HERA, NOT HERO: CENTERING THE MORAL LIFE ON MORAL COMMITMENT, RATHER THAN HEROIC COURAGE

by

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Instances of moral commitment are central to the moral life, whereas instances of heroic courage are not necessarily central to the moral life. Given this contrast, it is odd when heroic courage is privileged over moral commitment. Heroic vitalism is the strongest expression of the privileging of heroic courage over moral commitment. My thesis counters heroic vitalism by building on a tradition of rejection that has deep roots, but finds its strongest support in the work of Josiah Royce and the feminist and nonviolent traditions.

Though there are some senses of courage, such as heart, fortitude and endurance that are not particularly informed by the heroic, I suggest that our understanding of courage is dominated by the heroic. My suggestion of moral strength as an alternative to courage is based not only on courage's association with the heroic, but also on moral strength's

close connection with moral commitment, which implies an engagement with the world and counters any preoccupation with character traits.

My critique of heroic courage centers on its tendency toward being episodic, involving the overcoming of great fear, taking great risks and enduring potential violence. In contrast, moral strength is constant, not episodic and involves a moderated response to fear, risk and potential violence. This moderated response allows one to avoid the dissociation that often accompanies fearful, risky and violent situations. In turn, a freedom from dissociation facilitates a constant, lifelong engagement with the moral life.

I conclude by addressing the question, what use might this rethinking of "courage" and the conceptual development of "moral commitment" and "moral strength" mean in the day-to-day practice of ordinary people interested in positive social change? I suggest that a strongest moral commitment can be constructed and used to resolve problems of violence in achieving revolutionary goals. These problems include the means and ends problem involved in seizing power, the problem of violent self-defense against genocidal predation, the problem of political and cultural domination and the problem of structural violence in the marketplace.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"If you ever die a hero's death, Heaven protect the angels"[1]

If one oversimplifies the history of ethics, one could say that there are at least two large schools of thought which any ethical insight must engage to establish a meaningful dialogue. First, there is the school that stresses the role of character or virtue in the moral life. Second, there is the school that focuses on the centrality of ethical rules, actions and consequences--to varying degrees--in the moral life. The insight that I explore in this dissertation primarily engages the first school of thought, that of character or virtue ethics. However, it also engages the second school of thought in an important way.

The insight that I explore is about a possible defect in heroic courage. In fact, I suggest that heroic courage

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[1] This was one of four final lines considered for the script of Casablanca. Instead, the following line was used: "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship." Hillel Italie, "You Must Remember This," The Oregonian 16 Apr. 1992: E1.

may be so defective that it should be replaced with something significantly different--what I call "moral strength." Since heroic courage is an element of some views of character or virtue ethics--especially those associated with heroic vitalism[2]--it is clear that I have engaged in a dialogue with this school of thought.

However, it is not so clear that I am also engaging the school of rules, actions and consequences. To make this more clear, I suggest that we remind ourselves that the ability to follow a moral rule, take a moral action and generate a moral consequence may be understood as depending on some sort of heroic courage. From this perspective, heroic courage is needed to overcome any weakness in the face of moral problems or challenges.

The following example may help make this dual engagement clearer. A friend of mine was vacationing in Hawaii and had come down to the beach to sunbathe and play in the surf. In the distance, she observed a swimmer being pulled out to sea and the situation seemed so fearful to her that she froze. She was a national champion swimmer, but she could not overcome her fear of being pulled out to sea

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[2] More will be said about this school of thought in the next chapter.

too. Her inaction did not have tragic consequences because two local surfers eventually performed the rescue.

What does her apparent lack of heroic courage say about her moral life? She shrank from a fearful situation. She did not take the great risk that someone else with her ability--but also with heroic courage--would have taken. Within the context of virtue ethics, she failed to show heroic courage and her moral life is suspect. Within the context of the school of ethical rules, actions and consequences, she was too morally weak to apply an ethical rule or perspective mandating action and aiming at a desired consequence. This school would have generated views like the following. On utilitarian grounds, the most good would be done if she rescued the swimmer. On Kantian grounds, her duty to rescue the swimmer could be universalized. She may have been able to formulate these perspectives, but moral weakness likely prevented her from acting. All of these ethical judgments arise from what occurs on the center stage of the public eye--the drowning. What occurs off stage--her ordinary moral commitments--are not given the weight they deserve.

This example and others from my life contributed to my wondering why I don't seem to know any traditional heroes--like war heroes and great rescuers--whereas I know many

people with what I call "moral strength." The people that I admire have strong moral commitments that span many years and promise to span their lifetime. Interestingly, their moral strength seems to be expressed by their entire life, rather than isolated acts. The heroes and role models that I read about--including many of the popular players on the social and political landscape--seem distant and aloof--they don't work shoulder to shoulder with me, nor with the people I admire. These heroes and role models receive recognition and their acts are often touted as the very center of morality. The people with moral commitments, that I know, work in almost complete anonymity and their acts are hardly noticed in the sway of moral discourse. Heroes remain on center stage, while people with lifetime moral commitments are underrated, overlooked, or ignored.

From this observation, I began to wonder if the moral commitments of the activists that I admire might lead us past a mere critique of heroic courage toward an alternative centering of morality. Though the support necessary for a universal claim of such magnitude is beyond the scope of my work, I do suggest that such a logic about the moral strength of those with moral commitments is meaningful within my experience. Others may find this to also be meaningful within their experience.

Within this critique, I am making three claims. First, moral strength is more fully moral than heroic courage. Second, ongoing moral commitments are more fully moral than isolated heroic acts. And third, ordinary morality--made up of moral commitments--is more fully moral than extraordinary morality--made up of heroic acts. To illustrate these three contrasts in dramatic terms, I urge the reader to consider the lives of two people, Norma Rae, textile labor organizer, and T. E. Lawrence, English military adventurer and author.

The image of Norma Rae has always been more powerful to me than the image of Lawrence of Arabia. Rae was an ordinary textile worker who simply made a commitment to help her co-workers by organizing a labor union. She was an ordinary person, with ordinary limitations and fears, but she had an important commitment in her life to help those close to her and those she worked with. She had weaknesses that prevented her from rising to the heroic in certain crises, but she maintained what I suggest we call the "heraic"[3] through an ongoing commitment that slowly built a better life for those around her. Norma Rae is like so many

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[3] The heraic is meant to follow the view of Hera as one who privileged the garden over the gardener. From this, the heraic privileges moral commitment over heroic courage. More will be said about this view in the next chapter.

others whose commitments are rarely noticed. In terms of the three contrasts just introduced, she had moral strength, she had ongoing moral commitments, and those commitments, combined with her ordinary off-stage life, gave her an ordinary morality that seems to be the essence of the moral life.

On the other hand, Lawrence of Arabia was an extraordinary person, seemingly unlimited and fearless, who in his zest for adventure, both helped and harmed others. He was capable of great heroism and great vengefulness, alternately and episodically. His presence demanded center stage, but his moral accomplishments, if any, were undermined by his tendency toward violent frenzies. He is cast in the mold of the classical hero: courageous, yet somehow cold and inhuman.

In terms of the three contrasts, T. E. Lawrence had an heroic courage that was not consistently moral, nor consistently strong. He engaged in acts of heroism that were episodic and unpredictable. And the drama of his actions expressed an extraordinary morality that raises moral difficulties not present in the ordinary morality of Norma Rae. It is interesting to note that Lawrence's drama was a ruling class drama and Rae's drama was a working class drama. I argue that ruling class dramas, such as

Lawrence's, are historically and conceptually privileged over working class dramas.

Closer to home, a lifelong social and political activist in my hometown, Julia Ruuttila, never pushed herself forward; she just kept doing all the little things that made a difference. Unknown to almost everyone but those she helped, she was not cast in the hero mold--far from it! Rather, she was cast in the hera mold--warm, human and engaged in ongoing moral commitments.

Compare her life to that of Abbie Hoffman. He made a reputation for himself even while using a false name and plastic surgery to mask his identity. He fit the hero mold--complete with frenzies of his own. His episodic life was almost always center stage. And his suicide was simply the last scene in a self-consciously public life. Undoubtedly, Hoffman did good works. However, his eccentricities often undermined those good works. My key point is that he did not demonstrate the consistency of an ongoing moral commitment--and there was something cold and inhuman about him. He achieved the heroic, but failed to achieve the heraic.

The reader has probably noticed that I have contrasted female experiences against male experiences. This is no accident. I suggest that heroic courage is predominantly a

male experience and that moral strength, in the form of ongoing moral commitments, tends to be more central to female experience. Even though it could be argued that there is something heroic about Norma Rae and Julia Ruuttila, I use the term "heraic" to show the contrast between the expression of consistent strength against the expression of sporadic superhuman energy.

This contrast is dramatized in the recent film, "Hero", starring Dustin Hoffman, Andy Garcia and Genna Davis. The two clearly morally-flawed male characters compete on center stage for the moniker "hero"--savior of those trapped in a burning jetliner; while the two female background characters, with obvious moral strength, either do not have their commitments recognized or are mentioned in throw-away lines.

In creating an alternate perspective on heroic courage, I find support in the work of Josiah Royce in The Philosophy of Loyalty. Royce has been particularly useful in helping me understand the importance of commitment in morality. Where he uses the term, "loyalty", I use the closely associated term, "commitment" to overcome the problem he recognized that "war and loyalty have been, in the past, two

very closely associated ideas[,]...[an] ancient and disastrous association"[4]

For Royce, loyalty (or commitment) is generated as an Hegelian synthesis of inner drive and outer social will[5]. Without such a synthesis, one is cast at sea to be tossed about between the contrary forces of conformity and rebellion.[6] With such a synthesis, conflicts of inner and outer are resolved in loyalty (commitment).[7] As Royce said, "the loyal have known what it was to be free from moral doubts and scruples. Their cause has been their conscience."[8] Furthermore, "[w]here there is an object of loyalty [commitment], there is, then, a union of several selves into one life."[9] And finally, "to be in charge of life is always an occasion for loyalty.[10]

Royce's analysis of loyalty nicely fits my experience of people with lifelong moral commitments. They are not

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[4] Josiah Royce, The Philosophy of Loyalty (New York, Macmillan, 1908) 12.

[5] Royce 40.

[6] Royce 40.

[7] Royce 40.

[8] Royce 44.

[9] Royce 52.

[10] Royce 54.

tossed about by the cycle of conformity and rebellion. They are not immobilized by moral doubt. They express a union of several selves in the creation of a strong moral identity. They are in charge of their life and their cause is their conscience. However, this does not mean that they are free of character defect. They may be unable to take great risks, overcome great fears, or endure potential violence. They may simply be engaged in a meaningful life.

Within the history of philosophy, my work enters where I see a weakness in the feminist rejection of the heroic. This weakness has been feminism's inability to present a fully developed alternative model to the heroic. Without a positive alternative, the feminist critique loses force. It is argued that while we may not like everything about the heroic, it is all we have to engage us. However, I believe we have something far better: heraic moral commitment.

This dissertation will seek to reorient ethics toward moral strength and away from heroic courage in three ways. First, I contrast moral strength directly with heroic courage by reviewing an historical shift away from heroic courage and by examining the conceptual advantages and disadvantages of each term. Second, I contrast moral (heraic) commitments with heroic acts of courage because commitments are constituent of moral strength and heroic

acts are constituent of courage. To analyze this contrast, I examine a moral/immoral continuum of acts and commitments to illustrate that moral commitments are more central to morality than acts of heroic courage. Third, I contrast ordinary morality with extraordinary morality to show that moral strength and moral commitments are a part of ordinary morality and that acts of heroic courage, as well as heroic courage itself, are a part of extraordinary morality. This contrast is useful because it shows how the image of heroic courage is an elite image that reinforces the class structure. As a final summation of these contrasts, I have created an argument against the privileging of extraordinary morality that incorporates the contrast between moral commitments and acts of heroic courage. Throughout this work, I note how the experience of the male gender tends to be privileged over the experience of the female gender

In the final chapter, I will speculate on an application of these contrasts by identifying a "strongest moral commitment." This "strongest moral commitment" will be constructed from the insights of earlier work. I will be asking the following question: Is there a "strongest moral commitment" that is necessary and sufficient to show the most heraic moral strength in this historical period? My answer will be that there is such a moral commitment. It is

the commitment to be a part of a grass-roots movement that seeks to minimize violence.

Also in the concluding chapter, I will focus on a particular consequence of this "strongest moral commitment" in the field of social and political theory and practice. To do this, I will briefly discuss the problem of revolutionary violence and show how it is illuminated by this "strongest moral commitment." This illumination will help us with other problems in social and political philosophy, such as the means/ends problem, the problem of violent self-defense and the problem of domination.

To complete this introduction, I will address two objections to my thesis. First is the view that heroic courage is an aberration of courage and that virtue ethics should more properly be based on pure courage. Following this, the moral life based on pure courage does not run afoul of the problems of a moral life based on heroic courage.

My response to this view is multi-layered. First, I suggest that our understanding of courage is dominated by notions of the heroic. Even if we strip courage of these trappings, we are left with courage as heart, endurance and fortitude, but these qualities still seem to privilege what occurs within a person over what occurs on the moral

landscape. I admit that this kind of heart is admirable and useful in addressing the fear of death and infirmity, but in cases of its absence, I suggest that the moral life may be little affected. Those without this courage can take shelter in the courage of others and still maintain their moral commitments.

The second objection to my thesis will come from those who have a different picture of morality, not simply because they have quibbles about my use of the terms, "courage" or "heroic." In the next chapter, I will examine the opposing heroic vitalist picture of morality in detail as it emerges within the history of philosophy.

To replace heroic courage with moral strength represents a sea change within the field of ethics. This sea change can be traced from early doubts about heroic courage within the classical tradition through doubts within the existentialist and Christian traditions to the beginnings of rejection within the feminist and nonviolence traditions. A brief account of elements of this history is also presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To establish an historical context for the difficulties of heroic courage, I trace the historical evolution away from heroic courage toward moral strength. This work is brief and selective to show how a debate has formed between two views of courage. This contemporary debate can be seen as the conflict between heroic vitalism and moral strength. Historically, I will first focus on the classical period. Then, I will move to the existentialist and pragmatist periods. And finally, I will look at contemporary nonviolent and feminist thought.

1. Classical Period

Within the classical period, I will focus on Plato and Aristotle. In Plato, we find that courage is at the heart of the virtues. And the virtues are at the heart of classical morality. The "traditional conception of courage" that we find in Plato is that of "overcoming and combat"[1]. These military metaphors stay with us to the present time.

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[1] A.E. Rorty, "Two Faces of Courage," Philosophy 61 (1986): 151.

That courage belongs to extraordinary morality is supported by the rarity of it: "thoughtful courage (karteria) is a quality possessed by very few"[2]. This rarity of courage offers conceptual support for the earliest military structures where a few brave leaders command legions of troops.

Also supporting the military metaphor is the conceptualization of courage as rash and risky: "The courageous type for their part have far less of the gifts of fairness and caution than their moderate brethren, but they have in a marked degree, the drive that gets things done."[3] Overcoming or dominating fear seems to be a central obsession around the notion of courage. Plato looks to Socrates as a paradigm case of overcoming fear through the use of the intellect. Socrates supposes that the fear of death is the strongest fear. And that particular fear comes to nothing since death is either a pleasant "dreamless sleep" or a happy reunion with others who have died before.

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[2] Plato, "Laches," The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University, 1961) 197b.

[3] Plato, "Statesman," The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University, 1961) 311b.

Again, this view of courage supports the military metaphor, where one must overcome fear to rashly or violently accomplish military objectives.

In Plato, there seems to be no reservations that courage should be central to morality--though there are certainly some reservations about militarism. Turning to Aristotle, we find that like Plato, there seems to be no reservations that courage should be central to morality--though the reservations about militarism are more closely associated with the discussion around courage.

Aristotle sees courage as a mean between the extremes of rashness and cowardice--though: "rashness is thought liker and nearer to courage"[4]. In this way, he supports the view that courage tends toward rashness and risk. Likewise, he sees that "courage is a mean with respect to things that inspire confidence or fear"[5]--though: "courage is concerned more with the things that inspire fear"[6]. In this way, he supports the view that courage tends toward the overcoming of fear.

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[4] Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," The Complete Works of Aristotle I, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University, 1984) 1109a.

[5] Aristotle 1116a 10-11.

[6] Aristotle 1117a 29-30.

Though Aristotle has little to say about what might be close to things that inspire confidence, we might wonder if moral strength is just this sort of mean. The concerns that moral strength addresses through moral commitments have little to do with fear and much to do with confidence. In the activities of certain social and political activists[7], which I suggest are paradigmatic of moral strength, there is a great desire to inspire confidence within the integrity and strength of a grass roots movement.

In point of contrast between Aristotle and Plato, Aristotle believes that death is an evil. He believes that death amounts to "knowingly losing the greatest good"[8]. However, this observation does not serve to diminish one's courage: "he is none the less brave, and perhaps all the more so, because he chooses noble deeds of war at that cost."[9]

Though it may be true that death is an evil, overcoming the fear of death on Aristotle's view further removes courage from the experience of the general populace. In

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[7] The last chapter will focus on what kind of social and political activists form this paradigm case.

[8] Aristotle 1117b 13.

[9] Aristotle 1117b 13-15.

contrast to Aristotle's view, Socrates created a way for ordinary people to become courageous by simply coming to understand death in a more positive way. (Religious extremists often seem to capitalize on the ability of some people to come to understand death in a positive way.) However, ordinary people throughout the world seem to be fairly resistant to this kind of optimism about death.

Aristotle carries forward Plato's doubts about militarism in the following passage that accompanies his discussion of courage: "But it is quite possible that the best soldiers may not be men of this sort (courageous), but those who are less brave but have no other good; for these are ready to face danger, and to sell their life for trifling gains"[10]. Unfortunately, these doubts about the literal military do not translate into any doubts about the military metaphor of heroic courage.

2. Existentialist and Pragmatist Period

Moving to the existential period, we find that military metaphors are still present in the work of Soren Kierkegaard, but there is a shift from the highly visible

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[10] Aristotle 1117b 16-21.

classical hero to an unrecognized "knight of faith."[11] Given the utility that the notion of highly visible heroes had for military-style organization, this is a dramatic shift. Suddenly, the most courageous person is someone whom no one else can recognize. Only the person, herself, can know that she is courageous.

Kierkegaard uses the story of Abraham and Isaac to make his point about this new hero, the knight of faith. Abraham must not only resign his attachment to his son, just as the "knight of infinite resignation"; but he must go further and resign his attachment to morality, for he must violate his duty to protect his son above himself. In doing so, he goes beyond "human courage"[12] and attains the "humble courage"[13] of faith. In this way, he goes beyond the "courage to make trial of everything and to venture everything"[14] to the knowledge that "with God all things are possible"[15]. After breaking all of these attachments, he realizes that all

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[11] Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. Alastair Hanney (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985) 109-144.

[12] Kierkegaard 127.

[13] Kierkegaard 128.

[14] Kierkegaard 122.

[15] Kierkegaard 126.

things are a gift, that all is a "joy by virtue of the absurd"[16].

With Kierkegaard's shift, courage is no longer solely defined with reference to military metaphors. Though the notion of "knighthood" remains, the commitment of faith and the trust in the strength of God enters into our understanding of courage. This marks the first step in the transition from the classical military notion of heroic courage toward an alternate notion of moral strength and moral commitment.

Within the pragmatist tradition, Ralph Waldo Emerson talks of this new view of courage without the reference to God. He says that "self-trust is the essence of heroism"[17]. In this way, self-trust replaces trust in God. "Heroism is an obedience to a secret impulse of an individual character"[18]. Just as Abraham had a secret impulse from God, Emerson's hero has a secret impulse from within himself. "Every heroic act measures itself by its contempt for some

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[16] Kierkegaard 128.

[17] Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays: First and Second Series (New York: Lupton, n. d.) 212.

[18] Emerson 212.

external good"[19]. Again, just as Abraham's act contradicted morality, Emerson's hero must violate some commonly understood "good."

In doing this Emerson's hero arouses the contempt of: "just and wise men (who) take umbrage at his act until after some little time has past: then they see it to be in unison with their acts."[20] The heroic act "finds its own success at last, and then the prudent also extol."[21] Interestingly, the brave person is not necessarily conforming to the expectations of others--countering all notions of military discipline. Rather, Emerson's hero, like Kierkegaard's knight of faith, is making a private commitment to the good that may undermine, rather that defend, the status quo.

Henry David Thoreau explains how the integrity of an ordinary person can change the course of history. "[I]f one HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, ceasing to hold slaves, were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefor (sic), it would be the abolition of slavery in America"[22]. Thoreau does not

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[19] Emerson 212.

[20] Emerson 212.

[21] Emerson 212.

say that members of the propertied class (extraordinary people), those commonly thought to have power in society, have this kind of power--but rather ordinary people "who assert the purest right, and consequently are most dangerous to a corrupt State, [and who] commonly have not spent much time in accumulating property."[23]

Thoreau also has suspicions of the authoritarian blindness and anti-democratic tendencies of militarism. "The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense..."[24] In contrast to serving the country with one's body, one can serve the country with one's conscience. "A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the state with their consciences also, and so

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[22] Henry D. Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," A Yankee in Canada (New York: Haskell House, 1890) 136.

[23] Thoreau 138.

[24] Thoreau 126.

necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it."[25]

Though there is a considerable debate and a great exchange of ideas in this country, there has been a shortage of activism backing up the debate. As Thoreau says, "voting for the right is doing nothing for it."[26] From this, we see a view of the heroic that is based on the activism of ordinary people. Since Thoreau's time, activism is, perhaps, much more a part of the fabric of American life. But his worry is still relevant as long as American grass roots activism[27] remains relatively disempowered in contrast to the power of the corporate, propertied interests and the illusion of power through voting.

It must be granted that Thoreau has a considerable amount of cynicism about everyone's morality, ordinary and extraordinary. However, Thoreau exhorts ordinary people to change their ways and exhibits faith that they can meet the challenge. In contrasting the power of government and its leaders against the power of ordinary people, Thoreau says

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[25] Thoreau 126.

[26] Thoreau 130.

[27] Again, see the last chapter for an explanation of what counts as "grass roots activism."

that, "[t]he character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished"[28]. On the other hand, he has no such faith in the extraordinary among us, who have used their skills to achieve power and property. Using the metaphor of riding the shoulders of a giant, he critiques the way that ordinary people have a tendency to follow the whims of their leaders--their heroes. "I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue (other contemplations) sitting upon another man's shoulders."[29]

Using a cooking metaphor, where one person's goodness "leven[s] the whole lump"[30] of humanity, Thoreau sees courage as a quality that diffuses into the whole of ordinary people, rather than making one person stand out as extraordinary against the rest. He sees courage as the rightful quality of all men, where such a man "has a bone in his back which you cannot pass your hand through."[31] Within this view, the lack of courage is not seen as an intrinsic quality of ordinary people, but as an inhuman quality.

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[28] Thoreau 124.

[29] Thoreau 131.

[30] Thoreau 129.

[31] Thoreau 131.

However, it must be understood that Thoreau is not writing directly about courage and the heroic. Although it must be recognized that his work marks some important shifts in thinking about courage and the heroic, it must also be recognized that he still holds to the view that courage and the heroic are rare, and in this way, extraordinary. He has not shown ordinary instances of courage or the heroic--he merely exhorts ordinary people to take the challenge. And in this way, he seems to acknowledge that courage and the heroic are still slightly out of our grasp. Towards the end of his essay, he makes this acknowledgment clear by saying, "[w]e love eloquence for its own sake, and not for any truth which it may utter, or any heroism it may inspire."[32]

Following Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi expanded on the critique of war and militarism by founding a movement for moral commitment against the injustices of colonialism, as well as war and militarism. Gandhi's satyagraha is a moral force that represents the moral strength and moral commitments of a collective body of people--as much of the population as possible. However, as powerful as these collective commitments are, Gandhi did not fully escape

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[32] Thoreau 150.

military metaphors or the militarist view of heroic courage. Gandhi wrote: "Non-violence laughs at the might of the tyrant and stultifies him by nonretaliation and nonretiral"[33] Gandhi, like Plato before him, admits the extraordinary nature of courage: "We may not all evolve that type of courage which enables us to stand firm like a rock without retaliating."[34]

Though progress was made towards demilitarizing courage and adding notions of strength and commitment to our understanding of courage, the complete break with the extraordinary nature of courage does not suggest itself until the period of contemporary feminist philosophy. And even though progress was made through the history of philosophy, this conceptual progress was a small voice of protest against a swelling tide of hero-worship.

A whole view in political philosophy, sometimes called "heroic vitalism"[35], emerged as an antithesis to liberalism. Heroic vitalism opposed the liberal and Christian values of

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[33] M. K. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (New York: Schocken, 1951) 57.

[34] Gandhi 57.

[35] Eric Bentley, A Century of Hero-Worship (Boston: Beacon, 1957) talks of "heroic vitalism" in some detail in terms of the work of Carlyle and Nietzsche.

equality, fraternity, democracy, community, nonviolence and the perfectibility of humankind. Instead of these values, heroic vitalism asserted that the human condition was unalterably one of inequality, oligarchy, violence, suffering, Social Darwinism and was doomed to the cyclical nature of history. Heroic vitalism finds its unapologetic voice in the fascism of the early twentieth century. In the later twentieth century, heroic vitalism is not as openly expressed as it was in fascism--but it can be seen behind the policies of Reaganism and Thatcherism.

We can find a response to heroic vitalism in the work of Paul Tillich[36] and Rollo May[37]. Here, these authors talk of commitment in the context of courage and critique classical notions of courage, like heroic vitalism, that are founded on the metaphors of physical courage. In their views, positive commitments amount to the fundamental assertion of self that is essential to our being. Tillich says that this conception of courage is an ontological self-affirmation. May writes that "a man or women (sic) becomes

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[36] Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be (New Haven: Yale University, 1952)

[37] Rollo May, The Courage to Create (New York: Norton, 1975)

fully human only by his or her choices and his or her commitment to them."

It is helpful to think of courage, as May suggests, in terms of its common etymology with the French word, coeur, meaning "heart."[38] If courage is at the heart of our ethical and political lives, then it seems wise to examine its conceptual structure and its metaphorical history. On this point, Friedrich Nietzsche quotes the Bible: "where a man's treasure lies, there lies his heart."[39] However, we must be wary of our hearts being removed from us through hero worship. To own our own hearts, it seems wise to reclaim the heart of ethics and political philosophy--away from the heroic vitalists and back to the activist values[40] of moral strength and moral commitment.

3. Feminist Period

An effort at reclamation is most obvious within contemporary feminist thinking. To conclude this discussion, I will examine the strengths and weaknesses of

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[38] May 4.

[39] Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956) 149.

[40] See the last chapter of this dissertation.

the contemporary feminist analysis of courage and the heroic. Marta Weigle, writing in the 1990 edition of Women's Studies Encyclopedia II: Literature, Arts, and Learning, points out the age old focus of courage against physical death that typifies the archetypal heroic adventure and privileges male military experience over the "passive and auxiliary" roles of those like "Odysseus's wife Penelope." Weigle writes: "Heroic journeys often entail a confrontation with death. Western notions of heroism are basically masculine, influenced by the Homeric epics and feudal ideas of kingship and military prowess."[41] Perhaps the following quotation cited in Weigle's book, Spiders and Spinsters, captures this view best:

> The martial ordeal par excellence was the single combat, conducted in such a way that it finally roused the candidate to the 'fury of the berserkers.' For not military prowess alone was involved. A youth did not become a berserker simply through courage, physical strength, endurance, but as the result of a magico-religious experience that radically changed his mode of being. The young warrior must transmute his humanity by a fit of aggressive and terror-striking fury, which assimilated him to the raging beast of prey. He became 'heated' to an extreme degree, flooded by a mysterious, nonhuman, and irresistible force that his fighting effort and

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[41] Helen Tierney, ed., Women's Studies Encyclopedia II: Literature, Arts, and Learning (New York: Greenwood, 1990) 217.

> vigor summoned from the utmost depths of his being. ...it was a sort of demonic frenzy, which filled the warrior's adversary with terror and finally paralyzed him. ...As Miss Sjoestadt writes, 'The Hero is the man in fury, possessed by his own tumultuous and burning energy.'[42]

From this quotation, we see that courage is inextricably bound up in the heroic along with a frenzied cruelty, aggression, predation and wanton violence. This complex of qualities is necessary for both <u>becoming</u> a hero and being able to <u>face</u> a hero in combat. Survival in combat is at the core of both our classical conception of courage and our masculine conception of the heroic.

Feminists answer this view with two questions. The first is, why aren't women with courage also recognized as heroic. Second, why should anyone be considered heroic--given the ordinariness of most of our relationships? The strength of their argument against the heroic is in the second question. It challenges the concealing mythology surrounding the phenomenology of the heroic. If most of the relationships of heroes and ordinary people are ordinary, why do we privilege the heroic?

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[42] Willard R. Trask, trans., <u>Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth</u> (New York: Harper and Row, 1958) 84.

The weakness of their argument lies in their inability to present a fully developed alternative model to the heroic. Without a positive alternative, the second question refers back to the first question because of the need for some positive role model to express the aspirations of people struggling for social progress. Unfortunately, this role model is simply the woman warrior--too closely resembling the traditional masculine hero.[43]

The first question, why aren't women with courage also recognized as heroic, is interesting because it brings to light the gendered nature of the heroic. As explained above, courage seems to be inextricable from the masculine frenzied violence of the hero. Without this frenzied violence, courage is an incomplete concept. It is reduced to the supposedly imperfect strength shown by women who stay at home and struggle to take care of the ordinary affairs of life and worry about their men in combat for glory and domination. If a woman does something heroic, she tends to be considered a manly woman--a genderless oddity--a freak.

Unfortunately, the attempt to bring women into the ranks of male heroes tends to force women's moral strength

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[43] The film, Thelma and Louise, explores this particular conceptual dead end.

into the mold of male heroism. Collections of hero stories, such as David Adams Leeming's Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero have added the females Leda and Helen, Cybele, Virgin Mary, Joan of Arc, Pleiades (Australian Aboriginal), Penelope, Persephone and Demeter, Wanjiru (African), Inanna or Ishtar, and Hiiaka (Polynesian). But they all must conform to Joseph Campbell's account of the heroic "'monomyth' (departure, initiation and return) of the 'adventure of the hero' in his The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949,1969)."[44] Absorbing women into the male-oriented heroic does not counter the deeper difficulties of the heroic.

The second question offers a deeper critique of the heroic. Why should anyone be considered heroic--given the ordinariness of most of our relationships? To begin our discussion about this question, it is helpful to start with Berenice Fisher who points out that if some women are recognized as heroes, then women may experience both exhilaration and pain. "The exhilaration comes from identifying ourselves with feminist heroes. The pain comes from comparing ourselves and the women around us to these

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[44] Marta Weigle, Spiders and Spinsters: Women and Mythology (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1982) 198.

heroic images and seeing how poorly we measure up."[45] She warns that the exhilaration may not be worth the pain.

In exploring this contradiction, she observes that there appears to be a positive role for woman heroes. "[T]he women's movement, like modern social movements in general, uses heroes to distinguish its goals and values from traditional ones. Heroes show us where and how to draw the line between our actions and the actions of those around us who do not share our goals and values."[46] Furthermore, she points out that "heroes...validat[e] a historical struggle, marking its points of progress, and serv[e] as models for the ordinary person."[47] But, she argues, all of this seemingly positive utility is undermined by the negative image generated by comparing ordinary people to heroes.

Fisher points out that this negative image is particularly problematic in the creation of an inclusive movement for feminist social progress. I add that if ethics is to be truly inclusive, then negative images generated by

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[45] Berenice Fisher, "Who Needs Woman Heroes?", Heresies 9 (1980) 10.

[46] Fisher 10.

[47] Fisher 10.

moral heroes (or even saints) also undermine the collective and individual moral acts of ordinary people. In other words, the moral lives of ordinary people are devalued by the privileging of heroic acts of courage.

Finally, Fisher points out that most of the people we know are not heroes, and probably all of the relationships that we have with people are strikingly prosaic. I would take the move farther and suggest that it is likely that "heroes" also have mostly prosaic lives and relationships. Given all this ordinariness, why fixate on the extraordinary? Why not simply recognize heroism for what it is--an embodiment of isolated or episodic actions that are sometimes laudatory, sometimes troublesome. An affirmative response to this question undermines the position of heroic vitalists, who want heroic courage to be the touchstone that separates the extraordinary from the ordinary.

Perhaps the film, Lawrence of Arabia, captures the problem of the courage and the heroic best. Lawrence's emotions oscillate between tender love and violent frenzy. His love leads him to both courage and cowardice--likewise, his violence leads him to both heroics and demonics. His life is the chronicle of episodic heroism inter-spliced with

"vanity, cruelty and emptiness"[48] He is, I suggest, adrift in a turbulent sea without a moral rudder.

On the other hand, the film, Norma Rae, may express the alternative, moral strength, in its most natural light. The title character makes the transition from her commitment to her children and the men in her life to a commitment that also includes positive social change--in this case, through labor organizing. We are not surprised by this growth. Like Hera before her, Rae's strength is her "[a]bility to make a lifetime commitment"[49]. Perhaps we should never have abandoned Hera, the archetypal gardener, whose primary concern is her garden[50], for the glorious "hero," whose primary concern seems to be about the status of his heroic soul.

Interestingly, Fisher, in her discussion of problems with the heroic, mentions that "what it really means to be a 'strong' woman often remains ambiguous or unexplored."[51]

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[48] Stephen Farber, "The Vanishing Heroine", Hudson Review 27 (1974) 573

[49] Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women (New York: Harper and Row, 1984) 302.

[50] "[W]hen milk spurted from (Hera's) breasts, the Milky Way was formed. The drops that fell to the ground became lilies[.] Bolen 139.

[51] Fisher 12.

Perhaps the work of this dissertation can help establish what it means to be a morally strong woman and man.

CHAPTER III

MORAL STRENGTH AND HEROIC COURAGE

This chapter is divided into two major sections. In the first section, I provide more details about the first claim of this dissertation--that heroic courage is ethically peripheral to the centrality of moral strength--by contrasting moral strength with heroic courage. In the second section, I add more details about the second claim of this dissertation--that ongoing moral commitments are more fully moral than isolated heroic acts--by contrasting commitments with acts. Before we turn to the work of the two major sections, I will outline some advantages of the term, "moral strength."

1. Advantages of the Term, "Moral Strength"

It is interesting that the term "moral strength" has not been used very often in philosophical discourse. It seems that heroic courage has been seen as roughly the same as moral strength. I hope to show that these two terms are not equivalent, rather they are quite distinct and a contrast to each other. If moral strength can be shown to be importantly different from heroic courage, then it will doubtless gain more use in philosophical discourse (and

hopefully ordinary discourse). I also believe that it has an intuitive, unambiguous and straight-forward meaning that gives it an advantage over many technical terms. One of the central projects of this dissertation is to make a case that an important philosophical vacuum exists that the term "moral strength" fills quite nicely. The uniqueness and ease of meaning of this term make it a promising candidate for the job.

To begin, it is important to note that "moral strength" lacks the archetypal power of the term "courage." "Courage" has a long history as a powerful word that is deeply imbedded in the human psyche as well as human culture. The term "moral strength," does not have this history and power. However, "moral strength" has the advantage of urging us to look at how strong one's morality is expressed, shown and tested throughout a person's life. In turn, this offers us an opportunity to think of morality in terms of a person's history, rather than a morality based on special insights into a person's "true character."

The latter view, held by some of those supportive of a virtue-based ethics, places special weight on moral crises that show cowardice or heroic courage. The paradigm case for these moral crises is the battlefield, where one's character comes under fire from a serious threat. The threat may be a human enemy, a natural enemy, such as an

earthquake, or a temptation to do evil for personal gain. From this moral crisis viewpoint, we get a picture of a moral landscape filled with static moral problems that are solved correctly or incorrectly. The picture of the world as a set of static moral problems may easily lead to the view that an heroic solution to a single moral problem reveals a courageous character--one that can be relied on in a future crisis.

This view is similar to the view that a person who does well on one particular intelligence test is smart. From this perspective, a moral test reveals courage or cowardice as an intelligence test reveals a high or low IQ. Once christened as courageous or cowardly, contrary evidence is often ignored until another extraordinary crisis, where one might reveal a changed character. Since one's character is determined by these rare insights into a soul-under-fire, evidence of strength in the form of moral commitments and evidence of weakness in the absence of moral commitments are ignored. In contrast to this world of static moral problems and polarized character traits, the moral strength view suggests a world of dynamic moral commitments, where heroic acts are not confused with moral strength.

This opportunity to think of morality in more dynamic terms has two advantages. Not only is it a more accurate picture of human morality, it has a political use. The

moral strength view can be used to question the morality of elites and strengthen the morality of ordinary people. This occurs in the following way. In a world of increased concentration of wealth, power and celebrity, there are two important moral worries.

First, are elites morally deserving of their status? Often their power and wealth is justified not only by their celebrity, but by some assumed moral superiority. Because celebrities are often heroes and role models, it is assumed that they have some moral virtues--at least the courage to risk what it takes to become a celebrity. Even celebrities who seem to be less than fully moral may merely be suffering from a cowardly episode like the early Lord Jim. In this way, courage and the heroic are linked with celebrity, risk and morality. This link confuses recognition and reward based on risk and non moral talent versus recognition and reward based on morality.

Second, are ordinary people's moral lives devalued by the privileging of the extraordinary? Ordinary people's lives seem drab and pale compared to the heroics or histrionics of celebrities. Because celebrity status is granted for heroic responses to crises (real and perceived), it is often generalized that all celebrity involves some degree of heroism. This is reinforced by the risks of attaining and maintaining celebrity. However, this creates

the impression that non celebrities are not heroic since they do not face crises nor run the risks of celebrity. Both of these problems have been the subject of editorials--most recently in reference to the problem of erratic celebrities as role models[1] and the devaluing of parents as role models.

Another manifestation of the dynamic vs. static moral views arises with the question of whether a person can be an effective U. S. President without military experience. The military experience generates crises that can reveal courage or cowardice. President Clinton's lack of military experience was an election handicap that was only recently put to rest by his bombing of Baghdad. The question that seemed to hang over Clinton was, will a military crisis reveal him as a coward, since his draft-dodging might be seen as cowardly. More bluntly, Does he have the courage to stick in the knife if it becomes necessary? The question was never about his general handling of lifetime moral commitments, nor whether it is necessary to stick in the knife, but rather does he have the capacity for violence in a crisis? Will he show heroic courage or will he wimp out, regardless of any justification for the act. All of this

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[1] See any one of several 1993 editorials on the problems of Charles Barkley and Michael Jordan as role models.

attention to risk-taking and overcoming fear is the dramatic setting for heroic courage, not necessarily moral strength. It is this particular dramatic setting that leads us to focus on the extraordinary, the powerful and the uncommonly talented or uncommonly bizarre. As the spotlight sharpens on the extraordinary, the light dims on the ordinary. The view that I am presenting, that of moral strength, offers a way to widen the spotlight onto the moral commitments of ordinary people and away from the merely extraordinary.

This shift in illumination is primarily a help to distinguish morality from mere moral fascination, but it also offers some help for efforts at redistributing power and wealth to correspond to a redistributed moral landscape. In terms of one radical analysis, a small number of people are perceived as facing the real and/or symbolic moral problems of our time. Within this view, the entertainment celebrities, from movie actors to sports stars, face the symbolic moral problems: will the Clint Eastwood character save the President in the new film, "In the Line of Fire"? Will Charles Barkley overcome the pain of his injuries and rally the Suns to an NBA title? Extraordinary politicians and businesspeople face the real dramas. Will Clinton teach Saddam Hussein a lesson? Will Microsoft's Bill Gates give money to AIDS research? The extraordinary are the moral players on the basketball court and the courtyards of power,

on the studio back lot and the corporate penthouse. The ordinary are on the bench. The ordinary are not players on this moral landscape. If they become players on a reconceived moral landscape, ordinary people might also come to expect to receive some of the recognition and rewards for their playing time. This recognition and reward, if taken to its full logical conclusion, would amount to a redistribution of power and wealth.

In concluding this survey of some advantages of the term "moral strength" it is important to note that it is a more precise moral term than "heroic courage." "Moral strength" is not plagued with "heroic courage's" non moral connotations, or diffused by the possible uses of "heroic courage" to describe amoral or immoral attributes or acts. Later in this chapter, I will use several examples to show the problems of "heroic courage's" non moral connotations.

2. Moral Strength vs. Heroic Courage

In this section, I will further distinguish moral strength from heroic courage in a number of ways, most especially by showing moral strength as a lifelong force, where heroic courage is only temporary. This contrast is particularly important because it raises questions about whether heroic courage gives us much evidence of morality since it can be revealed in as little as one instance.

Whereas moral strength, as a lifelong force, gives evidence over a person's entire moral history. A key element in the following discussion is the way that the evidence for moral strength is shown and tested on an ongoing basis.

My impression reading the literature is that it seems to be assumed that "moral strength" and "heroic courage" have identical or similar meanings. It is my intention to show that they, in fact, have dissimilar meanings--that heroic courage is not necessarily moral, nor a kind of strength. As we will see in our examination of acts of heroic courage, heroic courage tends to be episodic at best, not lifelong, and it is often characterized by confronting great fear, risk, and enduring potential violence. In contrast, moral strength, as the strength of a moral commitment, is necessarily moral, lifelong, not episodic, and is generally characterized by only moderate fears, risks or exposure to violence.

The claim that heroic courage is neither moral nor strong challenges the notion of courageous strength. Because heroic courage does not necessarily have the strength of a moral commitment, heroic courage is not necessarily strong. Heroic courage without commitment can be a simple reflex. From this perspective, heroic courage might just as easily be a reflex as a strength. If, in any given case, a courageous person is expressing a reflex and

not a strength, then it is odd indeed to suppose that a courageous person is expressing something of much moral worth. The moral worth of a courageous reflex is particularly suspect in cases where heroism is merely the result of adventurism and the hedonism of adrenaline-enhanced risk taking.

In contrast, since moral strength is expressed throughout a person's life, it is surely a kind of strength--and it is surely moral. This dissimilarity in the meanings of "moral strength" and "heroic courage" is one way of showing how heroic courage is ethically peripheral to the centrality of moral strength.

Another way to show the contrast between moral strength and heroic courage is to think of moral strength as a life-long force. One who has moral strength has the ability to generate moral force and uses this ability. Norma Rae, an exemplar of an ordinary person, used a constant moral force to accomplish long-term improvements in the human condition. The notion of heroic courage alone does not imply this power to generate moral force over a protracted period of time. It takes a certain kind of endurance and commitment to generate this kind of moral force. While characters, like T. E. Lawrence, certainly have heroic courage, they may not have this kind of endurance and commitment. As an example, T. E. Lawrence's heroic effort to cross an expanse of desert

to overcome a Turkish outpost was fueled by the adventure and excitement of a military conquest. When the Arab campaign got dull and tedious during a winter encampment, Lawrence tired and abandoned his commitment.

On the other hand, "moral strength" can easily encompass the notions of endurance and commitment. Again, this distinction will be useful for us as we seek a clear understanding of moral strength and how it might be situated within ethical discourse, distinct from heroic courage. Beyond being a committed and enduring moral force, "moral strength" suggests an ongoing showing and testing that is not present in "heroic courage." In the following discussion, I will suggest that this quality of ongoing showing and testing emerges from the fact that moral strength is like other forms of strength. To show this, I will discuss the importance of ongoing showing and testing in various kinds of "strength,"[2] including "moral strength." I will suggest that the ongoing showing and testing of moral strength involves putting one's morality into long-term practice. Accordingly, this discussion will help shape the

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[2] In this section, I will describe "strength" as a way of understanding "moral strength." Doubtless, this will not tell us everything that we might want to know about what is "moral" in "moral strength," but I suggest that it will tell us crucially important things about what it means to have moral strength--and shed some light on the question of what is "moral."

contrast between long-term moral strength and short-term heroic courage.

2.1 Evidence of Strength

Evidence provides a key distinction between moral strength and heroic courage. As mentioned earlier, heroic courage requires the evidence of a character insight in the face of a crisis, whereas moral strength requires the evidence of ongoing moral commitments. In other words, heroic courage is seen in a crisis in the short-run and moral strength is seen in long-term moral commitments. The showing and testing of heroic courage occurs quickly in a crisis and may never be shown or tested again. On the other hand, the showing and testing of moral strength occurs over a long period of time, ultimately a person's whole life. I will be arguing that moral strength resembles other kinds of strength in that it appears that all kinds of strength require ongoing showing and testing. Because heroic courage does not require ongoing showing and testing, it is arguably not a kind of strength. In this light, it may be better to consider heroic courage a kind of <u>reflex</u>, rather than a <u>strength</u>.

In the following discussion I will be arguing that moral strength must be shown and tested to be fully realized--as in the case of other kinds of strength. As an

example, Julia Ruuttila, a virtually unknown labor and peace activist, showed and tested her moral strength regularly throughout her life with her moral commitments to improve the lives of ordinary people. In turn, her moral strength was fully realized by these ongoing moral commitments that were shown and tested. She was often seen in picket lines, protest marches and all manner of meetings and support activities that constituted the local labor and peace movement during the middle of this century. She rarely pushed herself forward into the limelight. She was satisfied to merely do what needed to be done. Dick Wise of the International Longshore Worker's Union said the following of Julia:

> I always thought she was a little more quiet about the way she did things unless she got riled up or something. Effective, but Julia could be around a lot of the time and you wouldn't even know it. She'd come to a meeting or council and she'd sit there and she'd listen to everything and she'd take notes and I'm sure if you wanted to know about anything that anybody said at one of those meetings, she could tell you. But she didn't jump up and wave her fists and say "that's not right."[3]

In contrast, the war hero, Audie Murphy, expressed his heroic courage in highly publicized, though isolated wartime

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[3] Sandy Polishuk, ed., I Had a Typewriter: An Oral History of the Life of Julia Ruuttila (Portland: privately printed, 1993) 2.

incidents. The problems of his later life did not serve to undermine the public perception of his heroic courage. People continued to admire him as a war hero, "America's most decorated soldier in war," though his post-war years hardly exemplified the moral life. As an illustration, just before he died in a plane crash, he "allegedly beat up a dog trainer at the end of an absurd argument over pet care." Though acquitted of any criminal wrong-doing, Murphy's inability to lead an exemplary moral life, nor a life free of immobilizing psychological weaknesses, is well documented.[4]

The picture of the moral life that uses Audie Murphy as an example privileges the military virtue of heroic courage in such a way that we think we can see into a person's character in one act of heroism--even though a person may never again show any heroic courage. On the other hand, the picture of the moral life given us through the moral strength perspective does not turn on any such privileged insight. It seems that moral strength is something that we know by examining the ongoing evidence of one's moral history--not by some direct apprehension of one's character. If it is important to examine one's moral history, then we

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[4] Thomas B. Morgan, "The War Hero," Esquire December, 1983: 597-604.

must have some way to see that history. The way that we see history is to examine everyday evidence, not special insights into one's character. We must see the evidence of one's ongoing moral history to know one's moral strength. Furthermore, one's moral history is a product of a lifetime of showing and testing one's moral strength.

To help illustrate the plausibility of my claim that strength must be shown over time to be fully realized and that to show strength, one must be tested over time, let's examine a few cases of strength. If it seems that strength is usually thought of as something requiring ongoing showing and testing, then it would seem to follow that moral strength would require ongoing showing and testing.

First, let's examine the claim that physical strength must be ongoingly tested and shown. If one makes a claim that one is physically strong, then it seems that one must ongoingly test and show it. A claim to physical strength is undermined by the claimant's reluctance to be tested. In other words, if one makes the claim to physical strength and refuses to ongoingly test or show it, then one's claim is significantly undermined. Of course, there may be reasons why one might refuse to have one's strength tested at a particular time, such as an illness or a demanding schedule or needed rest. However, if one categorically refuses to

test or show one's physical strength, then the claim appears to be undermined.

A response to the view that physical strength must be shown and tested might be that one might know they are physically strong without having to show it more than once. At first glance, this seems plausible enough. Why should one have to show one's strength more than once if one knows that one has it? However, the difficulty might be that one lifted a great weight once in a freak circumstance and might never be able to do it again.

Even if one feels strong (like feeling courageous), feeling strong seems insufficient to know that one continues to be strong after as little as one display of strength. I don't want to deny that feelings can be a way of knowing something about oneself. Indeed, it seems that quite a bit of self-knowledge is possible through feelings. However, it is also true that feelings are highly suggestible. In the area of strengths, it seems that those of us who live within competitive capitalist cultures may be quite ripe for delusion. Within this culture, we are often comparing ourselves with others and vacillating between impressions of our strengths and impressions of our weaknesses. To steady ourselves in this turbulent sea of uncertain impressions, we often fixate on an image of ourselves that may be quite false. The only way to escape these delusions is to

ongoingly test ourselves in real situations to see how we actually perform in comparison to others.[5] Perhaps within another culture, one's feelings could be more grounded.

Returning to our example, one claiming physical strength might be vulnerable to a delusion if one refuses to ongoingly test one's strength. Additionally, it is unlikely that anyone would claim physical strength without ongoing testing because ongoing testing is such an integral part of developing physical strength. In the odd case where one is simply born with physical strength without development[6], one still has to test one's strength to show that one still has the natural gift. Given these two observations, we can construct two arguments to support the need to ongoingly test and show one's physical strength. First, physical strength must be ongoingly tested and shown to be fully realized because the mere feeling of physical strength may be a delusion. In other words, the testing of natural physical strength must be shown to be ongoingly believed. Second, physical strength must be ongoingly tested and shown to be fully realized because the testing and showing of physical strength is an integral part of developing physical

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[5] This is called getting a reality check.

[6] I have heard that Bo Jackson has this kind of natural strength. It is said that he rarely, if ever, has had to train.

strength. Importantly, heroic courage has none of these showing and testing requirements.

To fill out the argument that all strength must be ongoingly tested and shown, let's take a look at intellectual strength, psychological strength, economic strength and political strength. Again, the first argument, regarding the danger of delusions, seems to hold in these additional cases of strength, even in the case of economic strength. Though it may seem hard to imagine what economic strength might mean if it did not depend on an actual accounting/showing of one's financial resources, I suppose that it is possible that one might harbor fantasies about the economic strength of one's assets--but this fantasy would doubtless be extinguished at the moment one's assets enter the marketplace. In the other three cases, it seems that one could have all kinds of delusions about one's strength intellectually, psychologically, or politically. However, these delusions could only be confirmed or denied through the ongoing testing and showing of one's strength.

Moving to the second argument, regarding the development of strength, the ongoing testing and showing of intellectual and psychological strength is also an integral part of developing these strengths. It is far-fetched to consider the possibility that one might enter the world with intellectual and psychological strength completely

developed. However, one could be born a member of a powerful family, inheriting economic and political strength. Therefore, the second argument does not hold in these latter cases, though the first argument holds in all of the cases mentioned so far.

In summary, we can state the following. In the cases of intellectual strength, psychological strength, economic strength and political strength, these kinds of strength must be ongoingly shown and tested to avoid delusions about them and for them to be fully believed. On the other hand, only some of them must also be ongoingly shown and tested to be fully developed.

As a final test, let's consider a claim to <u>spiritual</u> strength. One might conceivably claim spiritual strength without ever testing oneself or in any way showing it. One might simply feel and believe in one's spiritual strength. One might have the confidence that one would survive any crisis because of this spiritual strength. We might imagine that one has never had to develop this strength by having to suffer tragedies. One might have simply been born spiritually strong. So, from this perspective, one might be spiritually strong and know of one's strength without ever having to develop it through testing or showing. However, how can one circumvent the problem that one might be deluded about one's spiritual strength? It appears that the only

way one might know that one has authentic spiritual strength is through one's faith. In this case, one knows that one has spiritual strength, not only because one feels it, but also because one believes it. Interestingly, this belief seems to have a certain strength. And the strength of one's belief needs to be tested and shown by religious methods. So even though it would be odd to ask a person to test and show her spiritual strength, it would not be odd to ask a person to test and show the strength of her belief. Conscientious objectors to war are required to test and show their belief in their spiritual strength. Given this picture, it seems that a person's claim to spiritual strength is quite similar, if not identical, to a person's claim to strength of belief. And a claim to strength of belief is undermined by a refusal to be tested.

From this, we can conclude that moral strength requires ongoing showing and testing to be fully communicated and understood because all forms of strength seem to require at least an indirect showing and testing to be fully realized. In other words, all forms of strength seem to require some ongoing evidence. Therefore, we may proceed with the investigation of what is strong about moral strength--and what is weak about heroic courage--having established the view that moral strength needs to be ongoingly shown and tested to be fully realized. This opens up the concern

about the specific details of moral strength testing, which will be addressed in terms of a greatest moral commitment that is detailed in the last chapter.

2.2 Moral Weakness and Moral Strength

Moral weakness and moral strength seem to have a curious relationship to each other. At first glance, it appears that they are simple opposites. But in my survey of the literature, it appears that the opposite of moral strength is a kind of weakness that may encompass heroic courage. To understand this seemingly odd state of affairs, it is important to remember that moral weakness and heroic courage express elements of the static view of moral problems. If one performs well in a crisis, one has heroic courage. If one performs poorly in a crisis, one has a moral weakness or is cowardly.

However, in a more dynamic view of morality, our concern is not about performance in crises, but the fullness of one's moral commitments. Moral strength reflects these moral commitments. If one is unable or unwilling to make moral commitments, then this weakness may not be moral at all--but rather psychological. Interestingly, a person who performs a courageous act may have a weakness that prevents her from making any moral commitments. This move upsets the

assumption in virtue-based ethics that heroic courage is necessarily a character strength.

The term "moral weakness," in its traditional use, suggests a static picture of the world of moral problems where most ordinary people have a moral weakness, or are cowardly, because they are impotent when confronted with the big moral problems of our day. Often this impotence is a result of their being denied the opportunity to face a big moral crisis.

As an example, Lord Jim, from the story by Joseph Conrad, was afforded opportunities to face big moral crises because of he was an aristocratic member of an imperial state. He failed his first big test in a moral crisis that occurred early in his life and he struggled throughout his entire life to overcome this moral weakness that made him alternately infamous and anonymous. In his anonymous state, he became ordinary. His moral weakness--his ordinariness--was shown when he abandoned his officer's post on a ship of pilgrims when he thought the ship was damaged and doomed in a violent storm. In fact, the ship did not sink and his abandonment was widely perceived as dangerous cowardice for an officer in charge of the safety of numerous passengers. A public hearing deemed him a coward and he went to hide among the ordinary in humiliation. After his infamy subsided and his ordinary anonymity carried on for many

years, he was confronted with another big moral crisis and he responded heroically. He was able to save an entire village from an exploiter and enslaver. This second challenge marked his passage from ignominious coward (morally weak) and anonymous ordinary person to noble courageous hero. He started as an extraordinary elite, sank to coward and ordinary anonymous person, only to rise again as an extraordinary elite.

In the virtue-based view of ethics used by the heroic vitalists, these two moral crises and the dramatic reversals of fortune, taken together form the measures by which Lord Jim--and other elites--think of their moral character. The rest of us who have little opportunity for greatness or ignominy, must be content to think of ourselves as anonymous and morally impotent. In contrast, the moral strength view that I am presenting offers a way for us to think that our moral life is strong and meaningful.

It has been the project of many traditional moral philosophers to understand moral weakness as a problem for the wide majority of people. Only exceptional people, such as saints and heroes, are able to find exemption from this problem. This understanding arises from the view that what is moral, in any given situation, is usually fairly clear--and it is moral weakness or a weakness of the will that is

responsible for the fact that people so frequently fail to do what is moral.

It seems to me that this view rests on a static view of morality. Within this view, the world presents itself with fixed moral problems which can be addressed with a strong will or a weak will. The extraordinary people, the heroes and saints, are able to address these problems with a strong will--the rest of us address them with moral weakness or a garden-variety of cowardice.

In contrast to this view of the moral world, I suggest that few classical moral problems present themselves to us in our ordinary lives. Most of us will never be faced with the prospect of saving a village or sacrificing a boatload of pilgrims. This is simply because most of us will never occupy a powerful position in society that might grant the opportunity for heroism or saintliness--or in contrast, massive evil.

As the reader can see, my objection to this traditional view of moral weakness turns on the observation that this view is imbedded in a larger and fixed view of society where the extraordinarily powerful are capable of rising to moral heroism or sinking to massive evil and the rest of us are plagued with mere moral weakness by sheer virtue of our powerlessness. Most of us lack the power for either great heroism or great cowardice. In opposition to this <u>static</u>

view, I am presenting a dynamic view where both power and moral strength is within the reach of ordinary people through ordinary moral commitments.

In summary, moral weakness from the heroic vitalist view suggests moral powerlessness for heroic good or ignominy. However, if moral strength is seen as the ability to make lifelong moral commitments, then moral weakness can be reconceived as the inability to make moral commitments. On this revised view, heroic courage combined with the inability to make lifelong moral commitments can at least be an expression of a psychological weakness, if not a moral weakness.

2.3 Moral Wisdom vs. Moral Strength

Another feature of the static moral view tends to be that extraordinary moral agents have moral wisdom and ordinary moral agents have only average moral "intelligence." Both T. E. Lawrence and Lord Jim were able to craft complex plans to defeat the forces of evil. By engaging a kind of moral genius, T. E. Lawrence rallied the Arabs against the Turks and Lord Jim rallied the natives against the evil agent that was dominating the village. No mere mortal could have marshaled these forces. Only an extraordinary "lord" or aristocratic warrior could engineer such moral force. As the reader can see, this moral force

is a military force that creates and responds to crises--setting the stage for the play of heroic courage.

From this perspective, moral wisdom is more important than moral strength. This view presents the picture of a world of static moral problems in a way that is similar to the view where ordinary people have moral weakness. It is only those with heroic courage who have the courage to face difficult moral problems and the wisdom to solve them. From this perspective, both heroic courage and wisdom are inherent qualities of an extraordinary person's character that need not be tested or shown throughout a person's life. Rather, we can gain insight into a person's heroic courage or moral wisdom in as little as one instance. T. E. Lawrence addressed a few military crises with great wisdom, and gained the reputation as a military genius. A military genius is a kind of person where moral wisdom and heroic courage form an integrated character trait.

On the other hand, a person with moral strength develops her capacity to reflect on moral problems through a long-term moral commitment to both the theory and practice of simple good works. A person with moral strength may not have moral wisdom as an inherent character trait; however, this person may develop wisdom in the course of her lifelong moral commitment. We notice this in the savvy of people with long-term moral commitments. Julia Ruuttila was well

respected for the savvy that she developed through her commitment. But like Norma Rae, Julia made bad choices that were forgiven. For example, when she was a child, she abandoned her anarchist family for three days because of a threatening mob--but her family quickly forgave her upon her return.

Of course, the weaker claim here is that virtue ethicists seem to be misled if they assume that people must be born with moral wisdom to be moral. Many of these ethicists know that it can be developed over time. The stronger and more important claim is that, even if people make poor moral decisions in the short run, they may certainly make up for them by moral corrections over the long run.

The moral wisdom-as-central view suggests that people predominantly need to be able to distinguish between good choices and bad choices. For example, the question about the moral wisdom of T. E. Lawrence becomes whether he could distinguish between good and bad moral choices. Ongoing moral strength is not needed to make these distinctions and choices. Rather, wisdom and heroic courage are needed in a particular crisis. After one's reflection has discerned right from wrong, what the good is or what the moral response to a given situation should be, action clearly and simply follows from this analysis.

The moral-wisdom-as-central view may be summarized as follows: When it comes to morality, the major effort needs to go into the reflective and confrontational aspect with little or no effort going into long-term follow through. If this is the case, then strength does not seem to be at the heart of the issue. Rather, it seems that moral wisdom is central to morality--not moral strength. It follows from this that moral strength is only a minor concern in morality at best. Instead, moral wisdom should be the primary philosophical concern.

To demonstrate this view, I suggest that the reader look at a crisis that T. E. Lawrence faced. In order to cross a treacherous desert and conquer a Turkish outpost, Lawrence had to have the heroic courage to attempt the crossing and the wisdom to mount a successful military campaign. Lawrence needed to have heroic courage to face his challenge and the wisdom to solve the dilemma presented. He did not need any long-term moral strength because he did not have any long-term moral commitment. He simply had to let the adventure and heroism of the moment numb him to the risk, fear and violence. From this view of Lawrence's heroic courage, we come to see it as a heroic reflex, not an ongoing moral strength.

In contrast, Norma Rae faced crises and was not particularly courageous nor wise in her confrontations. On

many occasions, she succumbed to temptations, rather than resist heroically. In addition to her succumbing to sexual temptations, Norma Rae was tempted by management to take a supervisory position that would break her solidarity with her co-workers. She succumbed to temptation and took the job only to realize in horror how it affected her relationships with her friends. In succumbing to this temptation, she was neither courageous nor morally wise, so one could say that, from this perspective, she did not have heroic courage nor moral wisdom. She did, however, have moral strength because she had long-term commitments that were tested and shown. And she developed a valuable savvy about her work as she continued its practice.[7]

In opposing the moral wisdom view, I suggest that the reader consider how the moral wisdom-as-central view runs afoul of the unable-to-commit problem. Even if people have the heroic courage to confront a problem and know how to distinguish between good moral choices and bad ones, they still often seem unable to follow through when the situation is no longer exciting. T. E. Lawrence displayed this

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[7] She developed this savvy fast and quit her job as a supervisor and was forgiven just as quickly by her co-workers. This element of forgiveness was quite ordinary in this circumstance and provides an interesting contrast to the lack of forgiveness for Lord Jim's cowardice.

psychological weakness when he tired of the winter Arab encampment and fled the cause that he had earlier championed.

I suggest that the reason for this is that the moral wisdom-as-central view is a static view that supposes that only a few people have moral wisdom and most of us are morally unwise. This is virtually the same static view that supposes that only a few of us are courageous and most of us are morally weak. In place of the moral wisdom-as-central view, I suggest a dynamic view that expands its focus to include a significant contextual role for moral strength. This shifted focus can provide grounds for reinterpreting the problems of moral weakness and moral wisdom within the context of a dynamic moral strength. Given the view that moral strength requires ongoing showing and testing, an ongoing temporal context is established for moral strength that is much broader than the more immediate temporal context of individual moral distinctions, choices and actions. Since both the moral weakness problem and the moral wisdom problem turn on the difficulties of individual moral distinctions, choices and actions, their context is much narrower than the context of moral strength. After the focus is shifted to a wider context, we are free to think that the weakness comes from a lack of commitment--a problem in heroic courage; and moral wisdom is developed through the

practice of moral commitment, not from an inherent character trait.

2.4 Moral and Non-Moral Character Elements

To illustrate the difficulties with the moral wisdom-as-central view and the moral weakness view, let's look at an example that illuminates the contrast between these two views and the moral strength view. A person who has made a commitment to help the homeless has spent every Sunday for the last two months serving soup at a temporary shelter. On this particular Saturday, she receives a call to help serve soup because another volunteer has gotten sick. She is a little tired and says that she is unwilling to help today. Since she could easily rest after she has served soup, how are we to account for this inaction? Is she lacking in the wisdom to determine that serving soup would be the right thing to do? Is she too weak to do what she knows is right? This seems difficult to determine. It seems that we would need to know about her character in order to know how to answer these questions. This might be quite a complex task.

On the other hand, if we proceed from the context of moral strength, an analysis of her action is much easier to undertake. Additionally, this analysis may tell us more about the morality of the action than an analysis based on moral weakness or moral wisdom. Does her refusal to help on

Saturday suggest that she is unwilling to show or test her moral strength? We have no reason to suppose so. She will probably continue to show and test her moral strength by arriving on Sunday to help as usual. Does her ongoing commitment to help the homeless demonstrate moral strength? It certainly appears that it does.

In light of this moral strength analysis, it appears that her refusal to help on Saturday is relatively insignificant to the ongoing testing and showing of moral strength. Consequently, it seems that an analysis narrowly focused on moral distinctions, choices and acts not only gets quagmired in problems of moral weakness and moral wisdom, but draws our attention to relatively insignificant phenomena. The big picture is her ongoing expression of moral strength in her ongoing commitment to help every Sunday; the little picture is her refusal to help on one Saturday.

While the moral strength view might hold for the above example, does it hold for a more difficult example of moral weakness. Perhaps the same person, who refused to help feed the homeless on Saturday, goes out for a drive in the country later in the day. On the drive, she passes the scene of an automobile accident and does not stop to render aid, though it seems that someone may have been hurt. This case presents us with a clearer case of moral weakness.

When asked why she did not stop, she replies that she just could not face the horror of the scene at that moment. She had reached a limit that she could not pass.

Now, how are we to think of the moral strength of this person, given her response to this accident? Given the previous analysis, we can still understand that she has a commitment to those in need (the homeless) and expresses moral strength through this commitment. However, the automobile accident has confronted her with what might best be understood as a psychological weakness (she could not face the horror at that moment). This psychological weakness or limitation has, in turn, limited her ability to act on what is clearly the right thing to do.

So, before we know how to think of the moral aspect of her inability to act, we must consider the relationship of psychological or other seemingly non moral limitations to her behavior. If a person is physically unable to help another, then we do not consider that person morally weak. However, if a person is psychologically unable to help another, we are often confused about how to judge a person's moral character. Some soldiers studied during World War II were found to have these attitudes about the psychological weaknesses and limitations of other soldiers:

Soldiers who were visibly upset by danger were not regarded as cowards, "unless they made no apparent effort to stick

out their job." If, despite trying hard, the man could not perform adequately, he was regarded as a legitimate casualty. ... Soldiers whose symptoms persisted long after the objective dangers had subsided, were generally regarded as being sick.[8]

From these soldiers' views, we do not have a clear message on how to proceed. She may have tried hard to convince herself to render aid. But failing this, she may not have had 'symptoms that persisted long after the objective danger'. Given this ambiguity, some might consider her a coward, a moral weakling or a moral idiot; and others might consider her a psychological "casualty." Ironically, if she bounces back and is able to maintain her moral commitment to the homeless the next day, some might consider this evidence of moral weakness or a lack of moral wisdom, not moral strength--whereas if she was unable to maintain her moral commitment to the homeless the next day, some might consider this evidence of a confirmed psychological weakness.

From these difficulties, one thing is sure: she has a psychological limitation or weakness and she may have a moral weakness or lack moral wisdom. What is not so sure is whether this psychological limitation is a moral weakness or resulted from a lack of moral wisdom. A moral view that

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[8] S. J. Rachman, Fear and Courage (San Francisco: Freeman, 1978) 235.

focuses on acts will be more likely to see a moral weakness or a lack of moral wisdom in this case, whereas a moral view that focuses on a wider range of expressions of moral strength, will be less likely to jump to conclusions about the role of moral weakness or a lack of moral wisdom.

Before we let this analysis stand, we should consider one more aspect of the problem. How are we to compare her refusal to help serve soup on Saturday with her refusal to render aid at an accident? While the soup refusal may seem relatively insignificant to her ongoing expressions of moral strength, her aid refusal is not insignificant. However, given the mitigation of psychological limitations, it seems that it is best to understand it as a case for professional psychological help, not moral rebuke. From this, we may once again affirm that an analysis narrowly focused on moral distinctions, choices and acts not only gets quagmired in problems of moral weakness and moral wisdom, but draws our attention to relatively insignificant phenomena or non moral phenomena.

To show this in another way, let's look at a case of an action easily called heroic. Imagine a fearless person who does not make any particular effort to express moral strength. This person might come upon an automobile accident and easily render aid simply for the adventure of it. How are we to consider the moral strength of this

person? On our analysis of moral strength, she has little moral strength, rather she has the positive reflex known as heroic courage.

Her rescue at the scene of the accident is not insignificant, but I want to suggest that a view of morality based largely on reactive acts, in isolation from ongoing expressions of moral strength, will exaggerate the significance of this act. After all, it seems that her fearlessness and sense of adventure are non moral qualities of character. These non moral qualities are similar to the non moral qualities of fearfulness and horror expressed by the person in the previous example. The analysis of moral strength that I am presenting makes it easier for us to sort out these non moral qualities by broadening the focus away from a narrow concern for isolated moral acts.

Additionally, a morality based on reactive acts or heroic courage is little more than a kind of negative morality--a reflex that avoids the immoral. In contrast, a morality that is based on moral commitments is a positive morality--a way to create a morally improved world.

3. Commitments vs. Acts

In this part, I continue the line of thinking just mentioned by distinguishing acts of heroic courage from moral commitments in the following two ways. First, I give

examples where it appears that acts of heroic courage are episodic and involve confronting great fear, taking great risks, or enduring potential violence. This lack of continuity and fixation on fear, risk and violence compares unfavorably to the continuity and moderated response to fear, risk and violence that is expressed in a moral commitment. This distinction follows the earlier contrast between heroic acts as negative morality and moral commitment as positive morality. Secondly, I give more examples that show how acts of heroic courage might be immoral and/or amoral in contrast to the necessary morality of moral commitments.

3.1 Similarities and Contrasts

To begin, I suggest we look at some examples that show similarities and contrasts between an act of heroic courage and a moral commitment. A person who rescues someone from the ocean both seems to be courageous and have a moral commitment. It took an act of heroic courage to risk her life in the rescue and it might have taken a moral commitment to act on what she knew was right. However, on reflection, we can only be certain that it took heroic courage to take the risk. Since the rescuer may have jumped into the ocean for the adventure and thrill, we cannot be

certain that the rescuer had any long-term moral commitment to do what is right.

It is interesting to note, in this case, that it took heroic courage to overcome the fear inherent in the rescue. To jump into a raging ocean is frightening. In order to accomplish such a rescue, we might suppose that one must be able to overcome this fear. A dog, such as Lassie of television fame, might also have this ability--but certain dogs might simply be fearless or reckless. In cases of fearlessness or recklessness, one need not overcome any fear. One might simply jump into the ocean for the adventure. However, this 'jumping for adventure' attitude does not remove the danger of the situation. It seems that the fearless simply ignore or do not perceive the danger present.

The question then becomes, do both the fearful and the fearless show heroic courage in identical rescues? It seems, from our use of the term "heroic courage" that they both show it. We praise them both for having heroic courage upon hearing of a daring rescue. From this observation, we might suppose that heroic courage refers to one's ability to overcome, ignore or not perceive the danger present in a situation. (I use the phrase, "confronting great fear," to cover all of these possibilities.)

Now let's turn again to the possible moral commitment of the rescue. As I mentioned above, we cannot be certain that it took a moral commitment to perform this rescue. Let's suppose that the rescuer was a very limited swimmer. If she had jumped into the ocean, she might have compounded the crisis by becoming a second victim. The right thing to do might have been to find a better swimmer. In this case, it would take a moral commitment to avoid the impulse to jump in the ocean and to instead find a person more capable of a rescue. A fearless person, or a person obsessed with overcoming fear, might not have the moral commitment to avoid the impulse to jump in the ocean and attempt an immediate rescue. An act of heroic courage focuses on one's ability to ignore or overcome fear, whereas a moral commitment focuses on the best way to accomplish a rescue. From this, we now come to see that heroic courage focuses on fear and risk and moral commitment focuses on consistent action. Importantly, from this perspective, a person with a moral commitment may not be particularly courageous. This is because one may be able to find the best way to be moral without confronting monumental fears. In contrast to this, a dog, such as Lassie, may have heroic courage and no moral commitment. Indeed, at present, it would be odd to say that an animal has a moral commitment--though someday we may find out that this is the case.

These observations about acts of heroic courage may cause us to wonder if there is something suspicious about heroic acts and the heroic itself. The heroic, like the brave and courageous, seems to be oriented around notions of risk, fear and violence. Because of the hostile relation to fear and the friendly relation to risk and violence, it becomes possible to see the heroic as aggressive, insensitive and violent. In contrast to this, a moral commitment (the heraic) can resist evil without aggression, experience fear without combating it, and respond to a crisis without violence. Furthermore, the heroic demands recognition, whereas the heraic does not demand recognition. From this, we find that the heroic is extraordinary and the heraic is more ordinary.

3.2 Can Acts of Courage Be Immoral?

Now let's examine another case that raises the question of whether or not acts of courage can be immoral. If it is the case that acts of courage can be immoral, then we have another means of distinguishing moral commitment--for only in irony could it make sense for moral commitment to be immoral.[9] Philippa Foot argues that acts of courage cannot

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[9] Such an ironic use occurs toward the end of the film, No Way Out. The term used is "moral courage," though it functions as "moral commitment."

be immoral. To do this, she gives us the case of a wretched murder that was done in a situation involving great danger and she asks if such an action was an act of courage.[10] We might hear immoral acts described as courageous, but it does seem a bit strange in the case of a diabolical murder. In Foot's words, "it seems wrong to think of courage as equally connected with good actions and bad."[11] It does seem odd to say that a murderer is courageous, even though enduring great risk and overcoming, ignoring, or not perceiving great fear.

However, let's look at another example where the agent involved is not so diabolical. A Nazi soldier continues to fight the French resistance despite being injured. Because soldiers often find themselves on the battlefield with little or no choice of their own, we may feel more comfortable claiming that their actions require courage. Every army seems to have it's heroes and to be heroic is to have courage. However, in the case of a courageous Nazi soldier, we seem to have an instance of an immoral act of courage.

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[10] Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life, ed. Christina Sommers and Fred Sommers (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989) 228.

[11] Foot 229.

I would hope that this latter case would suffice to show an important distinction between a courageous act and a moral commitment by showing that a courageous act can be immoral. However, an objection must first be addressed. The reader may still wonder whether the term "courage" has been correctly used. One might wonder whether it was correct to suppose that the Nazi soldier actually displayed courage in continuing to fight. This objection turns on the view that it may be more accurate to say that the soldier showed determination not courage, where that determination may be immoral. We might say that we face a determined enemy and in saying this, we are not saying anything about the enemy's virtue or lack of virtue. But to say that we face a courageous enemy seems to say that the enemy is virtuous in some way. If the enemy is virtuous, then he is moral. This latter move equates courage and morality--and seems particularly odd in the case of Nazis. My response to this objection is to say that we often describe immoral enemies as courageous because they are heroic, though it seems that my interlocutor might claim that this observation involves a somewhat imprecise description.

3.3 Can Acts of Courage be Amoral?

To overcome this possible weakness in my response, I will turn to a different kind of case, where the term

"courage" suggests an amoral act: A football lineman is significantly injured in a third and short yardage situation, deep in the opposing team's territory. In order to help his team run a crucial play on fourth and one, he overcomes his pain and administers a key block--a courageous act. Is this courageous act a moral act?

Before I answer this question, I want to note that if there are situations of little or no moral significance in the world, football seems to be one. I would even argue that games, such as football, are amoral by design. They are intended to provide a respite from the weighty issues of the day--morality included. This is not to deny that games have important symbolic value. It is merely to say that football can be found on the amoral or non moral side of the spectrum.

Returning to this example, I think it can be argued that the observation that he was helping his teammates does not seem to elevate this situation to a moral crisis. So it appears that the lineman was not being particularly moral. However, linemen in this situation are often described as having performed courageous acts.

Additional amoral or non moral examples of courageous acts seem to be in ready supply. The sporting world abounds with them. In contrast, it seems to be a simple contradiction that there might exist amoral or non moral

examples of moral commitment. The only objection left to consider is the possibility that every human act is to some extent a moral act. In other words, there is no amoral or non moral act. If this is so, then my claim about the amoral or non moral uses of courageous acts would be undermined. However, the every-act-is-moral view would have to allow that some acts are more moral than others, allowing a continuum from very moral to hardly moral.

I would respond that the description of such a moral continuum is simply using different words to describe the non moral/moral contrast. No one would argue that non moral situations are completely vacant of moral content. There is simply little moral content in them. As mentioned earlier, the injured football player is showing loyalty to his teammates, but his loyalty is not of much moral stature when compared to the virtue of loyalty to one's family, friends and social causes. Football is just a game. By definition, it is not meant to carry the weight of one's higher moral commitments. From this perspective, a courageous act in a game is not the same as a moral commitment. To be morally committed to a game seems quite odd. We wouldn't expect a professional football player to make this claim. Anyone watching the National Football League games will see that professional football players often make pitches for their moral commitments outside of football (to the United Way,

etc.) seemingly to show that they have more than amoral aspirations.

This observation about non moral or minimally moral uses for the term "courageous act" does not gloss over the fact that these descriptions may be mistakenly used. In the case of sports, my interlocutor could say that an accurate description of these acts is that they are performed by tough and team-spirited athletes, not courageous and loyal heroes. My response to this objection is that amoral or non moral uses of the term "courageous act" are so common that one has to admit that the use of the term has irredeemably received this additional connotation.

In our discussion about the uses of the term "courageous act" that suggest immorality or amorality, we have been able to show that there are a considerable number of uses for the term that suggest amorality--the shear number of which seems to justify the changed connotation. However, we have failed to conclusively show that there are proper uses of the term that suggests immorality. There certainly are uses of the term "courageous act" that suggest immorality, however because they are somewhat rare, they may be improper uses. Since it seems that uses of "courageous act" that suggest amorality outnumber the uses of "courageous act" that suggest immorality, we must lean toward an interpretation that justifies the former use over

the latter use of the term. This, of course, assumes that usage is a determining criterion in these matters.

Our examination of the uses of the term "courageous act" that do not suggest morality, gives us an additional way to distinguish a courageous act from a moral commitment. However, it must be noted that a courageous act can be virtuous without every courageous act being morally good. This may be a way of satisfying both Foot and myself. Foot can be assured that a courageous act retains its status as virtuous without being undermined by a wide variety of amoral, and even immoral uses--improper or not. I can be assured that "moral commitment" is a more precise term to describe moral action. It is more precise in its reference to morality and more precise in its contrast to heroic courage's focus on episodic risk, fear and violence.

It should also be noted that Foot and others may see a disadvantage in the term "moral commitment" caused by the absence of the archetypal power of the term "courageous act." I grant that "moral commitment" does have this disadvantage, but I also believe that the advantages of the term "moral commitment" far outweigh its disadvantages.

Having shown these ways to contrast a moral commitment from an act of courage, I want to point out one more thing about the relationship between a moral commitment and an act of courage. We have shown that an act of courage does not

necessarily imply a moral commitment, but does a moral commitment imply an act of courage? As I mentioned earlier, it is possible to have a moral commitment without being particularly courageous. This is the case because one can have a moral commitment without having to take great risks or to overcome or ignore great fears. However, noting that a moral commitment does not require great leaps of heroism, it does require a certain public exposure. Like a bridge that spans two cliffs, there may be little danger in what the bridge does, but it is exposed to the public and to nature. In this exposure there are a certain amount of risks and a certain number of fears. In this way, moral commitment does imply a moderate amount of risk, but not the extremes of risk involved in heroic courage.

The bridge metaphor for moral commitment is interesting because it illustrates the long-term strength of moral commitment as opposed to the short-term bursts of risk and fearlessness that comprise acts of heroic courage. In this way, moral commitment implies a determination, deliberateness and conscientiousness over time that may be absent in acts of heroic courage. This long-term/short-term contrast may be one of the most important distinctions between moral commitment and acts of courage.

CHAPTER IV

HERAIC MORAL COMMITMENT

Having made the contrast between heroic acts and moral commitments at the end of the last chapter, I continue to explain the advantages of heraic moral commitment[1] in this chapter. This explanation will further my project of demonstrating how instances of moral commitment are central to the moral life, whereas instances of heroic courage are not necessarily central to the moral life. (Given this contrast, it is odd when heroic courage is privileged over moral commitment.) Heraic moral commitment is the key constituent of moral strength, as well as the expression of an ordinary morality that is more fully moral than heroically courageous extraordinary morality.

I begin this chapter by giving three examples of moral commitment. The first involves Julia Ruuttila, whose life expressed one of the most complete moral commitments. It was complete in that it was a lifelong, pro-active commitment that had a moderating response to fear, risk and violence. The second example involves the people of Le Chambon who had

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[1] Note that I use the terms "heraic moral commitment" and "moral commitment" interchangeably. I do this because I consider moral commitment to be the essence of "the heraic"--the contrast I am constructing against the heroic.

an admirable moral commitment, but may have fallen short of being fully pro-active. The third example is a case offered by Josiah Royce, one that involves the generation of a moral commitment that synthesizes the outer drive to conform and the inner drive to rebel. Though this kind of commitment is created through reflection and a moderating response to risk, fear and violence, it is a kind of commitment that is closest to the heroic because it is similar in its short time-frame to an act of heroic courage.

Following these examples, the chapter is divided into three sections. First, I examine some formal characteristics of moral commitment, including: the distinction between moral commitment and moral strength, the distinction between moral commitment and other forms of morality-in-action, and the distinction between having and making a moral commitment. Secondly, I look at some content characteristics of moral commitment, such as the distinction between maximal and minimal moral commitments and the distinction between pro-active and reactive moral commitments. Thirdly, I argue that moral commitment is a better response to immorality than heroic courage because moral commitment has a moderating response to fear, risk and violence that counters the dissociation that can easily occur in immoral acts, as well as acts of heroic courage.

1. Three Examples of Moral Commitment

I begin with Julia Ruuttila because her life illustrated one of the strongest, most complete moral commitments to improve the human condition. Using the term preferred by Philip Hallie, she provided ongoing "hospitality"[2] to those in need. In Hallie's schema, hospitality expresses concrete goodness, as opposed to abstract goodness. Hallie contrasts this hospitality with cruelty. As cruelty creates victims, hospitality un-creates victims. He understands hospitality as morally superior to kindness and even liberation because one can be kind while being cruel and one can rescue a victim, though the victim remains identified with being a victim. Only with the community dimension of hospitality can a victim be un-created, because community can transform the identity of an individual.

Born outside of Eugene, Oregon in 1907, she worked on many Northwest labor, peace and justice causes until her recent death. She went beyond giving lip service to the American ideals of liberty, justice and equality; she worked

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[2] Philip Hallie, "From Cruelty to Kindness," Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life, ed. Christina Sommers and Fred Sommers (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989) 18.

to make them a reality every day of her life. As her great grandson Jason Ruuttila said:

> She's a true American, a true patriot. I mean, even though she's against the war, she's a true patriot, because she believes in freedom of expression and opinion, the true believer of the American way, you know. Except for maybe capitalism and free enterprise. She believes what the Constitution actually says--all people are created equal, with liberty and justice for all. And that's why she still, at the age of 83 years old, is still fighting for it. Because it hasn't quite yet come to that. So that's why I think she's a true patriot, even though she's been called a Communist. They say "love it or leave it." Why leave it when you can stay and change it to the way you feel it should be. Make it better.[3]

Ruuttila's commitment was pro-active and lifelong. She was active in the civil rights and peace movements, and helped draw the labor movement into these struggles. She participated in lunch-counter protests to remove Oregon's "White Trade Only" signs and fought racism in unions. Though these activities entailed risk, she moderated her response to the fear, risk and potential violence in these situations. (I explain more about this kind of moderated response in the last section of this chapter.) She was not heroic in these situations, she was simply constant and reliable--rarely drawing attention to herself. She preferred to take a low

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[3] Sandy Polishuk, ed., I Had a Typewriter: An Oral History of the Life of Julia Ruuttila (Portland: privately printed, 1993) 4.

profile while solidly pursuing her moral commitments. Her commitment was expressed by her work, which was noticed as significant and admirable, while her personal presence was sometimes scarcely noticed.

My second example is the village of Le Chambon. The inhabitants of this village rescued six thousand Jews being persecuted by the Nazis and their French collaborators. Their moral commitment expressed itself as conscientious resistance. Philip Hallie describes this moral commitment in the following terms.

> The Chambonnais judged the laws of Vichy in their own ethical courts, their consciences, and found them wrong. Vichy, for instance, did it's best to enforce "surrender on demand," a decree that refugees must be given up when the appropriate state officials demanded it. In those airy, invisible courts of the human spirit, their consciences, the Chambonnais judged and condemned that decree, and they all did all they could to violate it.[4]

Their commitment to hospitality--un-creating victims--so impressed Hallie that he devoted a book to it, Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed. To Hallie, the depth of their hospitality to the persecuted seemed endless. He reports that Roger Darcissac, the official historian of Le Chambon,

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[4] Philip Hallie, Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) 271.

said the following about the inhabitants: "During those years they were completely wonderful."[5] In interviews years after the war, rescued Jews explained how their identities were transformed by the hospitality of the Chambonnais--these Jews no longer felt like victims, while other liberated Jews still carried the victim identity. In this way, the Chambonnais' hospitality transcended the liberation of France, but liberation creates heroes and hospitality creates none. "There were no nationally known names in the story of Le Chambon. When France was liberated, there were no triumphal marches for Andre Trocme (the minister) and his villagers through the streets of Paris or Marseilles...They were not so much French patriots as they were conscientious human beings."[6]

However, the Chambonnais were active primarily during the war years, whereas Julia Ruuttila's moral commitment had no dormant period. Because the Chambonnais' commitment had an episodic aspect, it had a parallel with the heroic. In this way, the Chambonnais are more like the heroic than Ruuttila.

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[5] Hallie 270.

[6] Hallie 10.

My third example, taken from Royce in The Philosophy of Loyalty, takes a further step toward the heroic, while still maintaining its status as a moral commitment. Though Royce talks about this example in terms of loyalty, I find that it doubles as a helpful illustration of moral commitment.

> In January, 1642, just before the outbreak of hostilities between King Charles I and the Commons, the King resolved to arrest certain leaders of the opposition party in Parliament. He accordingly sent his herald to the House to demand the surrender of these members into his custody. The Speaker of the House in reply solemnly appealed to the ancient privileges of the House, which gave to that body jurisdiction over its own members, and which forbade their arrest without its consent. The conflict between the privileges of the House and the royal prerogative was herewith definitely initiated. The King resolved by a show of force to assert at once his authority; and, on the day following that upon which the demand sent through his herald had been refused, he went in person, accompanied by soldiers, to the House. Then, having placed his guards at the doors, he entered, went up to the Speaker, and, naming the members whom he desired to arrest, demanded, "Mr. Speaker, do you espy these persons in the House?"
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> You will observe that the moment was an unique one in English history. Custom, precedent, convention, obviously were inadequate to define the Speaker's duty in this most critical instance.
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> ...[T]he Speaker at once fell on his knee before the King and said: "Your Majesty, I am the Speaker of this House, and, being such, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak save as this House shall command; and I humbly beg your Majesty's pardon if this is the only answer that I can give to your Majesty."[7]

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[7] Josiah Royce, The Philosophy of Loyalty (New York: Macmillan, 1908) 103-5.

For Royce, this example synthesizes the inner and outer wills into a loyalty of the highest order. Loyalty to either the inner or outer alone would place the Speaker wavering between the urge to conform and the urge to rebel. By showing his respect to both King and House, he has created a higher loyalty--or a moral commitment that transcends mere partisan loyalty. Though the term "loyalty" is certainly appropriate in this usage, I find the term "moral commitment" more compelling because, as I mentioned earlier, it avoids the militarist associations of "loyalty" and it emphasizes that the commitment is about morality.

The Speaker of the House thoughtfully articulated his commitment to both the King and the House. The fact that this example focuses on an isolated act gives it the closest association with the heroic, but it distinguishes itself from the heroic in that it does not seek to overcome great fear, take great risks and endure violence. Rather, the impasse is presented in such a way that it generates respect from both the King and the House, not deeper conflict between them.

2. Formal Characteristics of Moral Commitment

In this section, I explain how moral commitment, by its formal characteristics, expresses the moral life better than heroic courage. Formal characteristics are able to direct our thinking about something without focusing on any particular content. In the first formal characteristic that I explore, I show how thinking about moral commitment directs our attention to what shows or gives evidence of a person's morality. Then, I show how moral commitment expresses a dynamic morality through both a general commitment and particular commitments. Next, I explain the conceptual connections between moral strength and moral commitment. Following this, I compare moral commitment to other notions of morality-in-action. Then, I explore the distinction of making and having a moral commitment. Finally, I compare immoral commitments with moral commitments.

Thinking about moral commitment directs our attention to public evidence because of moral commitment's engagement in the world. This engagement in the world is shown and tested publicly in contrast to the inner workings of character development. Julia Ruuttila's moral commitment was shown and tested in her many public activities. In contrast to her public evidence, Lord Jim spent a long stretch of his

life mired in self-contempt for his lack of heroism. This self-contempt may be understood as an aspect of character development that ultimately resulted in his ascendance to the heroic--but in his time of self-contempt, he gave no evidence of moral commitment and thus no evidence of the moral life. In this way, any protracted absence of showing or evidence exposes one's lack of morality.

Thinking about moral commitment directs us toward a dynamic view of morality by helping us see that moral improvement comes from a steady, public engagement with the particular historical features of our world. In contrast to this, moral commitment de-emphasizes the view of morality in terms of isolated heroic acts which are not only sporadic, but also often capitalized upon for immoral, amoral or selfish ends. The potential of generating excessive private value from public heroism compares unfavorably to a constant, uninterrupted commitment to generate public value--the essence of an heraic moral commitment. (More will be said about the contrast between public and private value in the section on content characteristics of moral commitment later in this chapter.)

The examples of Julia Ruuttila, the Chambonnais and the Speaker of the House show how a general moral commitment is made through a particular moral commitment. In Royce's

example, the having of a general commitment and the acting on a particular commitment are synthesized in the Speaker's conscientious refusal. Without his ability to synthesize inner and outer wills, this moral commitment could not take place. This ability to actively synthesize is a key to how a moral activist can resolve a moral dilemma, where a person psychologically incapable of generating such a synthesis may not be able to reach resolution. This insight will help us view the activist as the highest practitioner of a moral commitment.[8]

From this, I suggest that the greater sense of moral commitment is the sense that one has a general commitment to be moral. The lesser sense of moral commitment refers to a particular commitment that is moral. However, it is important to note that a commitment to be moral <u>in general</u> requires one to make a particular commitment or commitments to show this general commitment.

To illustrate this distinction, it is most significant that Julia Ruuttila has a general commitment to be moral that is shown by her particular commitments. In contrast, the Speaker of the House has a particular commitment to serve both the king and the House, but, with the information we are

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[8] For more on this, see the last chapter of this dissertation.

given, we are not certain whether this particular commitment shows a general commitment. In the case of the Chambonnais, we see a particular commitment during the war, but we are again uncertain whether they had a commitment to deep hospitality that extended into peacetime.

In contrast to these cases of moral commitment, the hero, T. E. Lawrence, seemed unable to synthesize the three conflicting elements in his life. He vacillated between the two conflicting outer duties to Britain and the Arabs. And he vacillated between his sense of outer duty and his vain selfishness. I think it is helpful to consider this inability to synthesize a psychological weakness that made him unable to make a fully moral commitment.[9]

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[9] Both the term, "commitment," and the term, "commitments" have dual meanings, of the sort just explained, that may be combined. To illustrate this, Norma Rae may have commitments in the sense that she has a commitment to be moral and a commitment to a certain amoral pursuit. This amoral commitment can be shown by her commitment to improve her domestic situation, as well as her moral commitment to help her coworkers.

What is important about all of these distinctions is that when the words, "commitment" or "commitments" are used, I want the reader to remember that general commitment(s) (the will to be moral) is(are) shown by particular commitment(s) [the moral act(s)]. However to avoid confusion, I will try to be clear about which meaning I am using. In saying this, it is important to note that in my provisional statement about the meaning of "moral commitment," I will be attempting to reconcile these two senses of each term. This reconciliation turns on the interpretation of commitment as linking the will to commit with the act of committing. One completes the other. The Speaker completed his commitment to be moral by acting on a particular moral commitment.

This synthesis of willing and acting, within the notion of commitment, reflects a synthesis of two senses of the word, "commit." The first sense is when someone commits something. The second sense is

In thinking of these links and processes concerning the various aspects of willing and acting, it is useful to think of moral commitment as a kind of marriage. In this way, the commitment to a particular and ongoing course of moral conduct is a commitment to engage or marry oneself to moral activities. The metaphor of marriage is useful here as a way of understanding the constant public showing of one's morality. Again, referring back to Royce's story of the Speaker of the House, the Speaker affirmed his "marriage" to both King and House by his response to the King's request. And Julia Ruuttila affirmed the "marriage" of her own working conditions with the conditions of fellow workers.

The constancy of a moral commitment can be contrasted to the episodic nature of moral heroism. One danger of episodic moral heroism is that it is often used as a justification to generate excessive private value, in times not devoted to public value. In contrast to this, moral commitment implies a constant commitment to generate public value, though this commitment does not necessarily preclude the generation of enough private value to live a comfortable life.

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when someone commits to something. The first sense is about an action. The second sense is about a willing. Again, my argument is that actions complete their willing--particular commitments complete general commitments.

2.1 Moral Commitment and Moral Strength

Now that I have introduced ways of thinking about moral commitment that lead in directions that sharply contrast with heroic acts of courage, I will talk about the relationship of moral commitment to moral strength. First, I will address how they are distinguished from one another. Following this, I will discuss how a moral commitment is constitutive of moral strength and gives evidence of moral strength.

To begin, moral commitment and moral strength are closely linked in that both involve an active morality. Such an active morality requires both strength and commitment. However, strength and commitment cannot be reduced to each other. Strength implies a firmness and resolve, whereas commitment implies an engagement to a particular course of action. On the one hand, without moral strength, one will be incapable of following through on one's moral commitment. On the other hand, without a moral commitment, one's moral strength will not have a particular engagement in the world.

Julia Ruuttila had a moral strength shown by her moral commitment and a moral commitment that showed her moral strength. Her engagement in the moral life showed both her moral strength and her moral commitment. On the other hand, the strength of T. E. Lawrence is distinguishable from Julia

Ruuttila's strength by the lack of moral commitment. Without this moral commitment, T. E. Lawrence does not show moral strength, but rather he shows heroic strength. This heroic strength does not necessarily meet the requirements of the moral life because of the reasons described earlier. Perhaps it is better to think of heroic strength as a reflexive strength that can certainly be useful, if not necessarily moral.

In contrast to heroic acts of courage--or heroic strength--it is important how moral commitment shows moral strength. The aspect of showing and testing is key to both moral commitment and moral strength. Moral commitment is shown and tested in its particular engagement in the world. Moral strength is shown and tested through one's particular moral commitment.

If we want to determine one's moral strength, we must look to the way that it is shown and tested in the world. As the work of this dissertation proceeds, we shall see how moral strength is expressed in the world through moral commitment. If we look to one's moral commitment we will find one's moral strength. If we try to find one's moral strength directly, we run into many difficulties for lack of evidence. As explained earlier, virtue ethicists may look for episodic insights that show a moral character--but this

analysis does not lead to a dynamic view of moral strength, rather it gives a static picture of episodic courage.

2.2 Moral Commitment vs. Other Notions of Morality-in-Action

At this point, I will contrast heraic moral commitment with other forms of morality-in-action to suggest how heraic moral commitment is best suited for constructing a contrast to heroic acts of courage. The forms of morality-in-action that I am interested in are moral vision and the morality of one's existential project. At the outset, I think that these other forms of morality-in-action offer good and useful moral views. In the following discussion, I will examine each of these alternatives and show that, in spite of their advantages, the moral commitment has a distinctive advantage over them for the purposes of this work.

A moral vision is a view of the world that can either generate or be generated by one's moral concerns. A commitment to this moral vision helps bring it into reality. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" is a kind of moral vision that he created. King's work also expressed his moral vision in action. However, it is possible to have a moral vision and <u>not</u> put it into action. This is where the moral commitment has a distinctive advantage. Moral commitment combines the notion of a particular course of action that

needs to be taken and the notion of actually undertaking that course of action.

Turning to the morality of one's existential project, Sartre emphasized the moral importance of one's existential project. Interestingly, Sartre also explained how one might not consciously recognize one's existential project. This parallels the observation that one might not consciously recognize having a moral commitment. In these ways, one's moral commitment could usefully be thought of in terms of the moral dimension of one's existential project.

However, I think that it is mistaken to think that one's moral commitment could be reduced to the morality of one's existential project because Sartre's existential project carries the weight of a particular metaphysical conception of human being. In Sartre's terms, one's existential project "refers to the For-itself's choice of its way of being and is expressed by action in the light of a future end."[10] "By the very fact that the for-itself exists,...value arises to haunt its being-for-itself."[11] From this insight, the processes of existential psychoanalysis are constructed to "release[] to us the

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[10] Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) 633.

[11] Sartre 626.

ethical meaning of various human projects."[12] Without this existential psychoanalysis, we may not be able understand the ethical meaning of our existential project. On the other hand, a moral commitment can be unearthed much easier by looking to the evidence of one's everyday life. In this way, moral commitment has a distinctive advantage because it does not carry the existential baggage of one's "project."

In summary, if we try to find one's moral strength by looking at one's moral vision or the morality of one's existential project, we find that we are not looking in as good a place as when we look at one's moral commitment. Therefore, moral commitment is better suited than these alternatives to contrast acts of heroic courage.

2.3 Having and Making a Moral Commitment

Next, I will distinguish between <u>having</u> a moral commitment and <u>making</u> a moral commitment and introduce the notions of a <u>conscious</u> moral commitment and an <u>unconscious</u> moral commitment. This work strengthens the contrast between heraic moral commitment and acts of heroic courage by showing how one can both have and make a moral commitment and be aware or unaware of it--whereas in the case of heroic

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[12] Sartre 626.

courage, one is intensely aware of when one acts heroically. This contrast shows how a moral commitment can encompass more subtleties of the moral life than unsubtle acts of heroic courage.

To begin this discussion, I suggest that all cases of moral commitment cannot reduce to the act of making a moral commitment. People may have a moral commitment and therefore not need to make the moral commitment. As an example of this, the reader should consider the Chambonnais, who during World War II hid Jews and others being persecuted by the Nazis and Nazi sympathizers. Several of these people had a moral commitment to help those being persecuted, without ever consciously making a commitment. These individuals even went so far as to say that they did not see themselves as being especially good people for helping Jews and others escape their persecutors during World War II.[13] They did not see themselves as making a particular moral commitment to come to the aid of the Jews.

However, we can observe how each resident of Le Chambon had a moral commitment in the context of a group moral commitment at Le Chambon by looking at the strength and

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[13] See Philip Hallie, Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

consistency of their individual actions. In this way, we observe both individual and collective moral commitments because they have been tested and shown. To be fully realized, there seems to be a necessity that the moral commitment be tested and shown--and that, in the showing, it can be observed by someone who is able to recognize it. Once observed, this commitment can be explained to those unaware that they had a commitment.

Another way of explaining this is to understand that some of the citizens of Le Chambon had an unconscious moral commitment to help those being persecuted. Undoubtedly, other citizens were aware of their moral commitment and we can say that these other citizens had a conscious moral commitment to help those in need. It is likely that a person with an unconscious moral commitment can be shown that she has a moral commitment, and in this way, transform the unconscious moral commitment into a conscious moral commitment.

A problem with the moral commitment of people in Le Chambon is that this particularly strong moral commitment is so rare. Though we might like to think that Le Chambon represents what could be the case in other parts of the world, if there was a strong social commitment to help the victims of persecution and oppression, we must admit that the

seeming rarity of this commitment makes it difficult to generalize from it.

It seems that we might want to turn to a more widespread case of a collective moral commitment, for example, the American commitment to respect life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. How can the distinctions that I have introduced help us understand this widespread but more amorphous moral commitment? Like the moral commitment of certain people in Le Chambon, this American commitment may also be so deeply contextualized that individual citizens do not realize that they are making any particular commitment. Such a commitment becomes a part of the fabric of life--and in this way, it seems that, for certain individuals, such a commitment becomes an unconscious moral commitment. These people may have the American commitment without ever consciously making the commitment. Of course, as I have mentioned earlier, a person could become aware of her American commitment and realize that she has a conscious moral commitment.

Can this American commitment actually be considered a shared moral commitment? It might seem that such a diffuse commitment is hard to measure in the concrete lives of every American. My response to this question is to say that, though this commitment may be variously expressed and denied,

it is a part of the cultural fabric of American lives. As such, it represents a moral commitment in varying amounts depending on individual expressions.

I grant that the American commitment is not as uniform or visible as the Le Chambon commitment, but I believe that it can be shown. However, I recognize the fragility of a position based on an ambiguous observation of the American commitment. It may be easily claimed that some members of American society have such a small amount of this commitment that it does not merit recognition. And it is certainly the case that individuals periodically act in ways that deny this commitment. In this way, certain individuals do not always show this American commitment. My position ultimately rests on the existence of some kind of collective moral commitments--but I admit that we need evidence of these commitments, and that evidence may be hard to unearth.

Even if the American commitment is difficult to demonstrate in every case, evidence can be produced to show that the bulk of humanity has a history of a multitude of collective moral commitments that span the entire fabric of life. This entire fabric is visible in the composite of all the various studies made of particular commitments. There is evidence for these commitments, but in many cases it is only just beginning to be uncovered. Sandy Polishuk's (currently

unpublished) oral history of Julia Ruuttila is one important case of this new view of history. Importantly, these studies of particular commitments present an heraic history that is in sharp contrast to the history that privileges the heroic.

In lieu of a full treatment of this problem, I ask the reader to provisionally grant that we live in a web of collective moral commitments. Though individuals may tear at that web from time to time, it would be difficult, and likely impossible, to contradict these collective moral commitments in everything one does for one's entire life. My position is that the vast majority of ordinary people give evidence of moral commitments in their shared moral expressions which are inextricably imbedded in human culture.

Having made that point, I turn to the question of who is capable of making or having a moral commitment. This question is difficult if not impossible to answer empirically, so I suggest that it is helpful to answer it by assuming that everyone is capable of making and having moral commitments, but some people have a psychological weakness that inhibits their ability to make a moral commitment. This answer is consistent with my view that moral commitments are widespread and better reflect the moral life than heroic acts of courage.

Given this view, let's look at the psychological problem that makes one seemingly incapable of making a commitment to anything, typically one's work or loved ones. In this case, one is so impulsive that one seems unable to follow any plan. One starts to do one thing, then ends up doing something else. This is clearly a psychological weakness that involves one's ability to make a moral commitment.

However, would it be true that all people with a problem making commitments necessarily have no moral commitments? If it is the case that it would be difficult to completely contradict collective moral commitments that are a part of the fabric of everyone's life in everything one does for one's entire life, then it would seem that even the person having a problem making a commitment would have evidence of some moral commitments in some aspect of her life.

It is also important to note that people who have problems making a commitment may intend to make commitments and fail due to psychological weakness. If this psychological weakness is overcome, then this kind of person should be able to make significant moral commitments.

Perhaps this view is overly optimistic. I defend this optimism on the more inclusive picture of the moral life

given by focusing on moral commitment. This picture is much more inclusive than the picture of the moral life that privileges the heroic. In this regard, inclusiveness leads to optimism because of the intrinsic optimism of a picture with more good in it.

2.4 Immoral and Moral Commitments

In this final section concerning formal characteristics of moral commitment, I compare immoral commitment with moral commitment to show their similarity as commitments and their contrast as polar moral opposites. This discussion begins by focusing on the notion of human predators. It is important to note that human predators can be a result of either an immoral commitment or immoral compulsion. The notion of human predators and the notions of an immoral commitment and an immoral compulsion are useful in establishing a polarity of other-than-moral-commitment, against which we can see how moral commitments emerge conceptually. In this way, we see that a moral commitment is neither immoral, nor a compulsion, nor involving predation.

I am suggesting that a human predator is someone who preys on others. This is not to say that human predators literally eat others, rather I use the metaphor of feeding on others, as Karl Marx did, to dramatize how people can stalk

and consume people's resources, labor and dignity in the process of generating private value. Human predators can take various forms, from the sociopath who compulsively stalks and attacks another's person, to the business executive who either consciously or inadvertently stalks and attacks another's resources, labor and dignity.

In examining the notion of an immoral commitment in contrast to the immoral compulsion of a sociopath or psychopath, I distinguish between intended and inadvertent immoral commitments. At first glance, it seems odd to think that one would seriously make a commitment to be immoral. Rather, it is more likely that one might have an immoral commitment. I will first discuss the making of an immoral commitment, then turn to the having of an immoral commitment.

I suppose there may be a Satanic cult that claims to make immoral commitments. However, their practice--much like the Addam's Family--would, no doubt, belie their totally evil rhetoric. The simple fact that a Satanic cult sticks together and maintains some kind of integrity is testimony that each member may have at least a minimal moral commitment to the group and its other members. However, it is important to note that such a commitment to an exclusive group would be a minimal moral commitment. Interestingly, it is this

commitment[14] to keep the group together, follow through on group projects, and respect other members that makes the group strong.

What seems particularly important in this discussion about Satanists is that it seems possible for one to make a commitment to be immoral. The motivation for this commitment seems to be to gain advantage or power over others. The concerns of those involved with immoral and moral commitments revolve around issues of strength and power, though the way this power is conceived is radically different. It also seems necessary for both groups to make this commitment in a

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[14] Can one make a moral commitment to an immoral project or a group dedicated to immoral actions? One could certainly make a commitment to such a project or group, but why would we characterize it as a "moral commitment?" In the case of a Satanic group, it would be odd to say that its members make a moral commitment to each other in the greater sense of engagement in some enterprise that improves the human condition. However, it would not seem odd to say that its members make a trivial moral commitment to each other to follow the internal moral requirements of the group.

In provisionally granting this move to recognize these trivial moral commitments, we can say that a Satanic cult member usually tries to meet the moral requirements of the group. However, our interlocutor may still object by saying that this exclusive commitment to other cult members can undermine the well-being of others outside of the cult. Therefore, it is odd to think that cult members are making any kind of moral commitment, though they seem to be making a commitment of some sort. At this point, I am willing to grant part of our interlocutor's objection and say that cult members may make some immoral commitments and some amoral commitments to each other and possibly few moral commitments whatsoever--though it seems they make at least some minimally moral commitments, as explained above.

group context. In doing so, the Satanic cult member seems to be seeking a kind of immoral strength.

This seems to be just the opposite of the commitment of a grassroots activist. The grassroots activist also seeks power and advantage, though it is power to the powerless, rather than power over the powerless--and advantage to the disadvantaged, rather than advantage over the disadvantaged. For the grassroots activist, it also seems necessary to make their commitment in a group context. And in doing so, the grassroots activist seems to be seeking moral strength--the opposite of the Satanist, who seeks immoral strength.

In turning the discussion toward cases where one does not make immoral commitments, but has them just the same, I first return to the Satanic case. A child might unconsciously participate in a Satanic family's immoral commitment when the family passes this commitment down in subtle ways from one generation to the next.[15] Another example might be the problem of the "good Germans" who, while not making any positive commitments to Nazism, allowed themselves to be passively used in the Nazi commitments to exterminate the Jews and others they opposed. These "good Germans" seem to have had an immoral commitment by virtue of

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[15] Though the likelihood that this immoral commitment would not come to light in a predominantly non Satanist culture seems far-fetched.

their participation and compliance in the fabric of Nazi German life.

If the criteria for _having_ an immoral commitment is simply compliance in the fabric of a certain kind of life that victimizes others, then there are few of us that escape some kind of immoral commitment. If Euro-American culture victimizes non Euro-American cultures, then every member of Euro-American culture bears some part of this immoral commitment--though in the case of some victimized Euro-Americans, the weight of this immoral commitment may be quite small.

I think that the notion of _compliance_ is helpful because it sets up _resistance_ as the proper moral response. When much of this compliance is _unconscious_ or _denied_, then this is also helpful conceptually because it sets up the need for a _conscious affirmation_ of responsibility. Again, the grassroots activist holds that resistance and conscious affirmation of responsibility[16] are key features in political practice.

It is important to note, in the discussion that has taken place, that it seems difficult to completely succeed in any commitment to be fully immoral. One would, no doubt, do

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[16] This is a key aspect of consciousness-raising activities.

things that are both amoral and even moral, in spite of making a commitment to be immoral. And in the case of an unconscious immoral commitment, one would be even less successful in having a complete commitment to be immoral. However, the one who is consciously committed to being either moral or immoral would probably be more successful in the project of maximizing morality or immorality than one who only has unconscious moral or immoral commitments.

There is one more question that I want to raise about an immoral commitment. Does one need to show and test this immoral commitment for it to be fully realized? Obviously, if one never followed through on any immoral commitment, then one would not be doing anything immoral--except for irritating pronouncements. It seems that any commitment is shown and tested by the action that follows it. If no action follows the commitment, then it is an empty commitment indeed. However, it is likely that one who makes or has an immoral commitment does not want it too widely shown. The visibility of an immoral commitment increases the likelihood of retribution.

In this way, there is a hidden aspect to immoral commitments that does not seem to parallel moral commitments. Though a person making a moral commitment may remain anonymous to avoid drawing excessive attention to herself,

she would seem to undermine the moral quality of her commitment if she shrank away from the public knowing anything about her commitment. Though retribution may be just as likely in a moral commitment as an immoral commitment, a person making a socially significant moral commitment knows that such a commitment entails some risk, whereas those involved in immoral commitments seem to want power over others to reduce risks. More will be said about risk in the final section of this chapter.

3. Content Characteristics of Moral Commitment

To begin this section on content characteristics, I will contrast socially significant moral commitments with minimal moral commitments as a first step toward constructing a hierarchy of moral commitments that will be useful in constructing a picture of the strongest moral commitment. As mentioned earlier, such a strongest moral commitment will show that heroic courage fails both as a way to center morality and as a way to conceive of the highest form of morality.

Simply, minimal moral commitments are those fairly insignificant moral commitments that involve being polite, keeping promises, remembering birthdays, being on time for appointments, etc. Interestingly, these commitments, if

taken alone, can give one the appearance of being completely moral. One could mask a reluctance to be fully moral by employing such a strategy. Risk appears to be an important consideration to a person who restricts her morality to minimal moral commitments. If a person does not want to take moral risks, then a person can restrict herself to minimal moral commitments and still maintain the appearance of being moral.

In contrast, socially significant moral commitments are those moral commitments that express one's complete morality. Socially significant moral commitments involve commitments to ongoing moral projects whose objective is significant social improvement. This includes activities such as helping the homeless, assisting battered or raped women, countering racism, etc.[17] These socially significant moral commitments show that one has no reluctance to be fully moral--and that one is willing to take the risks associated with socially significant moral commitments.

From this analysis, we might suppose that the distinction between minimal moral commitments and socially significant moral commitments involves the notion of <u>risk</u>. From this perspective, a minimal moral commitment is a moral

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[17] The content of this list is debatable, but not on the issue of minimal commitments.

commitment that does not involve any risk and a socially significant moral commitment is a moral commitment that does involve risk. However, how does one know which moral commitments will involve risk beforehand? In other words, a minimal moral commitment might become a socially significant moral commitment by the simple addition of an unforeseen risk.

This scenario of unforeseen risk seems like it could happen from time to time. However, one who limits one's moral commitments to activities that do not seem likely to involve any risk will probably find that few moral commitments end up involving any risk. What seems to be the key issue here is that people who fear risk may be reluctant to make significant moral commitments. To avoid risk, or to minimize it, they can simply restrict themselves to minimal moral commitments. By way of a general observation of our culture, it seems that there is a psychological weakness involving the fear of risk, therefore this fear of risk may be at the root of an inability to make a moral commitment.

Before we move on to another contrast involving moral commitment, it is important to note that if one makes minimal moral commitments to mask a reluctance to make socially significant moral commitments, then one likely does not openly show this to the public. Again, this hidden nature of

less-than-significant-moral commitments is important in contrast to the public showing and testing of fully, socially significant moral commitments. In conclusion, I want to note that risk and public showing and testing are two key elements in socially significant moral commitments. This is not to overlook the fact that the most crucial distinction between minimal and socially significant moral commitments turns on the element of significant social improvement. This distinction will be useful for us as we construct an alternative to the heroic view of overcoming immorality and moral weakness.

At this point, I say more about how minimal moral commitments and socially significant moral commitments relate to public value and private value. I suggest that minimal moral commitments are often used to create private value at the expense of public value. This introduces the important moral contrast between the creation of public value and the creation of private value. Public value reflects the improvement of the general human condition. In contrast to this, private value reflects the improvement of one's personal condition. It is certainly possible that improving the general human condition will also improve one's personal condition--though certainly not as dramatically as a commitment to improve one's personal condition directly. On

the other hand, a commitment to improve one's personal condition will probably have little effect on improving the general human condition--often, it is quite the reverse.

This last observation goes against the trickle-down theory, where it is assumed that the creation of private value will trickle down to create public value. My own feeling is that the experience of the Reagan/Bush years has shown us that the creation of private value tends to generate increased private value while undermining public value, rather than generating public value.

The strategy of restricting oneself to minimal moral commitments can help generate private value at the expense of public value. As I mentioned earlier, restricting oneself to minimal moral commitments gives one the appearance of being a moral person, while concealing the reluctance to engage in socially significant moral commitments. This appearance of being moral can help one devote all of one's energies toward generating private value, while not appearing to be immoral. If one appeared to be immoral, one would not gain the trust of others who are needed to help in the enterprise of value generation.[18] Since a person of this sort will not want to

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[18] These appearances hold true even in the immoral enterprises of organized criminals. In these cases, elaborate systems of loyalty are the moral fabric that must at least appear to be respected.

risk any socially significant moral commitments, there will be no particular effort to generate any public value.

An example of a person of this sort is Donald Trump, who seemed to thrive on presenting the appearance of being moral by doing the minimally moral. When it was revealed that his personal and professional life was full of morally questionable behavior, his fortunes turned sour. He had no socially significant moral commitments to point to that might allay public suspicions. I want to emphasize that this kind of person is exhibiting a psychological weakness. I do not think that this kind of behavior is imbedded in human nature. However, I must allow that mine is an optimistic view.

The objection that might be raised at this point is, why can't one generate private value while remaining neutral on public value--neither creating or destroying public value? In other words, can't one improve one's own condition without reducing the general condition of humanity? On the face of it, this seems to be a possibility. However, I am arguing that, in the specific case of restricting oneself to minimal moral commitments and deceiving others by an appearance of complete morality, one generates private value at the expense of public value. To grant the plausibility of this claim, the reader must understand that public value is undermined whenever people deceptively present themselves as fully moral

and make no effort to improve the general human condition because the perpetuation of this false face of morality only prolongs the social reluctance to make a genuine commitment to improve the general human condition. I am assuming here that the reader agrees that the general human condition needs improving.

At this point, I will talk about exclusive groups and show how any commitment to an exclusive group at the expense of others outside of the group is necessarily a minimal moral commitment. The term "exclusive group" is meant to refer to a group which excludes others from membership. By excluding others from membership, the private value created by members may both be at the expense of others and not benefit anyone outside of the group.

Clearly, there will be varying degrees of permeation of private value to public value, depending on the character of the group. A family is exclusive in the sense that only certain people are considered members. However, some families take in homeless people and, in this way, counter their exclusivity. Likewise, other groups, such as fraternal organizations, have campaigns to help increase public values.

The groups that I am most worried about are groups that take more from the public than they give back. As an example, multi-national corporations, in their projects of

creating private wealth and value, exploit a tremendous amount of natural and labor resources and give only a small percentage of their wealth to the generation of public value (including taxes and charity). Often, this giving only impacts other elite groups, such as bureaucracy-laden social services and services to the middle class. Given this analysis, we can say that multi-national corporations are exclusive groups, even though their stock is available to any investor. The simple fact is that few people in the world, where multinationals find their resources, are able to afford any significant amount of stock--and therefore any significant amount of benefit from the groups' projects.

3.1 Pro-Active and Reactive Moral Commitments

Regarding socially significant moral commitments, I now want to distinguish between pro-active and reactive moral commitments to show how pro-active moral commitments represent more important moral commitments in this historical period than reactive moral commitments. Again, this work is useful in constructing a strongest moral commitment to show how acts of heroic courage pale in even showing the highest kind of morality.

To begin to explain this distinction between <u>pro-active</u> moral commitments and <u>reactive</u> moral commitments, it seems

that some moral commitments only react to a particular, time-limited difficulty. The people of Le Chambon, noble though they were, only responded to a time-limited crisis. After helping those being persecuted during a World War II, most, or all of them went back to their other commitments. After the war, their moral commitment of providing shelter to the persecuted went back into dormancy. No doubt it might emerge again during a local crisis, but their commitment to a deep kind of hospitality probably did not extend past their location in place and the time of crisis. In other words, they probably did not reach out to great distances to find people in need of protection from persecution. I call this time-limited moral commitment a reactive moral commitment.

In contrast to a reactive moral commitment, Julia Ruuttila continually sought out people in need of protection from persecution. This commitment to continually reach out to the victims of oppression is a pro-active moral commitment. Though the moral commitment of the citizens of Le Chambon was certainly praiseworthy, the moral commitment of Julia Ruuttila seems to be more important because it reaches out to, not only responding to, the needs of the oppressed. Though Julia Ruuttila's commitment may have been limited by various factors such as her fragile health, it was

not limited by any dormancy period. Jess Stranahan[19] said this about Ruuttila's commitment.

> There are people who have thrown themselves in struggles for what they call the masses. Social evils that need to be corrected need to be corrected on a blanket mass base. But when it comes to pitching in and helping some particular individual person that's not part of an overall political struggle that's being done in by the system, this is something that many of these people that are champions of the overall cause are not there on.
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> If someone was being kicked around, Julia would take it up because this person's being kicked around.

4. Moral Commitment in the Face of Fear, Risk and Violence

As I mentioned earlier, I shall now discuss how moral commitment is a better response to immorality than heroic courage because one with a moral commitment moderates one's response to fear, risk and violence. This moderation counters the dissociation that can easily occur in immoral acts as well as acts of heroic courage. Dissociation is a worry in morality because it can isolate one's self from one's body and feelings. This isolation can erode empathy and compassion.

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[19] Polishuk 6.

In turning to the problem of immorality, immoral commitments and immoral compulsions and the response of a moral commitment, I depend on a psychological insight about fear, risk and violence. This insight suggests that there occurs a dissociation between one's sense of self and one's body and emotions that seems to often accompany fear, risk and violence. In does not matter if that fear, risk or violence is justified, nor whether one is a victim or a perpetrator--in any case, dissociation can and often occurs. One worry about dissociation is that it can desensitize. And when one becomes desensitized, one can lose a sense of empathy for others. This presents a difficulty for both the victim and victimizer, both the hero and the antihero.

As and example, a person with post-traumatic stress disorder has endured great fears, risks and/or violence. This trauma tends to cause one to identify oneself in isolation from one's true feelings. In turn, this split makes it harder to identify with the true feelings of others.

One with a moral commitment can moderate one's response to risk, fear and violence by keeping a steady engagement with fear, risk and potential violence without taking extraordinary risks. As an example, one who has a commitment to end racism can engage in this cause steadily without having to perform an heroic rescue in an incident of racist

violence. In an incident of racist violence, the police[20] can be called in and monitored without having to directly engage oneself. This strategy of moderation minimizes the possibility of dissociation, desensitization and disconnection with others. In this way, moral commitment has yet another crucial advantage over heroic courage that likely generates dissociation, desensitization and disconnection.

The heroic response to immorality involves reacting to extremes. Where immorality is seen as cloaked in secrecy, the heroic emphasizes display. Where immorality is seen as involving fear, the heroic reacts with fearlessness. Where immorality is seen as involving risk, the heroic reacts with recklessness. And where immorality is seen as violence, the heroic engages that violence and often escalates it.

The heroic response is bipolar in that it sees weakness and strength as dramatic opposites, hiddenness and display as opposites, fear and fearlessness as opposites, risk and recklessness as opposites. Only the violence of immorality is embraced and not countered in the heroic response. Violence is embraced because it is often openly dramatic. These dichotomies and unities are played out endlessly in

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[20] Hopefully, the police will be well enough organized and supported so that they will not have to resort to the heroic either.

popular movies and television--where heroes battle villains--the violence of the battle being the openly dramatic display.

The moral strength/commitment reinterpretation rejects this particular dramatic view. It rejects it because the this view supposes that moral responses must be extreme and center stage. Display, fearlessness and recklessness are extreme and obvious. The moral strength/commitment view does not deny the importance of public exposure, control of fear and willingness to accept risks. It does, however, maintain that public exposure need not become display, control of fear need not be fearlessness and the willingness to accept risks need not become a calculated recklessness. Making moral commitments to help improve the general human condition can proceed in this moderate way.

My diagnosis of the heroic view is that it is fixated on overcoming weakness, hiddenness, risk and fear. Additionally, the heroic often involves enduring potential violence through denial, dissociation or giving it the gloss of positive stimulation. In contrast to this fixation and denial and dissociation, grassroots activists who illustrate the moral strength/commitment view, focus on the way that projects can improve the general human condition. This focus emphasizes the importance of moral commitments over any obsession about character traits. People of various

strengths and weaknesses can work together with positive moral commitments to improve the human condition. Grassroots activists are not a collection of heroes, but a collection of ordinary people who seek a kind of responsible moderation over extremes in their lives by placing commitment over character perfectionism (the garden over the gardener).

Importantly, this moderate way is more accessible to, and inclusive of, ordinary people. Interestingly, this moderate way is much in the spirit of Aristotle's notion of moderation, though when he spoke of courage, he seemed to be overly influenced by the heroic view.[21]

Again, Julia Ruuttila's life expresses this moderate way. Her moral strength was not undermined by her fears of risk. Sandra Ford tells this story about Ruuttila's struggles with fear.

> She's a good role model for standing up for your principles. You know, for being an ethical person. I think Julia was one of the most ethical people I've ever known. She just had these principles.
>
> And how to handle your fear. We were at a demonstration and she got pushed around. And she was such a small, frail looking person, you know? And I said, "God, Julia, don't you ever get afraid

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[21] Aristotle's influence by the heroic view seems to come from his thinking of courage within the paradigm of the battlefield. See Stephen R. Leignton, "Aristotle's Courageous Passions," Phronesis XXXIII/I (1988) for a detailed account of Aristotle's use of the battlefield paradigm.

you'll get hurt?" And she says, "Oh, sometimes I get afraid they'll beat me up, or I get afraid of this, afraid of that, you know."

I remember once asking her if she ever got frightened living alone, because she was so political, and our paranoia was at incredible heights, and as it's turned out it was real to be paranoid. She didn't tell me no, she said, "Yeah, I get afraid, but I don't know what good it would do me to not do what I'm doing." That kind of sticks in my head because my father used to say that all the time, you know, that there wasn't anything wrong with being afraid, it was how you handled the fear. And she personified that lesson that he would tell us. She handled her fears in a really good way.[22]

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[22] Polishuk 2.

CHAPTER V

ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY MORALITY

In the first part of this chapter, I contrast extraordinary morality with ordinary morality to introduce the way that the image of the heroic can privilege extraordinary morality and support the class structure[1]. I begin by focusing primarily upon extraordinary morality and then turn to a discussion of ordinary morality. However, in both sections, I compare and contrast these two kinds of morality with each other. In the second part of this chapter, I give a more detailed account of an argument against having extraordinary morality central to ethics.

I suggest that extraordinary morality is about the morality of episodic high-risk-takers, who are often recognized as heroes and even saints, and that ordinary morality is about the morality of people with ongoing moral commitments. I argue that the agents of extraordinary

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[1] The class structure identified by Marx and Engels focuses on the main camps of proletariat and bourgeoisie and defines them in relation to the ownership of the means of production. Marx and Engels contrast this fundamental class structure with status groups that reflect the ranking of individuals on various criteria. I suggest that we consider classes as heroic and non heroic. The heroic class is the class of political and economic "players" and the non heroic class is the class of those played as objects by the heroic players. This division roughly approximates the bourgeoisie/proletariat division, but it highlights the classes' narrative roles, rather than their purely economic roles.

morality, as described above, tend to generate private value and status from the recognition given in our society. This accumulation of private value and status tends to take away from their commitment to public value. Stated in another way, the private power they gain tends to corrupt their ability to generate public value. I suggest that this corruption undermines a consistent showing and testing of moral commitments. Therefore, any claims that they might have concerning ongoing moral commitments are undermined. There may be a few exceptions to these tendencies, but they are rare.

To illustrate this point, take the case of T. E. Lawrence. He claimed to have the moral commitment to help the Arabs achieve independence from colonization. But in the process of becoming a hero of the Arab revolt against the Turks, Lawrence's expanding vanity provided the corruption that undermined this commitment. Rather than delivering the Arabs from colonialism, he merely replaced the Turkish yoke with a British yoke.

In addition to these tendencies, perhaps the most powerful effect of privileging the extraordinary is the image of the heroic that is stamped on the elite class. The elite class are the players and all others are the objects of their play. This image of the heroic props up the class structure because the media and the arts focus on the drama of the

elites and the public sees elites within the heroic mode. In other words, the elites are the stars of the show and the public are the audience in the darkened theater. Once the class structure gains this narrative support, everyone has a tendency to accept it as the status quo--the story of life as we know it.

I have suggested that the agents of ordinary morality are uncelebrated and ordinary people who tend to integrate private concerns with ongoing commitments that generate public value. Because they tend to be unrecognized, there is less opportunity for the corrupting influences that affect extraordinary moral agents, as described above. I suggest that since these people are not derailed from their task of generating public value, their ongoing moral commitments may be more clearly shown.

The work that is done to describe extraordinary morality and ordinary morality will be helpful towards my argument that any morality generated from the activities of extraordinary people is not a morality that should be central to ethics and social/political philosophy. Instead, morality that is generated from the moral commitments of ordinary people should be central to ethics and social/political philosophy.

1. Extraordinary Morality

I suggest that a helpful way to understand extraordinary morality is to think of it as the morality of extraordinary acts. I call the people that perform these acts extraordinary moral agents. Like T. E. Lawrence, these people are capable of extraordinary acts that the common person does not seem to have the power nor opportunity to accomplish. Lawrence, as a British officer, was able to join and lead the Arab insurrection because he had extraordinary skills combined with extraordinary opportunities. The difficulty that these extraordinary, heroic acts presents is that people capable of them may not be the best role models for the moral life. While the acts themselves may be moral, the person who performs the act may not be the best model of the moral life. Lawrence's heroic acts contributed to the Arab insurrection, but his leadership and commitment to the long term liberation of the Arabs from colonialism was faulty and troubled by weakness. In this way, extraordinary moral agents may not be fully moral because they may show little evidence of socially significant moral commitments. To illustrate this, let's look more carefully at some additional examples of extraordinary moral acts.

If someone rescues a drowning child from a river, it is clear that she has done an extraordinary moral act. We would

even go so far as to say that she has shown great heroic courage. However, do we have evidence, in this one act, that she has a socially significant moral commitment? It seems that we have one piece of evidence. But that evidence could be contradicted by later evidence. Suppose we find out later that the same person is involved in a daring robbery of an armored truck carrying a full load of bank receipts.

In both cases, the person showed heroic courage and daring. However, the first case showed evidence of generating public value[2] by rescuing the child, whereas the second case showed evidence of generating illicit private value by robbing the armored truck. After gaining both pieces of evidence, we have a case of an extraordinary moral agent, who has the capacity for extraordinary moral and immoral acts; however, the contradictory evidence undermines any claim to a socially significant moral commitment.

Though other extraordinary moral agents may do extraordinary acts that are moral and none that are immoral, they may still not offer any evidence of socially significant moral commitments. As an example, Audie Murphy saved his buddies from an attack by risking his life to divert the enemy's attention. Undoubtedly, this is an extraordinary

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[2] See the previous chapter for a detailed explanation of the generation of public and private value.

moral act. To perform such an act, a person must be an extraordinary moral agent. However, we again have only one piece of evidence that this person has a socially significant moral commitment.

This evidence may be contradicted by other evidence. This other evidence need not be evidence of immoral acts, as in the example above. It may be that the person spends the rest of his life performing amoral acts. Audie Murphy came home a highly recognized war hero and used his notoriety and status to become a minor movie star. To an observer, this career generated private value, without noticeably undermining public value. So, it cannot easily be called an immoral career. On the other hand, his career did not seem to generate any significant public value. So, it may not have involved any socially significant moral commitment.

In Audie Murphy's case, he did not make any pretense that he was making a socially significant moral commitment. He spent most of his life trying to recover from the trauma of the war. In another case, we can imagine a war hero returning to his home and using his notoriety and status to create a successful political career. Suppose that this political career is ostensibly committed to the generation of public value. However, upon careful study, observers discover that his political career actually served the interests of the ruling elite. This generation of private

value, in the interests of an exclusive group, undermined any claim to the creation of public value. And without any creation of public value, the war hero has no claim to a socially significant moral commitment.

Now, let's look at an even more difficult case. A person devotes his life to helping the homeless to the point of becoming homeless himself. He is skilled in his media relations and receives widespread recognition for his tireless work and vow of personal poverty. Each day, he performs acts that aid the homeless. Each act is certainly a moral act. And the aggregate of acts seem to give us evidence that this person has a socially significant moral commitment. However, upon closer examination of this person's life, it turns out that he was using his access to the homeless--gained from his media generated heroism--to coerce individuals into sexual encounters.

This evidence that is uncovered about his sex life undermines his claim to a socially significant moral commitment. Though he appeared to be a hero and even a saint, it turns out that he used his notoriety, status and position in the vulnerable lives of the homeless to gain immoral private value. Even if he had only used his position to obtain an extraordinarily high salary, he would still undermine his claim to a socially significant moral commitment. It should be noted that he might not totally

undermine his claim to a moral commitment, but I think he has certainly trivialized it.

In these examples, we have seen how a focus on a single extraordinary moral act or an isolated set of extraordinary moral acts can be a fragile method of determining whether a person has a socially significant moral commitment. Though one may appear to be a hero or saint from this collection of extraordinary moral acts, one may not be able to claim full morality in the sense that one has a socially significant moral commitment. This kind of full or complete morality would seem to rest on the ongoing, socially significant moral commitments to create public value that are not undermined by immoral or amoral commitments to create private value. In other words, one's full morality rests on one's moral integrity shown in the preceding way.

Interestingly, extraordinary moral acts may take a great deal of heroic risk and public exposure and yet may not be able to generate the kind of public value that a simple socially significant moral commitment could generate on less risk and less public exposure. Though I don't want to underestimate the risk and public exposure involved in ordinary socially significant moral commitments, one must admit that the risk and public exposure is not on the same level as extraordinary moral acts. In the extraordinary acts cited above, of jumping into a dangerous river, facing

enemy gunfire and devoting one's life to helping the homeless by becoming homeless oneself, one appears to be taking so much risk that it's like throwing one's life away. In some cases, vanity or self-loathing may be at the root of this fearlessness and seeming recklessness. If this is the case, then these vices may contribute to the inability of an extraordinary moral agent to make socially significant moral commitments.

2. Ordinary Morality

I suggest that it is helpful to think of ordinary morality as the morality of ordinary commitments. Because practically everyone[3] has at least minimal moral commitments, practically everyone participates in ordinary morality. This is contrasted to extraordinary morality, where only extraordinary moral agents perform extraordinary moral acts. In the cases that follow, I will avoid any examples where one shows only minimal moral commitments--these have been discussed in detail earlier in this dissertation. Rather, I will give cases of ordinary morality where ordinary moral agents show socially significant moral commitments

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[3] The possible exception to this is the psychopath or sociopath, who stalks and preys on others, and does not identify with any group to gain their positive values.

Early in this century, Grace Reeves, who had been caring for her aging mother, decided not to marry the man she loved, so that she could devote herself to her mother's needs. She became a school teacher to nourish other people's children, though she had none of her own. She gladly befriended neighbor children, one of whom was me, and gently helped them come to understand the world. She clearly went beyond polite social conventions to do good in the world. The good that she did was not trivial, though it was seldom recognized. She took only moderate public risks, though the aggregate of her generous acts added up to great public value. Though she didn't push herself into the public limelight, she would not have shrunk from it if it had chosen to shine on her.

She had a private life that was nicely integrated with her public life. Neither life was sacrificed for the other. She wasn't vain, fearless or reckless. She had a clear socially significant moral commitment to care for those in need and help young people understand the world. There was no evidence to undermine this claim.

Another example of this kind involves Julia Ruuttila, who dedicated her life to establishing the rights of workers and other grass-roots social and political causes. She always seemed to be nearby when a human rights project was

underway. The following story from Lois Stranahan illustrates the modesty of her moral commitment.

> We were always on a picket line for the farm workers, boycotting grapes and lettuce and trying to help organize on behalf of the farm workers, and to knock out the pesticides, and here it is still going on and it's even worse.
>
> One of our very dear friends from the longshoremen, he was always kind of keeping an eye out for this sort of thing on the waterfront, and one time grapes came in, and they came in listed "golden trout" during the boycott, and so, Rocky Brown called me, and then I in turn called Julia, and I said we gotta get a hold of the committee, and the longshoremen, I'm sure, at the noon break will support the picket line if we can get it organized, and boy, I'll tell you, we called different ones and had said call five people, and we called the news media. So by noon break before they came back at one o'clock, we had this huge picket line organized.
>
> And so we got down there, and we had all the news there, and it was quite a crowd. Of course, Julia said, "Now, we'll stay back because we don't want y'know, the fellas to know that we were the ones the did the organizing. It was just organized by the committee, the UFW committee.
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> So we pulled it off. They didn't unload the grapes. And went down south. The San Francisco longshoremen refused to unload 'em, and wherever they went, I don't know, but I'm sure they were rotten by the time they got there.[4]

As you can see, she never sought to draw attention to herself and never took unreasonable risks. She received scant

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[4] Sandy Polishuk, ed., I Had a Typewriter: An Oral History of the Life of Julia Ruuttila, (Portland: privately printed, 1993) 5-6.

recognition during her lifetime, though she is remembered fondly in death. She had a clear socially significant moral commitment to help the excluded and expendable find a dignified place in this world. Like Grace Reeves, there was no evidence to undermine this claim.

One distinction between these two women was that Julia's moral commitment was more public and involved more risk. One could argue that Grace's moral commitment was somewhat more reactive and Julia's somewhat was more pro-active[5].

A more difficult example is the case of Mother Teresa. Here is a woman who has received recognition for her ongoing good work with the poor and sick. Her notoriety does not seem to have undermined her socially significant moral commitment. Her claim to sainthood does not seem to be undermined by the temptations of excessive private values generated by fame. Though other extraordinary moral agents are tempted by the status and comforts generated by public recognition, Mother Teresa has resisted these temptations.

In this way, the example of Mother Teresa illustrates that extraordinary morality can, in some rare instances, involve taking great risks without being vain, reckless and

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[5] See the previous chapter for a more detailed explanation of pro-active and reactive moral commitments.

fearless and being able to maintain public celebrity status without using it for vain, private purposes. And, of course, being able to continue to do extraordinary acts while maintaining the socially significant moral commitment of ordinary morality--without resting on one's laurels.

There are two things that are particularly interesting about this example. First, Mother Teresa shows that ordinary moral agents can, in rare circumstances, be extraordinary moral agents. Though it is usually the case that ordinary moral agents are not extraordinary moral agents and that extraordinary moral agents are not ordinary moral agents, Mother Teresa is an exception to the rule.

Second, Mother Teresa shows her socially significant moral commitment through her resistance to the pitfalls of extraordinary morality. This commitment is rare indeed. The only remaining problem in Mother Teresa's case is that she may have used the ego-gratification of her notoriety to fuel her extraordinary moral acts. I know of similar cases where a person is able to sacrifice her private life to public works because of the fame and consequent ego-gratification. There is something disturbing in this kind of person--they seem to be vaguely inhuman. If a saint of this kind is somewhat inhuman, it makes it seem undesirable to be like her. If it is undesirable to follow in her footsteps, then she does not provide a role model for ordinary morality.

Rather, she is just another inaccessible elite--and isolated extraordinary moral agent. This worry about the inhumanness of sainthood is discussed in detail by Susan Wolf[6].

My only additional comment is that there are doubtless many other unrecognized Mother Teresas. It seems that the world of extraordinary people can only be populated by one such saint at a time. This observation is one piece of evidence that extraordinary morality and extraordinary moral agents are a curious social construction that is more about elitism than morality. I suggest that the social construction of extraordinary morality and extraordinary moral agents arises from the dramatic form that privileges the heroic elite. History presents a theatrical stage that is populated by elites as the heroes of history. In this view of history as theatrical drama, the common person is in the darkened audience--and the common person's ordinary morality is also in the shadows.

We need more evidence to show that this it true, but it is interesting to speculate that extraordinary morality, as a social construction, is created in the interests of those who dominate our culture. It is certainly in the interests of this elite to make it seem that only extraordinary people can

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[6] Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," The Journal of Philosophy (August 1982): 419-439.

perform heroic acts. If these heroic acts are the standard for quintessential moral activity, than the less risky, less public, less recognized moral commitments of ordinary people are undermined. Given this climate, elites gain a kind of deceptive "moral dominance," through a kind of theatrical dominance, as well as the pure dominance of power. If this is the case, discourse about moral commitment can counter this effort at "moral dominance." This view needs elaboration and support that cannot be given here.

3. An Argument Against Extraordinary Morality

Hopefully, the above discussion has shed some doubt on the morality of extraordinary acts of heroism. Hopefully, the reader is beginning to wonder whether these extraordinary acts should be peripheral to ethics and social/political philosophy. From this analysis, we might begin to wonder if these extraordinary acts are anomalies of morality, rather that paradigmatic aspects of morality. What is important about this consideration is that moderately risky and moderately public moral commitments are arguably more central to ethics and social/political philosophy than highly risky, highly public acts of extraordinary heroism. From this, it becomes clear that extraordinary morality should <u>not</u> be central to ethics and social/political philosophy; and ordinary morality, as I understand it, should be central to

ethics and social/political philosophy. My argument proceeds from the understanding that what should be central to ethics and social/political philosophy involves the moral commitments of all or most people's lives. As I have explained extraordinary morality, it does not involve the moral commitments of all or most people's lives. And, as I have explained ordinary morality, it does involve the moral commitments of all or most people's lives.

The terms, "extraordinary morality" and "ordinary morality" have helped us reach this conclusion. This is their key advantage. Though they have the disadvantage of seeming to divide morality into two units, extraordinary and ordinary, this disadvantage can be overcome by understanding that extraordinary morality is really a kind of anomaly of morality. This is the case for two reasons. First, only a few people give evidence of this kind of morality. And second, the phenomenology of extraordinary acts that are the focus of this kind of morality, give us suspicions that these few people are not as fully moral as other people who consistently show socially significant moral commitments. On the other hand, ordinary morality encompasses practically everyone, because as discussed earlier, practically everyone has either minimal or socially significant moral commitments as explained earlier.

In formal terms, the argument that I am presenting has three key moves. These moves are: first, socially significant (heraic) moral commitments are central to ordinary morality, not extraordinary morality. Second, heroic acts of courage are central to extraordinary morality, not ordinary morality. Third, since socially significant (heraic) moral commitments are more fully moral than heroic acts of courage, ordinary morality is more fully moral than extraordinary morality.

The first general observation to be made about this argument is that the three moves actually suggest eight claims that need to be supported to ensure the logic of the conclusion. These eight claims are the following: first, socially significant moral commitments are central to ordinary morality (from move one); second, socially significant moral commitments are not an aspect of extraordinary morality (also from move one); third, acts of heroic courage are central to extraordinary morality (from move two); fourth, acts of heroic courage are not central to ordinary morality (also from move two); fifth, socially significant moral commitments do not require acts of heroic courage (implied by move one and two); sixth, acts of heroic courage do not require socially significant moral commitments (implied by move one and two); seventh, socially significant moral commitments are more fully moral than acts of heroic

courage (from move three); and eighth, ordinary morality is more fully moral than extraordinary morality (from move three). In this chapter, each of these claims will be established in detail to support the moves of the argument.

In the following, I will examine each of these eight claims, one by one. This discussion will also take place in light of the ways that these claims might be misunderstood. Additionally, I will raise and answer some important objections to these claims. It is important to note that some of the support for these claims has been given in earlier chapters.

3.1 Socially Significant Moral Commitments Are Central to Ordinary Morality

Starting with the first claim, "socially significant moral commitments are central to ordinary morality," I will begin by reviewing our understanding of socially significant moral commitments. A person has this kind of commitment when she acts to significantly improve the general human condition. To insure that one is actually improving the general human condition, one probably needs to be in dialogue with others who are also engaged in the same commitment. In this way, moral dialogue with others seems as crucial as individual moral reflection in generating an authentic socially significant moral commitment. And, of course, one's

commitments need to be open to public inspection to ensure the full morality of these commitments. In some cases (detailed earlier), public inspection is needed to determine if one is using moral commitments to hide immoral activities.

Next, we need to review our understanding of ordinary morality. As explained earlier, ordinary morality is centered around the moral activities of ordinary people. The best of these activities of ordinary people are socially significant moral commitments. Since socially significant moral commitments are the highest moral activity, as shown in the hierarchy of moral activities described earlier, ordinary morality finds its anchor and grounding in these highest of moral activities. Surrounding this anchor are all the more minimal moral commitments. From this perspective, the extraordinary morality of episodic heroic and courageous acts stands on the periphery of morality along with minimal moral commitments, not at its core. We might even say that extraordinary morality is an anomaly of morality because of its rarity and its problematic aspects.

As an illustration of this view of morality, let's look at the way we might compare the moralities of divergent peoples. If we describe the morality of an African tribe, we will be interested in its highest moral principles. If we find that their highest moral principle is to improve the general human condition in the manner described above--and we

find that this corresponds with a Native American tribe--we can say that the two moralities have an important similarity and that these moralities affirm the centrality of socially significant moral commitments. To confirm this description, we will need to examine the practices of both tribes.

On the other hand, we can look at Nazi morality and find that the highest moral principle is a kind of loftily disguised opportunism and submission to authority. The absence of any socially significant moral commitments can lead us to say that Nazi morality was inferior to the hypothetical tribal moralities described above. This is the case regardless of any occurrence of Nazi heroic courage.

In these illustrations, we found that it was crucial to find the core of their ordinary moralities, as embodied in their highest moral principles. It was also crucial to examine those principles <u>in action</u> to determine the actual character of those principles. In the case of Nazi morality, we could not just look to their moral pronouncements about creating an improved human species (master race). We needed to see this pronouncement in the context of the opportunities that it gave the Nazi's for seizing and consolidating their domination over Germany and Europe. And as mentioned above, evidence of acts of Nazi heroic courage would not be relevant to our work.

Importantly, this discussion rejects any absolute relativism that would prevent us from making a cross-cultural moral comparison. I am arguing that a socially significant moral commitment should be the core principle of all moralities. Any morality without socially significant moral commitments at its center is lacking. In this way, I am arguing for an ordinary morality that is ordinary or applicable to all human experience.

This brings us to the objection that if certain moralities do not have socially significant moral commitments at their core and therefore ordinary people within these moralities do not have these kinds of commitments, doesn't this undermine the claim that socially significant moral commitments are central to ordinary morality? Along this same line, one might wonder whether most moralities might lack socially significant moral commitments at their core--then only extraordinary moralities would have socially significant moral commitments at their core. If this objection has merit, then it undermines the claim being made in this section.

To answer this objection, I remind the reader that ordinary morality, as understood in the previous chapter includes a continuum of minimal and socially significant commitments. In contrast to this, extraordinary morality only includes extraordinary acts of courage, heroism and

saintliness. Though few moralities may actually reach the highest socially significant moral commitment to improve the general human condition--all moralities include some segment of the continuum of minimal to socially significant moral commitments. In this way, socially significant moral commitments are a part of ordinary morality, not extraordinary morality. From this discussion, we can see that the objection raised above was based on a misunderstanding where only the strongest socially significant moral commitments are thought to be in ordinary morality, rather than a continuum of minimal to socially significant moral commitments.

3.2 Socially Significant Moral Commitments Are Not an Aspect of Extraordinary Morality

Moving to the second claim, "socially significant moral commitments are not an aspect of extraordinary morality," I suggest we understand this claim as following from the previous discussion. Extraordinary morality is the province of heroic, courageous and saintly acts. Socially significant moral commitments do not necessarily involve heroic, courageous and saintly acts--and are, therefore, a part of ordinary morality.

However, we must address the case of Mother Teresa who does saintly acts and has socially significant moral

commitments. Doesn't this observation suggest that we should put her socially significant moral commitments into the category of extraordinary morality, along with her saintly acts? How can we separate these?

To answer this objection, I suggest that the reader note that only Mother Teresa, or another saint, can accomplish her saintly acts. On the other hand, ordinary people can have or make her socially significant moral commitments--indeed many people do make these socially significant moral commitments. Because ordinary people can easily integrate socially significant moral commitments into their lives, socially significant moral commitments are <u>not</u> an aspect of extraordinary morality.

3.3 Acts of Heroic Courage Are Central to Extraordinary Morality

The third claim is: acts of heroic courage are central to extraordinary morality. This is a restatement of the first part of move two. If we understand that acts of heroic courage are themselves extraordinary, it follows fairly easily that these acts are central to extraordinary morality. This insight about acts of heroic courage is, no doubt, at the root of these acts being considered supererogatory by some philosophers. However, these acts are all too often paradigmatic of what it is like to be a fully moral and

virtuous person. Classical philosophers and Homeric epics are at the start of this hero-worshipping tradition within Western culture and it has had a rich history in both our literature and our philosophy. Heroic vitalism is merely its latest expression.

3.4 Acts of Heroic Courage Are Not Central to Ordinary Morality

The fourth claim is: acts of heroic courage are not central to ordinary morality. This claim is a restatement of the latter part of move two. Because acts of heroic courage are extraordinary, it seems strange to consider them central to ordinary morality. Once a dichotomy has been drawn between extraordinary and ordinary morality, it seems easy to see that acts of heroic courage belong in extraordinary morality and moral commitments belong in ordinary morality. On the other hand, if there is no dichotomy drawn between ordinary and extraordinary morality, then it is easy to see how the visibility of acts of heroic courage might stand at center stage in the moral landscape while more modest moral commitments are shunted offstage.

One reason that there has been little effort to draw the dichotomy between ordinary morality and extraordinary morality has been the absence of an alternative to acts of heroic courage to take the center stage of ordinary morality.

Contemporary feminism has been helpful in identifying hidden moral commitments in the lives of nurturing people. This philosophical, political and literary effort on the part of feminists has given us support for fleshing out the identity and centrality of socially significant moral commitments.

3.5 Socially Significant Moral Commitments Do Not Require Acts of Heroic Courage

The fifth claim is: socially significant moral commitments do not require acts of heroic courage. This claim is unstated but implied by the separation of ordinary morality and extraordinary morality. To defend this claim, I want to raise two objections to it. The first will be that socially significant moral commitments must require some heroic courage and second that socially significant moral commitments must at least require an occasional act of heroic courage.

The first objection begins as follows. If we understand the highest moral commitment as a commitment to improve the general human condition, isn't it likely that such a lofty commitment will require heroic courage? Since few people have a commitment to improve the general human condition, these few people must be extraordinary and heroic--and their actions must require heroic courage.

To answer this objection, I suggest that the desire to improve the human condition is not as rare as is supposed. It can be found in the simple desire for meaningful work. It is common for people to seek meaningful work that transcends a mere exchange of work-hours or investment for wages or profit. How else can we understand this urge than the desire to improve the general human condition?

As an illustration of this, people usually go into human service work because they simply want to help people. People usually go into wildlife work because they want to improve the natural habitat. Even people who go into profit generating businesses often believe that their business creates human value beyond the bottom financial accounting line. If it was just the bottom line that most people worried about, organized crime would be even more popular than it is.

I must agree that, in certain analyses, it can be argued that few people actually improve the human condition, but not because people do not have that aspiration. It is merely because the institutions that support work for improvement of the general human condition are not particularly viable under capitalism.

If we grant that people seek meaningful work that entails socially significant moral commitments, we need to determine whether socially significant moral commitments are

within the reach of ordinary people. If our economic institutions prevent work that entails socially significant moral commitments, then it is not the fault of ordinary people--but rather the fault of the elite who design, maintain and profit from those economic institutions. Interestingly, these elite people are an extraordinary group, not an ordinary group of people.

The difference between the few people who are able to make the highest moral commitment and those who desire to make this commitment to improve the general human condition, but fail to find a way to do it, is usually not a matter of a difference in heroic courage, but a difference in viable proximity to groups where one can manifest this commitment. Again, the lack of groups where one can make a socially significant moral commitment is predominantly caused by an economy hostile to the financial viability and security of those groups dedicated to generating a kind of public value not reducible to monetary terms.[7]

This difference in viable proximity is a logistical problem, not a problem of the absence of moral commitment. In other words, moral aspirations alone will not ensure that

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[7] An important qualification needs to be made here. Traditional women's and mother's domestic work is difficult, if not impossible, to reduce to monetary terms. In this way, women, in mothering the people of the world, have a socially significant moral commitment that largely goes unrecognized.

one can make a moral commitment. People must be able to organize themselves into viable groups where socially significant moral commitments can be generated and maintained. If people are preoccupied with other economic and cultural concerns, and there are few opportunities where people can work toward general human improvement, we cannot expect that people's desire for meaningful work will be fulfilled.

To close my response to the objection raised above, I will summarize my reply by saying that even if there are few people who are actually able to maintain the highest moral commitment to improve the general human condition, they are not extraordinary and heroic because many others would do the same thing if they had the opportunity. Therefore, socially significant moral commitments do not require acts of heroic courage. Rather, socially significant moral commitments require moral aspirations and a viable proximity to groups that facilitate the generation and maintenance of these commitments.

However, even if it is granted that socially significant moral commitments do not require heroic courage, might these commitments require occasional acts of heroic courage? Any person who is trying to improve the general human condition, in this historical period where capitalism and militarism are arguably undermining the general human

condition, may easily find herself in circumstances where heroic courage is required to meet specific challenges. If acts of heroic courage are required, at least occasionally, to meet these challenges, can't we say that this observation has undermined the claim that socially significant moral commitments do not require acts of heroic courage.

In answering this objection, I must allow that socially significant moral commitments require a continuous series of actions throughout one's life. I must also allow that it is not unreasonable to suppose that a few actions in this series of actions may require heroic courage--given the contemporary hostile climate.

Let us suppose a worst case scenario where a person is not able to accomplish these few actions due to a lack of heroic courage. This lack of heroic courage may be for psychological reasons that have nothing to do with the person's commitment. On the other hand, the person may simply be intimidated by a great fear, a great risk, or the prospect of violence. However, despite these difficulties, this person still maintains her commitment at every other opportunity that does not require any heroic courage.

Can't we still suppose that this person has maintained her moral commitment to the best of her ability? Disappointment must have occurred when she was unable to accomplish certain acts, yet she came back and continued her

socially significant moral commitment. Her persistence in the face of failure further affirms her moral commitment. Though she expresses no particular courageousness, she maintains her moral commitment and therefore she expresses her moral strength.

If we combine the previous observation that people may not be able to make moral commitments because of logistical problems with the current observation that people may not be able to accomplish every action that might be associated with a socially significant moral commitment, we find that an ethics that focuses on personal virtue may be inadequate. Personal virtue may have little to do with the ability to make a moral commitment. And personal virtue may have little to do with maintaining every aspect of a moral commitment. In other words, a person who is not particularly courageous may seem inadequate on a virtue-based ethical analysis, nonetheless that person may be adequate on a moral commitment analysis.

3.6 Acts of Heroic Courage Do Not Require Moral Commitment

Moving to the sixth claim, that acts of heroic courage do not require moral commitment, we might wonder if a person without moral commitment is able to do anything courageously. One might suggest that heroic courage must draw on some

source of inner commitment. Shouldn't we think of this inner commitment as moral commitment?

To answer this objection, I want to allow that courageous people may draw on some source of commitment. However, I question whether that commitment is best termed, "moral commitment." To see this more clearly, let's look closer at what kind of commitment is needed for courageous acts. As we have discussed earlier in the work, it seems that heroic courage primarily requires the overcoming of fear, the willingness to take frightening risks and endure possible violence. So the commitment necessary for heroic courage is the commitment to overcome fear and risk harm in a given situation.

This kind of courageous commitment has a relationship to fear and harm in a particular situation. On the other hand, moral commitment has a relationship to ongoing moral commitments. As explained above, this moral commitment need not require heroic courage. To show the contrast between these two kinds of commitment, I will use the metaphor of bridging. The commitment of moral commitment is like a bridge between two shores that may crumble in frighteningly bad weather, but be rebuilt again in calm weather. The commitment of heroic courage is like an expensive yacht that can ferry people between two shores during frighteningly bad weather, but cannot be relied upon for daily travel. The

bridge illustrates the commitment to allow people ongoing mobility across an expanse of water. The yacht illustrates the courageous commitment to cross the expanse of water during horrendous conditions. The yacht does not necessarily illustrate an ongoing moral commitment.

Just as these two metaphors are dramatically different from each other, the two commitments that they express are also dramatically different from each other. Because of this contrast, it seems wrong to think that courageous commitment is necessarily moral commitment. Rather, courageous commitment is better expressed as the commitment to overcome fear, take risks and endure violence. Furthermore, heroic courage for some may be a mere reflexive response to fear, risk and violence and not be an expression of any kind of commitment. For this reason, it seems that we can easily claim that heroic courage does not require moral commitment.

3.7 Socially Significant Moral Commitments Are More Fully Moral Than Acts of Heroic Courage

The seventh claim is: socially significant moral commitments are more fully moral than acts of heroic courage. This is expressed by the first part of the third move of the argument. This claim is at the heart of the sea change that I am suggesting in ethics. In virtue ethics, I am suggesting that the virtue of heroic courage should not be central and

that moral commitment should not be seen as a mere replacement for heroic courage. Rather, moral commitment is not simply an individual virtue, but is constructed from personal, social and situational elements.

Likewise, in other ethical systems that use heroic courage as a way of countering weakness in applying ethical intentions, rules, or theories, the notion of moral commitment also represents a sea change. The notion of moral commitment offers a way out of the heroic courage/weakness dichotomy. Again, this is because the notion of moral commitment is at least partly constructed by social institutions and circumstances, in addition to the fact that moral commitments are often unseen and unaffirmed.

3.8 Ordinary Morality Is More Fully Moral Than Extraordinary Morality

The eight and final claim is: ordinary morality is more fully moral than extraordinary morality. This is the conclusion of the third move of the argument. It builds on all the work done in the previous seven claims. The key insight of this claim is that extraordinary morality is not within the experience of most people. In other words, the conditions where extraordinary morality apply are extreme conditions--conditions of great fear, risk and violence. In contrast, conditions where ordinary morality apply are

moderate conditions--conditions of moderate fear and risk, with relatively no prospect of violence. The case in support of this claim turns on the view that ordinary conditions are where one finds oneself most of the time and therefore one's moral actions and aspirations in those conditions constitutes a full sense of morality. In contrast, rare and extreme conditions would hardly be the place to gain this full sense of morality.

We have now covered each of the eight claims that are involved in the three moves of the argument of this chapter. Now, I will summarize how the three moves of the argument have been adequately supported.

3.9 Summary

The first move of the argument is that socially significant moral commitments are central to ordinary morality, not extraordinary morality. One key insight about this move is that it is not necessary that the strongest moral commitment be a part of every morality on the face of the earth. There needs to only be evidence of a continuum between minimal commitments and socially significant moral commitments to support the case that socially significant moral commitments are central to ordinary morality. Even if some cultures have only minimal moral commitments, this exception would not disprove the assertion of this move. It

would only show that some cultures (possibly Nazi culture) do not have ordinary morality. In summary, this move is well supported as soon as we realize the ordinariness of moral commitments and the extra-ordinariness of acts of heroic courage.

The second move of the argument is that heroic acts of courage are central to extraordinary morality, not ordinary morality. This move is well supported when we realize the episodic nature of heroic courage, as well as the extreme conditions where heroic courage takes place. The episodic nature of acts of heroic courage can easily undermine one's ability to maintain moral commitments. Rather, moral commitments draw on the daily dedication and persistence necessary to continue in the face of a lifetime of difficulties. The metaphor of the bridge as moral commitment and the expensive yacht as heroic courage is particularly helpful in showing the limits of heroic courage and the expansiveness of moral commitment.

The third move and conclusion of the argument of this chapter is: Since socially significant moral commitments are more fully moral than heroic acts of courage, ordinary morality is more fully moral than extraordinary morality. Central to our analysis of this move is the way that the first two moves lead to this final move. The first two moves do this by setting up the dichotomy of ordinary morality

against extraordinary morality and the dichotomy of moral commitment against acts of heroic courage. These two dichotomies are generated by the combination of the first six claims detailed in this chapter that are either stated or implied in the first two moves of the argument. After these two dichotomies are established, the two claims of the final move and conclusion follow logically. If one objects to the viability of these two dichotomies, then my argument collapses. I have tried to make the strongest case in support of these two dichotomies throughout this dissertation, just as I have made the earlier case for the dichotomy of moral strength against heroic courage.

By detailing how the first seven claims lead to the eighth claim and conclusion of this argument, we can say that these seven claims represent the full set of premises for the argument and that the conclusion follows from these premises. The work of this dissertation up to this point ensures that this conclusion is logically and contextually sound. We have assured its logic by reviewing the moves and claims above. We have assured its contextual soundness by using a variety of examples and illustrations from the world in which we live.

CHAPTER VI

SPECULATION: A STRONGEST MORAL COMMITMENT

In this concluding chapter, I will discuss the key contrasts of this dissertation from the perspective of their importance to practical social analysis and political change. Due to the space limitation, this chapter will necessarily be speculative and detailed arguments will not be presented. Those arguments will hopefully come later in my work and the work of others. This chapter is simply meant to answer the question: what use might this rethinking of "heroic courage" and the conceptual development of "moral commitment" and "moral strength" be in the day-to-day practice of ordinary people interested in social change?

There are many different strands that could be traced from the theoretical concerns of the central argument into practice since the heroic and the heraic are expressed in many aspects of our lives. In this chapter, I concentrate on only a few of those strands. One strand is the construction of a strongest moral commitment--built on work done earlier. After I suggest what the strongest moral commitment looks like, I discuss problems arising from revolutionary activity that expresses the heroic and how this activity might be changed to express the heraic--the

strongest moral commitment. My critique draws its insight from the view that revolutionaries who strive for the heroic buy into the politics of heroic vitalism that is reactionary, rather than progressive.

To show this contrast between heroic social change and heraic social change, I remind the reader of the contrast between T. E. Lawrence and Julia Ruuttila. Lawrence saw himself as a revolutionary engaged in the task of liberating the Arabs from Turkish colonialism. However, his work reflected heroic vitalism in a reactionary sense because his extraordinary activities did not lay the foundation for a true revolution, but rather set the stage for the British to step into the colonial role vacated by the Turks. On the other hand, Ruuttila's ordinary heraic activities laid the foundation for a true revolution--a revolution of citizen activism that resists demagogy.

In the course of this chapter, I speculate on how an heraic moral commitment may help resolve problems about violence in revolutionary causes. The use of violence to achieve revolutionary goals, preserve the revolutionary force and defend the oppressed against genocidal attacks is an ever-present difficulty within revolutionary strategy. Philosophically, it takes the form of the means and ends problem involved in the revolutionary seizure of power and

the problem of violent self-defense against genocidal predation, political and cultural domination and the structural violence of the marketplace.

Although these problems are seemingly on the minds of few people in the developed world, they are on a great many minds in the undeveloped world. However, the refusal of people in developed countries to recognize the importance of these problems does not undermine their significance to ethics, as well as social and political philosophy. Perhaps everyone in developed countries should face the problems of revolutionary violence on a day-to-day basis, not just vicariously through news accounts. Making people in developed countries face this problem may be at the heart of "terrorist" programs originating in many third world countries.

1. Elements of a Strongest Moral Commitment

To start this discussion, I focus on two different kinds of moral commitment. I note that the following types of people and their relationships to moral commitments can be ranked from good to better. In other words, the first category, that I call "Le Chambon," is a good kind of moral commitment, but the second category, "global grass-roots," is a better kind of moral commitment. From this contrast,

the global grass-roots moral commitment is stronger and until a stronger moral commitment is shown, the global grass-roots commitment seems to be the strongest moral commitment.

The key contrast between the first group, "Le Chambon" and the second group, "global grass-roots" is that the first group has "reactive moral commitment" and the second group has "pro-active moral commitment." From this contrast, other contrasts emerge in the following discussion. I will do an inventory of "Le Chambon" qualities first, followed by an inventory of "global grass-roots" qualities.

1.1 Le Chambon Commitment

The Le Chambon commitment is a reactive commitment because the Chambonnaise responded to a local crisis rather than necessarily reaching out to crises wherever and whenever they might be. From this, people in the Le Chambon category may undermine public value for private value. If their moral commitment is dormant during times without a local crisis, then their pursuit of private value can be seen as undermining public value. This is true because of the nature of our historical period--and particularly if people in the Le Chambon category are seen as expressing the highest kind of moral commitment. Since our historical

period can be shown to require pro-active moral commitments to improve the human condition--which so desperately needs to be improved--then mere reactive moral commitments do not meet the need. If reactive moral commitments are seen as the highest kind of commitment, then this kind of misconception undermines public value because it does not meet the contemporary needs of public value.

Another way to look at this problem is to observe that those in the Le Chambon category are not consistently generating public value. This inconsistency is caused by the limit of reacting to a local crisis. The following illustration may be useful here. If a "Le Chambon" type of person, who is a member of a rich community, only helps people in a her neighborhood, and furthermore, she only helps people in her neighborhood when she observes a crisis, it can be shown that she does not have a commitment to improve the entire human condition. She will only help by reacting to certain situations and certain people. She will overlook the crises of people outside of her neighborhood and those hidden crises of people within her neighborhood.

It is important to note that people in the "Le Chambon" category are different than war heroes. War heroes react to certain emergencies by bold and daring action in the face of violence. People in the "Le Chambon" category respond to

crises with a steady commitment to provide deep hospitality and nonviolent resistance in circumstances that are rarely, overtly violent. Certainly, people in the "Le Chambon" category are expressing a moral commitment, where war heroes may not.

My worry about the "Le Chambon" category is the dormancy period, when members of this group do not express an active moral commitment. This dormancy period might be appropriate in a just world, where there are only occasional crises. However, we don't live in that kind of world at this time. Therefore, if people in the "Le Chambon category are thought to be the most moral, then this view will undermine public value. On the other hand, if people in this category are thought to be less moral than those with pro-active moral commitments, then the dormancy period itself can be seen as morally problematic. Granting this analysis, the undermining of public value in the "Le Chambon" case primarily depends on the existence of the dormancy period. Additionally, this dormancy period may be a time when members of the "Le Chambon" category express only minimal moral commitments, whereas, during a local crisis, they will be expressing socially significant moral commitments.

At this point, it should be noted that members of this category seem to be committing a kind of inadvertent immorality by having a dormancy period. Just as a war hero thinks he is conforming to the highest standard of morality, a person in the "Le Chambon" category probably thinks she is conforming to the highest standard of morality. This misconception, along with the dormancy period itself, is at the heart of the problem of their inadvertent immorality.

As stated in the last chapter, people in the "Le Chambon" category may have an unconscious, as well as reactive, moral commitment, though, if it was pointed out by an observer that a "Le Chambon" member had a moral commitment, it could easily change from an unconscious moral commitment to a conscious moral commitment.

The final aspect that I want to focus on is the "Le Chambon" member's relationship to risk and fear. It seems that these sorts of people are willing to take great risks and overcome fear much like a war hero. Because they have periods of dormancy, like war heroes, they probably do not develop a modulated response to risk and fear that can be developed by someone with ongoing, pro-active moral commitments. People with pro-active moral commitments can learn to moderate their risks and to moderate their response to fear. Without this moderation, people in the "Le

Chambon" category lean toward the calculated recklessness and fearlessness of a war hero that can, in turn, create dissociation and difficulty with empathy.

1.2 Global Grass-Roots Commitment

Turning to the "global grass-roots" category, we find that moderation is a key element. Though people in this category are willing to take risks and confront their fears, they moderate those risks so that they can maintain a lifelong commitment--and they moderate their response to fear so that they are neither fearless nor fearful. This moderation avoids the vanity, self-absorption and emotional denial of a war hero.

Another key element of the "global grass-roots" category is the pro-active moral commitment involved in the work of people in this grouping. They have a continuous socially significant moral commitment to improve the general human condition through particular activities. Though they may spend part of their time generating private value, they <u>always</u> spend a portion of their time generating public value. In this way, they continuously balance the private with the public by keeping both active and neither dormant.

They are also alert and reflective about ways that their private pursuits might undermine their public

activities. If they invest significant amounts of money in exploitative businesses, on the one hand, and then try to undo the damage on the other hand, they may be undermining themselves. Through this process of alertness and reflection, they integrate the private and the public.

In this process of alertness and reflection, people in the "global grass-roots" category are particularly sensitive to any inadvertent stalking and preying on others. They see this as the worst evil--one that makes the deep hospitality of those at Le Chambon particularly admirable. Though it may be impossible (and perhaps undesirable) to remove all traces of immorality in one's activities, people in this category worry about significant ways that they may be expressing unconscious immoral commitments.

Additionally, people in this category are sensitive to membership in any exclusive group. Even membership within the nation-state is criticized to the degree that it tends toward dangerous exclusivity. Membership in any exclusive status, such as the privileges of being a white male are also criticized.

Just as people in this category do not hide aspects of their lives from themselves, they are not willing to hide pertinent aspects of their moral lives from the public. Any

hiddenness of this sort would undermine their moral commitment.

Finally, people in the "global grass-roots" category may have unconscious moral commitments, but it is unlikely because of their continuing reflection on their activities. Because they have a clear idea of what a moral commitment is, they are likely to recognize it in themselves. They are also likely to recognize that the war heroes courage and "Le Chambon" person's reactive moral commitment are not as fully moral as their pro-active moral commitment.

1.3 Applying the Global Grass-Roots Commitment in Situations of Extreme Structural Violence

We have found that the strongest moral commitment involves a constant, ongoing commitment, that is not episodic, and is geared to continuously generate public value in the form of improving the overall human condition through particular activities. Whether a particular activity actually improves the overall human condition is debatable, though such debatability should not be seen as a liability. Rather, such a debate only creates a powerful dialectic which can better prepare us to think about how to improve the overall human condition. The difficulty that I address in this chapter is the difficulty of applying the

global grass-roots moral commitment in situations of extreme structural violence[1].

The global grass-roots moral commitment might be simply thought of as the lifetime commitment to improve the condition of humanity. As we saw in the various examples explored, this commitment involves being a member of a movement that challenges all forms of predation and domination. No sphere of predation or domination is exempt from this challenge. Religion, economics, and culture must be looked at as critically as one examines the political sphere. In all of these areas, structural violence may be found.

In the commitment to rid ourselves of predation and domination, we must think of what counters these problems in our lives. I suggest that the positive model that counters predation and domination is the model of shared power and the cooperative generation of shared abundance. (The model of shared power and shared abundance is not developed in this work.) Further, I suggest that any social change activity be done with a process that minimizes violence to counter any predatory or dominating aspects of social change

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[1] I understand structural violence to be found in situations of injustice that generate victims, whether from direct violence or from indirect violence, such as starvation, illness, exploitation, oppression and disempowerment.

work. This commitment to minimize violence follows from the heraic and the global grass-roots commitment in two ways. First, it follows from the observation that exposure to violence contributes to dangerous forms of dissociation and desensitization. And second, it follows from the commitment to counter predation and domination, key elements of structural violence.

2. The Problem of Revolutionary Violence

Now that I have spelled out the crucial aspects of a strongest moral commitment, I suggest that such a commitment can help us with problems of revolutionary strategy. Since this strongest moral commitment involves ridding ourselves of predation and domination, it seems that revolutionary activity directed at that purpose expresses the strongest moral commitment. However, the implied commitment to minimize violence seems to suggest that a key element of revolutionary activity, revolutionary violence, is wrong. However, I believe that this appearance is deceiving. It is deceiving because a commitment to minimize violence is a commitment to counter all forms of violence, including hidden structural violence. And the countering of structural violence means that revolutionaries must defend themselves and others from it. It follows that this self-

defense may take the form of violence, if all other modes of nonviolent self-defense fail.

In situations where a revolutionary force is being attacked by reactionary forces, it seems that the revolutionary force has a right to defend itself violently--if nonviolent alternatives fail. In situations where the revolutionary force is defending its people against genocidal policies, it seems that the revolutionary force may also use violence to defend people from those policies--again if nonviolent alternatives fail. However, the difficulty that arises from this analysis is whether revolutionaries are justified in seizing power violently. I want to argue that they are not justified in seizing power violently--and they may not even be justified in seizing power nonviolently outside of democratic processes. However, before I do so, I want to illustrate the problem by looking at an historical circumstance that often repeats itself in contemporary Central America.

In El Salvador, for example, revolutionaries used violence in three ways. First, they used it to defend ordinary people in the countryside from genocidal policies and attacks by government forces. Second, they used violence to defend their revolutionary force from extermination. And third, they used violence to seize power

by liberating territory from government control and administering the liberated territory through a revolutionary command structure.

My argument favors the first two uses because they minimize violence, whereas my argument opposes the third use because it provokes violence. However, the difficulty with my argument is in how to distinguish between the first and third uses of violence. In the first use, genocidal policies and attacks are opposed. In the third use, the jurisdiction of the genocidal and autocratic government is replaced with a non genocidal autocratic revolutionary command. Clearly, genocide is countered in both cases, so why aren't both cases legitimate? To answer this, we must focus on the difficulties of an autocratic revolutionary command.

The difficulty set up by an autocratic revolutionary command is that it is hostile to democracy and pluralism. People under this command are either loyal to the command or are suspected as traitors. This dichotomy fits neatly into a militaristic, authoritarian structure, which is intrinsically oppressive. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that the people under this command have been defended from genocidal attacks by government forces.

The question arising from this state of affairs is, does defense from genocide necessarily require an authoritarian command structure? The answer often given is that such a command structure is needed because traitors are just as deadly as genocidal attacks by government forces--they amount to the same threat. However, I wonder if this is necessarily the case.

To flesh out this problem, let's look closer at an illustration. If a village has a traitor in it who reports to the government forces when rebel soldiers visit or when people in the village feed or shield members of the revolutionary force, then that traitor can be held partly responsible for any attacks on the revolutionary force or genocidal reprisals on villagers. In this case, it seems as though the traitor is a threat that amounts to the same threat as the genocidal attack. Therefore, in this case, it would make sense for the community and the revolutionary force to have some way to defend themselves from the traitor--violently, if nonviolent defense fails.

In what form should this defense take place? In South Africa, traitors were burned to death while encased in a rubber tire--"necklaced." This is cruel, but also represents the frustration that is present in a situation with few resources for defense against what may be a

legitimate threat. Rebels in El Salvador established military command structures to make and enforce laws in the liberated areas. This established a legitimacy that allowed traitors to be arrested, tried and punished. In this case, the authority of the government was rejected and replaced by the authority of the revolutionaries. Under these circumstance, "necklacing" can be avoided and lesser, but effective punishments (hopefully nonviolent) can be instituted. This meets the criterion of minimizing violence, while protecting the revolutionary force and the villages.

The question that arises at this point is, why should the revolutionary force administer this justice system, why not democratically elected leaders from the liberated area? The first worry is that those leaders will be assassinated. However, they might be protected in some way. The next worry is that the electorate or the elected leaders may not be fully sympathetic with the revolutionary force. This might endanger the revolutionary force--and the revolutionary force has a right to defend itself. On the other hand, it also means the revolutionary force does not have as much popular support as hoped or expected. In this event, what is the revolutionary force to do? Once the revolutionary force has established its revolutionary

intentions, how can it retreat? This is a desperate situation for a revolutionary force, but some kind of compromise can probably be worked out that minimizes the authority of the revolutionary force, without selling them out to the government forces.

Such a diplomatic solution is preferable because it avoids the creation of any new structural violence in the name of rebel command authority. It also sets in motion local democratic processes that are founded on shared power--rather than authoritarian processes that are founded on fear, hate and suspicion. As we have seen historically, well intentioned rebel forces undermine their purposes by adopting authoritarian processes.

Returning from this illustration to my argument, any non democratic seizure of power seems unjustifiable and likely to undermine revolutionary goals. Though this observation makes revolutionary practice more difficult in some ways, it also tests the popularity of a revolutionary movement in an important and useful way. The revolutionary force should not see themselves or be seen as the rescuer/hero because that image buys into the politics of heroic vitalism that is reactionary, rather than progressive. Revolution-as-rescue today can easily turn

into authoritarianism and a hierarchy of dependence tomorrow.

3. The Problem of Means and Ends

How can this insight, which is at root about the contrast of heroic courage and moral commitment, help address the philosophical problems of means and ends, violent self-defense and revolutionary violence? First, let's look at the problem of means and ends. This problem focuses on the difficulty of whether certain questionable means are justified by the ends that are sought. Revolutionaries are not the only ones confronted with this problem. Ordinary people may also wonder if ends justify the means.

The common justification for questionable means to achieve worthy goals is the supposed fact that the ends could not be achieved without the questionable means. As an example, a person may lie to protect an innocent life because protection could not be achieved in any other way. This happened when people shielded Jews from the Nazis during World War II. In this case, the questionable means of lying seems to be justified by the ends--the safety of the Jews--and the fact that there was no other way of ensuring their safety.

The more difficult case that we have been discussing involves two different means/ends sequences. The first is that violence as a means is justified by the end of the revolutionary force's seizure of political power. The second is that the seizure of authoritarian political power is justified as a means toward the end of reorganizing the economy to reflect the interests of all of the people.

In order to meet the criterion established in the case involving the Jews above, there must not be any other means to achieve the goals. If there is such an alternate means, then the questionable means loses its justification. If there had been a way to protect the Jews without lying, then lying loses its justification.

In the case of a revolutionary seizure of power, there seems to be a plausible, alternate means for achieving the goal of a reorganized economy. This alternate means is the democratic empowerment of the full population through grassroots political activity and locally responsive representation.

Interestingly, the revolutionaries in El Salvador are turning to this alternate means of gaining political power. Their efforts to seize power violently only created a kind of gridlock war. Diplomatic talks began and reached fruition because there seemed to be no winners in such a

war--only losers. However, if people in the countryside completely disarm themselves, they may only invite further genocide and structural violence. So, on the one hand, the strategy of a violent seizure of power has both intrinsic and consequential problems. And on the other hand, violent self-defense against genocide and structural violence remains an important element of revolutionary struggle based on the moral principle of minimizing violence.

From the example of peasant uprisings in Central America, we see that the violent seizure of power loses justification when there is a nonviolent means of gaining political power. However, in cases of genocidal attacks from government forces or genocidal structural violence, there may be no alternative to violent self-defense. So in the latter case, violence as a means is justified by the ends of preserving life when there is no nonviolent alternative.

In summary, this discussion about revolutionary violence has helped us see that the problem of means and ends depends on the existence of nonviolent alternatives. If there are nonviolent alternatives, then the ends <u>do not</u> justify the means. If there are no nonviolent alternatives, the ends <u>do</u> justify the means. This conclusion is reached through the use of a strongest moral commitment--a

commitment that sees no virtue in the dramas of violence, but does not shrink from violence if there is no other choice.

4. Revolutionary Self-Defense

Next, I will turn from the means and ends problem to the problem of revolutionary self-defense. As I have suggested above, it seems that revolutionary violence that restricts itself to self-defense against genocidal attack is ethically justified when based on the principle of minimizing violence when there is no nonviolent alternative. In this way, this principle follows from the strongest moral commitment that we have developed earlier. It does not seem to matter whether genocidal attacks are overtly violent assaults by reactionary forces or covert attacks of structural violence that may occur in the form of starvation, disease, unemployment, homelessness, exploitation or the random violence of oppressed communities. What does matter is whether there is any viable nonviolent or less violent alternative. If there is no such viable alternative, then this limited kind of revolutionary violence seems justifiable.

With this said about revolutionary self-defense, what can be said of other forms of violent self-defense? To

begin this discussion, we can follow the lead developed above and follow the principle of minimizing violence (following from the strongest moral commitment). From this, it would seem that violent self-defense, in general, is justified if it seeks to minimize violence when completely nonviolent alternatives fail or are unavailable.

However, what about a circumstance where a number of men are trying to kill one man. If the single man has an automatic weapon, he might be able to shoot all of the men in self-defense. This is hardly minimizing violence. To minimize violence, it would seem that the single person should submit to being killed. So, a simple principle of minimizing violence will not do in every case of self-defense--though it seemed to work in the cases of revolutionary violence that we looked at earlier.

Can we derive a better principle from the strongest moral commitment? My response is that its hard to give up on the commitment to minimize violence. Minimizing violence seems like a sensible commitment. Rather than abandoning this commitment because it does not hold in every case, perhaps we should wonder whether this principle <u>needs</u> to hold in every case. In other words, can't certain principles be valid because they hold in almost all cases, even though there will likely be some exceptional

circumstances such as the case of self-defense against many attackers? In situations such as this, it seems that exceptions do not undermine the principle involved. In this particular case, the kind of person we are interested in is a person with an heraic moral commitment. If such a person is being attacked by several people, he is not seeking the heroic, but rather is simply seeking to survive to continue his moral commitments. So, even in the case of extreme violence such as this, a person can maintain the heraic, while defending himself with violence.

We can summarize the way our strongest moral commitment helps us with the problem of justifying self-defense by saying the following: In many cases, self-defense is justified as a way of minimizing violence by minimizing violence to oneself and the attacker (given that self-defense intends to protect the self and minimize violence to the attacker). On the other hand, the justification of self-defense is not undermined by some exceptional circumstances where violence is not minimized--so long as retaliation and gratuitous violence is avoided.

Perhaps another way of expressing this principle is to say that violence should be restricted to defensive measures, where no other nonviolent alternative is available and when retaliatory or gratuitous violence is avoided.

However, the commitment to minimize violence seems to be clear enough for ordinary usage and simpler to say.

5. The Problem of Domination

With this said in support of self-defense, I will end the discussion on the use of our strongest moral commitment by exploring an aspect of the problem of domination. This is the problem of how to have power over one's own life without having power over others. In other words, is it necessary to dominate others in some way so that one can control one's own life? In yet other words, is freedom possible in a world of domination? I will argue that freedom is rare in the present civilized world. We tend to either live as the dominator or the dominated. Neither of these is freedom because neither allows for autonomous empowerment. The dominated depends on the dominator and the dominator depends on the dominated -- neither is free.

The strongest moral commitment offers a way to counter the problem of unfreedom. By countering all forms of exclusive groups, the strongest moral commitment is a commitment to inclusiveness where power is shared in a community and where each member of the community is enfranchised. The goal of this commitment is that each member of the community can say that the community and its

resources are her own. Clearly, this kind of shared ownership and power can only occur in a context of cooperative, shared abundance.

In the existing free market economies, both abundance and scarcity reduce to undemocratic forms of control. The existing market mechanisms take resource, labor and consumer abundance and lower their value and make them expendable. On the other hand, existing market mechanisms take resource, labor and consumer scarcity and heighten their value and reserve their use for the elite.

If power is not shared in the community, then each member can only achieve power in her own life by gaining power over others or joining an exclusive group that is capable of having power over others. But this kind of power generates accommodation and rebellion, neither of which contribute to anyone's freedom. Accommodation of this sort is usually insincere and undermines the trust between parties. And rebellion generates conflict that enslaves both parties to the conflict. On the other hand, when power is shared in a community, each member can begin to achieve a level of autonomy and freedom.

An example from family life may help illuminate this point. In a family that is characterized by domination, family members are easily caught in a cycle of dependent

accommodation and divisive rebellion. Neither course leads to freedom because accommodation supports dependence and rebellion generates conflicts that also take away from freedom. However, if the family is characterized by the sharing of power, then autonomy and freedom can and does flourish because people are not preoccupied with conflict and dependent relationships.

The reader might wonder what it means to share power in a community. It means that the community is dedicated to enfranchise each member of the community. If the community is dedicated to any exclusive group, then others are necessarily disenfranchised. Since capitalist governments are dedicated to the exclusive interests of property owners, people who do not own property--homes, land, capital or enterprise, are necessarily disenfranchised. Even if labor is thought of as a kind of property, people with low skills are disenfranchised. And people with non property strengths such as compassion, sensitivity and generosity are disenfranchised. Within this system, each member of the society can only achieve power in her own life by achieving domination over the disenfranchised. In other words, empowerment against the effects of structural violence is only possible, on an individual level, by shifting the effects of structural violence from oneself and onto others.

The only alternative to this perpetuation of structural violence by all members of a society is suicide or the revolutionary creation of a community that is dedicated to the interests of all of its members. Either all members become property owners in some meaningful sense, or society abandons the privileging of property over other human and environmental values, such as nurturing, stewardship, communion, integrity, forgiveness, service and generosity. This commitment to minimize violence by countering structural violence, to promote inclusivity by countering exclusive groupings, and to create community through shared power and shared abundance, appears to be the strongest moral commitment -- a commitment that requires the moral strength of ordinary people.

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