructed, offered it upon the alter in his son’s stead. It is never stated whether Abraham would
have killed his son for fear of his God, but it seems that God judged that what in fact took place
was itself enough to prove that Abraham truly feared Him.

48 Ishmael — Yish’ma’el (יִשְׁמָעֵאל) — is believed by Muslims to be the primal ancestor of all Arab peoples and of the
Prophet Muḥammad.
49 Ibid., 22:1 – 2.
50 This image would later be used as a marker for the “Old” Testament’s prophetic connections to the “New” as
regarding the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God, the Cross of human and cosmic suffering upon His shoulders.
51 Ibid., 22:12.
For this harrowing act of loyalty,\textsuperscript{52} God made His final pact with His chosen man:

\textit{…By myself have I sworn, saith the L\textsc{ord}, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.}\textsuperscript{53}

The birth of Israel complete,\textsuperscript{54} Abraham is officially made the ancestor of a nation, not only numerous and prosperous, but also a blessing to the world. This man, both cowardly and courageous — of such compassion that he bargained with God Himself that the wicked of another place be spared for the sake of the righteous, and of such meek selfishness that he preferred his life to that of his wife — is beloved of God and proves himself worthy of His ultimate blessing. A man who is blessed with great kindness but also self-centeredness is worthy to be the one through whom God had chosen to act and breed His new holy people. Abraham’s story, therefore, sets a precedent: namely, that a character’s flaws make his triumphs all the more awe-inspiring — that heroism is a state of moral comprise.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52} Sarna, “The Birth of Isaac and the Akedah,” in \textit{Understanding Genesis}, p. 163. “…[T]he story reveals something more about the character of the patriarch. [There is an] intimate connection between [God and Abraham in] the call at Haran, at the outset of his spiritual odyssey. The great difference between the two events is what constitutes the measure of Abraham’s progress in his relationship to God. The first divine communication carried with it the promise of reward. The final one held out no such expectation. On the contrary, by its very nature it could mean nothing less than the complete nullification of the covenant and the frustration forever of all hope of posterity. Ishmael had already departed. Now Isaac would be gone, too. Tradition has rightly seen in Abraham the exemplar of steadfast, disinterested loyalty to God.”

\textsuperscript{53} Genesis 22:16 – 18 (KJV).

\textsuperscript{54} God staying Abraham’s hand allows for Isaac to beget Jacob, Ya’akov (יָעַקֹב), who in time (35:10) God renames Israel, Yis’ra’el (יִשְׂרָאֵל).

\textsuperscript{55} Demonstrated, too, is God’s faith in Abraham, but also His intention to shift the balances of Abraham’s life. There must be loss in Abraham’s life that he should have faith, but God must reward that faith, for whatever Abraham’s failings, God’s plan mandates that his family survive, the needs for the future seeming to supersede the need for God to directly punish his chosen one’s transgressions. This fact — among countless others — could be a result of the Torah’s human scribes and editors, though such intercessions could alternately be leveled out by the losses Abraham suffers — from twice losing Sarah to his cowardice to losing Ishmael to Sarah’s jealousy and his God’s acceptance of it, not least God’s command that he sacrifice his “only” son.
II.1.3 MOSES: OUR WEAK-MOUTHED TEACHER

Moses is among the most unlikely of heroes to appear in Biblical literature, not necessarily on account of his circumstances, but certainly in view of his character. Like his great ancestor Abraham, he is fearful, but also weak of speech and highly unwilling to accept God’s challenges and invitations to heroism. Born to a slave-girl, he was committed to the mercy of the waters of the Nile to spare him from Pharaoh’s decree that every Jewish baby boy be drowned; rescued from the Nile by one of Pharaoh’s daughters, he was adopted as one of the king’s sons. Raised in royal luxury, he wanted for nothing, until one day he beheld an Egyptian Overseer whipping a helpless Israelite slave. Looking this way and that, Moses drew his sword in his disgust and slew the Egyptian. For this, he fled the country and took refuge in the land of Midian, where he married a shepherd girl, Zipporah, of neither Israelite blood nor faith. There, he took the duty of tending his father-in-law’s sheep; but God, however, had a different plan for this fugitive, raised and having married as a pagan.


57 Jochebed; Hebrew: Yokheved (יֹכֶבֶד).

58 The story of the birth and abandonment of Moses derives from the ancient motif of the abandoned hero, appearing in other cultures as well as in the case of the great king Sargon of Akkad; see Sarna, “The Birth and Youth of Moses,” in Exploring Exodus, p. 29 and Campbell, “And We Washed Our Weapons in the Sea: Gods and Goddesses of the Neolithic Age,” in Transformations of Myth Through Time, pp. 65 – 66.

59 Exodus 2:12. “And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.” The morality of this killing was contested by the Talmudic rabbis of later centuries, citing the verse from Isaiah 59:16, “And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.” (KJV) This verse gives the impression that Moses slew the Egyptian for he saw no “man” — no person, ish (איש) of moral substance — to do justice, wondering “that there was no intercessor,” and in his lonely desperation, undertook the duty himself. Still, the more traditional interpretation — that of a murder, regardless of the victim’s cruelty — may be left to stand for the sake of argument.

60 Hebrew: Tziforah (צִפוֹרָה).
The Israelites, Moses’ people, still were slaves, though the Pharaoh had since died. They “sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage,” and their God “heard their groaning”; He “looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.” One day, while tending the sheep of his wife’s father, Moses beheld the blinding sight of a bush ablaze in the distance, but appearing not to be consumed by the fire. The God of the Israelites came to Moses through the fire and spoke to him. He said, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” But Moses protested: “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” God reassured Moses that He would be with him. Moses protested once again: “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” God reassured him once more, and later Moses confronted Pharaoh, God lending force and strength to the tongue of His shepherd:

Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go… And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go. And [Moses said with Aaron], The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days’ journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword. And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. Pharaoh was not moved, and God sent the Ten Plagues upon Egypt in punishment for his refusal.

61 Ibid., 2:23 (KJV).
62 Ibid., 2:24 – 25 (KJV).
63 Ibid., 3:10 (KJV).
64 Ibid., 3:11 (KJV).
65 Ibid., 4:10 (KJV).
66 Ibid., 5:1 – 4 (KJV). Moses spoke with his brother Aaron the priest, whom he had come to know while in Midian.
The Plagues only hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and only with the final plague, the slaying of each Egyptian first-born son, did Pharaoh relent and order that the Israelites depart the kingdom. But he still sought revenge, and sent a vast army in their wake to slay them all. God, however, would not allow Pharaoh to lay waste to His chosen tribe, and as his army bore down upon the Israelites before the Gulf of Suez,

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

As the Red Sea parted, God’s People crossed the exposed seabed to the safety of the shores of Sinai, and once they had all crossed, through His chosen one, God replaced the waters, their wrath drowning the armies of Egypt before the eyes of the People.

Three months of wandering passed before God spoke to Moses, through whom He had freed the People of Israel from slavery. He called Moses to Mount Sinai, and there in a whirl of blinding smoke God bestowed upon the weak-tongued shepherd the Ten Commandments on which he would build a new nation. But the people disobeyed Moses and their God; Moses beheld his people bowing before a golden idol of a calf, and in his rage he smashed the Tablets given him by God. Again he ascended the mountain, and he himself cut two new tablets from stone, and these God inscribed for all time.

67 The sparing of the first-borns of the Israelites is the origin of the holiday of Passover, God informing the people to mark their door frames with lamb’s blood to signal the Angel of Death to pass over their houses. It is also in retribution for Pharaoh’s father’s policy that every Israelite first-born son be drowned in the Nile (Exodus 1:22).
68 Ibid., 14:21 – 22 (KJV).
69 For which Aaron the priest is castigated by God (Numbers 20:12).
70 Ibid., 34:1 – 28. For bestowing the Law upon the people of Israel, Moses is remembered with the epithet Mosheh Rabenu (משה רבנו), “Moses our Teacher.”
For forty years, then, the Israelites did wander through the Sinai desert, until finally they did reach the precipice of the Promised land of Canaan. But God would not allow Moses, the great man who had led His people out of bondage, himself to lead them into the land promised to his fathers. God spoke to Moses one final time:

This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD.71

There is debate as to the reason why Moses was forbidden to enter the Promised Land of his people, but it is said that it was God’s chastisement for having struck a rock twice, rather than speaking to it as God had ordered him to do, that water would spring from it to quench the people’s thirst.72 Nevertheless, Moses is considered by many to be the greatest character — if not hero — of the Jewish tradition. Though fearful, weak of speech, and unwilling to be God’s vessel of leadership, he is proclaimed upon his death the only prophet to know the Lord face to face.73 The unlikeliest of heroes, though revered as both leader to freedom and the founder of a whole new civilization, the lesson of his life reaches far beyond his own small desert tribe.

II.2.4 KING DAVID: HERO & SINNER

No hero of the Bible, however, is as human as David,74 standing tall beneath the chisel of Michelangelo, but creaking with weakness beneath his passions. Unlike Moses, he was not raised

71 Deuteronomy 34:4 – 5 (KJV).
72 Numbers 20:1 – 12.
73 Deuteronomy 34:10. To behold God is the goal of every life — therefore, it is believed, Moses did not die in vain.
74 Hebrew: יְהוָה.
in a court; though, he tended a flock. A King of the Jews already sat on the throne, Saul, but he was a troubled and weak man, who had angered God. God spoke to the prophet Samuel, who went forth to the estate of Jesse to find a possible new king who would free Israel from the growing might of the Philistines, a foreign people who lived along the coast. God rejected the elder seven of Jesse’s sons, but settled upon the small boy David, out tending the flock, commanding Samuel to “Arise,” and “anoint him: for this is he.”

David was brought to the palace where he played his lyre to sooth Saul’s troubled mind. But news came that the army of the greatest, largest warrior of the Philistines, Goliath, was on the march and he had challenged the king to send one of his people out to duel with him in single combat. None was of sufficient courage to go out and fight the menacing pagan; except for the king’s young servant, the harpist David. He came before Goliath, and Goliath was enraged that he was to be challenged by a boy, showing his enemy’s cowardice. But David said to the towering giant from the distance, “Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.” Before Goliath could reach the boy and slay him with his sword, David let forth a stone from his sling, the stone smiting the giant between his eyes, Goliath

75 The pattern for the Patriarchs and other heroes is pastoralism — namely, that they are shepherds of the People.
76 Hebrew: Sha’ul (שָׁאוּל)
77 Hebrew: Sh’mu’el (שְׁמוּאֵל), literally, “Name of God.”
78 Hebrew: Yishai (יִשַׁי).
79 I Samuel 16:12 (KJV).
80 Saul grew to love David as a son, though he did not adopt him as a prince. David the harpist is also reputed by lore to be the author of the more beautiful of the Psalms, though the truth of this is disputed.
81 Hebrew: Gal’yat (גָּלְיָת).
82 Ibid., 17:45 (KJV).
falling dead to the ground. This triumph turned King Saul’s love to hate, and in his jealousy he attempted to kill David again and again, his former dear one becoming an exile. One night, though, David came upon Saul asleep in his army camp; his men saw this as the opportunity to rid the kingdom of Saul’s unpopular rule and put David on the throne. David, however, took Saul’s spear and his pitcher of water, and with the dawn he raised the spear upon the summit of a nearby hilltop and called out to Saul, stating that he wished to reconcile with the man who had been a father to him. His own weapon in David’s hand, Saul wept, crying out, “Is this thy voice, my son David?”

Upon Saul’s death in battle, David was crowned king. His reign began in glory. He united the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel into one, subdued the Jebusites, and bought the threshing floor by the southern end of Jerusalem as the site of the Temple of the Jews’ one God. But David was still a man of passion, despite his courage and ability. Using his power wisely would be his greatest challenge.

One night, gazing down from the roof of his palace, David beheld a woman bathing upon the roof of her house, the most beautiful he had ever seen. The King made inquiries, and he was told that her name was Bathsheba, and she was married to the warrior Uriah the Hittite, but his passion for her overrode this knowledge. He sent messengers to fetch her, and without refusal she came to the bed of the handsome king. Their affair persisted without consequence

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83 Ibid., 24:16 (KJV).
84 Hebrew: Yehudah ve-Yis’ra’el (יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיְהוּדָה).
85 Hebrew: Yevusi (בָּשֹׁם).
86 Hebrew: Bat Sheva (בַּת שֶׁבַע).
87 Hebrew: Uriyahu ha-Hiti (אוּרִיָּה הַחִתִּי).
until the day Bathsheba informed her lover the King that she was with child; on account of this, David could no longer allow her husband to live, and he ordered that Uriah the Hittite be murdered, and then made Bathsheba his own wife. But David had incurred God’s wrath — not only for these crimes, but for others which included many other adulteries — and God sent the Prophet Nathan to confront him. To him David confessed his sin, and stood fast to be punished, finally bowing to the fact that God’s Law superseded any made by a king, even one of His own people. For his sin, God cursed David and his descendants — including the son by Bathsheba whom Nathan would crown as King Solomon — to never be free of the sword nor strife of all kinds. By this curse, David died a bitter and broken man.

Dershowitz’ assertion is valuable and wise, though it may demonstrate a different expectation of heroism than that provided by Campbell, the Greeks, and the Biblical tradition of which Dershowitz waxes so eloquent. The heroes of Judaism are men of fear, weakness, and passion, but they are presented as heroes, and their stories never cease to intrigue the reader. Each perform deeds of nobility and courage, and likewise of cowardice and greed; but their virtues and vices unite in the Biblical narrative to paint portraits of fully human figures at the center of stories whose influence partially served as the basis for Western civilization. Humanity, through its free will and moral reasoning, is capable of both good and evil, and the heroes

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89 Hebrew: Natan  (נָתַן).

90 Ibid., 12:13. “I have sinned against the LORD.” (KJV)

91 Hebrew: Sh’lomoh  (שְׁלֹמֹה). The building of the Temple, too, seems to incur God’s wrath in the future, placing emphasis on hierarchy and materialism, rather than love of Him — all the Temple-era prophets being thoroughly anti-Temple.

92 Ibid., 12:10 – 12.
Abraham, Moses, and David are the Bible’s most fascinating case studies in men who exhibited both — examples of human reality in all its nobility, intrigue, and pathos. In the words of another contemporary Jewish public figure, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, “God expects us to be human, not saints. Just be human, God says, and the rest will follow.”\(^9\)

1. THE GREEK VIEW: TRAGIC, MORTAL HEROISM

II.2.1 ODYSSEUS’ CHOICE: HOMERIC COURAGE IN MORTALITY

Immortality is not worthy of pity, for what is there to lose? The inventors of theatrical tragedy, the Greeks, saw one’s life on earth as the only act in a finite human story.\(^1\) Though symbolic of ultimately universal and trans-personal realities,\(^2\) the characters of Greek myth and tragedy evoke our pity and terror insofar as we may relate to them as individual beings capable of evoking such emotions. The heart bleeds and quickens in fear for Oidipous for it is he — not king, not murderer, not committer of incest — for whom we feel. It is a tango which requires the presence of a unique, created figure to combine with the archetypal symbols, follies, and energies which in their union bring about the tragedy. Though the Greek understanding of individuality differs slightly from the post-medieval European,\(^3\) the interest in unique human excellence brings about the conclusion that excellence comes from a unique individual’s relationship with the natural and supernatural energies which bring it about. Human consciousness is unrepeatable, for each of us relates to the powers of life in an inescapably different way, however similarly, and

\(^1\) Though more than worthy of study, the largely Orphic tradition of metempsychosis, or reincarnation, shall not be discussed here.


\(^3\) See II.3.
such differences possess moral value in as far as they may give educational choices to the pursuance of life action.

Moreover, this view of the human being’s participation in cosmic reality is the original Western answer to each one which had gone before. As Campbell explains,

Against the symbol of this undying power [i.e., the forever circling cosmos and the endlessly reincarnating beings below] the warrior principle of the great deed of the individual who matters flung its bolt, and for a period the old order of belief — as well as of civilization — fell apart. …In the West, on the other hand, the principle of indeterminacy represented by the freely willing, historically effective hero not only gained but held the field, and has retained it to the present. Moreover, this victory of the principle of free will, together with its moral corollary of individual responsibility, establishes the first distinguishing characteristic of specifically Occidental myth…

The natural result of this change is the Homeric hero: mortal, glorious, flawed, distinguishable from others. The Greek concept of the hero as doer of great deeds is of importance, for it depicts man’s power in relation and comparison to that of gods. Many of man’s accomplishments are within the reach of the gods, but in their stead, man accomplished them all. That men and women — so short-lived, weak, slave to the confines of emotion and finite reason — can perform any great deed beneath Father Zeus’s storm clouds is the proof of their greatness. That free will has even only occasionally created prosperous civilization rather than barbarous wasteland is proof of our worthiness of it. In myth, the child Akhilleus was offered the choice of a long and ordinary life or a brief burst of glory on the battlefield. The greatest of all warriors, his death was early and his fame eternal. For the ultimate reward of eternal fame, he chose the latter. His greatness, in this instance, lies in that he disregarded his own safety and answered the call to adventure and action, without fear of its conclusion.

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Akhilleus, however, was not offered immortality. His comrade, Odysseus, “that man skilled in all ways of contending,” was. Having been rescued from the sea, fed, and welcomed in love by the beautiful nymph Kalypso, for many of their seven years together Odysseus spent each dawn “[racking] his own heart groaning, with eyes wet / scanning the bare horizon of the sea,” tearfully gazing in longing for home, son, and wife. He lived with the nymph for he, by the gods’ decree, had nowhere he could go, and no means known to him by which to leave. Therefore he remained on her island, “[laying] with her each night, for she compelled him,” though having long ago ceased to enjoy her, every morning returning to the shore once again to yearn for Ithaka.

Upon Zeus’s command in Book V of the *Odyssey* that Hermes descend from Olympos and inform Kalypso, at Athena’s request, that Odysseus’ captivity be at an end, Kalypso, yielding to Hermes’ entreaties, goes to Odysseus, weeping, as ever, by the sea. Taking him back within her cave, she dines with him, ambrosia and nectar — the food of a god — placed beside the meal. Once both had eaten their fill, Kalypso spoke to her captive lover thus:

“Son of Laërtes, versatile Odysseus,
after these years with me, you still desire
your old home? Even so, I wish you well.
If you could see it all, before you go —

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6 Ibid., V.142 – 143, p. 85. “I fed him, loved him, sang that he should not die / nor grow old, ever, in all the days to come.”

7 Ibid., V.88 – 89, p. 83.

8 Ibid., V.163, p. 85.

9 Ibid., V.161. “…for long ago the nymph had ceased to please.”

10 Ibid., V.209, p. 87.
all the adversity you face at sea —
you would stay here, and guard this house, and be
immortal — though you wanted her forever,
that bride for whom you pine each day.
Can I be less desirable than she is?
Less interesting? Less beautiful? Can mortals
compare with goddesses in grace and form?”¹¹

But clever Odysseus remained undaunted by the softly-braided nymph’s ploy, his desire for
home and the embrace of his Penelope of far greater strength than any “adversity” against which
she could warn him:

To this the strategist Odysseus answered.

“My lady goddess, there is no cause for anger.
My quiet Penélopê — how well I know —
would seem a shade before your majesty,
death and old age being unknown to you,
while she must die. Yet, it is true, each day
I long for home, long for the sight of home.
If any god has marked me out again
for shipwreck, my tough heart can undergo it.
What hardship have I not long since endured
at sea, in battle! Let the trial come.”¹²

Risking and conquering the goddess’s anger, he perseveres and largely speaks the truth: that
there is no way his wife at home could be of greater beauty than an immortal nymph. Still, he
pines for her, not the goddess before him, and still wishes to depart, confident any other god’s
wrath, as all which has come before, can be survived.

Longing for his human love while a prisoner of an immortal’s lust, he is unshakable in his
preference for the reciprocal romantic relationship he already possesses, and the woman —
perfect in her mortal imperfection — with whom he, too, shall grow old. He recognizes the

¹¹ Ibid., V.212 – 222.
¹² Ibid., V.223 – 233.
privilege of his current situation, but possesses the hero’s courage to renounce it in favor of the mortal, natural reality to which he as a human being belongs. To love (in the salient romantic fashion) is both to cherish and protect: and it is pointless to do so in relation to a thing whose presence and condition is of an infinite nature. Immune to affliction, old age, and death, one cannot cherish a god in this way, for a god is indestructible; neither can one protect such a thing, for he or she is largely impervious to harm and impermanence. The urgency of mortality is the source of our passions, and little more than the hollowest of lust may be the result otherwise.

Zeus decrees Odysseus worthy of eventually returning home at the very beginning of the poem in recognizing that Odysseus only wants for those things which are of imperative importance to his existence. “Greed and folly,” says the king of the gods, “double the suffering in the lot of man,” Odysseus possessing neither of these. For the most part, he is a man who wishes to return to a healthy relationship to reality, namely reassuming his kingly and husbandly duties, in lieu of pointlessly lusting after plunder and unattainable conquest. Most importantly, he possesses the courage to affirm his own life, rather than wishing for another; to believe, one could say, that the pastures of his own kingdom are greener than those further beyond. In this, he shows the opposite of hubris: wishing to remain a human being with all its pains and rigors for the sake of what he loves, in renunciation of the offer of godhood. The Greeks believed that man’s reality existed for a reason, that humanity must balance its needs with the requirements of the principle of ultimate (divine) reality. Odysseus’ refusal portrays just such an act of Greek mortal courage: refusing to renege upon human values in the face of a goddess’s desire, while not evoking her wrath.

13 Ibid., I.50 – 51, p. 2.
II.2.2 SOKRATES:
MARTYR TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE

For Sokrates (c. 469 – 399 B.C.E.), knowledge is personal; what is right or wrong cannot be determined externally — namely by authority. It is the function and duty of the individual to develop one’s critical faculties and to discover and understand morality and action for him- or herself. Truth must be found rather than be bestowed or received. Each person has a mind capable of knowing; therefore it must be used, and used liberally for the purpose of truly understanding that which is merely otherwise assumed. This was all the more essential in the Athenian system of direct democratic government, where in every adult male property owner was bound by law to participate in the governing of the city and its empire.¹⁴ Sokrates would spend his days wandering the streets of his beloved city, conversing and arguing with anyone he met, asking them to question the assumptions, large and small, they held about their lives.¹⁵ In this way, Sokrates is the ultimate individualist: the individual is to be the authority for his or her own moral, intellectual, and spiritual life, requiring that external dogma, assumptions, and decisions must be questioned and put to the test of the capabilities of one’s own logical observations. Unlike earlier and later philosophers, Sokrates turns his back on nature: for him, each unique person is the ultimate object of study and care.

Sokrates’ values and methods, however, require complete openness. To assume is to be led by a shepherd of unearned authority, one often partially created in one’s mind to quiet uncertainty — to have incomplete, even fraudulent knowledge. One must question, especially in

¹⁴ Given the real-world implications of moral life left unprobed, and the strength attained by a constantly exercised mind, it is unacceptable to live without examining that life fully, corresponding to the care one would give one’s life in every other way. See Plato, Apology 38a in The Last Days of Socrates, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 66.

¹⁵ This was made far easier due to much of the citizenry being walled into the city between 431 and 404 B.C.E.
relation to the most important problems of life. In Plato’s *Euthyphro* (c. 399 – 395 B.C.E.), for example, the dialogue’s namesake, one who believes himself an expert in religion, informs Sokrates that he is leveling a prosecution against his father for leaving the murderer of one of the slaves on their Naxos estate to die while bound and gagged before being collected for his own prosecution. He says doing so, despite the derision of many, is upholding “the position of divine law on what’s holy and what’s unholy.”

Sokrates asks,

> My word, Euthyphro, does that mean that you think you understand religion so exactly, matters holy and unholy that is, that you have no misgivings about the circumstances you describe? Aren’t you afraid in taking your father to court that you too might turn out to be doing an unholy deed?

Sokrates’ own personal opinion may even be irrelevant: the point of much of their discussion is Euthyphro’s assumption that he has sufficient knowledge of religious ethics to embark on such an unusual prosecution — one which he himself describes as “prosecuting my father on a murderer’s behalf.” As Harold Tarrant, in his introduction to the revised Penguin translation of the dialogue, observes,

> The question which excites the Socratic mind is how anybody, man or god, can recognize any action as an instance of goodness. What is the standard, and in what terms can we express it?

Justice, or “holiness,” among the most important of human values, cannot be based simply upon “what is agreeable to the gods.” A hard standard must be developed, based upon candid

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16 Ibid., *Euthyphro* 4e, p. 12.
17 Ibid., p. 13.
18 Ibid., p. 12.
19 Ibid., Harold Tarrant, introduction to *Euthyphro*, p. 6. He does say, however, that, “On this question it must be said that the *Euthyphro* fails: the standard is not divine approval, apparently, but it will not help to say that holiness is part of justice unless we understand how to recognize an instance of justice,” pp. 6 – 7.
20 Ibid., *Euthyphro* 7a, p. 16.
observation of human action and values — in short, an *evaluation* of them, thoroughly tested by self-questioning (or self-prosecution, one could say). Among the many ways in which the Greek and Biblical traditions differ, for example, is this lack of objective, absolute moral standards.

This, however, is one example, quite innocuous in comparison to others. As with Christ, to keep the tone of Sokratic controversy, the main drama of Sokrates’ life and philosophy lies in his death. Two years before the conclusion in 404 B.C.E. of the catastrophic Peloponnesian War, which ended in Athens’ humiliating surrender to the Spartan general Lysandros, Sokrates, a member of the Athenian Council of Five Hundred, cast a controversial vote. Eight naval captains who had been victorious in the Battle of Arginousai were put on trial (though only six were present) for dereliction of duty on account of leaving a large number of sailors who had fallen overboard to drown. The reason they gave was that a storm, unmistakable in its power, was quickly advancing towards their ships, and they were forced to sail back west to Athens immediately, or all would have drowned. Many of Sokrates’ fellow council members believed this sorrowful occurrence to be such an appalling crime that all the captains be summarily executed. Sokrates, by the luck of the lot, was acting as president of the Council at the time, and is known to have voted against the proposal, citing his belief that each defendant should be tried individually. Legality, it seems, was the basis of his objection, one which was to no avail.

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23 Ibid. “This trial was part of an ongoing struggle-to-the-death between convinced democrats and their equally convinced and diehard oligarchic opponents. In 411 this struggle had erupted into outright faction-fighting, and there had been a counterrevolutionary oligarchic coup led by four hundred extreme oligarchs. One of the four hundred, Theramenes was the prime mover behind the trial of the generals in 406, presumably because he calculated that their conviction would severely weaken the democratic leadership. Paradoxically, Theramenes was able to persuade the mass of the ordinary Athenians to adopt this anti-democratic tactic, and despite Socrates they did illegally condemn the generals to death en bloc…” Theramenes had himself also been a *triēarkhos*, or trireme commander, in the same battle, and quite likely also wished to divert suspicion away from any part he may have played in the event.
— the six captains were all convicted by majority vote and sentenced to death by the drinking of hemlock. Sokrates was credited with adages such as “the majority is always wrong,” implying a distaste for Athens’ brand of democracy based upon the anti-individualist requirement of majority rule.

The unpopularity of this public decision, combined with his irritating habit of accosting citizens in the streets and subjecting them to his questioning, probably contributed to a significant level of unpopularity. Five years after Athens’ surrender, in 399, Sokrates was arrested on charges of refusing to recognize the gods of the city, introducing new cults in competition with said gods, and corrupting the young with his ideas. At his own trial before the same assembly over which he testified that he presided so controversially in 406, he was ordered to stand and defend himself or to apologize. In his disciple Plato’s masterfully-written account of the trial, the *Apology*, Sokrates demands free dinners for life, the Athenian honor given to victorious Olympic athletes, and to be recognized for his services to the city. Such service is outlined as his dogged pursuit of his interest in mercilessly prodding people to understand their thoughts and ways of thinking, that they may become more self-aware and self-responsible. He says, famously,  

> To put it bluntly (even if it sounds rather comical) God has assigned me to this city, as if to a large thoroughbred horse which because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly. It seems to me that God has attached me to this city to perform the office of such a fly; and all day long I never cease to settle here, there, and everywhere, rousing, persuading, reproving

24 Ibid., p. 130.

25 Robin Waterfield, introduction to *Socrates’ Defense* in Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield, edited by Robin Waterfield (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), p. 33. Sokrates being guilty of these charges is irrelevant to this inquiry. What is of interest here is that he sees it fit to flout convention in favor of principle. For an examination of the charges brought against him, see Ibid., pp. 33 – 37.

every one of you. You will not easily find another like me, gentlemen, and if you take my advice you will spare my life.\textsuperscript{27}

His unrepentant attitude did not sit well with much of the Council. They proposed the death penalty in place of his offer of five hundred, then finally three thousand \textit{drakhmai}, the payment guaranteed by several of his followers, including Plato. Still, the prospect of death did not seem to frighten him. In the \textit{Apology}, he does not seem to care;\textsuperscript{28} in the version written by Xenophon, another of Sokrates’ disciples, Sokrates cares little about dying for he shall die an old and physically impaired man — if one believes one goal of life is to grow old, then Sokrates had indeed achieved that aim. He also possessed little fear of death on account of the fact that he would be forced to live a censored, humiliated life, wherein he could no longer pursue his passion and duty as a philosopher.\textsuperscript{29} Among his last words to the tribunal are, equally famously,

\begin{quote}
\ldots I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living…\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

Sokrates was convicted and sentenced to death by the drinking of hemlock, just as had the six men he had defended seven years earlier at the very same council. To the end he showed no fear, and died a martyr to the individualistic spirit of, as he would say, questioning the word of the shepherd. His death arguably was the founding for Athens’ new empire, one of the mind, which today is its greatest legacy.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27] Plato, \textit{Apology} 30e – 31a, p. 57.
\item[28] As he knows the nature of death is uncertain.
\item[29] Xenophon, \textit{Socrates’ Defense} 5, p. 43. ‘‘…I will be choosing to die rather than to remain alive without freedom and beg, as an alternative to death, a vastly inferior life.’’
\item[30] Plato, \textit{Apology} 38a, p. 66.
\end{footnotes}
II.2.3 PITY & TERROR:
THE TRAGIC HERO AS MIMETIC OF NATURAL EXPERIENCE

A tragic character stands on his or her own two feet and is responsible for the behavior which brought him or her to the point of disintegration. Regardless of fate, however relevant, the protagonist is ultimately the architect of his or her own end. The tragic dimension of human existence is the fictional sphere in which the rationally calculable realm of human action interacts with the trans-rational, supernatural energy of life beyond human control. A tragedy’s power partially arises from the interest the story takes in the protagonist, for our pity and terror cannot be fully evoked by or for an egoless outline of a being.

Aristotle’s *Poetics* (*Peri poētikēs*) of c. 335 B.C.E., the fundamental text of the Greek understanding of drama, explains a tragedy neither in metaphysical nor literary-philosophical terms, but in practical language which gives a philosophical analysis of the building-blocks of dramatic-poetic construction. These rough lecture notes explain the pieces which comprise a well-crafted and wisely composed work of literary and dramatic poetry. Further, they make the case for drama’s spiritual and moral importance against the Platonic view that fictional representations of forms are demeaning counterfeits of them. As Homerist and literary critic Theo Theoharis explains,

> Forms are not absent presence in Aristotle’s philosophy, or states of being, as they are in Plato’s, but ongoing activities, the manifest energy of reality, the principles of development in nature and human experience. Most significantly, the forms that make nature and humanity real belong to the phenomenal world and are known by observation in that world, not through inductive ascent to any transcendent realm.

…Aristotle holds these forms of life to be the reason for life, drama [having] special significance in his thinking. Showing life lived well and badly,

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dramatic structure makes the substances of human reality knowable and, to those with eyes to see and ears to hear it, known.32

On earth, one does not observe things as pure and perfect but only as deviations. Kant (1724 – 1804) recognized that the mind may only contemplate small, concrete deviations from the Ding an sich, and likewise Aristotle (c. 384 – 322) shows that each and every thing as manifest in reality is a unique deviation of this kind. On this specific subject, Plato and Aristotle seem to agree; however, of the two, Aristotle values this deviation. Individuation, thus, consists, metaphysically, in deviation from a (Platonic) norm; in tragedy, this form — rather than the “Form” — is what evokes an audience’s emotional and rational response.33 Aristotle views writing as mīmēsis,34 holding, in line with Shakespeare, a mirror up to nature in order that we may gaze upon it through our rational faculties. Furthermore, the individual artist (no longer simply artisan) is here affirmed. Although the names of Athenian potters, inscribed upon their luminous masterpieces often in the form of curt insults to each other, are known from well over a century before Aristotle, the idea of art as mīmēsis (legitimate creative observation of the nature of reality) brings a unique dignity to the artist who paints, sculpts, or writes of either the gods or of men. Regarding tragedy specifically, Aristotle speaks thus in the Poetics:

Since the mimesis is enacted by agents, we can deduce that one element of tragedy must be the adornment of visual spectacle, while others are lyric poetry and verbal style, for it is in these that the mimesis is presented.

…Since tragedy is the representation of an action, and is enacted by agents, who must be characterised in both their character and their thought (for it is through these that we can also judge the qualities of their actions, and it is in

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33 For explanation of Platonic “Forms,” see I.2.2, pp. 30 – 31.

their actions that all men either succeed or fail), we have the plot-structure as the mimesis of the action (for by this term ‘plot-structure’ I mean the organisation of the events) while characterisation is what allows us to judge the nature of the agents, and ‘thought’ represents the parts in which by their speech they put forward arguments or make statements.\textsuperscript{35}

Where Plato believed art a counterfeit of a copy — for example, the shadow of an object, which is itself the concretization of an idea — Aristotle saw an autonomously accurate and just reflection of nature.\textsuperscript{36}

Tragedy, then, is the dramatic-literary reflection of the interaction between human action and reality. The metaphysical result of the inevitable and gloriously apocalyptic confrontation between two elemental realities of nature: the energies of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The god Apollo, patron of art, music, and healing, beside his Muses, beholds and inspires the beauty of individual forms; Dionysos, the dark, mad god of drunken ecstasy, destroys such precious forms that new life may come from their ashes. These two energies — love for what is unique against the untamable, impersonal, ever on-marching dynamic of nature — come together in tragedy to produce the painful joy which is the burning point of life itself. This precise subject is the very discussion of the manic-depressive genius Nietzsche’s \textit{début} volume, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy (Out of the Spirit of Music)}. He opens his 1872 masterpiece as follows:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have succeeded in perceiving directly, and not only through logical reasoning, that art derives its

\begin{quotation}

\textsuperscript{36} Zoran, p. 26. “From the ontological point of view Plato claims that poetry is a copy of a copy; its status is similar to that of shadows and reflections of physical objects, which are themselves reflections of ideas, hence poetry is two degrees remote from truth and closer to falsehood. For Aristotle, on the other hand, poetry belongs to an autonomous domain, that of \textit{mimēsis}, imitation, which is not defined in terms of truth value. From the epistemological point of view, Plato believes that poetry is not composed through knowledge relating to real existence, but through opinion, relating to apparent existence. …Behind [this difference] lies a deep philosophical gulf concerning the status and significance of ideas; a philosophical gulf concerning the conception of the soul and of education; a psychological gulf concerning the view of the citizen and the state; and so on.”
\end{quotation}
continuous development from the duality of the Apolline and Dionysiac… These terms are borrowed from the Greeks, who revealed the profound mysteries of their artistic doctrines to the discerning mind, not in concepts but in the vividly clear forms of their deities. To the two gods of art, Apollo and Dionysus, we owe our recognition that in the Greek world there is a tremendous opposition, as regards both origins and aims, between the Apolline art of the sculptor and the non-visual, Dionysiac art of music. These two very different tendencies walk side by side, usually in violent opposition to one another, inciting one another to ever more powerful births, perpetuating the struggle of the opposition only apparently bridged by the word ‘art’; until, finally, by a metaphysical miracle… the two seem to be coupled, and in this coupling they seem at last to beget the work of art that is as Dionysiac as it is Apolline — Attic tragedy.37

The explosive destruction which brings about the tragic response cannot occur without the presence of a unique, Apollonian individual protagonist: Nietzsche’s analysis displays a pair of opposites which require the presence of the other. One cannot respond emotionally or rationally to the destruction of a non-entity which does not face life with a specific set of personal traits. In tragedy, it is the pain of life which is depicted and what is celebrated, and we are to feel as one with that pain, which is the energy of the universe: to put ourselves into direct accord with that suffering which is the basis of our own individual existences. Nietzsche lauds this with the force of

\[\text{[Adding] to this dread the blissful ecstasy which, prompted by the same fragmentation of the principium individuationis, rises up from man’s innermost core, indeed from nature, we are vouchsafed a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysiac, most immediately understandable to us in the analogy of intoxication}^{38}\]

Dionysos, the god of tragedy, is the god of ecstatic intoxication: he comes singing forth from the abyss in tragedy to smash the rational, ordered world of the Apollonian where one is enclosed

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37 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), p. 14. Though Apollo is commonly associated with the art of music, Dionysos is likewise, but his could be described as ecstatic and spontaneous, as opposed to the inspired composition of Apollo’s Muses.

38 Ibid., p. 17.
within one’s precious individual casing. With tragedy, the individuating principle, the experience-point of the *ego*, is blown and the power of life with its majestic pain is experienced. This is the ecstasy of the Greek tragedy: wherein the rational *ego* is destroyed in the whirlwind of the portrayed character’s dismemberment. Human shortcomings as they interact with both excellence and supernatural reality are what hold our interest while the emotional drama creeps up upon us. It is the individual character, in combination with an appropriately-constructed plot, which brings us to tears: namely, the *principium individuationis* — embodied by we the audience — beheld in its inevitable destruction.

To take a step further, we turn not directly back to Aristotle but to James Joyce, who in his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* gives Stephen Dedalus the task of framing these ideas more specifically:

—Pity is the feeling that arrests the mind in the presence of whatever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling that arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause.\(^{39}\)

Far more than simply the emotions which are to be invoked by such dramatic action, pity and terror are the means by which the tragedy is an emotional vehicle for the artistic transformation of consciousness. Pity arrests the mind before a *human* sufferer — not of any specific color, ideology, social class, or people — but also before whatsoever is *grave* and *constant*: what cannot be changed. Thus, the cause of his or her destruction is a metaphysical, “secret” energy, moving the characters to that point of final disillusion. With the establishment of an unchangeable circumstance for the tragic character’s fate, it inevitably comes that the mind

arrested by pity and terror before the grave and constant must go one step further: rather than cringing in anguish it must rise in tearful exhalation to affirm that before which it is arrested. The bold conclusion which Nietzsche draws from this, from The Gay Science (1882), is simply

\textit{Amor fati}: let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let looking away be my only negation! And, all in all on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer!\textsuperscript{40}

To say “Yes!” to that fate which one has had the courage to affirm is to forget the ethical world where one accuses others and oneself of bringing about an ugly, unjust cataclysm. No part of life is to be scorned as unjust: one’s fate is to be loved, affirmed, and embraced with joy.

Nevertheless, it must be restated that this impersonality must be fully balanced by Apollonian personalism.\textsuperscript{41} In the clash of the Apollonian and Dionysian, both are absolutes.\textsuperscript{42} Though the Dionysian power is representative of the all-embracing, all-erasing majesty of the cosmos against which Apollonian man is but a grape within Dionysos’ divine press, the Apollonian is and must be equally resolute until the end. To restate Aristotle, protagonists are “agents, who must be characterised in both their character and their thought,” that is to say, individual characters who are distinguishable from others and are of value and interest in their own right.\textsuperscript{43} Their downfall, also, is not the result of evil,\textsuperscript{44} rather it is attributed to “a great fallibility on the part of the sort of agent stipulated”\textsuperscript{45} — human folly, either as the result of free


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 17.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 17.

\textsuperscript{43} Nevertheless, such artistic characterization is in the service of the mimetic value of the plot.

\textsuperscript{44} Aristotle, chapter 13, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 45.
will or birth, shown to be the obvious cause of mortality and affliction. Such destruction is to be made of even greater interest by making characters of slightly more exemplary moral character than the general audience,\(^\text{46}\) therefore increasing the pity for one who is (seemingly) unjustly afflicted. Though Aristotle certainly believes plot-structure to be superior in importance to characterization,\(^\text{47}\) he makes it clear that the *plausibility* of plot (as well as characterization) is essential,\(^\text{48}\) for otherwise the disbelief of the audience cannot be suspended beyond belief in the actors, their masks, *etc.* — that an actual individual could experience such events.\(^\text{49}\) He, in addition, though almost reluctantly, makes it clear that because of tragedy’s emphasis upon action, “only for the sake of [action] it is mimesis of the agents themselves.”\(^\text{50}\)

The intended response of the viewer of a play composed using Aristotle’s advice is *katharsis*. This concept seems to be an addition to his theory of drama. As action and fate’s defeat of virtue could serve to discourage public virtuousness, he thus adds the embattled term to create an emotional resolution for the tragic model he has already constructed.\(^\text{51}\) He says:

> Tragedy, then, is a representation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude — in language which is garnished in various forms in its different parts — in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative — and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting *katharsis* of such emotions.\(^\text{52}\)

Aristotelian *katharsis* is thus the resolution of Dionysian destruction: with the smashing of order

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\(^\text{46}\) Ibid., chapter 15, p. 47.

\(^\text{47}\) Ibid., chapters 6, 14, pp. 37 – 38, 45.

\(^\text{48}\) Ibid., chapters 13, 15, pp. 44, 48.

\(^\text{49}\) Ibid., chapter 9, p. 41.

\(^\text{50}\) Ibid., chapter 6, p. 38.

\(^\text{51}\) Theoharis, *Ibsen’s Drama*, p. 21.

\(^\text{52}\) Ibid., p. 37.
and the individual’s stability in the world there is the re-ordering which takes place: the moment of *katharsis* being when the character’s fate is seen as being part of rather than unjustly apart from reality. The purpose is that the destruction witnessed can be affirmed, loved, and admired as a glorious instance of life’s destructive energy as coming about through the character’s actions. (In this context, the concept of *katharsis* as meaning either to “clean up” or “clean out” the psyche is still appropriate, though the latter seems to be more so. Why does the *Oidipous* of Sophokles, for example, move us so? In part, it is an entirely perfect instance of a virtuous character overcome by fate and circumstance, but brought to his doom also by his own free will.

The *Oidipous* (c. 429 B.C.E.) concerns a good man who finds himself unable to outwit the terrible destiny decreed for him. Born to King Laios and Queen Iokasta of Thebes, the King learns from an oracle that his son shall grow to murder him and take his place in his wife’s bed. He orders the child killed, but upon Iokasta handing him to servants who leave him to die upon a mountain, a shepherd brings the infant to the childless house of Polybos and Merope of Corinth where he is brought up as their own son. Once grown, Oidipous hears a rumor that he is not the son of Polybos and Merope and confronts them; they deny his accusation. Still suspicious, he questions the Delphic oracle which, rather than answering the question of his heritage, informs him that he is fated to murder his father and marry his mother. Aghast, he escapes Corinth, hoping to escape the destiny of the oracle. On the main road from the city, he encounters an elderly aristocrat with whom he enters into a petty but ferocious quarrel over whose chariot has

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53 Ibid., p. 22. Theoharis summarizes the “cleaning up” translation as “…holding that Aristotle means a cleaning up of the mind these feelings move in, an alignment of otherwise disordered irrational, imaginative, and logical awareness. Aristotle’s psychology, ethics, and metaphysics in general, as well as his insistence on the substantial force of rationality in dramatic experience, weight the second case far more convincingly.” *Katharsis*, then, is the means by which the psyche is meant to manage and survive such rational and emotional chaos.

54 Zoran, p. 26. Zoran seems to agree with Theoharis in that in the specific realm of poetic art, “…Aristotle thinks that poetry furnishes for the soul a cathartic process, and is thus healing for the soul.”
the right of way at a crossroads. When the man (King Laios) strikes Oidipous with his scepter, Oidipous replies by throwing the old man from his chariot, the fall proving fatal. Shortly after, Oidipous solves the riddle of the Sphinx (“What is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three in the evening?”), answering “Man” in infancy, adulthood, and old age. The reward for this triumph is the kingdom of Thebes wherein a great plague has raged as a result of the Sphinx’s curse and the hand of its beautiful widowed queen, Iokasta.

Some years later, the play begins. Oidipous’ brother-in-law Kreon returns from Delphi to proclaim that the great plague which rages once again is a curse against the pollution of the city by the presence of the murderer of its former king. Oidipous, by his own admission the one “whom all men call the Great,” in recognition for his saving of the city in the past, throws himself into the ensuing investigation — cursing the murderer for foisting such suffering upon the city and his people. The investigation is complicated by the fact that the evidence begins to point to him, for which he rebukes Kreon. The blind prophet Teiresias is called and reluctantly tells Oidipous that he himself is the murder of King Laios, for which the King rebukes him angrily; Teiresias then tells Oidipous that he is the blind one. Eventually Tiresias departs, muttering that when the murderer is finally discovered he shall be a native son of Thebes, both brother and father to his children, and son and husband to his mother. When Oidipous asks his wife Iokasta her opinion of Teiresias’ words, she tells him that her dead husband was killed in a roadside quarrel many years after being given an oracle which was never fulfilled, her physical description of Laios matching Oidipous’ own memory of that day’s encounter. When a

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55 Sophokles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. David Greene in *Greek Tragedies I*, third edition, ed. David Greene, Richmond Lattimore, Mark Griffith, and Glenn W. Most (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), l. 8, p. 117. Sophokles also makes a pun on his name using the Greek verb oída (οἶδα), “to know” or “to see,” to highlight the discrepancy between the cleverness of the man who solved the Sphinx’s unsolvable riddle, and the one who is entirely ignorant of and blind to the terrible truth of who he is.
messenger arrives from Corinth informing the King that Polybos has died, Oidipous believes that half of the prophecy is false; but then he is told that Polybos was childless, and that the messenger was once a shepherd who was given a child decades earlier and had brought him to Polybos’ house. The shepherd says that another shepherd gave him the child, a man who was ordered to expose him. The King sends for him, and he reveals that he was a witness to the altercation at the crossroads. Iokasta, who has by now realized the truth, desperately begs Oidipous to cease his questioning, but upon his refusal, she runs back into the palace. When the second shepherd arrives, it emerges that the child he gave away was Laios’ own son, and that Iokasta had given the child to the shepherd to be abandoned secretly upon the mountainside in fear of the prophecy that Laios’ son would grow to kill his father and marry his mother. In a rage, Oidipous re-enters the palace to find Iokasta, his mother and wife, hanging in their bedroom doorway. Overcome with madness and grief, he wrests the two gold brooches from her dress and gouges out his eyes.

A blind Oidipous now exits the palace and begs to be exiled at once. He says to the Chorus in Sophokles’ ringing words:

What I have done here was best done — and don’t tell me otherwise, do not give me further counsel.
I do not know with what eyes I could look upon my father when I die or go
under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother —
those two to whom I done things deserving worse punishment than hanging.
…And my city,
it’s towers and sacred places of the gods,
where I was raised as the noblest man in Thebes,
of these I robbed my miserable self
when I commanded all to drive him out,
the criminal since proved by the gods impure
and of the race of Laius.
To this guilt I bore witness against myself —
with what eyes was I to look upon my people?
…Now I am found to be
evil and a son of evil. Crossroads,
and hidden glade, oak and the narrow way
at the crossroads that drank my father’s blood —
my own blood — from my hands, do you remember
still what I did as you looked on, and what
I did when I came here? O, marriage, marriage!…
Come — it’s unfit to say what is unfit
to do. — I beg of you in the gods’ name hide me
somewhere outside your country, yes, or kill me,
or throw me into the seam to be forever
out of your sight. Approach and design to touch me
for all my wretchedness, and do not fear.
No man but I can bear my evil doom.\(^{56}\)

His two daughters (and half-sisters), Antigone and Ismene, are brought out, Oidipous lamenting
their having been born to a family so cursed. He departs the stage a martyr to his fate and its
unwilling but acknowledging architect.

Oidipous — a unique, upright individual character — is the focus of a drama which
centers around the results of his own actions. The entire length of the plot rings with Oidipous’
drive to know the truth, even while ironically denying it himself. With the exception of his
father’s casting him out for reasons of self-preservation, the entirety of the play and its tragedy
revolves around Oidipous’ behavior as relates to the oracle. Our pity and our terror are evoked
for him as a man, different from another character in similar circumstances, and possessing
unique virtues which are pitted against an insurmountable situation. We feel for Oidipous as see
ourselves in him — one individual evoking the empathy and shock of others. Yet, we affirm his
fate, for his crimes are real. There is a strange pang of outward peace in Oidipous’ own case, for

\(^{56}\) Ibid., ll. 1369 – 1415, pp. 180 – 181.
he does succeed in discovering the truth, and by doing so, lifts the plague from the city — therefore, his downfall was necessary. Affirmation, combined with our pity for one who ironically knew nothing of what he had done, brings about the condition of what Schopenhauer calls *Mitleid* — “suffering with” the other, or indeed with life itself, which, in opposition to death, is suffering. We feel pity for the Apollonian individual whose actions sacrifice him or her to the inevitability of Dionysian disintegration; oneness with the suffering of a good, flawed man who has fallen before fate’s inescapable decree.
3. NOBLE & GENTLE HEARTS:  
COURTLY LOVE AND THE ROMANCE OF THE GRAIL

II.3.1 THE MEETING OF THE EYES:  
THE ART OF COURTLY LOVE

So through the eyes love attains the heart:
For the eyes are the scouts of the heart,
And the eyes go reconnoitering
For what it would please the heart to possess.
And when they are in full accord
And firm, all three, in the one resolve,
At that time, perfect love is born
From what the eyes have made welcome to the heart.
Not otherwise can love either be born or have commencement
Than by this birth and commencement move by inclination.

By the grace and by command
Of these three, and from their pleasure,
Love is born, who its fair hope
Goes comforting her friends.
For as all true lovers
Know, love is perfect kindness,
Which is born — there is no doubt — from the heart and eyes.
The eyes make it blossom; the heart matures it:
Love, which is the fruit of their very seed.\(^1\)

The words of the Limousin troubadour Guiraut de Borneilh (c. 1138 – c. 1215) capture like no others the Western characterization of the experience of love; love through one’s own experience, mandated by neither Church nor State nor even family, but by the windows to one’s own soul.

The High Middle Ages in Europe saw a revolution in human relationships and personal expression which is among the most defining characteristics of Western civilization. The troubadours, wandering minstrels who traversed Western Europe singing of what the eyes had made welcome to the heart, were the first to concretely conceive of love in the person-to-person manner in which we do today. Dharma and honor are shattered: true love, as the troubadours saw it, supersedes the dogma of the pulpit and the convention of society, fusing the individual to his or her own bliss and agony in the form of the other.

The Middles Ages were what the poet T. S. Eliot called the “Waste Land.” Men and women were required to profess beliefs they did not hold; to hold positions, titles, and offices which they had inherited and had not earned; and to declare love for spouses whom they had married for political purposes, but for whom they felt no love. The healing of the Wasteland is the underlying theme of Medieval romance, embodied by the character of one who has sought to live an authentic life in opposition to the inauthentic ones on all sides. The work of breaking through the impersonality of the society’s edicts and arriving at the spiritual place of a life which is one’s own unique destiny characterizes the works of the poets and troubadours as forces for a peculiarly Western consciousness. The two kinds of love of which poets, saints, and sages had written extensively for millennia preceding this period were those of agapē and Eros — both, of course, of an emotional richness capable of providing any artist with plenty to present in a manner both intelligent and eloquent. The first, agapē, is the spiritual love of the Judeo-Christian teaching that one must have the love by which one cares for and preserves oneself for others, and

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3 Marking that time of hope and terror between the world wars, *The Waste Land* (1922) loosely follows the legend of the Grail and the Fisher King, combined with vignettes of British society of the period along with various literary and cultural allusions to Buddhism and the Hindu Upaniṣads, in addition to those of Western literature.

without discrimination. None are to be exempt from this communal, impersonal love for one’s neighbor, even one’s enemies. The other, that of the god Eros, is of little more than “the zeal of the organs for each other,” the biological sexual urge for the enjoyment of another’s body — equally impersonal. In both of these scenarios the personal factor of experience is of little or no importance, especially in the former case, it being a moral imperative to love all of God’s fellow children.

The Western revolution of consciousness consisted in the troubadours’ celebration of love as a person-to-person relationship, born of the meeting of the eyes — a relationship entirely in opposition to the social convention of the time, namely that of marriage as a political and financial arrangement, the two parties being expected to do their part on behalf of their parents, or the woman, as but a pawn, on behalf of her husband. “Love,” as a result of this, says Campbell, “entered such a situation as a destiny — a terrifying destiny, because the social response was death.” Marriage in the form of two people joining each other voluntarily was seen as heresy, and the sexual component adultery, both of which the Church deemed capital

5 It is precisely such discrimination — discerning the difference between individuals — which brings love into the truly personal sphere.

6 Matthew 5:44 – 45. “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (ESV)


8 Campbell, “Where There Was No Path: Arthurian Legends and the Western Way,” in Transformations of Myth Through Time, p. 212. “A marriage, in the courts of those days, was arranged by the family, not a marriage of individual choice. That’s the kind of marriage that predominates to this day in the East, and it was the kind of marriage of the ancient world. Two people who had never seen each other before are joined in marriage, and the church sacramentalizes this and says, ‘two bodies, one flesh.’ What it really is is ‘two bank accounts, one bank account.’”

9 Ibid.

10 Campbell and Moyers, “VI. Tales of Love and Marriage,” in The Power of Myth, p. 232. “The troubadours became associated with the Manichean heresy of the Albigensians that was rampant at the time — though the Albigensian movement was really a protest against the corruption of the medieval clergy. So the troubadours and their transformation of the idea of love got mixed up in religious life in a very complicated way.”
crimes. The social repression of such experience most certainly did transform love from a private emotion into a spiritual destiny, and one to be pursued whatever the cost to one’s honor, honor being the principal good of the chivalric world of medieval aristocracy. The threat to the Church was the individual realization of love as a spiritual experience superior to that of priestly sacrament: in a sense, the individual raising his or her own love above the place of God.\textsuperscript{11} The struggle is most clearly symbolized in the word \textit{amor}, the Provençal spelling of \textit{amour}, the noun for “love”; when spelled in reverse, it reads \textit{roma}, the word for Rome and the Holy See.\textsuperscript{12} Where the dogma of a Church riddled with corruption and immoral intrigue had failed to fulfill the spiritual yearnings of the heart, love filled the void, at the individual’s invigorating peril. Europe’s answer to the Near Eastern, Asian, as well as Greco-Roman, tradition of arranged marriage was the revolution of the troubadours in the continent’s years of assimilation of Christianity.\textsuperscript{13} The path of \textit{amor} went between the impersonal opposites of physical and spiritual love,\textsuperscript{14} making the statement for a new and uniquely Western way of life.

The so-called “courtly love” tradition of the Middle Ages was as much a game as an actualization of spiritual and romantic destiny (though a game which was played by highly practical rules). The knight was to overcome trials precisely as if he were in quest of anything other his lady’s love, all for her to assure herself that his love was genuine. The tradition of delay which ensued was to test the knight and screen out men simply beset by a passing lust and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 254. “Love was a divine visitation, and that’s why it was superior to marriage. That was the troubadour idea. If God is love, well then, love is God.” The danger to the Church, understandably, was that its moral and spiritual power would be usurped by the individual’s own heart. It is entirely to valid to argue that to simply discard an external moral authority is both irresponsible and foolish; still, much of this impulse was a reaction to corruption.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Campbell, “Where There Was No Path: Arthurian Legends and the Western Way,” in \textit{Transformations of Myth Through Time}, p. 213. “By what kind of magic can people put God in your heart? They can’t. He’s either there or not there, out of your own experience. That’s the sense of the thing.”
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 209, 211. Europe began to truly assimilate Christian doctrine to its native impulses between c. 1150 – 1250.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Campbell, “The Love-Death,” in \textit{Creative Mythology}, p. 177.
\end{itemize}
without any interest in forging a long-term romantic relationship, wherein far more than simply the enjoyment of her beauty was to be understood. Once assured that her prospective lover was a knight of a gentle heart, she would grant what is known as *merci*, signifying that a varying level of romantic access would be accepted — anywhere from an annual kiss to a full residential status as the lady’s conjugal lover. Other aspects of the ideals of courtly love are expressed by the chaplain to the court of Éléonore d’Aquitaine and her daughter Marie de Champagne, Andreas Capellanus, in his amusingly informal book *The Art of Courtly Love*, believed to document court life there between 1170 and 1174:

> A wise woman will therefore seek as a lover a man of praiseworthy character — not one who anoints himself all over like a woman or makes a rite of the care of the body, for it does not go with a masculine figure to adorn oneself in womanly fashion or to be devoted to the care of the body… Likewise, if you see a woman too heavily rouged you will not be taken in by her beauty unless you have already discovered that she is good company besides, since a woman who puts all her reliance on her rouge usually doesn’t have any particular gifts of character. As I said about men, so with women — I believe you should not seek for beauty so much as for excellence of character… A person of good character draws the love of another person of the same kind, for a well-instructed lover, man or woman, does not reject an ugly lover if the character within is good. A man who proves to be honorable and prudent cannot easily go astray in love’s path or cause distress to his beloved. If a wise woman selects as her lover a wise man, she can very easily keep her love hidden forever; she can teach a wise lover to be even wiser, and if he isn’t so wise she can restrain him and make him careful. A woman, like a man, should not seek for beauty or care of the person of high birth, for “beauty never pleases if it lacks goodness,” and it is excellence of character alone which blesses a man with true nobility and makes him flourish in ruddy beauty…

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16 In other words, that the knight could prove himself that he was willing and able to accept his lady for herself, regardless of her wealth and beauty, and would not discard her once he had lost interest; that he would affirm her in her imperfection and see her as an autonomously spiritual being, as well as a physical creature.

17 Ibid. The lady who accepts a love-struck knight’s service, while neither accepting nor rejecting him, is *sauvage* or “savage,” and such behavior is far more dangerous, as the knight may attempt to prove himself in far more extreme ways which may lead to his death, if not outright suicide.
Character alone, then, is worthy of the crown of love. Many times fluency of speech will incline to love the hearts of those who do not love, for an elaborate line of talk on the part of the lover usually sets love’s arrows a-flying and creates a presumption in favor of the excellent character of the speaker.\(^{18}\)

The timelessness of the chaplain’s words are coupled with their moral wisdom. The ideals codified are of love as evoked between men and women capable of love beyond the simple appreciation of each other’s physicality. Character, above all else, moves the other’s heart. One’s goodness is to be the main element in attraction; so, too, the gained knowledge that both parties are of a moral stature permitting acceptance of faults, and compassion for the other in all of the circumstances mentioned in the vows of legal spouses. In other words, that either person is of the spiritual and moral readiness to be at the mercy of love’s torment, as well as its joy — to fully accept his or her love as the fount of the bliss and pain of life itself.

II.3.2 POISON MOST SWEET: THE ROMANCE OF TRISTAN & ISOLDE

The greatest love story of the Middle Ages is undoubtedly that of Tristan and Isolde, the star-crossed lovers rendered unto death by a love greater than the bounds of chivalry and virtue. Six or eight versions of the story are known to have been written,\(^{19}\) with only a handful surviving down to the present day.\(^{20}\) The greatest and most complete rendering is that of the Middle High German poet Gottfried von Straßburg, his version the inspiration for Wagner’s operatic adaption (1857 – 1859). The definitive story of illicit love as both the source of one’s rapture and sorrow,

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it makes the statement for a specifically Western value system which would come to be the ideal of love in the centuries leading to the present. It is of importance to state at the outset that the story is of a specifically Western variety, for it and its like are not without their luminous Asian contemporaries. The Gītā Gōvinda of the twelfth-century Sanskrit poet Jāyādevā (c. 1175) depicts the lover affair between the Lord Kṛṣṇa and the married gopika (cow herdswoman) Rādhā. Both works magnificently portray the joy and peril of adulterous love, but they differ crucially. Campbell explains:

A moment’s comparison of the two romances, however, immediately sets apart the two worlds of spiritual life. The Indian lover, Kṛṣṇa, is a god; the European, Tristan, a man. The Indian work is allegorical of the yearning of flesh (symbolized in Radha) for the spirit and of the spirit (symbolized by Kṛṣṇa) for the flesh, or, in [Ananda Kentish] Coomaraswamy’s terms, symbolic of “the ‘mystic union’ of the finite with its infinite ambient”; whereas the European poets, Thomas of Britain (c. 1185), Eilhart von Oberge (c. 1190), Béroul (c. 1200), and Gottfried von Strassburg (c. 1210), the four leading masters of the Tristan cycle, have represented the lovers as human, all too human — overwhelmed by a daemonic power greater than themselves.21

The love of Tristan and Isolde is presented as of a similarly transcendent nature,22 though its consequences are entirely human. The Gītā Gōvinda is a song of lust (kāma), rather than of love (amor). Not only is Kṛṣṇa the divine incarnation of the god Viṣṇu, in actuality, Rādhā, superficially his human beloved, is the incarnation of the goddess Lakṣmī, Viṣṇu’s eternal consort. The dimension of adultery is also merely an illusion, for her husband, Ayāngosha, is also another form of Kṛṣṇa. Though apparently composed by Jāyādevā as a forbidden and voluptuous hymn to the daughter of his guru,23 the poem, in all its glory, is a celebration of a form of love entirely different from that of the troubadours — namely that of, one could say,

21 Ibid. Campbell uses the term “daemonic” in the sense of a trans-rational, dynamic power (namely love).
22 Ibid. The two are seized by the “power… of the goddess Minne (Love).”
cosmic, rather than specifically human love for one irreplaceable other. Campbell comments upon this difference as follows:

In the various contexts of Oriental erotic mysticism, whether of the Near East or of India, the woman is mystically interpreted as an occasion for the lover to experience depths beyond depths of transcendent illumination… Not so the troubadours. The beloved to them was a woman, not the manifestation of some divine principle; and specifically, that woman. The love was for her. And the celebrated experience was an agony of earthly love: an effect of the fact that the union of love can never be absolutely realized on this earth. Love’s joy is in its savor of eternity; love’s pain, the passage of time; so that (as in Gottfried’s words) “bitter sweetness and dear grief” are of its essence.24

It is thus that the story of Tristan should commence: a tale of human love doomed to tragedy by the bounds of convention and impermanence; but, likewise, that love, in Paul’s words, “Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”25

Tristan himself was fated for doomed love by his own birth. Born to the knight Rivalin of Parmenie26 and the princess Blancheflor, sister to King Mark of Cornwall, his father died in battle with his treacherous overlord Morgan, his mother dying in childbirth at the news of her lover’s death.27 Cared for by Rivalin’s loyal marshall, Rual li Foitenant, the boy was brought to Cornwall by avaricious merchants who abducted him in the hope of gaining ransom. There, he, as David,28 stunned his uncle Mark’s court with his skills in music, and the King grew to love the boy as if he had been born to himself rather than his sister. One day, word came to the court that a knight named Morolt the Strong had come from the court of Ireland to enforce the annual

25 I Corinthians 13:7 (KJV).
26 A fictional land subject to the Cornish-English crown on the French side of the Channel between Bretagne and Normandie.
27 Arthur Thomas Hatto, trans., introduction to Gottfried von Straßburg, Tristan, with the ‘Tristran’ of Thomas (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 24. Of interest as far as the flouting of convention is concerned, “In German law [that observed by Gottfried]… Tristan was a bastard, since he was conceived out of wedlock, a state which no subsequent marriage of his parents could legitimize.”
28 See II.1.3 and Ibid., p. 19.
tribute of the sons of Cornish and English barons as hostages to the Irish throne. To prevent the
giving of the cream of the next generation of knights to the service of the Irish King Gurmun the
Gay, Tristan pledged to his uncle that he would fight and defeat Morolt in single combat, as
Morolt had informed the court a year earlier that such was the price of opting out of the tribute.
Despite the court’s discouragements, Tristan accepted the challenge and engaged Morolt in a
duel on an island in the harbor. During the course of the battle, Morolt slashed Tristan’s leg with
a sword which his sister-in-law, Queen Isolde, a renowned sorceress, had poisoned. Tristan,
though painfully injured, replied by dismembering and slaying Morolt with a blow to the skull. 29

Tristan became horrendously ill, the wound in his leg quickly becoming gangrenous to
such a degree that none of his uncle’s doctors could treat him, the wound’s stench itself making
treatment nearly impossible. Tristan then asked his uncle to allow him to leave Cornwall in a
boat accompanied only by his harp, and to let the boat carry him to the source of the poison.
Mark reluctantly relented, and Tristan did cross the Irish Sea. The boat having carried him to
Dublin Bay, he reversed the syllables of his name — “Tantris” — that none should know that he
indeed was the knight who had slain Morolt. His miraculous singing reached the shoreline, and
Tantris the minstrel, as he identified himself, was pulled from the skiff and brought to the court
of Gurmun and Isolde to be cured by the Queen. The Queen brought him to court to play the harp
and sing for those assembled, including her daughter of similar age, also named Isolde. All were
entranced by his miraculous talent, but the stench of his wound pained his audience too much for
them to enjoy his art fully. Once having recovered to an extent that he had regained much of his
strength, and the foul reek of his wound having dissipated sufficiently, the Queen asked him if he
would consider being her daughter’s tutor, not only of the harp, but of the manners and languages

29 A splinter from Tristan’s sword is left in the skull and is later discovered by Queen Isolde upon Morolt’s
posthumous return to Ireland.
in which he was also so miraculously well-versed. He accepted and commenced to teach the
girl the arts of bienséance (decorum), literacy, and music, culminating in impressive mastering of
all such skills. When fully recovered and commended for his work as Isolde’s tutor, Tristan was
reluctantly allowed to leave for his home country and then set sail for Cornwall.

Once returned to his uncle’s court, Tristan told his unmarried uncle of the beautiful
princess he had met at the court of Gurmun, and Mark, willing to entertain the possibility of
marriage, entreated Tristan to return to Ireland at his convenience and bring Isolde to the court.

When Tristan returned to Dublin, he heard word that a great dragon had been terrorizing the
countryside and a royal edict had been published stating that any man who was successful in
slaying the dragon would be rewarded with the hand of Princess Isolde. Tristan, once again
disguising himself as Tantris, went forth, his knight’s gear in tow, and located the dragon. After a
pitched battle, Tristan finally felled the dragon, removing its tongue for proof that it was he who
had slain the monster. Another man, however, a cowardly Steward of the Queen, desired the
Princess, but with neither the strength nor the courage to kill the dragon, he waited until Tristan
had departed and slunk to where the dragon lay and hacked off its head, calling his friends to
assist him in dragging it away for his claim. Tristan, meanwhile, foolishly hid the dragon’s
severed tongue within his shirt — the noxious tongue poisoning him as he walked. By chance,
Isolde and her mother discovered him floating unconscious in a pond near the Palace, and once

30 Gottfried, “Tantris,” in Tristan, p. 145. “Lovely Isolde, Love’s true signet, with which in days to come his heart
was sealed and locked from all the world save her alone, Isolde also repaired there and attended closely to Tristan as
he sat and played his harp.” See Campbell, “A Noble Heart: The Courtly Love of Tristan and Isolde,” in
Transformations of Myth Through Time, p. 238. “He plays wonderfully, and immediately the two fall in love, only
don’t know it. This is the whole understanding of this story by Gottfried. They are crazy in love with each other, but
they just don’t know it. Tristan plays the harp better than he’s ever played it in his life…”

31 Ibid., pp. 238 – 239. “The model for this was the story of Abélard and Héloïse, which dates to 1116, one century
earlier. Abélard was Héloïse’s teacher and seduced her. Tristan is the teacher of Isolde.”

32 He is partially advised to do this by those members of his court who are jealous of his love for Tristan, and hope
that Tristan will be killed upon his return to Ireland, in the hope that somebody there will discover his true identity.
again brought the supposed minstrel back to the court to be cured of his affliction. In the course of his recovery, one day, Isolde came upon Tristan’s sword, and admiring it, discovered a nick in the blade whose shape reminded her of the splinter which was pulled from her dear dead uncle Morolt’s skull, residing in a box in her chambers. Matching the two, in a rage, she confronted Tristan, defenseless as he lay in a bathtub, and vowed to kill him in revenge for the death of her uncle. Tristan managed to calm her fury by informing her that if she were to kill him there, having been poisoned by the tongue of the dragon which he himself had slain, her mother’s cowardly and churlish Steward would be given her hand in marriage as a result of his ignominious machinations. When King Gurmun finally summoned his court to bear witness to the claim of the man who had slain the dragon, the Steward presented the dragon’s severed head and theatrically stated his right to the hand of Isolde. Tristan, however, presented the dragon’s tongue in evidence against the Steward, and so, by the King’s decree, claimed the beautiful Isolde to wed.

Still, Tristan had come to fetch the Princess for Mark; though, unbeknownst to them, they both incidentally had fallen in love during the months during which Tristan was her tutor. He, nevertheless, dutifully as ever, captained a ship loaded with sailors and Isolde’s handmaidens to bring her across the sea to Cornwall. A short while into the voyage, however, a mild storm began to grow; though it was not one which threatened the lives of those on board, the cold wind and spray distressed the ladies greatly, who had no experience of sea travel; thus Tristan ordered the ship to be put to shore the moment land was sighted. Once they had landed, with better weather upon them, the sailors and the majority of the Princess’s ladies-in-waiting repaired to the beach to free themselves of the confines of the ship. Still grieving the loss of her homeland, Isolde refused go ashore, though loathing to be near the one who had slain her uncle. Tristan came to
her, and wishing to comfort her in her anger and anguish, sent one of her handmaidens to fetch
them both a draught of wine. Unaware that the Queen, skilled in sorcery, had brewed a love
potion to be presented at Isolde’s wedding to Mark for them both to drink in order that true love
unite them in their arranged marriage, the unassuming maid brought the two the small bottle
wherein the potion was kept. The forever-famous moment Gottfried describes:

Now when the maid and man, Isolde and Tristan, had drunk the draught, in an
instant that arch-disturber of tranquility was there, Love, waylayer of all hearts,
and she had stolen in! Before they were aware of it she had planted her victorious
standard in their two hearts and bowed them beneath her yoke. They who were
two and divided now become one and united. No longer were they at variance:
Isolde’s hatred was gone. Love, the reconciler, had purged their hearts of enmity,
and so joined them in affection that each was to the other limpid as a mirror. They
shared a single heart. Her anguish was his pain: his pain her anguish. The two
were one both in joy and in sorrow, yet they hid their feelings from each other.
This was from doubt and shame. She was ashamed, as he was. She went in doubt
of him, as he of her.33

Together they had drunk Queen Isolde’s love potion and, still little more than children,34 now
drew to each other, overtaken by love’s embrace. The secret of the love potion, too, itself held
their bittersweet destiny. The poison upon Morolt’s sword which had so nearly killed Tristan was
essentially one and the same with the love-draught he and Isolde had drunk, believing it to be
wine. Their shared joy in love thenceforth burned with the agony of both their temporal
separation and the circumstance of their adultery — a sickness unto death beyond the reach of
any cure; a wound which only the weapon which delivered the blow could but palliate.35

Meanwhile, Brangane, the nurse of Isolde, cursing herself, knew what had happened. She


34 Campbell, “Where There Was No Path: Arthurian Legends and the Western Way,” in Transformations of Myth
Through Time, p. 213. The age of fifteen or so is the generally accepted one for the lovers at the time of this scene.

essentially the same potion — the sickness unto death that no doctors can cure…” See Campbell and Moyers, The
Power of Myth, p. 243. This is also a function of the Apollonian principium individuationis: love for the preciously
unique and finite, as well as that thing from which the lover is truly and eventually separated by temporal reality, is
the crux of the pain of love.

111
went to the lovers and exclaimed upon their admission, “Alas… that flask and the draught it contained will be the death of you both!” To this bold Tristan replied,

‘It is in God’s hands!’ said Tristan. ‘Whether it be life or death, it has poisoned me most sweetly! I have no idea what the other will be like, but this death suits me well! If my adorable Isolde were to go on being the death of me in this fashion I would woo death everlasting!’

The entire system of life, indeed all the world, is thus refuted. Love in its pain and ecstasy, without care, is Tristan’s life — its sweet poison committing him to a living death for which he would sacrifice his own soul’s salvation.

Nevertheless, the two continued their secret affair; however, having given her maidenhood to her love Tristan upon the ship, Isolde persuaded the virgin Brangane to undertake the loathsome duty of taking her place with Mark at the wedding night. Brangane kept her word and did her lady’s bidding — Mark’s inattention to details doubly disqualifying him from any legitimacy as Isolde’s husband. Eventually, Mark learned of their affair, but, unable to do anything due to his love for them both, he in his nobility banished them both from court. The lovers went into exile in the forest, going to live in a cave christened by the pre-Christian giants who had carved it from the rock the “Cave of Lovers,” a grotto dominated by a crystal bed-altar on which the sacrament of intercourse was to be enacted. Accidentally, Mark discovered the grotto one morning while on the hunt and beheld them lying side by side. Aware of his approach, however, Tristan placed his sword between himself and Isolde — the sign of a woman’s protector — duping Mark into believing that perhaps he had misunderstood them. (This is


37 Ibid., p. 206. The general Catholic understanding of Hell in the Middle Ages was indeed of a literal nature.

38 See Campbell and Moyers, “VI. Tales of Love and Marriage,” in The Power of Myth, p. 237. In any life circumstance, Campbell says, “Any life career that you choose in following your bliss should be chosen with that sense — nobody can frighten me off from this thing. And no matter what happens, this is the validation of my life and action.”
regarded as the sin of Tristan, in this moment preferring his reputation as a knight above his love.) Mark invited the two back to court, offering them both forgiveness, but such forgiveness was the seed of their undoing. They continued the affair and were caught once again. Mark still could not order their execution, but forever exiled Tristan to his homeland of Parmenie. There, he heard word of a princess who lived nearby, a girl named Isolde of the White Hands. His agony for his lost beloved so great, he fell in love with her name, never having seen her. His disembodied love was so great that he went forth and married the girl, but could under no circumstance bring himself to enjoy her maidenhood. Only Isolde of Dublin was Isolde, no similar part of another being sufficient to equal her in her irreplaceability. His disgruntled young bride’s brother Kaedin came to know of Tristan’s refusal to honor her with his body, and confronted him, only for Tristan to confess his love for another of the same name. Kaedin took pity upon Tristan and agreed not to inform his sister of the secret.

Eventually, Tristan, wounded unto death by a poisoned spear in battle, arranged for Kaedin to send a message to the true Isolde, still Queen of Cornwall and England, to sail across the Channel and cure him of his affliction, she having learned much in skill from her mother — the code for her agreement or refusal being a white or black sail. Only Isolde of the White Hands overheard the making of this plan, and conceived a revenge against the husband who had left her a married virgin for love of another. Lying in her arms, clinging to life, he beseeched her to say if Queen Isolde’s ship had arrived; in fact its sail was white, but vengeful Isolde of the White Hands whispered to her husband that it had shone black. Four times he moaned the name of his beloved, then did render up his soul. Queen Isolde arrived too late, and, clutching his lifeless body to her breast, she, too, rendered up her soul in her wish to die by his side.

39 Gottfried’s poem breaks off at this point, leaving the reader to continue with the fragmented text of Thomas of Britain, the older version on which Gottfried had modeled his own.
The story of the lovers signifies an attitude to love which elevates a personal heresy from a selfish crime against the stability of social convention to the center of the individual’s experience.\textsuperscript{40} The authentic life, in all its bliss and agony, is affirmed straight down to the fires of Hell, whose flames will seem as nothing to that pain and joy which is love. “…[T]hat one should have faith in his experience [is the sense of this],” says Campbell, “and not simply mouth terms handed down to him by others.”\textsuperscript{41} This is the experience of life, in its unique manifestation experienced by each one of us. “Love,” he continues, “is a pain, you might say — the pain of being truly alive.”\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{II.3.3 \textsc{The Dark Forest of the Grail: The Quest of Parzival}}

The theme of the Grail is the bringing of life to Eliot’s Wasteland,\textsuperscript{43} namely the inauthenticity of standard medieval life. How is it to be healed? It may only be healed by the example of an authentic life — one which is lived in terms of one’s own volition and value system, with compassion and fidelity. The quest for the Holy Grail, then, is the European model for the adventure in which the hero seeks the fulfillment of his full spiritual authenticity.

The literary origins of the Grail story are complex,\textsuperscript{44} though the most salient statement of its values can be briefly summarized in reference to the version of the story which the fifteenth-century poet Sir Thomas Malory translated into the English \textit{La Mort d’Arthur}, namely \textit{La Queste}

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  \item \textsuperscript{40} The problem of reconciling this human ache to the institution of marriage is not answered in the Middle Ages, though a fulfilled standard is set that marriage be based upon love and human experience rather than political gain.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Campbell and Moyers, “VI. Tales of Love and Marriage,” in \textit{The Power of Myth}, p. 234.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 257.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Campbell, “Where There Was No Path: Arthurian Legends and the Western Way,” in \textit{Transformations of Myth Through Time}, p. 213.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., pp. 210 – 211.
\end{itemize}
*del Saint Graal (The Quest of the Holy Grail)*, written by an anonymous Cistercian monk. In this version of the story in which the knight Galahad is principal, the Grail appeared before Arthur’s assembled court carried by angelic miracle above the great dining table. Its light shone through a cloth which cloaked its radiance, though all beheld it in rapture. When it had withdrawn, Arthur’s nephew, the knight Gawain, rose to his feet and proposed a quest, namely that the miracle of this Grail should be sought to be beheld unveiled. And in one passage which Malory did not translate, it is said that the other knights agreed to the quest, but believed it would be a disgrace for them all to pursue the Grail together as a host; rather, each knight entered the dark forest where it was indeed darkest, and no path could be seen.\(^{45}\) Where one’s father or mother’s life had been one’s path, with this statement, the trajectory of life is shifted entirely. When before all had followed a guru of some nature — whether one’s parents, clergyman, or trade master — with the aim of replicating, honoring, and equalling past success, the accent is wrenched from external expectation to internal potentiality. Within each cell in the body is carried the DNA which possesses the unique signature of that person of whom it is a part; so, too, is that creature’s life a thing which has never before existed, but must be found, for it does not exist of its own accord. The West had thus answered the Indian imperative that each must dissolve before one’s *dharma*, following the given path of the guru, in favor of spiritual release and moral perfection. Here begins the Western conceptualization of life itself as the individual’s adventure, regardless of the commands of religious and social convention. The forest of the quest cannot be entered upon a neatly-rendered path, for if a path exists, it is the path of another, and to follow such a path is to live the very wasteland life which is to be shed. So, too, these values inform possibly the greatest of the Grail stories, the *Parzival* of the Bavarian knight Wolfram von Eschenbach (*fl*. c. 1195 – c. 1220).

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 211.
1225) which, like Gottfried’s *Tristan*, dates to c. 1210. It concerns the life of its namesake hero and his quest for love and the spiritual fulfillment of the Grail, combined with the ambient drama of Arthur’s court.

One of the two sons of the great knight Gahmuret, Parzival was born in England to the young queen Herzeloyde; the other, named Feirefiz, born in Baghdad to Belakane, the black Muslim queen of Zazamanc. Gahmuret dying on crusade in the Holy Land without knowing either of his sons, Herzeloyde wished her son to forgo the fate of his father, and renounced her life as queen — where at court, as Gahmuret before them, knights still jousted and died for her hand. She acquired a farm in the countryside on which she gave birth to Parzival. The boy grew to be strong and brave as his father, but was not blessed with the cleverness and self-awareness of other young men, though he had inherited his mother’s gentleness. One day a number of knights rode by the farm, and Parzival, knowing only of the angels of which his mother had taught him, bowed before these strange, unfamiliar beings; the knights rebuked the boy for his foolery, proclaiming that they were indeed knights. The knight’s heart of his father leading him, Parzival asked the men where he could go to become as they were; “Arthur’s court,” they said, the great castle of Camelot in the opposing direction.

Parzival then returned to his mother and informed her of his desire to become a knight, whereupon she fainted. Upon her eventual reluctant accession to his request that he leave her, she dressed him in the clothes of a fool — a one-piece garment with pointed hood — in the hope that the knights would reject him. She then sent him on his way on a small farmer’s pony, she

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traveling behind him. When, however, the boy turned a corner on the road, his mother died of the grief that he would leave her. Unaware of his mother’s death, the boy arrived at the court of Camelot, whereto a great knight in scarlet-painted armor was riding. He followed the king into the court, and witnessed the knight, a majestic king who believed that Arthur had illegally acquired a portion of his lands, ride into the dining hall and throw a glass of wine in Queen Guinevere’s face before the King’s eyes. “Any who wishes to avenge my insult,” he said, “meet me in the courtyard.” Brave, innocent Parzival’s heart jumped at the chance to ingratiate himself with Arthur’s court and thus followed the red knight out of the castle. When the knight saw the boy dressed in the clothes of a fool astride a farmer’s pony, he, as Goliath, believed himself twice insulted, and would not even degrade his lance by riding at his adversary as if he were worthy of his prowess; he instead turned it laterally and slung at young Parzival. Unhorsed, Parzival reached for a home-hafted javelin from the quiver upon his back, and launched it at the knight; the missile entered the king’s visor and mortally pierced him through the eye socket. Having so dishonorably killed the king — doubly disgracing Arthur’s court — Parzival dragged the man along the ground back and forth, attempting to strip him of his armor. A young page was sent out from the court to learn the fate of the red knight, and found the boy engaged in this exercise. The kind page assisted Parzival in removing the armor, fastened it upon him, saddled him upon the dead knight’s great charger rather than the farm horse, and sent him forth; the dead knight’s horse, which he could not stop, galloped uninterrupted the remainder of the day. The horse carried him to the estate of an elderly knight, Gurnemanz, who had lost his three sons to jousts and was left only with his young daughter, Liaze. Though he beheld a fool, the old man knew that the beautiful boy could be trained in knighthood, and perhaps become the husband he required for his daughter. Indeed he did train the boy in the arts of weaponry, horsemanship, and
chivalry; as for chivalry, he taught the boy that a true and wise knight must never ask unnecessary questions. Once he believed the boy’s training complete, he offered Parzival the hand of his beautiful Liaze. To this Parzival replied that only when he had achieved fame could he be worthy of the dear girl, or any other, and politely declined the offer of his host, and so rode forth.

Leaving the reins slack upon the horse’s back, he was brought to the besieged castle of the orphaned Queen Condwiramurs, a girl precisely his age, presiding over a desperate and starving court. Brought into the castle, he met the radiant girl, she kissing her possible savior gently before bringing him to the great hall where he was welcomed by all with food smuggled in by her wealthy uncles. That night, he was awakened by the sound of weeping, sitting up to see the beautiful young girl sobbing beside the bed. Saying that one should bow to none but God or His angels, he beseeched her to take his place in his soft bed, and he would sleep elsewhere. She, vested in “formidable armour: a white silken shift!”, said to the handsome boy, “If you will honor yourself and treat me with such restraint as not to struggle with me, I will lie in there with you,” and so drew close to him in the bed by his side. Through her anguish, she told him of her plight: her castle was besieged by the armies of the great King Clamide and his seneschal Kingrun, the men whose violence had rendered her an orphan, and her cousin Liaze — whom

48 Ibid., “In Search of the Holy Grail: The Parzival Legend,” p. 251. “In this tradition, the horse represents the will in nature, and the rider represents the rational control. Here nature is what’s moving us.” Parzival, having learned the arts of knighthood, now trusts to the horse, the vehicle of his unconscious, to bring him to his destination.

49 Ibid. From the French, conduire amours, “the guide of love.”

50 Ibid., pp. 248, 251. Parzival is reputed to be roughly the same age as Tristan at the time of the drinking of the love potion, therefore, fifteen or so.

51 Wolfram, Parzival, Chapter 4, p. 106.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid. As far as the potency of their mutual sexual attraction and advances, Wolframs says, “So far as lovers’ embraces went, both he and the Queen were dunces.”
Parzival had left that afternoon — forever bereft of her beloved brothers. Clamide now wished to claim Condwiramurs’ lands and herself as his wife. “Were [my palace] never so high I would pitch headlong into the fosse before Clamide should ravish my maidenhead. That is how I would cheat him of his boast!” she said. Parzival there vowed to rid her house of her tormentors, and she thus slept peacefully in his arms. That morning, after the chaplain had said Mass, Parzival was given his armor and rode forth from the castle to confront Kingrun the Seneschal, and in mere moments they had unhorsed each other, but Parzival quickly wounded the great knight, and before he could relieve him of his head, the knight who the previous hour had been so feared surrendered to his adversary. Parzival ordered him to go to Arthur’s court and tell all there that he would not cease until all Kingrun and his master had done to the houses of Condwiramurs and her uncle Gurnemanz had been avenged. Upon his return to the castle, Condwiramurs embraced him as her lover and husbandly servant, and the broken siege was celebrated with a great feast for her starved people. That night, however, as Wolfram says, “[Parzival] lay [beside her] with such restraint as would not suit many women nowadays, were they so treated.” For this and one night further his innocent fear persisted, until he recalled his mother and Gurnemanz’s instructions as to such matters, and finally found that her beauty drew him to embrace her, “and if you will allow me to say so he found what is sweet when near. Together they observed the old custom a-new.”

After two years together, during which he had gained much knightly fame, Parzival remembered his mother, and entreated his wife that he be given leave to see her, which she

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54 Ibid., p. 107.
55 Ibid., p. 110.
56 Ibid. Without clergy, they married each other, as lovers, for each other (for both possessed little in wealth), with their intercourse the sacramentalization of their spiritual connection. For him, it is the fulfillment of his vow to Gurnemanz: that he would only marry a woman whom he had won by his own valor.
granted. Again he rode off, leaving the reins slack upon the horse’s back; only the horse did not lead him that evening to his (dead) mother’s farm, but a lake, wherein sat two men in a boat, one with peacock feathers flowing from his cap. He asked the finely dressed man, fishing rod in hand, if he knew of a place where he could stay for the night. The man replied that if Parzival were to ride forward, and not lose his way, there would be a castle at which he would be welcomed, and the man would be his host that night. Parzival reached the castle, the Castle of the Grail, and that night, the Grail King, Anfortas — that feathered fisherman — his host, was brought in to meet his guest upon a litter, unable to stand, nor sit, nor even to lie upon it.\textsuperscript{57} Parzival, in his compassion, beheld his crippled host and was moved to ask, “What ails you, uncle?”\textsuperscript{58} but Gurnemanz’s long-ago instructions held him back: he deemed such a question unnecessary and so remained silent in his pity. The magical court immediately knew what had transpired, and ever so kindly entertained the knight, and the King then presented Parzival with a sword.\textsuperscript{59} When Parzival awoke in the morning, not a soul remained in the castle, and a page raised the drawbridge so quickly that it clipped the horse’s hooves, shouting “You silly goose! Why didn’t you open your gob and ask my lord the Question? You’ve let slip a marvelous prize!”\textsuperscript{60}

Eventually Parzival met up with Arthur’s court, who for years had been in quest of him that he could be inducted into the order of the Round Table. Upon a picnic being prepared to welcome him, a hideous crone rode over the hill upon a tall mule, she strangely dressed in the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] Cf. T. S. Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land}, V.340. “Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit,” lines taken from Wolfram. The Grail King is maimed and lame, the result of a duel in his youth with a Muslim warrior whom his lance had killed, and that of his enemy had, for all purposes, rent from him his manhood. Though a beautiful young man, he only inherited his crown from his father Titurel (also crippled), and himself lived an inauthentic life. His wounded, crippled impotence is the cause of the darkness and infertility of his country — the Wasteland.
\item[58] Campbell, “In Search of the Holy Grail: The Parzival Legend,” in \textit{Transformations of Myth Through Time}, p. 255. It was in his nature to ask the question, but the social code — against which he is to fight — stayed his tongue.
\item[59] Ibid. “It is a sword which is going to break at a critical moment, just as he [the Grail King] broke at a critical moment.”
\end{footnotes}
height of French and English fashion. She was Cundrie, the messenger of the Grail King, and from her mouth, tusked as a that of a boar, she cursed Arthur, once beloved of her lord, but now loathed by him; but the brunt of her wrath was reserved for Parzival, the one who had not seen fit to voice his pity for her master and ask what ailed him in his pain. Parzival withdrew in shame, without fully understanding his guilt, and spent the following five years in pursuit of returning to the castle from which he had been banished. One night, he came to a hermitage, where lived an old man named Trevrizent, who welcomed him. The man wished to say grace before eating, but Parzival refused. He confessed his hatred for God, for God, he believed, had betrayed him, and had left him stripped of his honor without having done evil. Worship of and thanks to God returned many fold what was given, said Trevrizent; love would be answered with love, and hate with hate. Parzival told him of his failed adventure, and of how he vowed to return to the castle; the hermit replied that to do so was impossible — only once could a knight hope to be admitted to the presence of the Grail King; Parzival disavowed his host’s admonition, and again vowed to succeed.

Meanwhile, Gawain, Arthur’s nephew, had won the hand of a lady for whom he had relentlessly fought, in addition to disenchanting a castle wherein five hundred knights and five hundred ladies were held captive, and his great wedding was in progress. Parzival was invited to this affair, but could not stay, for his heart was loyal to Condwiramurs before the arrayed beauties in merriment at the wedding. Turning away from the reception, however, he beheld the terror of a great knight emerging from the nearby woods — just as had been the fate of Anfortas — the knight then engaging Parzival in combat. They fought together, one in their fury,

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61 In this view, congruent with that of Dante, God’s relationship with the individual is entirely dependent upon the attitude of the mortal — fortune, Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell all being uniquely tailored functions of one’s own attitude to life, and the One from whom it came.

62 His tenacity (loyalty) is what leads him to press on, even in the face of wise spiritual counsel.
 unhorsing each other, then battling fiercely with their swords. Finally, the blade of Parzival’s sword, gift of his one-time host the Grail King, snapped upon his adversary’s helmet. The stranger then proclaimed that he would cease to duel with a knight who had lost his weapon, and so they both rested in truce upon the grass. They removed their helmets, and Parzival’s eyes beheld a handsome youth, his skin strangely speckled black and white, as the feathers of a magpie, whose name was Feirefiz. In their conversation, they found that they shared the same father. Parzival, filled with an awkward joy, offered to bring his handsome half-brother to the gay celebration which took place but a short walk from there, and the youth heartily agreed.

Amid the wide-eyed gazes of the ladies there, who had never seen a man of such mesmerizing beauty and strange complexion, the same boar-faced crone upon the tall mule appeared before the crowd and called out to Parzival; she said that he was welcome at the Castle of the Grail, for through his loyalty to the adventure, he had achieved the mercy of the King, and that his companion, too, was welcome. (Few Catholics could enter the Grail Castle, let alone enter twice, but the Grail saw readiness in all, regardless of color or faith, and Feirefiz the Muslim was welcomed.) Once there — Condwiramurs having joined them — Parzival and Feirefiz appeared before the Grail King; the Grail was brought in, carried by Clarischanze of Tenebroc, the Grail maiden, but Feirefiz the Infidel could not see it, only the radiant girl, for his heart she stole the moment his eyes beheld her. The attendants of the Grail muttered that perhaps the youth should receive baptism, and the King explained that “all infidels were debarred from seeing it.” Feirefiz, proud of his faith, could not fully understand the notion, but asked simply if

63 This strange description of the skin of a man of mixed ethnicity may likely be the result of the primitive understanding of heredity in Wolfram’s time, or of his intention to visually show an example of such a “mixture.”

64 The immorality, especially sexual, of the clergy is here answered with the Grail being attended by a true virgin, offsetting the oft-disregarded chastity which was expecting of the male priesthood.

65 Ibid., Chapter 16, p. 404.
through baptism he could win the love of the beautiful Clarischanze, whom he would make his wife. The answer granting his wish, he said, “If her love rewards me, I shall gladly fulfill [your] God’s Commandments,” and was thus baptized — the Grail, then, appearing to his eyes in its radiance. With this, a sentence appeared upon the rim of the Grail, to the effect that “any Templar whom God should bestow on a distant people for their lord must forbid them to ask his name or lineage, but help them gain their rights.” Parzival then asked the question he was moved to ask five years earlier; the King was healed, and Parzival himself was crowned the Grail King, reunited with his wife and two sons, as sovereign lord of authentic life.

Through the story, Parzival displays his courage, loyalty, and compassion — all which bring him to attaining the fruition of his quest. The Grail, says Campbell, is that which is attained and realized by people who have lived their own lives. The Grail represents the fulfillment of the highest spiritual potentialities of the human consciousness.

The ultimate, realistic goal of the adventure, as with marriage, is to reconcile such illumination with society, though such a feat was never achieved during the Middle Ages, only later centuries seeing such assimilation. Nevertheless, Parzival, kind though foolish, like Tristan, through his integrity of character and fidelity both to his love and his true calling, achieves the adventure and finds the boon to which his heart led him. He learned to live a life which was his, and no other’s, finding his own path through the dark forest to attain his unique destiny. He won both a love and a life, and healed the Wasteland by holding to his own instinct, whereby he was led. Courtly

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67 Ibid. Years before the Magna Carta (1215), Wolfram had conceived of a king ruling over a people whose rights were of concern, not only to a king, but to God.
68 One of whom is Lohengrin.
69 Campbell and Moyers, “VI. Tales of Love and Marriage,” in The Power of Myth, p. 244.
lovers and noble knights, Parzival and Tristan embody the Western spirit of individual adventure, love, and tragic or heroic quest for a life which is truly one’s own — a bliss whose attainment is achieved by responsible integrity.
In Congress, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

When in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the cause which impels them to an separation.

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these States, solemnly publish and declare, That these United States are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all Political Band has and ought to be dissolved between them and the Said Crown; and that all Allegiance to any Government whatever, is hereby entirely and absolutely cut off and abolished.

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our Sacred Honor.

The United States of America. In Witness Whereof, We, the undersigned have hereunto subscribed our Names, at the City of Philadelphia, on the fourth Day of July, in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-six.
4. The Constrained Enlightenment: Locke, Smith, Burke, and the American Revolution

II.4.1 Locke and the Individual: Human Freedom in Constrained Nature

The discussed folly of the French Revolution lay in the chauvinistic hubris of its fomenters’ belief that through their overthrow of the aristocratic society’s idle corruption man could be remade in the image of a new nature. Where Rousseau and Robespierre had passionately subscribed to the “unconstrained” view of human nature, their contemporaries across the sea saw fit to follow a different path. The American Founders and Framers, men as learned as Rousseau, understood, however, the limitations of human moral capacity and wisely resigned themselves to the reality that a truly free society could only be constructed via the recognition of such limitations, they being inevitable. They, too, were men of the Enlightenment; they believed, however, as did Kant independently, in the good of the individual’s extrication of him- or herself from the “self-incurred minority” created by the submission to political or intellectual tyranny — whether all-embracing and kindly, or iron-fisted and sadistic.

The “constrained” Enlightenment, that resulting in the founding of the United States and the framing of its Constitution, began in England nearly a century before Jefferson’s pen set forth

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1 See I.2.3.

the words of the Declaration of Independence. The philosopher John Locke (1632 – 1704), known as the “Father of Liberalism,” himself put forward his own view as to the dignity of the human individual; that the individual’s own mind is of infinite interest. In his 1690 treatise, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, he explained,

Since it is the Understanding that sets Man above the rest of sensible Beings, and gives him all the Advantage and Dominion, which he has over them; it is certainly a Subject, even for its Nobleness, worth our Labour to enquire into. The Understanding, like the Eye, whilst it makes us see, and perceive all other Things, takes not notice of it self: And it requires Art and Pains to set it at a distance, and make it its own Object. Whatever be the Difficulties, that lie in the way of this Enquiry; whatever it be, that keeps us so much in the Dark to our selves; sure I am, that all the Light we can let in upon our own Minds; all the Acquaintance we can make with our own Understandings, will not only be very pleasant; but bring us great Advantage, in directing our Thoughts in search of other Things.\(^3\)

Each individual person’s mind, Locke believed, was worthy of study, and presented the scientist and philosopher with infinite depths and material, not only which to study, but to yield as the boon of understanding the nature of the reality which does constrain us. He continues:

When we know our own Strength, we shall better know what to undertake with hopes of Success: And when we have well survey’d the Powers of our own Minds, and made some Estimate what we may expect from them, we shall not be inclined either to sit still, and not set our Thoughts on work at all, in Despair of knowing any thing; nor on the other side question every thing, and disclaim all Knowledge, because some things are not to be understood…\(^4\)

Locke, like Kant, also believed that the human mind was bounded by its limitations; although by understanding of these limitations, via the intellectual and epistemological route, a consensus could be reached, by which humans may responsibly know the limits by which they are

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\(^4\) Ibid., I.1.6., p. 5.
constrained, true external freedom may be achieved. The limitations of the mind are not to be the
source of despair, but of intrigue; knowledge of the points at which human intellectual and moral
capability fall short allows the philosopher to understand human ability.

An earlier work, the *Second Treatise of Government* (1679 – 1681), with the fledgling ideas which would contribute later to the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* already in mind, Locke applies these views to the role of the state. Though accepting that human beings are unable to see beyond the limitations of the mind, Locke sees the seeds of the capabilities which within such nature lead to a truly free society. He rejects the view of his contemporary, Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679), that human nature so castrates human ability that government — namely one of nearly omnipotent power — is the only agent which may make for human stability and security. Locke, though acknowledging human limitation, seems to take a middle road, one which leads finally to a view of human nature which understands that humans are possessed of the necessary capabilities for survival in their natural state. The implication is that, if the state allows for its citizens to pursue their own self-interest, and make use of their naturally-endowed capabilities, they may remain free without being made both slaves and wards of the state:

To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men naturally are in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the laws of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man. A state also of equality, where in all power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection, unless the lord and master of them all should, by any manifest declaration of his will, set one above another, and confer on him, by an evident and clear appointment, an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty.

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This equality of men by nature… makes it the foundation of that obligation to mutual love amongst men, on which he builds the duties they owe one another, and from whence he derives the great maxims of justice and charity.\(^6\) Locke’s words do not advocate a Rousseauian view of human nature but an assessment of human natural competency in the field of material survival. This relatively innate ability regarding providing for oneself in nature is Locke’s evidence that man, though entirely bereft of the angelic perfection in nakedness with which Rousseau would crown him in the following century, was blessed with the faculties to survive, and most likely thrive, autonomously, without the assistance of an overbearing earthly authority. Such ability, contrary to Rousseau, most certainly does not assume human beings shall behave *morally* in a state of nature: only that *survival* itself is entirely within human capability, and that the state is thus bereft of that first, most basic argument for its domination of the people.

Further, from this autonomy, says Levin, stems “the notion of the individual’s God-given inalienable rights, of which all individuals are entitled, and which provide the moral condition for civil society.”\(^7\) The aforementioned equality is not to be equated with the Marxist concept and aim of “equality of outcomes or result,”\(^8\) rather, however, with an equality before God and divine Law. The aims of the “civil society” also appeal to the “law of Nature,” namely the (frankly *amoral*) human instinct to self-preservation:

> The state of Nature has a law of Nature to govern it, which obliges everyone, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions; for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and


\(^7\) Levin, “John Locke and the Nature of Man,” p. 89.

\(^8\) Ibid.
infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master, sent into the world by His order and about His business; they are His property, whose workmanship they are made to last during His, not one another’s pleasure. And being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of Nature, there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another’s uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours. Everyone as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station willfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he as much as he can to preserve the rest of mankind, and not unless it be to do justice on an offender, take away or impair the life or what tends to the preservation of the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another.9

It once again must be stated that the natural state of human life of which Locke speaks is not to be confused with the collective (Rousseauian) notion. The human individual, yes, in the state of nature is free; the individual in the natural state of the society is not. The natural condition of human societies is not one of freedom but of tyranny and prodigious harm to others, for the dark side of human nature appears when one lives cheek-by-jowl with another — whether peasant or ruler. A just and free society accepts the reality that individuals possess the ability to survive autonomously and, by the ironic reason of nature, wish to preserve themselves, and may live in relative peace with those who respect the property and person of the other.10 The idea of rights to things for which there is a “natural” precedent — namely and bluntly the right to self-preservation — does not begin with Locke, but his work is among the first to apply it to a concept of a government’s relationship to its country’s citizens. So strongly does Locke care for such rights that he is anxious to outline the circumstances under which they may be abused in


10 Locke seems to presuppose that the people of which he speaks subscribe already to moral principles of action, and accountability to a God as outlined in the Ten Commandments, an internal morality being crucial to the survival of a free society. On this point, it may be just to say that Locke fails to state with adequate clarity his moral view of human nature. The pitfall of the Rousseauian, unconstrained, characterization is that rather than the gentle creature who innately follows all of Christ’s commandments to love selflessly, human nature tends to the opposite.
their very defense, and how civil, rather than tyrannical, government is the only means by which such rights may be truly protected:

...[S]elf-love will make men partial to themselves and their friends; and, on the other side, ill-nature, passion, and revenge will carry them too far in punishing others, and hence nothing but confusion and disorder will follow, and that therefore God has certainly appointed government to restrain the partiality and violence of man. I easily grant that civil government is the proper remedy for the inconvenience of the state of Nature...

...[F]reedom of men under government is to have a standing rule to live by, common to everyone of that society, and made by the legislative power erected in it. A liberty to follow my own will in all things where the rule prescribes not, not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man, as freedom of nature is to be under no other restraint but the law of Nature...

This freedom from absolute, arbitrary power is so necessary to, and closely joined with, a man’s preservation, that he cannot part with it but by what forfeits his preservation and life altogether. For a man, not having the power of his own life, cannot by compact or his own consent enslave himself to anyone, nor put himself under the absolute, arbitrary power of another to take away his life when he pleases. Nobody can give more power than he has himself, and he that cannot take away his own life cannot give that power over it.\[11\]

The the right to property is also specifically stated, property the result of human labor.\[12\] As Levin outlines,

Locke further distinguishes himself by asserting not only the individual’s right to private property but also the government’s obligation to respect and uphold that right, for it is central to the sovereignty of the individual. He describes the nature of labor and property in the state of nature, the transition from bartering to the use of money, and what is, in essence, the societal vitality of the market system...

For Locke, labor represents initiative, productivity, and enterprise, which are imperative to not only the survival of the individual but also his well-being and success... Moreover, Locke explained that the wealth created and possessed

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\[12\] One could ask immediately whether the possessions of the “robber baron” and cruel world-conquerer are not also “property.” This is a question slightly more complex than can be addressed in this context; however, such acquisition of wealth would be seen as an instance of (ideally) judicially punishable theft in a society in which the right to property is not only respected but protected. Though the construction of a judicial system which may justly confiscate illegally or immoral properties wealth through due process cannot be discussed here, to do so is just.
by one individual does not prevent another individual from creating and possessing wealth.\textsuperscript{13}

The Marxist retort to his assertion — namely that the possession of large amounts of property by the few, as in the case of several massive ships floating upon the same lake as many small boats, displaces and forces the many into poverty and political powerlessness — can be refuted in the political sense by the understanding that money only buys influence under the circumstances in which a government possesses the power to be of relevant service to such a party. If a government were powerful enough to incur a wealthy citizen’s desire to purchase its influence, then such a government is far too powerful indeed — that immoral and inappropriate power, in this case, likely being that to impose economic regulations upon other businesses at the behest of a business which wishes to immobilize its competition within the marketplace. Therefore, much, though not all, of the difficulty involved in the individual’s journey to gaining wealth is the result of a government which has well exceeded its morally justified share of power.\textsuperscript{14}

Locke then turns to the issue of the people’s relationship to government. As regards tyranny, “…[H]e that thinks,” he writes, “absolute power purifies men’s blood, and corrects the baseness of human nature, need but read the history of this, or any other age, to be convinced to the contrary.”\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, only a government which assumes its power with the consent of the governed is truly a necessity, and without a moral alternative:

The great end of men’s entering into society being the enjoyment of their properties in peace and safety, and the great instrument and means of that being the laws established in that society, the first and fundamental positive law of

\textsuperscript{13} Levin, “John Locke and the Nature of Man,” pp. 92 – 93.

\textsuperscript{14} Contrary to the belief of many, including those far outside the Marxist camp, this economic system would be most closely defined as “mercantilism” or “corporatism,” rather than capitalism.

commonwealths is establishing of the legislative power, as the first and fundamental natural law which is to govern even the legislative.

…[It] is a power that hath no other end but preservation, and therefore can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or designedly to impoverish the subjects…16

As Levin opines in summation, this is the philosophical birth of the representative republic, its power, most importantly, assumed and bestowed upon it by and with the consent of the citizenry.

The idea of a government whose (proper) role it is to protect — not to bestow — the human rights to life, liberty, and property:

Consequently, Locke argues that the only legitimate form of government is that which is established by the consent of the members of society; that the only kind of government that can preserve the individual’s God-given natural rights, including liberty and labor/property, is a representative commonwealth in which there are three branches or at least three distinct responsibilities; that it must operate through just and impartial laws, which are applied equally to everyone in that society, including those in government; and that the extraordinary power of making laws must not be delegated to those who are beyond the reach of the governed.

Locke emphasized that even the representative governments, of the kind he described, can take on a tyrannical character.

…Underlying Locke’s view of man, society, and government is the individual’s right to the value he creates with his own labor and in his own property… now and in the future, for it is central to his nature and existence. The right of all individuals to try to acquire property, and once acquired to secure it, is a right that no man or government can legitimately deny him, and which just governments are instituted to preserve and protect. Although some will become wealthy and some will not — that is, the result will be unequal when comparing individual to individual — the poorest man can become rich and the richest man can become poor depending on how each applies his labor…

Moreover, whereas Marx and Engels later argued for the destruction of what they called the bourgeois, or the feudal lords and later capitalists, insisting there can otherwise be no justice for the laborer, Locke explained that the coercive redistribution of wealth through the government’s abuse of law and misapplication of rights destroys individual liberty; ambition, productivity, and wealth; and the purpose of the commonwealth. Instead, society and government should ensure that all individuals, regardless of their circumstances of birth, are unmolested in their right.

16 Ibid., 11.134 – 135, pp. 79 – 80, cited in Levin, “John Locke and the Nature of Man,” pp. 89 – 99. “Moreover, the legislature has as its task to uphold and secure man’s inalienable rights, be informed by the governed, be free of corruption, and restrain itself.” Levin, p. 99.
inalienable rights. If all are free and secure in this regard, there can be no predestined or official class structure or caste system. In this sense, property rights are the great equalizer — not of outcomes but opportunity.\textsuperscript{17}

Locke’s view of human nature, combined with that view’s understanding of the human instinct to self-preserve, lays the foundations for a governmental structure which is there not to control the people but merely to responsibly protect them from the darker side of their nature.

\textbf{II.4.2 SMITH AND ECONOMIC FREEDOM: THE INVISIBLE HAND OF UNINTENDED ALTRUISM}

The great economist Adam Smith (1723 – 1790) said famously in his seminal study, \textit{An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations} (1776) that the market is led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of [the vendor or consumer’s] intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest, [either of the aforementioned parties] really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good.\textsuperscript{18}

In line, for the most part, with Locke’s understanding of the solitarily self-sufficient character of human nature, Smith, from an economic standpoint, advances one step further. To begin, his view of said nature is ever so slightly dimmer than Locke’s.\textsuperscript{19} While they would seem to agree upon the rationally justifiable potential for human success under entirely free circumstances, Smith ventures further into the concerns of practical moral observations; from his 1759 \textit{Theory of Moral Sentiments} (a strictly philosophical rather than economic work):

\textsuperscript{17} Levin, “John Locke and the Nature of Man,” pp. 100 – 104.
\textsuperscript{19} Locke seems to highlight the more impressive sides of human nature for the purpose of discrediting the Hobbesian idea of the human “need” for an iron-fisted, tyrannical government to both protect and control the population, while nevertheless acknowledging that the human character is innately fraught with the ability to do evil to others.
Let us suppose that the great empire of China, with all its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, and let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe, who had no sort of connection with that part of the world, would react upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity. He would, I imagine, first of all express very strongly his sorrow for the misfortune of that unhappy people, he would make many melancholy reflections upon the precariousness of human life, and the vanity of all the labours of man, which could thus be annihilated in a moment. He would, too, perhaps, if he was a man of speculation, enter into many reasonings concerning the effects which this disaster might produce upon the commerce of Europe, and the trade and business of the world in general. And when all this fine philosophy was over, when all these humane sentiments had been once fairly expressed, he would pursue his business or his pleasure, take his response or his diversion, with the same ease and tranquility as if no such accident had happened. The most frivolous disaster which could befall himself would occasion a more real disturbance. If he was to lose his little finger tomorrow, he would not sleep to-night; but, provided he never saw them, he would snore with the most profound security over the ruin of a hundred million of his brethren.  

The human being is forever oppressed by a pathetically low ceiling for moral capacity and feeling. At best, Smith believes, in this particular case, compassion for another is based upon shock, if anything else, and a newspaper report concerning the deaths of a truly titanic proportion of the world’s population at that time read within the warmth of any European’s home would cause very little else. Even if Smith’s supposed European subject were to meet a survivor or relative of a number of those who perished in such a catastrophe, his pity would assuredly ebb with time. This is to say that true altruism is not only foreign to human inclination and conduct, it is thoroughly unnatural, whatever one’s interpretation of that term, and regardless of the conscious mind’s reaction to such a statement. Many around the world exhibit such gentleness towards their fellows, but such conduct is, at the very least, the exception to human inclination

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21 Ibid., p. 108. “Nature, it seems, when she loaded us with our own sorrows, thought that they were enough, and therefore did not command us to take any further share in those of others, than what was necessary to prompt us to relieve them,” cited in Sowell, p. 12.
— or, says Smith, the exquisite byproduct of free men and women pursuing their own inclinations and desired life-action. The externally commanded (fraudulent) altruism — let alone equality — of the Marxist state forces upon its all too human subjects an entirely unnatural state of existence — namely to live for all others outside of their realm of immediate concern. Smith’s understanding of the nature of a truly free market system is based upon the simple model of the free exchange of goods and services — one wishes to eat, thus he or she goes to purchase food; another wishes to acquire money with which he or she can in turn purchase food or any other goods, therefore he or she sells the food at a price which a consumer would find reasonable and would compensate the vendor for both labor and business expenses. The price system determines the monetary rate at which goods may be sold, rather than governmental “central planning,” as Friedman would put it. It is only to state the patently obvious that abuses should take place, though the “invisible hand” of the market sets prices based upon supply and demand (if not also quality), and any vendor who attempts to charge an exorbitant price (for service of undeserving quality or value) shall be punished by the consumer, who, in consideration of the leanness of his or her wallet, shall pass that vendor over for another (this supposing that the avaricious, dishonest vendor has not sought government intervention to protect him- or herself from the consequences of such behavior). The same is true, too, for discrimination in hiring and selling; the consumer is free to choose whether to accept service from the vendor who refuses to hire or serve those of certain skin pigmentations or sexual orientations, just as he or she is, too, to reject it. Here, individual, natural self-preservation and -interest is the key to this form of unintended altruism. And altruism it is, for if one is to acquire wealth honestly by this model, one must work with diligence to develop a product or service which caters to the needs and desires of others.
Smith is not without his highly thoughtful critics, however. Bronowski and Mazlish, for example, highlight Smith’s idea that improved productivity is the result of the division of labor. “Unfortunately,” they say, “Adam Smith often treated labor as a commodity rather than an activity.”

Regarding this insight, they continue,

what he said had quite a disastrous effect during the next thirty to forty years. When one propounds labor theory of wealth in which labor is treated mainly in terms of supply and demand, a very inhuman kind of civilization is implied; and the implication became reality in the years after Smith’s death.

Smith did the worker one other disservice. By concentrating on the division of labor as being, along with greater capital investment, the source of increased productivity, he was drawn into thinking of man as a mere “machine of production.” He knew the price to be paid for this view, and he was keenly aware that “gross ignorance” characterized the inferior ranks of people when they were cut off from a full and rich work life…

Smith also was not averse to government intervention in some fashion, namely that it “intervene and educate the laboring poor — [a] strange doctrine for a supposed free enterpriser.” Still, despite this, say Bronowski and Mazlish,

Adam Smith, did, however, realize that the well-being of the worker depended not on the absolute wealth of the nation but on the fact that the wealth was expanding. The real wages of labor depended, he declared, on the “advancing, stationary, or declining condition” of the society, and only in an advancing society was the worker’s lot tolerable. It was at this point that Smith [however] came to the heart of his theory: a continuously advancing and expanding economy could only exist in an atmosphere of laissez faire. The worker, as well as the manufacturer, had to be free to pursue his own advantage, without let or hindrance.

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22 Bronowski and Mazlish, “Adam Smith,” p. 348, note 18, “What we [propound] is Smith’s theory of... labor... distinguished from his theory of exchange value. When, nearly 100 years later, Karl Marx elaborated his theory of labor value, he really did little more in this respect than reproduce Adam Smith; he had an immense and open respect for Smith. [The theory]... wavered between the view that the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of labor required to produce it and the view that it is determined by the amount of labor it can purchase.”

23 Ibid., p. 349.

24 Ibid., p. 350, n. 21, “Smith also anticipated the argument of Malthus that increased wages meant increased births (and therefore, in a static economy, eventual starvation). Smith said: ‘The liberal reward of labour, therefore, as it is the effect of increasing wealth, so it is the cause of increasing population. To complain of it is to lament over the necessary effect and cause of the greatest public prosperity.’” Smith, Wealth of Nations (London: Everyman’s Library, 1954), I.VII.27, p. 72.
An added defense of Smith, possibly in clarification of his original motive, is to point to the 
unintended cooperation of disparate, often usually antagonistic, parties. Peaceable cooperation is 
the payoff, it seems, for much of the stated dislocation and hardship. The most iconic and 
elloquent example of this is economist Leonard Read’s short, seminal article, *I, Pencil* (1958). No 
one person on Earth could possibly make a pencil, it says; only voluntarily cooperating parties 
producing the graphite, wood, paint, brass, glue, rubber, and the steel required to produce the 
tools needed to cut the wood, mill the graphite, let alone assemble the pencil itself.\(^{25}\) Despite its 
obvious faults, this division of labor brings workers and producers together in peaceful economic 
cooperation, rather than battlefield engagement. Further, in light of Smith’s ironic personal 
distaste for so-called “capitalists,”\(^ {26}\) this idea has become the model for the free market 
capitalism which has been the source of so much of America and the Western world’s wealth 
over the centuries. Whether via moral enterprises or not, such as the slave trade, the free market 
system, rather than centralized government, has, however controversially, been the greatest 
spreader of wealth to all economic levels of society in history.\(^ {27}\) This alone is but one triumph of 
the revolutionary idea of using human miserliness to the advantage of a free civilization.

**II.4.3** **BURKE’S WARNING:**
**THE LESSON OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION**

Edmund Burke (1729 – 1797) was the English Enlightenment’s prophet of revolution. An


\(^{27}\) For example, see I.2.5, p. 46, nn. 63, 64.
Irish Protestant, he understood the wish of the oppressed and colonized to be free. During his parliamentary career, he supported the rights of the abused Roman Catholics of his homeland, led the charge for the ill-fated impeachment of Warren Hastings, the corrupt Governor-General of India, called for checks on the power of the monarchy, and strongly supported the American Revolution and the rights of the citizens of those colonies. Then, however, this man whom liberals and revolutionaries of the time praised so highly penned his most famous work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Upon the fall of the Bastille in 1789, a French acquaintance, the aristocrat Charles-Jean-François de Pont, inquired of Burke as to what were his impressions of this new revolution. Burke replied in two lengthy letters; the longer of which, written upon reading the Welsh philosopher Richard Price’s *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* the following January, he published as *Reflections* that November.

*Reflections*, among Burke’s most famous works, is a seminal text of what Sowell, in conflict with the other, terms the “constrained” vision of human nature. In a letter to his friend Joseph Harford, the recently defeated MP for Bristol, dated September 27, 1780, Burke wrote:

> There is, by the essential fundamental Constitution of things a radical infirmity in all human contrivances, and the weakness is often so attached to the very perfection of our political Mechanism, that some defect in it, something that stops short of its principle, something that controls, that mitigates, that moderates it, becomes a necessary corrective to the Evils that the Theoretick Perfection would produce. I am pretty sure it often is so, and this truth may be exemplified abundantly.

> It is true, that every defect is not of course, such a corrective as I state; but supposing it is not, an imperfect good is still a good…

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29 Ibid., pp. 13 – 14.

Burke understood the foolishness of intellectual attempts to design, let alone construct, a perfect government. “The arrogance and exhibitionism of intellectuals [recurred often in Burke],” writes Sowell, “…[speaking] of their ‘grand theories’ to which they ‘would have heaven and earth to bend.’” Such theories included the notion that perfection of the human condition, and earthly institutions, was indeed possible, if not thoroughly impracticable. Human nature was slave to its passions and fears, and, despite its abilities, was incapable of bringing such dreams to fruition.

*Reflections* is a magnificently organic commentary on such understandings, though in Burke’s dense but piercing and political language. He begins his substantial correspondence with a discussion of whether France’s new-found “freedom” is worth celebration, regarding the circumstances and means by which it was supposedly achieved. He writes,

> The circumstances [of such happenings] are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or noxious to mankind. Abstractly speaking, government, as well as liberty, is good; yet could I, in common sense, ten years ago [1780], have felicitated France on her enjoyment of a government (for she then had a government) without enquiry what the nature of that government was, or how it was administered? Can I now congratulate the same nation upon its freedom? Is it because liberty in the abstract may be classed amongst the blessings of mankind, that I am seriously to felicitate a madman, who has escaped from the protecting restraint and wholesome darkness of his cell, on his restoration to the enjoyment of light and liberty? Am I to congratulate an highwayman and murderer, who has broke prison, upon the recovery of his natural rights?…

> When I see the spirit of liberty in action, I see a strong principle at work; and this, for a while, is all I can possibly know of it. The wild gas, the fixed air is plainly broke loose: but we ought to suspend our judgement until the first effervescence is a little subsided, till the liquor is cleared, and until we see something deeper than the agitation of a troubled and frothy surface. I must be tolerably sure, before I venture publicly to congratulate men upon a blessing, that they have really received one. Flattery corrupts both the receiver and the giver; and adulation is not of more service to the people than to kings. I should therefore suspend my congratulations on the new liberty of France, until I was informed how it had been combined with government; with public force; with the discipline

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and obedience of armies; with the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue; with morality and religion; with the solidarity of property; with peace and order: with civil and social manners. All these (in their way) are good things too; and, without them, liberty is not a benefit whilst it lasts, and is not likely to continue long. The effect of liberty to individuals is, that they may do what they please: We ought to see what it shall please them to do, before we risque congratulations, which may be soon turned into complaints. Prudence would dictate this in the case of separate insulated private men; but liberty, when men act in bodies, is power. Considerate people, before they declare themselves, will observe the use which is made of power; and particularly of so trying a thing as new power in new persons, of whose principles, tempers, and dispositions, they have little or no experience, and in situations where those who appear the most stirring in the scene may possibly not be the real movers.  

Burke’s wisdom in his distaste for the French Revolution lies in his resolute coolness. He does not reserve comment upon and opinion of what could be known of the Revolution as of January of 1790; but for the rest, namely its future excesses, he reserves final judgement. Nevertheless, the importance of circumstance reigns supreme: that those who enjoy such new-found liberty be of the correct character, achieving it virtuously, is the marker of a society which shall remain free. The adage that freedom does not exist without personal responsibility is here addressed quite clearly. Those who are guilty of madness, criminality, and wide-eyed blindness in their passion for freedom, he says, sadly, are unfit for such a blessing. Therein lie the seeds of the Revolution’s downfall. The true motives of those who seek liberty — thus power — must be ascertained, and their level of personal responsibility known for the purpose of judging whether the future of their movement shall be for good or ill.

Having strongly supported the American Revolution which had ended six years earlier, Burke astonished many of his contemporaries by supposedly reneging upon such previously-held


33 The Treaty of Paris was signed on September 3, 1783.
values and expressing concern at the events of the revolution in France. The struggle for American independence, he believed, was a comparatively fair and straightforward one, wherein a colony fought a professional army fairly to win its sovereignty from a faraway government and monarchy. The civil order of the Mother Country and its civilian subjects was for the most part not effected, with the new government of the United States largely non-violently creating its own civil order. He used the comparison of the Glorious Revolution (1688 – 1689) in England with that of France. The Glorious Revolution — the overthrow of King James II, a Catholic convert, by his daughter Mary and her Dutch husband William (Willem III van Oranje-Nassau) to replace the new infant heir to the throne James Francis Edward Stuart in order that England would remain a Protestant nation, unbound by the ties to Rome of which it had been free since 1534 — was an event which restricted the power of the monarchy. The “Bill of Rights,” passed by Parliament on December 18, 1689, once and for all, outlined the limits of royal authority over Parliament and country, defeating the growing absolutism of the Stuart era. It is untrue that the Glorious Revolution can indeed be called the “Bloodless Revolution,” as it was christened in its own time, for the Williamite War in Ireland, the bloody Jacobite risings in Scotland (lasting in succession until 1746), and even the collapse of the Dominion of New England and the overthrow of the government of the Province of Maryland in faraway America all occurred as a result of the change in leadership. Still, the deaths from these conflicts, rightly, were mercifully few in comparison to the nine-year slaughter of the Civil War (1642 – 1651), culminating in the regicidal execution of Charles I in 1649. Burke did agree that a truly tyrannical government could be resisted, even by force of arms if necessary, but such force required rational justification.

34 The Bill of Rights reflected the concept of government by consent which Locke’s writings popularized, its origins in England’s Anglo-Saxon roots, wherein the chieftain or king only ruled by the consent of his lords and people.
as well as a reasoned understanding of the limitations of such action. He expressed his immense displeasure with the excesses of the reign of his own King, the mad George III, as far as the rights secured by the Glorious Revolution went, but he praised the Bill of Rights of 1689 as a “most wise, sober, and considerate declaration,” composed to protect the people from the ambitions of “overmighty” monarchs. He compared the French Revolution — and its violence when set beside that of the Glorious — to the English Civil War with its endless bloodshed which resulted in the beheading of the King and the reign of terror under Cromwell the Lord Protector and the Rump Parliament.

Though it is likely Burke understood the plight of the destitute French peasantry as well as the part which their king and government had played in bringing about such a status quo, Burke believed the revolutionaries’ conduct undeserving of the title of full justness. The lesser of two evils, he believed, was the protection of the old feudal aristocratic system, even in view of its

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35 Burke, “To Joseph Harford — 27 September, 1780,” in Selected Letters of Edmund Burke, p. 263. “I admit that Evils may be so very great and urgent that other Evils are to be submitted to for the mere hope of their Removal. A War, for instance, may be necessary, and we know what are the Rights of War, But before we use those Rights, We ought to be clearly in the state which alone can justify them; and not, in the very fold of Peace and security, by a bloody sophistry, to act towards any persons, at once as Citizens and as Enemies; and without the necessary formalities and evident distinctive lines of War, to exercise upon on our Countrymen the most dreadful of all hostilities… A positively Vicious and abusive Government ought to be chang’d, and if necessary, by Violence, if it cannot be, (as sometimes it is the case) Reformed: But when the Question is concerning the more or less perfection in the organization of Government, the allowance to means is not so much of a latitude.” This is entirely in line with his support of the revolt of the American colonies and the rights of the Crown’s Irish Catholic subjects.

36 Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, pp. 98 – 99. “His majesty’s heirs and successors, each in his time and order, will come to the crown with the same contempt of [the people’s] choice with which his majesty has succeeded to that he wears. [¶] …This new, and hitherto unheard-of bill of rights, though made in the name of the whole people, belongs to those [élite] gentlemen and their faction only. The body of the people of England have no share in it.”

37 Ibid., p. 100. “…drawn up,” he continues, “by great lawyers and great statesmen, and not by warm and inexperienced enthusiasts [as in France]…”

38 Burke the Irishman had good reason to look back with cold and jaded eyes upon the ramifications of the Civil War. Between 1649 and 1653 Oliver Cromwell’s Parliamentarian New Model Army subdued the Irish Catholic Confederation, which had sided with the Royalists, and occupied the whole of Ireland. To punish the ongoing Irish guerrilla warfare which had continued after his forces’ victory over the Federation in 1641, he passed a series of Penal Laws against the majority Catholic population, and confiscated much of their land in the north. This resulted in a large proportion of the inhabitants being slaughtered by government order and loyal Scottish Protestants being shipped across the Irish Sea to settle the land (resulting in the demographics of modern North Ireland).
genuinely regrettable behavior. The events of the Revolution which had already occurred as of the writing of *Reflections*, such as the Storming of the Bastille (July 17, 1789), the storming of the Palace of Versailles during the Women’s March which ended with the capture of the royal family and government (October 6), and the confiscation of the property of the Church (November 2), displayed to Burke that the revolutionaries were not ones to act through piecemeal reform as did the English Parliament during the Glorious Revolution, or even the American Continental Congress in its drafting of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, Constitution in 1787, and Bill of Rights in 1789. The feudal wealth of the idle aristocracy, and of the Church was to be redistributed to “the people.” The confiscation of aristocratic and Church property, to Burke, was among the most deplorable actions of the revolutionaries, citing the citizen’s right, however wealthy, to his or her own property on the one hand, and his own Christian faith on the other. On the problem of property he writes,

> The characteristic essence of property, formed out of the combined principles of its acquisition and conservation, is to be unequal. The great masses therefore which excite envy, and tempt rapacity, must be put out of the possibility of danger. Then they form a natural rampart about the lesser properties in all their gradations. The same quantity of property, which is by the natural course of things divided among many, has not the same operation. Its defensive power is weakened as it is diffused. In this diffusion each man’s portion is less than what, in the eagerness of his desires, he may flatter himself to obtain by dissipating the accumulations of others. The plunder of the few would indeed give but a share inconceivably small in the distribution to the many. But the many are not capable of making this calculation; and those who lead them to rapine, never intend this distribution.39

If the individual does not have a right to property, then those to whom it is redistributed do not either; and in this case, those by whom such wealth is to be redistributed swindle the multitude in

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39 Ibid., p. 140. He continues, “The power of perpetuating our property in our families is of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself. It makes our weakness subservient to our virtue; it grafts benevolence even upon avarice.”
much the same way as its original possessor may have done. Burke’s blunt defense of the French aristocracy’s right to their property, however wise, clashes rather with Smith’s notion of the gaining of wealth through the free market, as none of them had worked for and earned their property through their own labor. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man, ratified by the National Assembly on August 26, 1789, defines property as among its rights, but Burke understands this assertion to be entirely void and dishonest under the circumstances of the Assembly’s ability to confiscate the property of its enemies. This notion insinuates, also, that a free market system could never take root in France without a (genuine) right to property, even for the “immorally” wealthy, as no “morally” wealthy individual would be possessed of the right to property earned through honest labor. His defense of the corrupt French Galician Church, too, seems superficially knee-jerk and out-of-touch; however, the moral authority of the Church, and the eternal Law it represents, he believes, cannot be done away with, as God’s Law must be above the law of the state, however seemingly just. Corruption, feudal injustice of one kind or another, and economic “inequality” have and shall always exist, says Burke, and to seek to eternally remedy them cannot end in anything being for the better, as to do so is impossible, and its result shall itself be injustice, even if it is of a different nature from the former form.

Then, with regard to the revolutionaries’ irrational fervor for their romantic cause, Burke invokes the final piece which would seal the Revolution’s eventual, bloody failure. As with the followers of Marx, the revolutionaries, through their destruction of the old order, sought to destroy the bounds of past experience which would ordinarily give them pause:

[The revolutionaries] despise experience as the wisdom of unlettered men; and as for the rest, they have wrought under-ground a mine that will blow up at one grand explosion all examples of antiquity, all precedents, charters, and acts of parliament. They have the ‘rights of man.’ Against these there can be no prescription; against these no agreement is binding: these admit no temperament, and no compromise: anything withheld from their full demand is so much of fraud and injustice. Against these their rights of men let no government look for security in the length of its continuance, or in the justice and lenity of its administration. The objections of these speculatists, if its forms do not quadrature with their theories, are as valid against such an old and beneficent government as against the most violent tyranny, or the greenest usurpation.41

In other words, any who would see fit to question the wisdom of any action of the Revolution, from the content of the Declaration of the Rights of Man to the many instances of organized violence — especially if he or she were to cite anything from the vast body of past human experience — such a person’s lack of fervor was not to be tolerated. The past was to be blissfully forgotten, and its logical barriers to revolutionary passion and “justice” demolished with it. “Law,” says the Declaration, “is the expression of the general will.”42 This fact alone, its precept taken directly from the romantic, collectivist sentimentality of Rousseau, doomed the Revolution to its ultimate foundering and self-destruction. If law (and presumably order) are left to the mercy of the “general will,” then “justice” is based upon popular whim:

But one of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and the laws are consecrated, is lest the temporary possessors and life-renters in it, unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due to their posterity, should act as if they were the entire masters; that they should not think it amongst their rights to cut off the entail, or commit waste on the inheritance, by destroying at their pleasure the whole original fabric of their society; hazarding to leave to those who come after them, a ruin instead of an habitation — and teaching these successors as little to respect their contrivances, as they had themselves respected the institutions of their forefathers. By this unprincipled facility of changing the state as often, and as much, and in as many

41 Ibid., pp. 148 – 149.

42 “Declaration of the Rights of Man – 1789,” Article VI.
ways as there are floating fancies or fashions, the chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken. No one generation could link with the other. Men would become little better than the flies of a summer.

The mercy of collective passion is no mercy at all to which to be left, says Burke; by beginning the world anew, the ecstasy of breaking the shackles of the old is one which is surely to be very short-lived. However dreadful the old order may have been, such destruction rends from society (let alone the “civil society”) its ability to survive, grow, and even to heal itself. Indeed, the “societal continuum,” says Levin, which such political “utopianism seeks to break” is namely the connection through tradition between the past (the wise and the dead), the present (society’s “life-renters”), and the future (those who are yet to be born).

By breaking this continuum, the people of the present, blind to their full dependence upon their society, are free to behave with the irresponsibility suiting their current pleasure, without considering the ramifications of their however well-intentioned actions. This naïve nail damned the Revolution to the living coffin of the Great Terror more than three years later, wherein little more than a J’accuse, whether shouted or whispered, sent thousands to the guillotine. Such shortsighted passion eventually replaced one despot with another, one who embodied the ideals of Revolutionary “new man,” remade by and for the moment. Passion for a justice and liberty which few seemed to understand drove the Revolution to its eventual destruction whereby its own aims disgraced itself. The characteristic “infirmity” of human contrivance ignored, the Revolution steered dead ahead towards the beauty of “no-place” without thought for the dark future to which its ecstatic passion condemned itself.


Ibid., p. 150.


II.4.4 “LET THE EXPERIMENT BE MADE”: TRIUMPH OF THE “CONSTRAINED” AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The main expression of the “constrained” Enlightenment, however, preceded both Burke and the French Revolution. The American Revolution, from which the revolutionaries of France derived much of their rhetoric and raison d’être (not to mention d’état), nevertheless, was of an immensely different nature from the revolution of which Burke would write in 1790. One could certainly characterize the French Revolution as a human and societal experiment; though the American example which it attempted to copy was of a radically different nature.

Though Burke’s “constrained” criticisms of the consequences of the “unconstrained” French Enlightenment have previously taken precedent over precise and explicit explication of the nature of Sowell’s idea of the “constrained” vision of human nature, discussion of the final, American portion of the English-Scottish-American philosophical trio of Enlightenment thought is now appropriate. Sowell describes a philosophy which hinges upon the aforementioned understanding that human beings are not fundamentally good, and the ills of society may only be mitigated rather than eradicated, one embraced by the Framers of the American Constitution and not by the French revolutionaries:

The great [human] evils of the world — war, poverty, and crime, for example — are seen in completely different terms by those with the constrained and the unconstrained visions. If human options are not inherently constrained, then the presence of such repugnant and disastrous phenomena virtually cries out for explanation — and for solutions. But if the limitations and passions of man himself are at the heart of these painful phenomena, then what requires explanation are the ways in which they have been avoided or minimized. …In the unconstrained vision, there are no intractable reasons for social evils and therefore no reason why they cannot be solved, with sufficient moral commitment. But in the constrained vision, whatever artifices or strategies restrain or ameliorate inherent human evils will themselves have costs, some in the form of other social
ills created by these civilizing institutions, so that all that is possible is a prudent trade-off.

…Alexander Hamilton in *The Federalist Papers* regarded the idea of individual actions “unbiased by considerations not connected with the public good” as a prospect “more ardently to be wished than seriously to be expected.” Robespierre sought a solution, Hamilton a trade-off.

The Constitution of the United States, with its elaborate checks and balances, clearly reflected this view that no one was ever to be completely trusted with power. This was in sharp contrast to the French Revolution, which gave sweeping powers, including the power of life and death, to those who spoke in the name of “the people,” expressing the Rousseauean “general will.”

The aim, briefly, of the American Founders was (1) to create a nation from a patchwork of thirteen scattered colonies, (2) win a war against the Mother Country at a reasonable cost, and (3) construct a well-shackled government which would represent fairly these disparate states, and which would never become more powerful than the citizenry it existed to serve, protect, and restrain when necessary from the most extreme of immoralities. This set of aims is encapsulated by the “how” in the form of the Constitution, and the “why” represented by the Declaration of Independence. The thrust of the Declaration — the *justification* for rebellion against a monarch who had “[quartered] large bodies of troops among us… plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people” — was that *all* humans were possessed of “certain unalienable rights” upon which no government, near or far, possesses a right to infringe. Such rights, unlike those outlined in the French Declaration of the

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48 “Why has government been instituted at all? Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice without restraint.” But also, “It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?” This stemming from the assertion that, “It is the lot of all human institutions, even those of the most perfect kind, to have defects as well as excellencies — ill as well as good properties. This results from the imperfection of the Institutor, Man.” Alexander Hamilton, *et al.*, *The Federalist Papers* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1961), pp. 110, 322, and *Selected Writings and Speeches of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Morton J. Frisch (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1985), p. 390, cited in Sowell, pp. 27, 28, 13 (respectively).

Rights of Man (wherein said rights are bestowed upon the citizen “under the auspices of the Supreme Being”\textsuperscript{50}, Thomas Jefferson wrote that the citizens of his new nation were “endowed by their Creator” with these “unalienable rights.” The significance is that while in France God simply smiled upon the Assembly’s declaring the Rights of Man, for Jefferson and his colleagues, the right to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” are ours from our birth — from our \textit{creation}. God is the \textit{Author} of our rights, rather than any government (however humanely intentioned): thus, neither this nor any other government is possessed of the right or power to strip us of such rights. “…[A]ll men are created equal,” namely equal before God and law — rather than in personal ability or an amount of property decreed by the state.

To agree in history’s light with the grievances against the King which make up the majority of the Declaration (grievances of which Frederick Douglass famously made light in reference to the plight of America’s slaves nearly a century later\textsuperscript{51}) is largely irrelevant to the import of both charters. The recognition of human rights transcending the power of any government (government which, for the protection of those rights, must be, just as is already our

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\textsuperscript{50} “Declaration of the Rights of Man – 1789,” Preamble. God \textit{approves} of these rights, but does not bestow them.

\textsuperscript{51} He did this in ironic defense of the Constitution, citing the fact of there being no clause therein which actively sought either to justify the morality of or the continuation of the institution of slavery. The passage in Article I § 2 (“Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.”) is often cited as a condition for specifically codifying the inherent inferiority of Africans and ensuring that such persons be legally lesser than the white majority from that point forward. The cited clause was, in fact, a rough compromise between the representatives of the Northern and Southern states, whereby slavery could continue, however, the Southern states would be forbidden from fraudulently drawing upon their large non-free population (also including white indentured servants) for the purpose of creating congressional districts which would result in the South possessing the ability to elect more representatives to Congress than the Northern States, whereby slavery would have continued indefinitely. Further, no Southern State would have joined a Union with Northern abolitionists such as Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania on the other side without such a trade-off. This clause, incidentally, was abolished with the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868. (Neither should Article I § 9 be overlooked, wherein the importation of Africans to America is to be ended by the year 1808: “The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight…”) “The Constitution of the United States.” \textit{The Heritage Foundation}. The Heritage Foundation. Accessed April 12, 2016. \url{http://www.heritage.org/initiatives/first-principles/primary-sources/the-constitution-of-the-us?ac=1}. 

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nature, constrained by checks and balances) is the triumph of the conception of the American experiment. The hope was that these documents should ensure a society, replete, as all, with injustice, vice, and immoral excess, based upon the understanding that individual liberty, private property rights, and sovereignty supersede the so-called collective “good.” As in Smith, individuals following their natural self-interest create trans-personal benefits. This concept, originating partially from Benjamin Franklin’s personal friendship with Smith, centers around the idea popularized early in the century by Bernard de Mandeville in his irreverent poem *The Fable of The Bees: or, Private Vices, Public Benefits* (1705, published in book form in 1714), the subtitle providing much of its significance in light of Smith.

The Constitution (in all senses) breaks down the powers and structure of a government which, based upon the constraints set upon humanity by its nature, is to be constrained by the founding law of the nation to act only within certain parameters, namely the enumerated powers specified under Article I § 8. These powers, then, are to be checked by the powers reserved to the people themselves. The original ten amendments which are known as the Bill of Rights recognize and enshrine (rather than confer) the people’s (God-given) rights to: (I) freedom of speech and religion; (II) the right to keep and bear arms in defense of such and further

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52 John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations (Vol. VI)*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, MA: Charles Coffin Little & James Brown, 1851), p. 9. “The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If ‘THOU SHALT NOT COVET,’ and ‘THOU SHALT NOT STEAL,’ were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society, before it can be civilized or made free.” This assertion can be taken as but one example of the Framers’ Judeo-Christian inspiration and justifications for their principles and governmental experiment.


54 Ibid. “This is the moral that every member of society, by the act of seeking his own advancement [humorously christened ‘vices’ by the title], contributes to the balanced functioning of society — in short, that [economic] competition is a better regulator for society than any of planning. Since the rising manufacturing class was handicapped by many old government regulations and traditions, it came to make this doctrine of economic laissez faire central to its outlook later in the century… Adam Smith’s remarks about America in the *Wealth of Nations* reflect the personal influence of Franklin on Smith in later life.”
freedoms;\textsuperscript{55} (III) to be free of the forced quartering of soldiers in private homes; (IV) protection against unlawful search and seizure of property; (V) protection against governmental abuse in the case of legal proceedings; (VI) the right to due process, legal counsel, a jury of one’s peers, to be informed of the nature of the charges brought against oneself, \textit{etc.}; (VII) the right to a jury trial in certain civil cases and that such cases may not be re-examined by other courts; (VIII) protection against excessive government bail, fines, and cruel and unusual punishment; (IX) that rights as enumerated within the document’s original ten amendments themselves shall not deny others to the people in the future (\textit{i.e.}, future amendments); (X) that all powers not delegated through enumeration to the federal government are relegated to the States and their citizens.

The months of heated debate between May 25 and September 17, 1787 brought about a document which was, in effect, little more than a bundle of compromises. On the subject of the impossibility of constructing a perfect government, the ailing patriarch of the Assembly, the eighty-one-year-old Dr. Franklin, on the final day of argument, gave his opinion of the draft, delivered by reason of his physical infirmity by fellow Pennsylvania delegate, James Wilson; though his final public statement, it is perhaps his greatest:

Mr. President,

I confess that there are several parts of this constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them: For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information, or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise. It is therefore that the older I grow, the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment, and to pay more respect to the judgment of others. Most men indeed as well as most sects in Religion, think themselves in possession of all truth, and that wherever others differ from them it is so far error…

\textsuperscript{55} Principally in defense of the First Amendment — the freedom to speak, assemble, disseminate information, and worship freely generally agreed to be the most \textit{basic} of human rights — in addition to the rights recognized and enshrined in the other eight Amendments.
In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such; because I think a general Government necessary for us, and there is no form of Government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered, and believe farther that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in Despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic Government, being incapable of any other. I doubt too whether any other Convention we can obtain, may be able to make a better Constitution. For when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men, all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It therefore astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does... Thus I consent, Sir, to this Constitution because I expect no better, and because I am not sure, that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors, I sacrifice to the public good...

On the whole, Sir, I can not help expressing a wish that every member of the Convention who may still have objections to it, would with me, on this occasion doubt a little of his own infallibility, and to make manifest our unanimity, put his name to this instrument.56

Though Franklin spoke more than four years before the ratification of the Bill of Rights (December 15, 1791), which served, as aforesaid, to be the ultimate check and balance upon the power of the government outlined in the Constitution, Franklin’s words, wise though optimistic, encapsulate the triumph of the constrained Enlightenment. Government by either citizen consent or centralized tyranny were doomed to both fall far short of any dream of perfection; the fact that the Confederation Congress57 agreed upon the institution of a constitutional representative republic made up of elected common citizens was nothing more than a mere step in the direction of an ultimately abstract and unrealizable good. In other words, the Constitution, though far from perfect, was indeed the most perfect an assembly of mortals, possessed of prejudices and

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57 The name of the Congressional Assembly between March 1, 1781 and March 4, 1789.
passions, could create. Government, says the Constitution, is a compromise; one between anarchy and total order, mob rule and despotism, justice and wickedness, rectitude and immorality. That human nature conditions us as only finitely fit for the maintenance and dispensing of justice is thus to be taken for granted: so, too, is the imperative that government be as constrained as our nature, as no angels may ever be found to staff any state. Why, then, did the American experiment seem, more or less, to hold firm through the storms of the centuries to come? No answer, just as no Constitution, may be fully suitable. A clue may lie, however, in the Founders and Framers’ willingness each to “doubt a little of his own infallibility,” taking the leap of faith to trust in the need to affirm human nature as it is, and construct around it a system of government designed to work with and within both its potentialities and limitations. Embodied in the character of Franklin, as well as Jefferson, in particular, was the scientific spirit: that facts supersede the dreams of passion, and all hypothesis, however learned, must form its lyrics to the strain of facts’ dictation. No purges, no Terrors, no massacres occurred in the name of their Revolutionary republic: principles, rather than dream-cloaked dogmas, wrote the nobly imperfect Charters of Freedom. Still, conjoined with their scientific wisdom was their passion, as incandescent as that of any, for the first of all rights and necessities: to be free; and for this cause they set about, via both the pen and sword, to declare, in their human fallibility, “Let the experiment be made.”

58 In the end, the French Revolution utterly failed to produce a stable form of government; several incarnations of administrative assemblies emerged, with the last, the Directory, finally being deposed in a military coup by Napoléon on November 9, 1799.

II.5.1 JOYCE’S ULYSSES:  
LIFE IN ITS RICHNESS & COMIC POVERTY

“Nothing less than truth, nothing short of reality qualified as an artist’s subject,”¹ says Theoharis of James Joyce (1882 – 1941), author of the greatest of all modern epics, Ulysses (1922). For it is the undeniable imperative of the writer to affirm the fullness of human reality — in its richness as well as poverty — and present it with both fidelity and creative acceptance. The importance of this duty to represent life without omission of its mysterious distastefulness Joyce explained quite simply: “Life we must accept as we see it before our eyes, men and women as we meet them in the real world, not as we apprehend them in the world of faery.”² Though written in his youth,³ such an observation serves as the basic contract of the artist for representation of life’s value in all its exaltation and foulness — from love to adultery, birth to excretion, fantasy to masturbation. (Such honest and unapologetic representation led the novel to be banned in England and America, from 1920 to 1933 and 1936 respectively, and unavailable in Ireland for many decades subsequently, though never legally condemned there for obscenity.)

³ See Theoharis, Joyce’s “Ulysses,” xii. Written January 20, 1900 while a student at University College Dublin.
Rather than the fabled, technicolored isles of Hellas, Joyce chose his native Dublin for the setting of his own retelling of the voyage of storm-tossed Odysseus. Ireland, the impoverished, oppressed, squalid backwater of the British Empire, racked by revolution and starvation, is instead Joyce’s filthy and comic backdrop for the modern condition and return of Homer’s greatest hero. It is the story of Leopold Bloom (Odysseus), a simple, honest, half-Jewish advertising agent; his (unlikely) wife Molly (Penelope), whom contemporary scholar Stuart Gilbert christened an “over-ripe, indolent beauty”; and Stephen Dedalus (Telemakhos), a young, “deedless” poet and parodied version of Joyce himself. The novel chronicles the action and depth of a single day, June 16, 1904, the day, both ordinary and magical, on which Joyce met his future life-companion and wife, Nora Barnacle (the model for Molly).

Bloom is exiled from a healthy martial and sexual relationship with Molly on account of the death of their eleven-day-old son Rudy eleven years earlier. Fearing that intercourse with her resulting in traditionally-induced orgasm and impregnation shall result in the death of another child, he has left Molly, the buxom, lusty singer, immensely sexually disgruntled — relegating himself to the pursuit of masturbatory enjoyment via many and other inappropriate avenues. To remedy this situation, Bloom had procured the adulterous attentions of Hugh “Blazes” Boylan, a younger businessman who is to manage an upcoming concert Molly is to give, but he is soon deeply conflicted about the wisdom of this devious and cowardly decision. He wanders about Dublin that day, intending to escape the pain and discomfort of home and the episode of adultery.

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5 The Irish pronunciation of Dedalus, when spoken quickly, resembles a *portmanteau* description of his youthful lack of bardic accomplishment.

6 On account of the popular Jewish superstition that the physical defects in prenatal development which lead to the death of an infant must be due to the genetic deficiencies inherent in the father, whereas the child’s good health would be the product of the mother’s genes.
which he knows is to take place that afternoon, facing the anti-Semitic abuse of his fellow citizens, his past, future, and darkest psycho-sexual demons. Stephen Dedalus, the budding artist without inspiration, through both his own Telemakhaid and episodes interspersed with Bloom’s, leaves the shackles of living with his false, exploitative friend Buck Mulligan and, as Joyce, seeks the validation of a father figure which his own penniless alcoholic of a father could not be. Finally, the two meet after having both faced their devils, Bloom caring for the drunken Stephen with a spontaneous fatherliness, bringing Stephen back home to sober him. Engaging in the only full conversion depicted in the entire story, the two discuss their interests, differences, and hopes. Bloom subtly asks the handsome and learned youth if he would become Molly’s lover in place of Boylan, offering to pay him for teaching Molly Italian, an offer which Stephen politely declines in order to find his own female inspiration. This leaving Bloom the only man left to be Molly’s lover, he climbs into bed with her, sleeping at the opposite end. Molly, less sexually impressed with the studly Boylan than Bloom had expected, finally, through her famously uninhibited stream-of-consciousness internal monologue, recalls the day she and Bloom first made love in the grass on Howth Head. She decides that, “as well him as another,” she loves him in all his charming, kindly immaturity, and prefers him to any lover, even of superior sexual prowess.

Further explanation of the complexities of the endlessly deepening plot is irrelevant; the crux of the novel’s importance to this subject is as a study in comic acceptance of the world as it is, not as it should be. Ireland, as the macrocosm of human frustration and suffering, is occupied and impoverished, its despairing citizens oppressed by alcoholism and an archaic, Manichean Catholicism which denies the worth and dignity of bodily reality. How the Irish as a people and

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Bloom (its bumbling Jewish savior) are to heal themselves of their collective and personal malaise is to affirm the reality of life in its totality, with all its obvious joys, but also its stinking streets, excretion, adultery, neuroses, drunkenness, poverty, and all else from which we wish to escape through posthumous salvation. Do not live, Joyce says, as if life is to be lived in the Heaven of priestly sermon, but through the present moment which is God’s gift at birth. In Joyce’s ironic, cross-cultural wisdom, one knows, as the Buddha, that all life is sorrowful, though in our sorrow, through our love, we, through affirmation of it all, may experience the true bliss of the moment. Life is precisely as imperfect as are we, and it we must affirm in all of its pain and mediocrity. “[W]ell as well him as another,” Molly says; just as no perfect marital fidelity exists, so, too, no woman may find the perfect husband or lover, and Bloom, in his gentle childishness, succeeding, in all categories, just barely more than failing, is finally of far greater value to Molly than simply the sexual satisfaction given her by a brutish and uncaring bounder.

Making oneself a match for life in its complete fullness, comprising its dearest pleasures and its repugnant and awkward indignities, is the object of Ulysses’ heroic journey. As Bloom recalls the day about which Molly reminisces in her own monologue, he recalls himself and Molly

Hidden under wild ferns on Howth below us bay sleeping: sky. No sound…Pillowed on my coat she had her hair, earwigs in the heather scrub my hand under her nape, you’ll toss me all. O wonder! Coolsoft with ointments her hand touched me, caressed: her eyes upon me did not turn away. Ravished over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed. Mawkishpulp her mouth had mumbled sweetsour of her spittle. Joy: I ate it: joy. Young life, her lips that gave me pouting. Soft warm sticky gum jelly lips. Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes. Pebbles fell. She lay still. A goat. No-one. High on Ben Howth rhododendrons a nannygoat walking surefooted, dropping currants. Screened under ferns she laughed warmfolded. Wildly I lay on her, kissed her: eyes, her lips, her stretched neck
beating, woman’s breasts full in her blouse of nun’s veiling, fat nipples upright.
Hot I tongued her. She kissed me. I was kissed. All yielding she tossed my hair.
Kissed, she kissed me.  

Both Bloom and Molly have little trouble affirming the less tasteful elements of bodily experience, as well as being quite at home with the ordinary processes of nature; it is Bloom’s task, then, to discover the psychological means by which he may redirect that comfort towards Molly and a sexually healthy marriage. His description, anyhow, of their first tryst rings with the animality of the sexual experience. Scurrying earwigs and an obliviously excreting goat nearby all are symbolic images which bring the reader to the awkward understanding that our greatest pleasures come from the psychological position of acceptance of nature itself, in all its unclean unpredictability. We are only whole through acceptance of our animal half, one might say, and Molly’s lascivious guffaw at the defecating nanny goat quite concisely summarizes the childish joy to be felt in our kinship with the most base of non-human physicality.

Such language is not meant to entice the individual to lose his or her place in the social world or to view the specifically human values of spiritual and moral grace as but the axioms of a state of mind and society to be thrown off. Joyce the Aristotelian — the artist who believes that the soul and body are one body, united in their mutual experience — demonstrates that true literary art, it could be said, is in fact creatively honest mimesis of the natural and human worlds.

Life is to be comprehended artistically through truthful reproduction of all possible levels of

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8 Ibid., 8,900 – 916, p. 176. Bloom’s reminiscence of his first sexual experience with Molly, possibly, in a similar way to Molly’s monologue, is meant as a shock of sorts to the reader — the ultimate intended audience, of course, being Joyce’s sexually repressed countrymen and -women — into affirming, if not enjoying, the description of a sexual scene of a deliberately and excessively “natural” sort.

9 Theoharis, “Joyce and Aristotle,” in Joyce’s “Ulysses,” p. 3. “Life, insofar as it is a definitive characteristic of a natural body, derives from the soul that informs the body. The soul thus defined is no more separable from the body than sharpness is from the blade of an ax, or sight from an eye. Any inquiry into life therefore involves an inquiry into the nature and function of the soul.” This, once again, is among the main diversions the Aristotelian and Platonic doctrines take from each other: is the “Good” to be found on earth or in abstract theory?
human aesthetic experience. Our rational and moral values are hardly to be discarded, but rather checked and balanced based upon what Theoharis so concisely terms the “reality principle.” If the conventions of life contradict the reality of experience and scientific understanding, then we, as rationally responsible beings — to live in the proper conscious ratio to the world — must conform ourselves to such reality. The idea of “reality” as a social construct is here irrelevant: the individual must have the courage to assert that the imperfections of human existence (of all types, including bodily) are part and parcel of an experience which goes beyond our distastes. (The idea is that Ireland has lived in opposition to the “reality principle” and its conventions are out of ratio to the true nature of human consciousness and existence.) “Life is understood through observation of the activity of plants, animals, and human beings, natural bodies that all nourish themselves, grow, and decay,” says Theoharis, with Joyce stating that the goal of the human journey, in the form of the epic, is to establish the correct balance between Aristotle’s baser faculties of “nutrition, reproduction, imagination, locomotion, and desire” and the moral intellect. Our spiritual, rational, and moral faculties, in other words, are of the angels,

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10 This (the art of prose fiction) is not to be confused with the visual arts, for which Joyce establishes a highly specific set of rules in the Portrait (see p. 271), namely that the visual is split into two categories: “static” and “kinetic” art. Kinetic art (meaning a type of art made with the intent to move the spectator) is split into two sub-categories, “pornographic” and “didactic.” Pornographic visuality — whether of the most obvious sort, or but a simple and innocuous commercial advertisement — is meant to move the viewer to desire to possess the object presented. Didactic art is meant to depict an object made to move the viewer to loath, fear, or criticize it in the form of propaganda of whatever kind. One utilizes the style of so-called “social realism” in order to depict the poverty suffered by those underclasses victimized by a non-socialistic economic and social system, for example. Static art, however, is meant to hold the viewer in what can be called aesthetic arrest. The fortunately-composed rhythm of the forms presented locks the viewer in a relationship to the power and beauty depicted. Such a reaction is the reaction to the radiance of the eternal grace shining through the forms of earthly existence. In short, static art is to be an aesthetic experience based upon the rhythm of a composition, rather than a rational experience of a didactic message or base reaction to the beckoning of a visual invitation to possess an object.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., p. 4.

13 Ibid., xiii. “From Virgil through Dante, Milton, and Joyce, the epic has had as its objective of imitation the eternal nature of the created cosmos, and humanity’s struggle to discover and achieve its essential identity as a rational and moral agent in that cosmos.”
but our bodies of animal vulgarity — our salvation comes in the uniting of the two. The final realization of *Ulysses*, then, as described by Molly at story’s end, is the requirement to balance one’s wishes for life with the reality that human existence is a dynamism which is given rather than chosen. The conclusion which is to be made is that this world — let alone the conquered, drunken, hopeless one of Joyce’s Ireland — is the Golden World to be affirmed as perfect in its imperfection. Life, through all of its suffering and endless human shortcomings, is the ultimate adventure: the one to which we must have the courage to say “yes I will Yes.”

II.5.2 MANN & EROTIC IRONY: OUR LOVE IS FOR THAT WHICH IS FLAWED

The boldest and most eloquent statement of the dignity and value of human imperfection is that of Thomas Mann (1875 – 1955), among the greatest writers of the German Exilliteratur genre. Though his *magna opera*, *The Magic Mountain* (1924) and *Joseph* novels (1926 – 1943), develop these themes and motifs to immensely sophisticated heights, the first and clearest instance of Mann’s future trademark is made in the earlier novella, *Tonio Kröger*, published in 1903. It chronicles the artistic journey of the young Tonio, son of a conventional North German burgher father and Mediterranean, most likely Spanish, mother. All of his classmates and neighbors were conventional blue-eyed blondes; he was the only resident of the town who was dark, with “…a sharply chiseled, entirely southern face and dreamy eyes in delicate and gloomy shadows, with overly heavy lids,” such distinctiveness indicating the first Freudian prerequisite

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15 German-speaking authors who opposed and fled the rise of the Nazis.

for a life as an artist. Insightful and intelligent, he was intrigued by such things as Schiller’s play *Don Karlos*, but none of his ordinary, comparatively empty Nordic friends possessed any intellectual or artistic interests whatsoever, all overtures to converse on such subjects meeting with dead ends. He did, however, envy and admire their naïve warmth and picturesque, innocent vitality, though still isolated and unable to connect with them further. When grown, he moved south to live with a community of young bohemian literati — supposedly those to whom he was most socially and intellectually suited. Upon having situated himself there, however, he found his new-found compatriots to be little more than otherwise utterly incompetent, pathetic critics of life and society, advocating mercilessly unrealistic values for human conduct which they never thought to apply to themselves. They used their piercing writer’s criticism to fling idle abuse at that same type of unintelligent though warm-hearted and fully competent people who had been Tonio’s former companions. In his growing dismay, Tonio soon found himself — *der verirrte Bürger*, “the lost burgher” — equally as misplaced among this sourly cerebral community as he had been as a child amongst those same dull, attractive, kindly, golden-haired folk. He, *zwischen zwei Welten*, “between two worlds,” was even more at sea than before he had left his provincial hometown. Therefore, he quit this circle of hateful critics and left to pursue the genuine life experience which his fellow artists had and would not. Upon having gained more life experience,

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17 Campbell, “Erotic Irony and Mythic Forms in the Art of Thomas Mann,” in *The Mythic Dimension*, p. 274.

18 Ibid. “The inhabitants were of two orders: first, those frightened by life, who, like Schopenhauer, had intuitively penetrated the veil of phenomenality and were wallowing now in Bunyan’s ‘Slough of Despond,’ spiritual paralysis, existential ‘nausea,’ and sympathy with death; and then those, more like the majority of our current college ‘intellectuals,’ who had set up in their heads an ideal for human life and conduct to which no living thing had ever in the history of the human race conformed, and from the prospects of that unassailable tower of thought were demolishing with volleys of rhetoric every earthly institution and personage of public trust within reach of their winged words. Both were types of what Nietzsche had called ‘Decadents,’ people with little talent for life: girls who fell down when they danced and chaps who, like Tonio, had felt, one way or another, isolated, special, and apart…”
he wrote a letter to the central figure of this community, a young Russian painter, Lisaveta Ivanovna, with whom he had become acquainted, and who had first remarked of his misplacement in her particular bohemian commune:

I admire those proud, cold people who venture along the paths of great, demonic beauty and scorn “human beings” — but I do not envy them. For if anything can turn a litterateur into a true writer, it is my bourgeois love for what is human, alive, and normal. All warmth, all goodness, all humor, come from that love, and it almost strikes me as being the love with which, it is written, one can speak with the tongues of men and angels and without which one is merely a piece of low-grade ore, a jingly bell.19

That purely intellectual, supposed paradise of canny world-isolation had committed the sin which the Church of Joyce’s Ireland had perpetrated: namely condemning the reality of human nature and existence, and pompously insisting upon a different and thoroughly unfeasible value system. Tonio — as those many before him — argued that love, not merely astuteness, was the controlling principle of art, and like Joyce, that what is portrayed must be affirmed in all its horror or moral repellence. As Campbell explains,

The right word, le mot juste, he had recognized, wounds and can even kill; yet the duty of the writer must be to name and to name exactly. But what chiefly have to be named in a person are his imperfections, since in human life perfection does not exist. Perfection is cold, impersonal, finally uninteresting. (All the Buddhas, they say, are alike. Having gained release from the imperfections of this world, they have left it, never to return.) Accordingly, what makes a person lovable are precisely his imperfections and what the “right word” names as an imperfection is exactly what is to be loved. The arrow of judgement, then, is to fly to its mark with a balm on its point of compassion; for the function of art is not annihilation, but celebration.20

This Mann terms “erotic irony”; not “erotic” in any sexual sense, but using the symbol of Eros, the god of love, as the metaphysical archer who brings all of our more embarrassing qualities to

19 Mann, p. 228.

the forefront when we are hit, dumbstruck, by his arrow. Narrative art without truth is no art at all, says Joyce, and with Mann as well the writer is the archer of candor, but must also not lose sight of the duty to depict human folly with fairness and ultimately compassion. Human imperfection applies both to the author’s characters as well as to the author. To avoid the trap of propagandistic, “opinion” art, the artist must walk this fine line between brutal truth-teller and merciful coward. Protagonists which spring from the truly great author’s pen are noble, of endless interest, and lovable; antagonists and minor characters portrayed with truthful pity. The words of Christ to which Tonio alludes are words enough: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”

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21 I Corinthians 13:1 (KJV).
LIST OF PLATES


—–, translated by Georg Feuerstein and Brenda Feuerstein (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2011)


Dukore, Bernard F. *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (Florence, KY: Heinle & Heinle, 1974)


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