

REASON PAPERS

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**Symposium: Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen's
*The Perfectionist Turn***

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Editorial

Several contributions to this issue of *Reason Papers* are focused on virtue and its intersection with different aspects of political and cultural life. Our issue opens with a symposium on Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen's fourth co-authored book, *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics*. The purpose of this latest work from the pair is twofold. They deepen their grounding of non-perfectionist politics in "individualistic perfectionism" in ethics and they defend their ethical theory against contemporary alternatives (especially constructivism). Den Uyl and Rasmussen respond to challenges raised by Elaine Sternberg, Neera K. Badhwar, and David McPherson. Sternberg relies on her specialization in business ethics, economics, and finance to critique Chapter 8 of the book: "The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero." Sympathetic to neo-Aristotelian ethics, Badhwar presses Den Uyl and Rasmussen on how they relate virtue to flourishing and ground both in human nature. McPherson, drawing on a more communitarian view of self-formation, challenges their individualistic approach to human flourishing.

The second symposium in this issue takes a hard look at a controversial subject explored in Stephen Kershnar's *Gratitude toward Veterans: Why Americans Should Not Be Very Grateful to Veterans*. Kershnar's main thesis is that, as a group, the reasons individuals have for joining the American military do not satisfy the criteria needed to generate much gratitude in the country's citizens. Michael Robillard appreciates Kershnar's pushing back on "knee-jerk lionization or pitying of veterans" (p. 65), but wonders whether he fails to give sufficient weight to the risks that members of the military undertake when they enlist. Pauline Shanks Kaurin finds Kershnar's account insufficiently clear about degrees of gratitude and the differences between being grateful and showing gratitude.

Gary James Jason continues his examination of Nazi propaganda films, analyzing how Hitler's regime managed to "sell" an idea as repugnant as genocide. Jason argues that the five films he studies in this two-part series reveal how Nazi propaganda films effectively manipulated the emotions of its target audiences by engendering feelings of difference, disgust, and danger toward Jews.

In her review essay of *A Companion to Ayn Rand*, Carrie-Ann Biondi explains how this latest addition to the Blackwell Companion to Philosophy series rectifies an injustice done to the work of Ayn Rand. Long ignored, scorned, or misunderstood by most professional

philosophers, this *Companion* volume brings together careful scholarship from various scholars to present Rand's radical philosophy in a systematic, accessible way.

This issue of *Reason Papers* is rounded out by two thought-provoking Afterwords pieces. David J. Riesbeck shows with surgical precision the truth in the adage: "The devil is in the details." The object of his analysis is a Latin phrase quoted by John Stuart Mill in his *The Subjection of Women*. This phrase has persistently been mistranslated—and hence misunderstood—by editors of Mill's work. In this issue's only article focused on aesthetics, Vinay Kolhatkar begins to develop an "integrated theory of fictional narrative." He applies his view of the power of "being transported" to two recent films, *Dunkirk* and *The Promise*, explaining how he thinks that the former fails while the latter succeeds on the criteria he sets out.

We hope you enjoy the cornucopia of insightful thought on offer in these pages as much as we have.

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Symposium: Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen's *The Perfectionist Turn*

Metanorms, Metaethics and Metaphor:
Heroic Confusions in *The Perfectionist Turn*¹

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1. Introduction

*The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics*² is an important work, which valuably complements the authors' *Norms of Liberty*³. It should be welcomed warmly, especially by everyone who has ever faced shocked disbelief when explaining that Aristotelian ethics is not primarily about relations with other people.

By identifying, characterizing, and contrasting the templates of respect and responsibility, *The Perfectionist Turn* illuminates two radically different approaches to ethics. The authors show that the doctrines dominating modern philosophical ethics—utilitarianism and Kantian deontology—though conventionally considered to be polar opposites, both fall within what they identify as the template of respect. By differentiating that shared template sharply from the template of responsibility, the authors provide support for a neo-Aristotelian, individualistic perfectionist ethics.

¹ This article is a slightly modified version of a paper presented at the American Association for the Philosophic Study of Society at the Eastern Division American Philosophical Association, January 5, 2017, thanks to a travel grant provided by the Charles Koch Foundation.

² Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen, *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2016); henceforth *TPT*. All parenthetical citations in the text are to *TPT*, unless otherwise specified.

³ Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen, *Norms of Liberty: A Perfectionist Basis for Non-Perfectionist Politics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

Given the resistance that this worthwhile but unfamiliar message is likely to encounter, it is all the more important that its presentation not hinder understanding. So it's regrettable that in a key section of the book, the narrative is problematic, marred by mistaken or equivocal usages of key terms, and by shifts of focus. Disconcertingly, the same terms are used in ways that variously presuppose and undermine their ordinary and/or their technical meanings; contexts offer little guidance. Such confusions can seriously challenge credibility. They are likely to bemuse or antagonize rather than attract readers who are familiar with the concepts involved, and liable to unsettle even those who are profoundly sympathetic toward the authors' objectives.

The chief offender is Chapter 8, "The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero": it sadly disappoints the powerfully suggestive promise of its title. Although it contains much valuable discussion, the chapter's analogical method is flawed, incorporating confusions about the notion of entrepreneur that it calls upon to illuminate practical wisdom (p. 289). It also muddles other concepts—profit, optimization, insight, etc.—that are central to its discussion. Based on a borrowed structure, and misinterpreting some of its sources, "The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero" is disturbing and potentially counterproductive. Its confusions invite criticism, and deflect attention from *TPT*'s main argument.

It may be objected that Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen (henceforth D&R) are philosophers writing about metaethics and metaphysics, and that it is unfair to focus on their use of concepts taken mainly from economics. But by introducing such concepts, and making them the focus of a full chapter, D&R invite critical scrutiny. It would also be unfair to criticize authors for not writing a different book. But it is appropriate to indicate ways in which a printed text falls short of the authors' stated objectives. This article will therefore aim to unpack some of the confusions in Chapter 8, with a view both to providing clarification, and to suggesting an exposition that might offer stronger support for the neo-Aristotelian individualistic perfectionism that D&R champion.

2. Titular Titillation

D&R lead in to Chapter 8 by announcing they intend to address "what it means to be a responsible flourisher in practice" (p. 283). That worthwhile objective suggests that Chapter 8 will recall the salient features of flourishing and then explain how each is exemplified by the chosen "model of action" (p. 284). Such a program could have

done much to add credence and clarity to D&R's exposition of individualistic perfectionism (henceforth IP). With the emphasis firmly on IP flourishing as the *analysandum*, illustrations could have been taken from entrepreneurship without disputes about it much mattering. Indeed, the fact that practical wisdom and IP were reflected in explicitly identified different versions might even have been offered as further support for their view.

Unfortunately, however, the focus in Chapter 8 is not on flourishing, or on practical wisdom, but on the entrepreneur. At the start of the chapter, the authors acknowledge (p. 284) that the title "The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero" is provocative, and may mislead. To avert misapprehension, they restate their purpose: it is to show "that some of the essential features of market entrepreneurship are also essential components of ethical conduct" (p. 284). While that explanation does deflect attention from heroism, it also indicates a significant reversal of emphasis: from illuminating flourishing to elucidating entrepreneurship. But even that inverted aim is not achieved. What Chapter 8 actually shows, is that various features that different economists consider to be essential⁴ for their diverse understandings of the entrepreneur, are also exhibited in substantially modified form by ethical agents. By shifting the focus to the entrepreneur, D&R make errors and confusions surrounding entrepreneur and associated concepts a correspondingly serious concern.

3. Equivocation on "Entrepreneur"

The opening question in Chapter 8 is: "What general models of action are best suited to the type of moral theory we are advocating?" (p. 284). This suggests that D&R will review possible models, and explain why the titular entrepreneur has been chosen to illustrate the evaluational form of ethical conduct. D&R might have introduced the entrepreneur as the "quintessential individualist"⁵, whose conduct

⁴ "The essential features of a thing are just those that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for it to be that kind of thing and not some other Where X is the subject being defined, the essential definition of X specifies that combination of features that all Xs and only Xs always have."; Elaine Sternberg, "Defining Capitalism", *Economic Affairs* 35, no. 3 (October 2015), p. 382.

⁵ The "quintessential individualist" does get mentioned, but only incidentally, toward the end of the chapter (p. 317).

cannot be accommodated by the juridical model and the template of respect. They might have justified their choice by indicating that entrepreneurial action is crucial both to the ethical justification of profits⁶ and to capitalism's ability to generate wealth⁷. Instead, however, the authors simply assert that "For the evaluational form, the hero is the person who is insightful or, as we shall try to detail below, entrepreneurial . . ." (p. 286). They then organize Chapter 8 around features of entrepreneurship identified in an article by Scott Shane and S. Venkataraman⁸ (henceforth S&V), two professors of business.

Den Uyl and Rasmussen call upon five potentially incompatible notions of entrepreneur without identifying them as such, or indicating which features they themselves consider to be essential. Since the main academic analyses⁹ specify different characteristics as

⁶ Israel M. Kirzner, "Entrepreneurial Discovery and the Competitive Market Process: An Austrian Approach", *Journal of Economic Literature* 35, no. 1 (March 1997), pp. 75-76.

⁷ Although D&R clearly understand this (see p. 287 n. 4). But it only gets stated in the very last sentence of the chapter (p. 319).

⁸ Scott Shane and S. Venkataraman, "The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research", *Academy of Management Review* 25, no.1 (2000), pp. 218-26. As the article's title indicates, its subject is not the entrepreneur as such, but instead the academic study of entrepreneurship. S&V seek to "prod scholars . . . to create a systematic body of information" (ibid., p. 224). For that purpose, it is perhaps less problematic that their approach draws upon "different social science disciplines and applied fields of business" (ibid., p. 217), and that no clear definition of "entrepreneur" is provided. As even S&V acknowledge, their deeply ecumenical framework contains "potentially flawed logical arguments" (ibid.). Unfortunately, it also contains factual errors: e.g., contrary to what is stated, Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* was not published in 1934, but in 1942; the error is duplicated in *TPT* (p. 287 n. 6).

⁹ "Entrepreneur" is a hotly contested concept even—perhaps especially—amongst those who have subjected it to academic investigation: "One of the largest remaining disagreements in the applied academic literature concerns what constitutes entrepreneurship"; Russell S. Sobel, "Entrepreneurship", in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*, David R. Henderson, ed. (Liberty Fund, Inc. 2008), Library of Economics and Liberty, accessed online at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/Entrepreneurship.html>. See, e.g., Nadim Ahmad and Richard G. Seymour, *Defining Entrepreneurial Activity:*

being essentially entrepreneurial, they have different implications for D&R's stated program of comparing the essential features of entrepreneurship with those of ethical conduct. The meaning of "entrepreneur" becomes even more problematical when D&R extend its field of activity beyond the commercial to all of life, and enlarge its extension to include all ethical agents.

As conventionally understood, "entrepreneur" designates an exceptional commercial figure, perhaps plausibly considered heroic when associated with the swashbuckling launcher of a business. But the popular notion of the entrepreneur is extremely vague, variously designating all business founders and different subsets of them.

The conventional model has been refined in different ways by academic economists. For Joseph Schumpeter, the entrepreneur is essentially a creator; his role is distinct from that of manager, risk-taker, and inventor.¹⁰ The pioneering Schumpeterian entrepreneur is relatively rare, essentially innovative, and characteristically disruptive. A quite different understanding of the entrepreneur is offered by the Chicago economist Frank Knight. For Knight, the defining feature of an entrepreneur is not creativity, but acceptance of a particularly unmeasurable kind of risk (also known as "uncertainty"), for which not even probabilities can be calculated¹¹—think of Donald Rumsfeld's infamous "unknown unknowns"¹².

Definitions Supporting Frameworks for Data Collection, OECD Statistics Working Paper, accessed online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1090372>.

¹⁰ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008 [1942]), p. 132.

¹¹ "The only 'risk' which leads to a profit is a unique uncertainty resulting from an exercise of ultimate responsibility which in its very nature cannot be insured nor capitalized nor salaried. Profit arises out of the inherent, absolute unpredictability of things, out of the sheer, brute fact that the results of human activity cannot be anticipated and then only in so far as even a probability calculation in regard to them is impossible and meaningless."; Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston, MA: Hart, Schaffner & Marx, 1921), III.X.33, accessed online at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Knight/knRUP9.html#Pt.III.Ch.X>.

¹² Donald Rumsfeld, "Known and Unknown: Author's Note", December 2010, accessed online at: <http://papers.rumsfeld.com/about/page/authors-note>.

Building upon Knight, the Austrian economist Israel Kirzner holds that entrepreneurs are those who perceive and take advantage of previously unsuspected opportunities.¹³ Unlike the Schumpeterian entrepreneur, the Kirznerian entrepreneur primarily discovers rather than creates; unlike the Knight entrepreneur, his characteristic concern is not risk, but opportunity. Far from being restrictive, yet a fourth academic notion of entrepreneur is virtually all inclusive: according to Ludwig von Mises, being an entrepreneur is not just widespread, it is universal. According to von Mises, “In any real and living economy every actor is always an entrepreneur . . .”¹⁴.

Because D&R make the entrepreneur central, and organize the chapter around entrepreneurial features, their failure to isolate the various notions of entrepreneur creates serious confusions. Sometimes they treat the entrepreneur as a commercial figure who is both unusual (e.g., pp. 305, 315, and 318) and identifiable in one or other of the specific ways associated with Schumpeter (e.g., p. 305), Knight (e.g., p. 306), or Kirzner (e.g., p. 300). On other occasions, however, they undercut that association by citing as supporting examples, instances that the economists explicitly reject.¹⁵ Moreover, insofar as ethical

¹³ Israel M. Kirzner, “Entrepreneurial Discovery”, pp. 60-85.

¹⁴ Ludwig Von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 253, or *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1966), 4.XIV.67, accessed online at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Mises/HmA/msHmA14.html>.

¹⁵ Consider, for example, the understandings of “discovery”. Referring to it as “a key concept in market entrepreneurship”, D&R explain:

One might, for example, realize that a given output can be more efficiently produced at less cost than is presently the case, thus allowing for the sale of the good at a lower price. Or one might notice that if something is simply offered in a different way, more people are attracted to it, thus increasing sales. (*TPT* p. 300).

But applications of widely known techniques are insufficient for Kirzner: “The earmark of a genuine discovery is that it reveals the existence of something concerning which one had not been merely ignorant, but in fact utterly ignorant (in the sense that one was not even aware of one’s ignorance).” (Kirzner, “Entrepreneurial Discovery”, p. 75).

The usages of “profit” are similarly incompatible. According to D&R,

agents *per se* are considered to be entrepreneurial, simply in virtue of their being human actors, “entrepreneur” loses its distinctive meaning. Unless it indicates something independent of being an ethical agent, it adds nothing to how ethical agents are understood. It also becomes even less plausible that the entrepreneur exemplifies the titular *hero* of the responsibility template. However a hero is understood—as chief protagonist, champion, or prime exemplar—he must be exceptional and distinguishable from the ordinary run of agents. By its very nature, if (following Mises) everyone is an entrepreneur, the entrepreneur as such isn’t a hero.

4. Suboptimal Insight

Even if “entrepreneur” is explicitly linked to one of the academic models outlined above, confusions remain. D&R identify “entrepreneurial” with “insightful” (p. 286), but “insight” is, sadly, yet another term whose several meanings in Chapter 8 are often left unclear by the context.

In ordinary parlance, “insight” refers to an observation or conclusion that is considered particularly astute, and/or to whatever method was used to obtain it. Throughout *TPT*, “insight” is used in that popular sense. It is also used technically, to denote the (Aristotelian) cognitive faculty that enables achievement of both speculative and practical wisdom (p. 51), and/or the outcomes of

As we shall use “profit” here, we are not referring to the monetary result of some entrepreneurial activity. Rather, generally following F. A. Hayek, James Buchanan, and Israel Kirzner, profit refers to the added value that results from a redeployment of resources, as a consequence of an insight into their possible use. (*TPT*, p. 299; no citations offered).

For Kirzner, however, “profit” does refer to the gains from entrepreneurial activity. Moreover, like the discovery on which it depends, “profit” has an extremely limited extension: “entrepreneurial profits emerge only as the wholly discovered gains, which accompany entrepreneurial creation and discovery in the sphere of production.” (Kirzner, “Entrepreneurial Discovery”, p. 76). Knight’s usage is similarly narrow (Knight, “Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit”, p. 121; see note 11 above). Part of the problem comes from an ambiguity concerning “realization”. Most of its occurrences in *TPT* refer to the actualization of a potential. But sometimes, especially in the discussion of entrepreneurs, it shifts and simply refers to understanding or simply noticing a fact. The context does not always clarify which is intended.

employing that faculty. Chapter 8 introduces “entrepreneurial insight”, which variously denotes two quite different things. Sometimes, it refers to any (ordinary or Aristotelian) insight¹⁶ associated with someone independently identified as an entrepreneur. On other occasions, however, it refers to the special kind of alertness that *defines* the Kirznerian entrepreneur. Kirzner is careful to differentiate the entrepreneurial alertness that distinguishes and identifies entrepreneurs from the other sorts of alertness that are involved simply because “action is taken in an open-ended, uncertain world”¹⁷. It is, however, only the latter (ordinary or Aristotelian) insight that is involved in all ethical conduct; the entrepreneurial insight that defines Kirznerian entrepreneurs is relatively rare.

D&R confusingly attempt to clarify ethical insight by rejecting optimizing¹⁸:

[J]ust as it is fundamental not to confuse entrepreneurial insight with an optimization process in a market setting, neither is ethical insight primarily an optimization process. Regarding the former, as Scott Shane and S. Venkataraman note, following Israel Kirzner, optimization in the marketplace involves a more efficient use of already-employed means to ends. Entrepreneurial insight, by contrast, identifies new means to ends. (p. 287)

Unfortunately, following Shane and Venkataraman, D&R’s interpretation of both “optimizing” and Kirzner is misleading.¹⁹

¹⁶ The faculty or its outcome.

¹⁷ Kirzner, “Entrepreneurial Discovery”, p. 72.

¹⁸ “The object in ethics, then, is actually *not* to optimize—at least not with respect to any given good—but, rather, to integrate or synthesize properly” (p. 288). Also, “fittingness . . . should not be understood as an optimization process” (p. 293).

¹⁹ Kirzner does not discuss optimization in either of the articles cited by S&V. Insofar as the Austrian economists reject optimization, their rejection applies to the particular interpretation of it used in mainstream neo-classical economics, in which it is reduced to mathematical maximization calculations. What is rejected is a particular kind of calculation, not optimization as such.

“Optimizing” is normally contrasted with “maximizing”. Maximizing typically involves seeking the *most* that is achievable from operating along a single, linear dimension that is necessarily specified in advance. Optimizing, reflecting its etymology, instead requires achieving the *best* outcome. Achieving the best often requires integrating across multiple dimensions; as such, it typically involves uncharted territory.²⁰ Optimizing can involve identifying new means to familiar ends; it can even identify new ends.

Den Uyl and Rasmussen are correct that entrepreneurial and ethical insight are alike in relation to optimization. But that is only because neither requires a rejection of it.²¹ The appropriate target for criticism is not optimization, but what gets optimized. Insofar as “[t]he object in ethics . . . is . . . to integrate or synthesize properly” (p. 288) over multiple dimensions, optimizing is—despite D&R’s prior denial—precisely and primarily what is needed. Unfortunately, such confusions about optimization matter: they have the potential to repel readers who are sensitive to the etymology, and to obscure what is meant by ethical insight under the template of responsibility.

5. Inopportune Opportunism

Other misunderstandings and errors affect D&R’s discussion of opportunities and opportunism. As part of their exploration of how objectivity is social, D&R state that “third-degree opportunities” (TDOs) are not prevalent (p. 294), and that they are necessarily unethical (p. 294). Both evaluations are false.

According to David Rose, the author who devised the term “third-degree opportunism”, it arises when an agent

takes advantage of the fact that he knows the full set of possible actions while the principal does not, because of the *localization of knowledge*. To be specific, the agent selects an action that the principal will regard as

²⁰ Optimization always operates subject to constraints. Maximization might be interpreted as optimizing along the single dimension of quantity.

²¹ As they later concede, “there is certainly some optimization in the taking of any action . . . ethical action is not primarily about optimization in the form of ‘being all you can be,’ but rather in the form of ‘being all you would be’” (p. 289; see also p. 288 n. 7).

the best one only because the principal is unaware that the agent knows of a better one.²²

Unlike D&R²³, Rose recognizes that third degree opportunities are widespread; no contract can completely describe the actions needed to satisfy it. Moreover, far from being an impediment to progress (p. 294), TDOs are integral to it. The freedom they presuppose is part of the freedom necessary for entrepreneurial discovery to operate.

According to D&R, however, TDOs are morally repellent (pp. 294 and 295). They assert that taking advantage of TDOs

. . . puts the relationship we have with ourselves as a whole in disequilibrium by eroding what we ought to be in our relations with others generally. In other words, what we owe to others should line up with what we owe to ourselves (trustworthiness); and the exercise of third-degree opportunism removes that balance. (p. 295)

Trustworthiness is indeed an important virtue, but need not be violated in exploiting a TDO. Whether it is, depends on what the agents and principal had previously agreed: unless a contract specifies optimization or maximization, taking advantage of a TDO may be compliant.²⁴ But such contractual niceties are ignored by D&R when they consider the ethical status of TDOs. The reason why they consider exploiting TDOs to be necessarily unethical, is simply

²² David C. Rose, *The Moral Foundations of Economic Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 6.

²³ “However poorly a society might progress if third-degree opportunism were prevalent . . .” (p. 294).

²⁴ If the contract specifies maximizing the output of widgets meeting a specified standard, employees who generate a smaller number of widgets or substandard ones will be in breach. Even if the content of “maximum” cannot be known in advance, the obligation to pursue it would be established both contractually and via the agent’s legal duty of loyalty to pursue the principal’s objectives. If, however, as is so often the case, the contract only indicated that employees were to be widget producers, and the company was simply pursuing “general corporate purposes”, employees who merely satisfied would arguably not have breached either contract or duty.

because they conflate TDOs themselves with the “golden opportunities” that TDOs may offer.²⁵ It is not third degree opportunities but “golden opportunities” that necessarily undermine trust when exploited, and do so by their very nature.

“Golden opportunities”²⁶ are situations in which “. . . one is in a position to take advantage of another without detection, by violating or diminishing a trust relationship between them” (p. 294). Exploiting golden opportunities is immoral by definition, since doing so necessarily involves a breach or reduction of trust. Moreover, according to Rose, “Golden opportunities to engage in third-degree opportunism are by definition beyond the reach of institutional mechanisms that work through external incentives.”²⁷ That is because the mechanisms needed are precisely appeals to moral commitment. D&R, however, mistakenly attribute (p. 294) the inapplicability of “external incentives” instead to TDOs. Once again, the misleading narrative is likely to obscure the underlying message.

6. Discrepant Discontinuity

Confusions also affect the understanding of another “. . . key concept . . . frequently mentioned in connection with entrepreneurship in a market context . . . discontinuity” (p. 304). Both the economic and ethical examples of discontinuity offered in Chapter 8 are logically odd. They ignore three basic points. Conceptually, discontinuities can only occur in connection with things that have been or may be continuous; they represent breaks or gaps in a logical, physical or causal sequence. Second, the continuity/discontinuity dichotomy is not exhaustive. And third, only differences between things that can or should be the same count as discrepancies, or can be reconciled: discontinuities don’t qualify.

As a market example of discontinuity, D&R suggest the difference between “prices in one place and those in another for the same good” (p. 304). Such a price differential can genuinely represent an opportunity for arbitrage. But since the prices are by hypothesis in two separate markets, while they are not continuous, nor yet are they

²⁵ Part of the problem comes from D&R’s confusingly referring to both TDOs and golden opportunities as “such opportunities” in a paragraph (pp. 294-95) that starts and ends with explicit references to TDOs.

²⁶ Rose, “Moral Foundations”, p. 6.

²⁷ Ibid.

discontinuous: like many other kinds of differences, they are neither. D&R's ethical example—the difference “between two related, though conflicting desires” (p. 304)—is also not a discontinuity. To describe it as such, is to perplex the reader, as does D&R's conclusion, that “[s]uccessfully integrating values in one's life is no less a reconciliation of discontinuities than is market entrepreneurship” (p. 305). The two are indeed similar, but only because, contrary to what D&R suggest, neither counts as a reconciliation of discontinuities. Unfortunately, the peculiar usage of “discontinuity” may well cast doubt on their language and the argument elsewhere.

7. Worlds of L and E

Other problems include those affecting the lengthy commentary on the worlds of L and E (pp. 311-18). D&R introduce a generic lawyer L and a generic economist E ostensibly to explore characteristic ways of dealing with a concrete problem (p. 311). The exposition is puzzling almost from the outset, insofar as E's method is described as “altering incentives and *allowing* individuals to decide for themselves” (p. 311; italics added). This comes as a surprise. The introductory example seems only to be about a single, concrete situation—“the over-use of a piece of land” (p. 311)—not about managing a world. For handling a single, concrete situation, an economist might have been expected simply to engage in individual (perhaps Coasian) negotiation. The suspicion thus arises that although E was supposed to be a representative economist, E's world is not a world of economics.

Reinforcing this suspicion, D&R state, “. . . the ‘feel’ of the individualist perfectionist (IP) ethical world we have been advocating would be much more like the ‘amoral’ world of E, than it would be like L's juridical order” (p. 312). The characterization of E's world as “amoral” is also odd, especially since its “chief” and “central evil” (leakage) had already been identified (p. 312). The scare-quotation marks around “amoral” might indicate that the assessment is coming from within L's world. But the possibility of capture is only discussed later (p. 313).

Den Uyl and Rasmussen go on to state, “What L and E have in common is that they both have been effectively given, by the example, the authority to organize society according to some specified goal” (p. 313). It is not clear when or how the example conferred that authority. If, however, L and E have indeed each had “the authority to organize society” then, as suspected, neither is acting *qua* economist. Having

the legitimate authority to exercise coercive force in a jurisdiction is exactly what, according to many theorists (including Max Weber, Murray Rothbard and Ayn Rand), constitutes government, independent of the purposes to which that force may be applied. The problem is not so much that “both [worlds] are ultimately captured by the juridical” (p. 313), but that in making them both political, D&R seem to have ruled out the distinctively economic response by hypothesis.

They continue: “But suppose we eliminate the common denominator and imagine that there is no specific problem to be solved—not even a mandate to organize society in some way for any particular end—and, instead, only an approach to problems generally” (p. 313). Is the contrast now between two sorts of mandate, or between the presence and the absence of a mandate? Readers might imagine that the intended distinction is between a society that has a substantive purpose, and a society that simply provides a framework in which the associates can pursue their individual purposes²⁸. The latter is indeed the sort of society that seems most compatible with neo-Aristotelian, individualist perfectionism. But the muddled exposition obscures rather than clarifies that conclusion.

It is particularly disappointing that the presentation of L’s and E’s competing worlds is so confusing, because economics might be a “model of action” that works more generally than entrepreneurship to illuminate individualist perfectionism. Though Austrian economists differ among themselves about the essential characteristics of the entrepreneur (and about much else), they mainly agree on the fundamentals of Austrian economics that—unlike mainstream (neo)classical economics—allow room for, and explain the vital role of, the entrepreneur.

The model of human action that underlies Austrian economics is markedly similar to the understanding of human action employed in the template of responsibility and individualist perfectionism. In both, purposively acting individuals are at the core of a dynamic world of particulars and process, in which risk and uncertainty are unavoidable, and competing individuals’ preferences are not fixed but change creatively and interactively. Both recognize the essential importance of localized knowledge, individual judgment, and freedom from coercion. Although Austrian economics is controversial, it is probably

²⁸ This is the distinction between Michael Oakeshott’s “enterprise association” and “civil association”; see Michael Oakeshott, “On the Civil Condition”, in his *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 108-84. The latter resembles the political as understood by D&R in *Norms of Liberty*.

familiar to a considerably larger audience—even of philosophers—than D&R’s version of individualist perfectionism is, and could helpfully be invoked to illuminate it.

8. Conclusion

In summary, *The Perfectionist Turn* is an important book with a worthwhile objective, that of identifying, clarifying, and defending the distinctive features of the template of responsibility and neo-Aristotelian, individualist perfectionism. Precisely because *TPT* is a serious work of philosophy, it is appropriate to demand that it be written with philosophical rigor, and that even its use of borrowed concepts be able to withstand critical scrutiny. It is therefore unfortunate that a chapter meant to illuminate IP flourishing with a model of action requires readers to overcome so many confusions. Though there is valuable material in “The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero”, extracting it requires overlooking errors, infelicities, and ambiguities.

The most instructive parts of “The Entrepreneur as Moral Hero” are those that are independent of—indeed, sometimes in spite of—the entrepreneurial analogies. D&R do occasionally acknowledge (e.g., p. 290 n. 11 and p. 303) that their analogizing is problematical:

Even if we suppose that our foregoing analogy between the entrepreneurial and the ethical agent has been successful, the question remains as to what has been gained by this exercise. It may seem that we have done little to enhance our understanding of either the entrepreneur or the ethical agent. No doubt, there is truth in that objection; but our purpose in using the analogy has been less to understand these respective agents than to gain some insight into the nature of ethics itself. (p. 310)

That worthy project might have been better achieved had Chapter 8 eschewed all reference to heroes and clarified the references to entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, by explicitly identifying the contrasting templates of respect and responsibility, and highlighting the features of IP flourishing, *The Perfectionist Turn* performs an extremely valuable service. Neo-Aristotelian, individualist perfectionism deserves to be better understood.

Individualistic Perfectionism and Human Nature¹

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1. Introduction

There has been a resurgence of interest in neo-Aristotelian and neo-Stoic ethics in recent years. Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen's new book, *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics*,² is the latest addition to this literature.³ The authors defend what they call an "ethics of responsibility," the core idea of which is *individualistic perfectionism*. The four main ideas of individualistic perfectionism are as follows:

- (1) Being virtuous is good for the virtuous person, and not only for others.

¹ This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented at the American Association for the Philosophic Study of Society at the Eastern Division American Philosophical Association, January 5, 2017.

² Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen, *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2016). All parenthetical citations in the text are to *The Perfectionist Turn*, unless otherwise specified.

³ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Neera K. Badhwar, *Well-Being: Happiness in a Worthwhile Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Lawrence Becker, *A New Stoicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Paul Bloomfield, *The Virtues of Happiness: A Theory of the Good Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mark LeBar, *The Value of Living Well* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Daniel C. Russell, *Happiness for Humans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

- (2) Both virtue and flourishing are somehow grounded in human nature.
- (3) All our values and reasons are ultimately grounded in our own flourishing.
- (4) Although there are generic goods and virtues that all flourishing human beings must have, the weight of these goods and virtues in each person's life depends on the individual's nature and her circumstances. This is the individualistic element of their theory.

These claims are familiar to readers of ancient ethics and contemporary neo-Aristotelian and neo-Stoic work; what's new and interesting are the arguments that Den Uyl and Rasmussen offer for them. In emphasizing the individualized nature of flourishing, the authors successfully meet a challenge from subjectivists who think that an objective account of flourishing must ignore the individual's own nature and interests.⁴ Although they are not the first to argue that flourishing is individualized, I think they do an exceptionally good job of explicating and defending the claim, so my discussion of it will be brief.⁵ I will focus on their arguments for the relationship of flourishing to virtue and the relationship of both to human nature, and on their claim that all of our values and reasons are ultimately grounded in personal flourishing.

2. Relationship of Virtue to Flourishing

The authors argue that there is no ontological gap between being a good or virtuous human being and being a flourishing human being (p. 33). Both goodness and flourishing are grounded in our nature as rational animals, and neither can be understood apart from the other. The "first existential condition" we all face is the necessity of making a life for ourselves (p. 7). We have a natural end (or *telos*)

⁴ L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Daniel M. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Valerie Tiberius and Alicia Hall, "Normative Theory and Psychological Research: Hedonism, Eudaimonism, and Why It Matters," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 5, no. 3 (May 2010), pp. 212–25.

⁵ For other defenses, see Russell, *Happiness for Humans*, and Badhwar, *Well-Being*.

to which we are naturally attracted, and this end is our own flourishing (p. 45). Our basic responsibility on an ethics of responsibility, as Den Uyl and Rasmussen call their theory, is to construct an integrated self, a self in which “there is no division between the acting, willing, and being of the self” (p. 9). A flourishing self must be an integrated self, and an integrated self is a self that we perfect through self-direction. The fundamental issue on an ethics of responsibility is to become a certain kind of person, and not, as on an ethics of respect-for-persons, to have the right kind of relationship to other persons or, even, to ourselves. This is not to say that the right kind of relationships are not important, but rather, to say that “the foundational well-spring for ethical action and judgment” is the *telos* of flourishing (p. 8). On an ethics of respect, by contrast, ethical norms arise from the fact that we have to live with others (p. 2). However, having a natural *telos* does not imply that there is something in us that pushes us toward self-perfection. We have to exercise our capacity for self-direction ourselves.

But how should we direct ourselves? What is our guide in this process? The authors argue that our guide is virtue, especially the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom enables us to use the right means to achieve the right ends, which include the generic human goods as well as the moral virtues, and to integrate all into a coherent whole (pp. 54-61).⁶ Practical wisdom also shows that flourishing requires self-understanding, that is, an understanding of our own capacities, talents, and interests. This, in turn, requires an understanding of other people and of our social and natural environment. Self-understanding is crucial to self-perfection and flourishing because we can flourish only if we live in a way that is appropriately responsive to our own basic capacities and interests in the circumstances we find ourselves in.

In short, the moral virtues of integrity, temperance, justice, etc. and the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (hereafter simply

⁶ Note that, on Aristotle’s view, practical wisdom is the virtue that entails, and is entailed by, all of the other virtues; see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. IX. So if you have practical wisdom across the board, it follows that you already have all of the other virtues across the board. Hence, it is not a means to the other virtues. But perhaps Den Uyl and Rasmussen believe, as I do, that we can have practical wisdom in some areas of our lives and not others (see Badhwar, *Well-Being*, chap. 7), in which case practical wisdom in some areas *can* show us how to grow in practical wisdom and moral virtue in other areas.

“virtues”) are necessary for flourishing both because they are instrumental means to the generic and individual human goods that are necessary for flourishing and because they are partial realizations or constituents of it (pp. 38-39). On this view, it follows that the virtues are necessary, but not sufficient, for flourishing. We also need what Aristotle calls “external” goods, such as friendship and knowledge (or, at least, knowledge of important things). Finally, since we all have different interests and talents, we also need goods that fit our interests and talents, such as, for example, philosophy to a Socrates (p. 171) or basketball to a Michael Jordan. Hence, if we were deprived of friendship or some interest central to our lives, such as philosophy, our lives would cease to flourish, or at least, would be much diminished. Indeed, Den Uyl and Rasmussen argue that, because we are social beings, even the loss of other people’s regard can diminish our flourishing (p. 188). As I would put it, it is such external goods that are the chief sources of that emotional fulfillment called happiness, and happiness is an essential component of flourishing. Virtue is not enough.

This view is in line with Aristotle’s recognition of the role of external goods and fortune in flourishing. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle declares that great misfortunes can undermine the *eudaimonia* of even the most virtuous person (*NE*, Bk. I, chap. 10, 1100b25–1101a8). What remains untouched is only his virtue. Conversely, he says, “many strokes of good fortune” are an adornment on a *eudaimon* life and make it even more *eudaimon*.⁷

However, Den Uyl and Rasmussen don’t consistently acknowledge that any external goods are essential for flourishing. Indeed, like the Stoics, they typically *identify* flourishing with virtuous activity. As they say, flourishing just *is* “the exercise of one’s own practical wisdom” (p. 33; see also p. 52), and since practical wisdom entails all of the moral virtues, flourishing just is the exercise of the virtues. Again, our very *telos*, earlier identified with

⁷ In *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), John Cooper argues that, for Aristotle, external goods are only material for virtuous activity. Whether or not this is the correct interpretation of Aristotle, there is no reason to think that the claim is true. External *bads* are also material for virtuous activity. In any case, my point here is simply that, in the passages just discussed, Den Uyl and Rasmussen clearly hold that external goods like friendship and others’ regard are essential for flourishing in their own right, and not merely as material for virtue.

flourishing, is now identified with “deployment of practical wisdom” (p. 323). When we actualize our potentialities through the exercise of the virtues, we perfect ourselves, and self-perfection is what flourishing consists of (see, e.g., pp. 53, 64, 174, and 184). A good, that is, virtuous, human being is a flourishing or perfected human being (p. 172). For each individual, her or his own virtue or self-perfection or flourishing is what has ultimate value for her or him.

One problem with equating flourishing with virtue, as already noted, is that it is incompatible with the view Den Uyl and Rasmussen defend in some places, namely, that flourishing requires external goods and not only virtue. Another problem with it is that it is wildly implausible. For if flourishing is identical to virtue, then neither the unfortunate consequences of our own or others’ actions, nor those of cruel nature, can make any difference to our flourishing. Neither, of course, can good fortune. All that matters is our own actions and attitudes. If we respond to a personal tragedy virtuously, we continue to flourish, and if badly, we don’t. The tragedy itself makes no dent in our flourishing. The loss of our children is no more important to our flourishing than the loss of our tables and chairs. In Lawrence Becker’s words, Stoic sages, that is, the fully virtuous, “must be able to say of everything other than their virtue (friends, loves, emotions, reputation, wealth, pleasant mental states, suffering, disease, death, and so on) that it is nothing to them.”⁸ For everything other than our virtue is part of the circumstances or matter of our actions.

This, needless to say, is rather far removed from any non-philosophical conception of flourishing, any conception that people actually live by. So it is a special problem for a theory that purports to be based on human nature as it is, not as the theory wishes it to be. Why, then, do Den Uyl and Rasmussen hold this view? In the next section, I consider their argument.

3. Relationship of Flourishing and Virtue to Human Nature

I’ll start by discussing their response to a challenge to perfectionism raised by Daniel Haybron in his *Pursuit of Unhappiness*, a response that illustrates the strength of their individualistic perfectionism. Then, I will sketch a variation on this

⁸ Becker, *A New Stoicism*, p. 8. This Stoic view, as I argue in my *Well-Being*, pp. 207-11, is thus rather inhuman. And in making virtue alone essential for flourishing, it actually ends up robbing virtue of importance because it treats success in achieving our goals as unimportant.

example that illustrates the problem with their view that flourishing is identical with virtuous activity.

Haybron uses the example of a seasoned diplomat he calls Angela to argue that perfectionism gives the wrong answer about the nature of flourishing. Angela has been looking forward to a well-earned retirement after years of stellar service, but at the last minute she is asked to stay on to avert a crisis in a foreign country. Haybron argues that perfectionism requires that she stay on because doing so would more fully exercise the capacities that are central to her as a human being, namely, her rational capacities, but retirement is more conducive to her flourishing because it is more emotionally fulfilling. Perfection and virtue pull in one direction, flourishing in the other.

Den Uyl and Rasmussen rightly question this claim (pp. 183-86). Staying on as a diplomat would not necessarily require a greater exercise of Angela's rational capacities and virtues—practical wisdom can be exercised in retirement as well as in work. However, staying on as a diplomat would also not necessarily constitute a sacrifice of her well-being. It all depends on her interests and circumstances. Indeed, on Haybron's own description of Angela, it seems that taking on the more challenging task would be more fulfilling for her.⁹ Haybron's argument might be fatal to a non-individualistic form of perfectionism, but not to an individualistic perfectionism that takes into account the individual's own particular abilities, interests, and talents.

Suppose, however, that Angela's diplomacy fails terribly through no fault of her own, and she regrets not retiring. She acts honestly, courageously, tactfully, and skillfully in her negotiations with, let's say, the tyrant of the country in crisis, but her very virtue throws the tyrant into a conniption fit, and everything ends in disaster. She is, to put it mildly, thoroughly frustrated, and deeply regrets her decision to take on the task. Commonsensically, Angela's decision led to a diminishment of her flourishing, but insofar as Den Uyl and Rasmussen equate flourishing with virtuous activity, they must deny this.

What is their argument for this counterintuitive position? They provide their reasons in a chapter aptly named "Because," where they argue that "goodness is conformity of a living thing to its nature" (p. 222). A living entity's life-form, the kind of thing that it is, "provides

⁹ I give essentially the same analysis of this example in my *Well-Being*, pp. 207-8.

the *telos*,” and its “being a good entity involves activities that are in principle good for it” (p. 220). Hence, there is no ontological gap between the goodness of a living thing and what is good for it: “In general, then, life-forms are ‘meant’ to be an integration of ‘good for’ and ‘good of’” (p. 224).

However, the fact that “being a good entity involves activities that are in principle good for it” doesn’t entail that its good is identical with such activities. For both the consequences of its own good activities and the consequences of the actions of others and of nature can be bad for it. A rose bush can be functioning perfectly well, but if someone pours bleach on it, it withers. Likewise, a human being can be living perfectly virtuously, but if disaster strikes, it can rob her of all of her external sources of happiness. Recognizing that the good for an entity requires more than its own good actions is perfectly compatible with denying an ontological gap between its goodness and what is good for it.

The next question is: What is our nature and how do we know what it is? What is the human life-form?

4. The Nature of Human Nature

Our nature or life-form is defined by our “generic human dispositions,” dispositions that “are inherently reason-giving, because they are part of what defines what is valuable” for us (p. 190 n. 37). The most important of these capacities is reason, which we exercise by choice (pp. 230-32). It is this capacity that makes us human and distinguishes us from other animals. But what exactly is reason? It is the capacity “to grasp the world in conceptual terms” (p. 231). “This capacity is expressed in speculative reasoning (the pursuit of truth) and practical reasoning (the pursuit of human good)” (p. 231). Different cultures and forms of life are all, ultimately, due to this capacity. We exercise our reason in every aspect of our lives: in planning a trip or a meal, in commenting on a book, in the pursuit of friendship and other relationships, and even in exercising our other capacities, including our physical ones.

That reason is involved in every aspect of our lives is undeniable. However, speculative or theoretical reason is exercised not necessarily in the pursuit of truth *per se*, but in the pursuit of what *seems* to the thinker to be true, and practical reason is exercised not necessarily in the pursuit of the good *per se*, but in the pursuit of what *seems* to the agent to be good. Sometimes, people are innocently mistaken about the true and the good. For example, many people,

ignorant of economics, seem to have believed Donald Trump's false claims about his ability to "bring back jobs" to America through protectionist measures, and many people seem to think that his strong-arming of Carrier was a good, patriotic thing to do. But ignorance is not always innocent. Too often people seek out only those views that confirm the beliefs they already hold, because it would be painful to discover that their deep-seated beliefs are false or because it would open them to criticism by their peer group. They choose to believe whatever is advantageous to them in some way. Think of Democrats who evade evidence for the safety of Genetically Modified Organisms, or Republicans who discovered Trump's "virtues" as soon as it became clear that he was going to win the primaries. Sadly, it is the same capacity for exercising reason that people employ when they construct elaborate rationalizations of their beliefs and actions.¹⁰

Again, some of our capacities, such as the capacities for envy and resentment, seem to be inherently negative—devoid of all value. Such capacities are not reason-giving at all. Other capacities allow us to "find" different reasons in them. For example, although most people think that the capacity for sexual pleasure gives us reason to enjoy sex for itself, some think that sexual pleasure exists only as a means to reproduction. Again, many capacities, such as the capacities to read and write, leave it open what the appropriate use of them is.

Since human nature is not all good, we have to say why what we regard as potentially virtuous in human nature is potentially virtuous, and why what we regard as potentially vicious in human nature is potentially vicious. Den Uyl and Rasmussen reject the view that we do so on a normative conception of human nature, that is, on the basis of what Daniel Russell calls "second nature," rather than on the bare, descriptive facts of "first nature," because first nature, they say, is already normatively infused (pp. 189-90). As they put it, "a correct description" of human nature is "*inherently* value-laden" (p. 190). We learn about human nature from the sciences, humanities,

¹⁰ It might be objected that insofar as people are mistaken about the true or the good, whether innocently or not, they are not using their speculative or practical reason. Reason itself is always in the pursuit of the true and the good. But if this is true, then we need to be told which faculty they are using when they are mistaken. Furthermore, whatever faculty that is, it is surely as central to human life as infallible reason. For like reason, it is a conceptual faculty that is exercised in every aspect of human life and, like reason, it distinguishes us from the other animals.

arts, and careful observation. In answer to critics who argue that a descriptive account of human nature cannot yield a specific ethical outlook, Den Uyl and Rasmussen state that

one could say straightforwardly that human living involves certain activities—for example, the pursuit of friends, the acquisition of knowledge, and *the development of dispositions (moral virtues) that require the use of one's intelligence in dealing with life's challenges*—and that a human life that did not involve activities such as these would be incomplete and defective. These general standards connected to these activities provide, then, an ethical outlook. (p. 233; italics mine)

It's true that people without the capacity for either friendship or knowledge lack something important, something that leaves their lives unfulfilled.¹¹ But does it not beg the question simply to assert that those who lack moral virtue lack a good that leaves them unfulfilled, or that human living involves virtue, period? Human living too often involves vice rather than virtue, and intelligence is used even by the wicked in determining the best means to their wicked goals. Moreover, wickedness or everyday badness are as deeply rooted in human nature as virtue. Just as our nature contains the seeds of virtues like temperance, justice, kindness, or honesty, it contains the seeds of vices like intemperance, injustice, cruelty, or dishonesty.¹² Alternatively, we might agree with Aristotle that by nature we are neither good nor bad, we just have a potentiality for both: As he puts it, “the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor

¹¹ I say either “friendship *or* knowledge” because it's possible that some people with Asperger's syndrome are sufficiently different from the rest of us that they can flourish without friends or, at least, without intimate friends.

¹² Gareth Cook, “The Moral Life of Babies,” *Scientific American*, November 12, 2013 (interview with Paul Bloom about his book *Just Babies*), accessed online at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-moral-life-of-babies/>; Nathalia Gjersoe, “The Moral Life of Babies,” *Guardian*, October 12, 2013, accessed online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/oct/12/babies-moral-life>. Bloom argues that the same emotions that lead to moral behavior can also lead to immoral behavior.

against nature. Rather, we are by nature able to acquire them, and we are completed by habit” (*NE*, Bk. II, chap. 1). Furthermore, even people with genuine friendships, a genuine passion for knowledge, and many virtues can be vicious toward those they regard as inferior to them—toward “the other.” One example will suffice: America’s slaveholding Founding Fathers. Indeed, virtue (more or less) toward those who belong to “our group” and vice toward outsiders, is the way human beings have lived for most of human history and the way many live even now. One cannot identify human nature with only the good bits.

For the same sorts of reasons, since flourishing, on both the Aristotelian and the Stoic conception, entails virtue, Den Uyl and Rasmussen cannot simply assert that human beings are naturally attracted to their own flourishing, period (p. 45). Even though the seeds of such attraction are present in normal children, they don’t always bear fruit in adulthood. There are, after all, many bad human beings and many who act according to virtue only because, and when, they fear that acting otherwise will get them into trouble. Such people regard virtue as a burden rather than as a component of their flourishing. It is not something they are attracted to. Their conception of what’s good for them is very different from the conception of (mostly) virtuous people. What needs to be shown is why the conception of flourishing or self-perfection these people hold is wrong.

One answer Den Uyl and Rasmussen give is that “[w]hat is good for a human being is what is choice-worthy” (p. 243), and what is choiceworthy is the appropriate actualization of one’s potentialities (p. 174 and elsewhere). I completely agree, but what is the argument for these claims? What makes becoming virtuous appropriate and becoming vicious inappropriate? What makes the former rational and the latter irrational? What makes virtue the mature state (p. 197) and vice the immature state? I raise these questions not so much to cast doubt on Den Uyl and Rasmussen’s claim that we can ground ethics on a descriptive account of human nature, as to indicate that they need to say more in order to succeed in their project. An answer in terms of the importance of virtue for success in acquiring and keeping certain external goods, including good relationships with others, takes us part of the way, but not all the way, since such success often doesn’t require virtue toward those in the out-group or toward those who cannot retaliate. In order to show that human flourishing requires virtue, we need additional arguments.

5. The Ultimate Sources of Our Values and Reasons

Den Uyl and Rasmussen argue that “[u]ltimately, our values, reasons, and rankings are grounded in personal flourishing” (p. 85). This claim is quite common in the neo-Aristotelian and neo-Stoic literature. It is also, I think, quite problematic. For it entails, among other things, that our *ultimate* reason for exercising the other-regarding virtues—justice, kindness, generosity—is that doing so is part of our own flourishing rather than part of other people’s flourishing. To be clear, I’m not rejecting the view that these virtues are part of our own flourishing and that this gives us a reason for acquiring them and exercising them. I’m rejecting the view that our own flourishing is the *ultimate* or *only* reason for acquiring and exercising the other-regarding virtues.

Take, for example, Thomas Jefferson’s ownership of slaves. He needed slaves to run his plantation and support his many scientific interests which, in turn, enabled him to exercise many of his intellectual virtues. He was in no danger of reprisal from the slaves, he rarely felt guilty, and he certainly did not fear criticism from his society. What made slavery bad for him? Its injustice. But what made slavery unjust? Surely, the fact that it violated the slaves’ rights and prevented or undermined their flourishing. Hence, it’s this that constituted Jefferson’s *ultimate* reason why he should have freed his slaves. The impact of his injustice on his own flourishing was derivative from its impact on the slaves’ flourishing.

Speaking more generally, I see no reason to think that only things that are, or that we perceive to be, good or bad for ourselves, give us reason to respond to them positively or negatively, respectively. If I respond negatively to stories of the massacres in Aleppo, it’s because they are bad for the inhabitants of Aleppo, not because they are bad for me. The inhabitants’ suffering gives me a reason to make a donation to the International Red Cross, even though the inhabitants’ fate has hardly any impact on my flourishing. It might be countered that, deep down, I discern that making the donation is good for me, and that that is why I make it. But if my donation is good for me it’s only because, given the plight of the inhabitants of Aleppo, it’s the right or worthwhile thing to do. It’s not worthwhile because it is antecedently good for me, independently of its worth in light of their plight.

Or consider another example. It’s wrong for me to step on your gouty toe because it’s bad for you, not because it’s bad for me. That’s

why I apologize to you, and not to myself. My act is bad for me only because it's wrong, and it's wrong because it's cruel and bad for you. If stepping on your toe cured you of gout, and you wanted me to cure you, then it would be a worthwhile thing to do and whatever benefit I derived from it would ultimately be grounded in your good. These are examples of values or disvalues that are ultimately rooted in other people's flourishing, not our own. They become relevant to our own flourishing only derivatively.

Just as we are naturally attracted to things in the natural or artifactual world long before we know the meaning of flourishing, we are naturally attracted to and concerned about other people, long before we know the meaning of flourishing (or concern). One crying baby in the nursery sets other babies crying. The human face smiles at the human face. There is no reason to hold that when we acquire the ability to reason, the natural sociality that once led us to respond to others independently of our own flourishing, must be replaced by a sociality that is mediated by our own flourishing. We can see something as valuable to others even if we ourselves don't, even can't, value it. For example, I can recognize that music is a value to most people even if I myself am tone-deaf. This recognition gives me a reason not to be dismissive of other people's interest in music, or worse, not to destroy their music collection to make room for my precious book collection—even if they can't retaliate. In short, there is a natural concern for others that is not entirely rooted in our concern for ourselves.

Perhaps Den Uyl and Rasmussen would say that the agent-relativity of values or reasons entails that all values depend, ultimately, on their connection to the agent's flourishing. But does it? As far as I can determine, the agent-relativity of values or reasons for Den Uyl and Rasmussen consists of two ideas: (i) values and reasons are relational, that is, they are essentially values or reasons for someone-or-the-other, and (ii) they are personal, in the sense that something can be a value for me without being a value for anyone else. However, both (i) and (ii) can be true without it being the case that all values for me depend *ultimately* on their connection to my flourishing.

To conclude, Den Uyl and Rasmussen's book is a rich and dense discussion of the metaethics of virtue that, in my view, is right in its main thesis that both virtue and flourishing are grounded in our nature as rational beings. However, I've argued against Den Uyl and Rasmussen's equation of flourishing with virtuous activity, not only

because this equation contradicts their own claim in some places that flourishing requires external goods in addition to virtuous activity, but also and more importantly because it is highly implausible. I've also argued against their claim that all reasons and values are rooted, in the final analysis, in the agent's own flourishing. And I've shown why they need to say more in order to defend their claim that we can ground ethics entirely in a descriptive account of human nature.

Self-Formation and Other-Regarding Concern:
Commentary on Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B.
Rasmussen's *The Perfectionist Turn*¹

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Let me begin with two remarks from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here is the first:

We are related to our friend as we are related to ourselves. . . . Whatever someone regards as his being, or the end for which he chooses to be alive, that is the activity he wishes to pursue in his friend's company. Hence some friends drink together, others play dice, while others do gymnastics and go hunting, or do philosophy.²

Of course, these activities are not all mutually exclusive (though philosophy and gymnastics might not be compossible). That aside, here is the other (related) remark:

The wise person is able, and more able the wiser he is, to contemplate even by himself; . . . though he presumably does it better with colleagues . . .³

¹ This article is a slightly modified version of a paper presented at the American Association for the Philosophic Study of Society at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, January 5, 2017.

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999 [c. 325 BC]), IX.12, 1171b33–1172a5, with some minor changes.

³ *Ibid.*, X.7, 1177a34–1177b2, with some minor changes.

I start with these remarks for two reasons: First, I wish to note with appreciation the philosophical richness of Den Uyl and Rasmussen's *The Perfectionist Turn*,⁴ which is obviously the fruit of a long philosophical friendship. This speaks to Aristotle's point that although we can contemplate alone, presumably we can do it better with friends or colleagues. Second, the above remarks about friendship—especially the thought that “we are related to our friend as we are related to ourselves”—are suggestive of the theme that I want to take up here in my commentary on the book, namely, the relationship between self-regarding and other-regarding concern.

There is a lot in the book with which I am in agreement, especially the broadly Aristotelian approach to ethics that aims at the good life (*eudaimonia*), and there is also much that I learned from it. However, I want to offer some critical comments on the central distinction that is made between two basic “templates” (i.e., “orientations,” “frameworks,” or “approaches”) in ethics: the “template of respect” and the “template of responsibility.” Den Uyl and Rasmussen favor the latter template, though I find the dichotomy itself problematic, and in what follows I explain why.

For the template of respect, as Den Uyl and Rasmussen understand it, “the necessity of living among persons is taken to be the principal reason for developing norms of conduct—even with respect to ourselves,” whereas for the template of responsibility, “the source of all norms—even those concerning our life among others—derives from the existential fact that we must make something of our lives” (p. 2). In other words, the template of respect gives primary emphasis to *other-regarding concern*, with self-regarding concern being derivative, whereas the template of responsibility gives primary emphasis to *self-regarding concern*, with other-regarding concern being derivative.

The two templates, according to Den Uyl and Rasmussen, “are not two theories of ethics, but approaches within which theorizing will take place” (p. 3). For instance, they classify both Kantianism and utilitarianism under the template of respect, while they regard Aristotelian virtue ethics as falling under the template of responsibility (p. 4). However, this categorization is a little forced. In regard to utilitarianism, though it does give primary emphasis to other-regarding

⁴ Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen, *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2016), p. 2. Hereafter, all references to *The Perfectionist Turn* will be cited parenthetically in the text.

concern, it seems better to speak of a template of considerateness rather than respect, since the utilitarian is concerned with maximizing pleasure (or preference-satisfaction) and minimizing pain (or dissatisfaction). The requirement of respect corresponds to that which has dignity or nobility and is thus respect-worthy. These are categories of intrinsic value that the utilitarian does not recognize (since he or she thinks pleasure or preference-satisfaction is the only intrinsic value, and it is odd to think that pleasure as such or preference-satisfaction as such is respect-worthy). The template of respect does seem to have clearer connection with a Kantian approach to ethics, especially given the emphasis on human dignity. I don't think it is right, though, to say that Kantianism gives primary emphasis to other-regarding concern, with self-regarding concern being derivative. Kant recognizes perfect and imperfect duties to self and to others, and both are rooted in an account of our dignity as human beings.

My primary concern here, however, is not with how to characterize Kantianism and utilitarianism. Rather, I am concerned with how best to articulate a broadly Aristotelian conception of ethics, where one aims at the good life (*eudaimonia*), where some set of virtues is said to play an important role in achieving this aim, and where the account of the virtues bears some significant resemblance to Aristotle's own account. Is such a conception of ethics best understood in terms of the template of responsibility? As mentioned above, Den Uyl and Rasmussen think so, and they describe their own Aristotelian ethic of responsibility, "individualistic perfectionism," as follows:

The human life-form consists in a determinate set of potentialities which, when actualized appropriately, amount to . . . human flourishing or the self-perfecting life. . . . [What] lies at the heart of ethics is the issue of what is worthy of being valued, which for us is ultimately an individual human being's own self-perfection; and this requires that ethics be primarily concerned with persons determining for themselves in what their individual human good concretely consists. Human good is thus grounded in the individuating and generic features of individual human beings; and it is fully immanent in their self-perfecting choices, actions, and lives. (p. 174)

What should we make of this? I agree that we should aim at self-perfection and in doing so we need to take responsibility for our own

lives. However, I don't think we should dichotomize self-regarding and other-regarding concern in the way that Den Uyl and Rasmussen suggest with their two opposing templates for ethics. I contend that aiming at our own self-perfection also includes concern for things that are "worthy of being valued" beyond this self-perfection, where their value is not merely derivative upon the value of self-perfection. Thus, I don't agree that "*the source of all norms . . . derives from the existential fact that we must make something of our lives*" (p. 2).

A key reason to think that we cannot dichotomize self-regarding and other-regarding concern has to do with the nature of proper self-formation (*Bildung*), which is a topic that I don't think receives due consideration in *The Perfectionist Turn*. On the view that I want to advance, the self only properly exists in a certain moral and social space.⁵ In other words, our identity or sense of self is *constituted* by our relationship with others, especially certain significant others (viz., family and friends, religious and cultural communities and their traditions, and so on), and by certain experiences of normative demands upon our lives, such as what we take to be respect-worthy, reverence-worthy, and love-worthy.⁶ This means that self-regarding concern will *integrally* be bound up with other-regarding concern.

⁵ See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pt. I ("Identity and the Good"), esp. chap. 2; Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1996), esp. chap. 1. Den Uyl and Rasmussen do make brief mention of Taylor's idea of the "dialogical self," but they reference this in the context of a discussion of self-reflection and suggest it is equivalent to the "dialectical self" in Adam Smith (p. 8 n. 13). I think this misses how it concerns the self in social space, that is, a socially constituted conception of the self. At another point, they also do remark: "We are . . . internally shaped by our sociality as much as we confront it externally" (p. 60). However, this point is not filled out and it is not clear that it is intended to imply what I have described as the self in moral and social space, which I am suggesting challenges the dichotomy of the two templates and the view that self-responsibility can be "the source of all norms."

⁶ Taylor argues that without an orientation in moral and social space, where we place our selves in relation to certain significant others and normative demands, we would have an identity crisis and experience a kind of existential vertigo. I cannot explore this argument here, but I do find it compelling. My appeal is simply to the appearances (i.e., the phenomena) and what seems needed for making sense of our lives.

All Aristotelians would in some sense agree with this last claim. Many contemporary Aristotelians, for example, seek to justify the importance of other-regarding virtues such as compassion, generosity, justice, honesty, loyalty, fidelity to promises, and so forth by showing how these virtues are needed for promoting the “good functioning of the social group,” which in turn is important for realizing our own good as rational, social animals.⁷ Den Uyl and Rasmussen also acknowledge this point and maintain that we only achieve our good “with and among others” (p. 54; cf. pp. 11, 24, 53–54, 61, and 188). Indeed, unlike some other contemporary Aristotelians (e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre), they defend a liberal political and economic order centered on individual negative rights on the basis that these rights “regulate conduct so as to establish conditions that secure and maintain the possibility of individuals pursuing their own forms of human flourishing and engaging in moral activity among others” (pp. 89 and 93; cf. p. 94).⁸ While such rights claims are seen as instrumental to achieving our own good, Den Uyl and Rasmussen also affirm a more direct connection between other-regarding and self-regarding concern when they write: “[A] significant part of human potentialities is other-oriented. *Philia* (friendship) in all its various forms of relatedness is, for example, one of the basic generic goods identified by Aristotle as an integral feature of the good human life” (p. 53).

What is missing in all of these justifications for other-regarding concern is precisely what I have described as the morally and socially constituted self, where we cannot strictly separate out self-regarding and other-regarding concern. In the case of friendship, this involves seeing ourselves, as Aristotle puts it, as “related to our friend as we are related to ourselves.” In other words, there is a “we-identification” here in which we affectively identify with our friend

⁷ See Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 202. Alasdair MacIntyre also writes about the importance of participating in “social networks of giving and receiving” for realizing our own good; see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999), chaps. 9–11.

⁸ Den Uyl and Rasmussen clearly do not share MacIntyre’s view that our modern liberal political and economic order poses a significant threat to the life of virtue; see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007 [1981]), chaps. 17–18. This is a disagreement that I cannot take up here.

and his or her good such that we wish and pursue good for our friend for his or her own sake, but where this is at the same time pursuing good for ourselves since our friend's good is our good. This we-identification does not negate the individual person, but rather it involves a *communion* (etymologically, a *with*-union), which implies a unity or bond across different individuals.

What is also missing in the above justifications for other-regarding concern is an account of how others are “worthy of being valued”—that is, loved, respected, revered, etc.—for their own sake, which would cut against Den Uyl and Rasmussen's claim that what is “worthy of being valued” is “ultimately an individual human being's own self-perfection,” which, as we have seen, is also said to be “the source of all norms.” Indeed, it is noteworthy that they describe the good of friendship as being based on *our own* potentialities, rather than on the *friend's* love-worthiness. In my view, both of these contribute to the good of friendship in one's life.

In order to understand better this and the general concern about recognizing things beyond one's own self-perfection that are “worthy of being valued” for their own sake (but which, in so valuing them, also contribute to self-perfection), I think it is helpful to appeal to Charles Taylor's account of “constitutive goods.”⁹ A constitutive good is a fundamental object of “strong evaluation”: it is good not merely in virtue of being desired, but rather as something that we judge we *ought* to desire or show concern for. In other words, it places normative demands upon us: for example, demands of love, respect, admiration, awe, or reverence, in virtue of being love-worthy, respect-worthy, admiration-worthy, awe-worthy, or reverence-worthy.

Constitutive goods, as *fundamental* objects of strong evaluation, have two key functions in the ethical life. First, as the name suggests, constitutive goods *constitute* the goods (which Taylor calls “life goods”) that make up for us “the good life,” that is, a normatively higher, more fulfilling mode of life. For instance, if we regard some conception of our own human potential as a constitutive good—that is,

⁹ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pt. 1, esp. chaps. 1 and 4. It should be noted that on one occasion in the text Den Uyl and Rasmussen also speak of “constitutive goods,” but they understand this concept differently from Taylor. For them, constitutive goods are the various goods that make up a flourishing human life, that is, the good life (p. 42). Taylor would call these “life goods,” which are derivative from “constitutive goods,” as I discuss in the next paragraph.

as demanding respect and admiration—then we can see how this constitutes certain goods that make up the good life: namely, the virtues of character and intellect whereby we fulfill this human potential. Den Uyl and Rasmussen seem to recognize a constitutive good in this domain but not in others. However, we can (and I think should) recognize other human beings as constitutive goods—that is, as love-worthy, respect-worthy, or reverence-worthy due to the dignity or sanctity of human life—and so as constituting certain goods that define for us the good life: namely, other-regarding virtues such as friendship, justice, generosity, loyalty, etc. We also can (and I think should) regard the natural world as a constitutive good—that is, as being worthy of awe, wonder, and respect due to its beauty, grandeur, intricateness, etc.—and so as constituting certain goods that define for us the good life: namely, the virtues related to care and respect for the natural world and to proper awe and wonder. Likewise, if we are theists, then we will regard God as a constitutive good—that is, as being worthy of our love, reverence, and allegiance due to God’s perfect goodness, love, wisdom, etc.—and so as constituting certain goods that define for us the good life: namely, virtues such as piety, humility, and loving devotion. In each of these cases we can see how the proper responsiveness to a constitutive good contributes to a normatively higher, more fulfilling mode of life, that is, the good life. This proper responsiveness will also require proper self-formation (*Bildung*).¹⁰ The key point to see here, though, is how our own self-perfection, on this account, cannot be “the source of all norms” since it includes concerns for things that are “worthy of being valued” beyond this self-perfection, where their value is not merely derivative upon the value of self-perfection. In fact, the relationship goes the other way, as constitutive goods constitute the goods that define for us the good life.

In addition to this constitutive function of constitutive goods, there is a second function, namely, the *motivational* function. As Taylor puts it, constitutive goods are “moral sources,” that is, they are

¹⁰ John McDowell, who explores this idea of *Bildung* from an Aristotelian perspective and shares a lot in common philosophically with Taylor, writes: “The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities. When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons”; see John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 82.

“something the love [or respect] of which empowers us to do and be good.”¹¹ In other words, when we are properly responsive to some constitutive good (e.g., our own human potential, other human beings, the natural world, or God) and see it as worthy of respect, reverence, admiration, love, etc., then this will motivate us to realize the goods it constitutes and which contribute to defining for us a normatively higher, more fulfilling mode of life.

This account of constitutive goods can also help to address the concern that Den Uyl and Rasmussen raise in the “Afterword” about “Big Morality.” Their concern has to do with whether there is something too tame about an ethical perspective founded solely on the concept of “human flourishing,” as it does not seem able to account for the extremes of good (e.g., Jesus and Socrates) and evil (e.g., Hitler and Stalin), since “promoting [or attaining] flourishing” does not seem to capture the goodness of extreme good and “impeding flourishing” does not seem to capture the badness of extreme evil.¹² Den Uyl and Rasmussen write: “The problem of big morality thus resurrects the old charge leveled against eudaimonistic ethical theories that, by not appreciating the other and by being too focused upon the self, they are too narrow” (p. 320). Their solution is to suggest that the key difference is made by the great value of individuality: extreme evil shows “an utter and thorough disregard of individuality,” whereas in cases of extreme goodness “it is almost a hyper form of individuality that is displayed and impresses us. The acts of heroism, generosity, excellence, charity, and the like are admired because the agents of these acts stand out *so* distinctly as individuals” (pp. 331–32).

My own view is that there is something too tame or overly flattening about an ethical perspective founded solely on the concept of human flourishing. The language of “flourishing” has a biological and indeed botanical connotation, given its etymological connection to “flowering.” And so we are encouraged to see human flourishing as being on par with the flourishing of a dog or an apple tree. However, in light of this, I think we may be better off without the language of flourishing in Aristotelian ethics. As Aristotle himself says, “we regard

¹¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 93.

¹² Raimond Gaita would second the concern raised here; see his *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1998), chap. 1 (“Goodness Beyond Virtue”) and chap. 2 (“Evil Beyond Vice”).

neither ox, nor horse, nor any other kind of animal as happy [i.e., *eudaimon*]; for none of them can share in this sort of [noble] activity.”¹³ In other words, there is a major disanalogy between the good life for human beings and the good life for a dog or an apple tree. The good life for human beings, as I have suggested, should be understood as a matter of strong evaluation: that is, it is a normatively higher, more fulfilling mode of life, which involves “noble activity” and makes normative demands upon us. It is this strong evaluative dimension that we need in order to make sense of “big morality,” that is, the extremes of good and evil. We need strong evaluative categories such as the noble (or the respect-worthy), and indeed, I think also the sacred (or the reverence-worthy). For instance, the experience of great evil often involves a sense that something sacred (or reverence-worthy)—for example, human life or human sexuality—has been violated. Likewise, the experience of some great good often involves a sense of nobility or saintliness.

In either case, I don’t think an appeal to “individuality” alone is sufficient. We need to ask: Individuality of *what*? An individual car is replaceable in a way that an individual human life is not. We also need to ask: Why should *someone else’s* individuality matter to me? Additionally, why am I responsible for making something of *my* individuality? What is required is an account of how other human beings and our own human potential are constitutive goods, that is, respect-worthy, reverence-worthy, love-worthy, etc., such that they constitute certain goods (viz., different kinds of virtues) that define for us the good life. It is through failure to be properly responsive to such constitutive goods (e.g., the dignity or sanctity of human life) that great evil can occur, and it is through proper responsiveness to them that great good is achieved. Indeed, as aforementioned, when we are properly responsive to a constitutive good, we will be motivated to achieve the goods that it constitutes. Noble and saintly persons are those who are best responsive to constitutive goods, and achieving this is a matter of proper self-formation.

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.9, 1099b30–32; see also *ibid.*, X.8, 1178b24–34. On Aristotle’s idea of acting for the sake of the noble, see *ibid.*, II.3, 1104b29–35; II.4, 1105a29–34; III.7, 1115b11–12; and IV.1, 1120a22–23.

Response to Critics

Douglas J. Den Uyl
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“The perfect man needs to inspect his moral habits continually, weigh his actions, and reflect upon the state of his soul every single day.”
—Maimonides, *The Fourth Chapter*¹

1. Introduction

We are very pleased to have our book, *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics* (hereafter, *TPT*),² be the subject for a symposium in *Reason Papers*. *Reason Papers* is a journal of high standards and quality contributions as we see from these comments on our work. We are pleased not only because of the quality of this journal, but also due to our long association with it. One of us had an article published in the first (1974) issue of this journal. The other had an essay published in the second issue. Over the years, each of us has, on different occasions, published in this journal, and at other times, we have jointly published articles as well. Furthermore, in 1993, our book, *Liberty and Nature: An Aristotelian Basis for Liberal Order*,³

¹ Maimonides, “The Fourth Chapter,” in *The Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, ed. Raymond L. Weiss and Charles Butterworth (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), p. 73.

² Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen, *The Perfectionist Turn: From Metanorms to Metaethics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2016).

³ Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl, *Liberty and Nature: An Aristotelian Defense of Liberal Order* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1991).

was the subject for a symposium. In many respects, we find ourselves having come full circle, and we are appreciative of the opportunity to have our views considered in detail by this journal. We would like to thank the editors for their professionalism and courtesy in this regard.

2. Not Seeing the Forest for the Trees: A Response to Elaine Sternberg

We thank Elaine Sternberg (hereafter, ES) not only for these comments,⁴ but also for the many comments and suggestions she has made to us over the years on our various works. We have always found her comments to reveal what is crucial and of importance in what we are trying to accomplish and to raise helpful questions and objections. However, in this case ES has missed the general import of Chapter 8, “Entrepreneur as Moral Hero,” and, regrettably, failed to engage with its central message.

ES does not relate Chapter 8 to the rest of *TPT*. We make it more than clear in the very beginning of this chapter that since we have been operating on a theoretical plane throughout the work and since ethics is meant to issue in action, we need to illustrate further what is involved in a theory that rejects the juridical model of ethics and makes the exercise of one’s own practical wisdom the centerpiece of the ethical life. In order to do this, we consider many of the different features that are associated with being an entrepreneur—our point being, of course, that to exercise one’s own practical wisdom involves being entrepreneur-like in many respects.

We note that “ethical knowledge is concerned with guiding the conduct of an individual human being in situations that change and are not the same from individual to individual—which is to say, that it is concerned with the contingent and particular” (*TPT*, p. 67). By considering the views that Israel Kirzner, Scott Shane and S. Venkataraman, Friedrich Hayek, Joseph Shumpeter, and especially James Buchanan have about entrepreneurship, we illustrate the entrepreneur-like features of practical wisdom in dealing with circumstances that are contingent (and particular) for individualistic perfectionism. Here is a summary of what we show:

⁴ Elaine Sternberg, “Metanorms, Metaethics, and Metaphor: Heroic Confusions in *The Perfectionist Turn*,” *Reason Papers* 39, no. 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 8-21.

- (1) Being practically wise is not merely an optimization process. Human flourishing is not so much a matter of using known resources in their most effective manner, but is more like discovering means that are unknown or partially unknown to us.
- (2) Practical wisdom is not manifested in abstract universal principles, but in a knowledge that is tailored to ourselves and circumstances.
- (3) In order to attain the flourishing or self-perfecting life, practical wisdom might need to break down, reorder, and rework one's value hierarchies.
- (4) The life of practical wisdom involves risk, which involves learning how to deal with consequences and their effects upon our lives. As a result, the life of practical wisdom involves finding the mean between dogmatism and incontinence.
- (5) The life of practical wisdom involves uncertainty and discontinuity, for example, finding the appropriate course of conduct for each new set of circumstances.
- (6) Practical wisdom includes, as one of its central tasks, the process of discovering how to reconcile discontinuities with innovative restructuring of value relationships.
- (7) Though the insight into the contingent and particular that characterizes practical wisdom is direct (not discursive), there is nothing about this process that is epistemologically passive. By noting the entrepreneur-like features of insight, we make it clear that knowing is not an activity that occurs apart from alertness, creativity, imagination, thoughtfulness, and persistence. It takes us away from any view that makes such insight something that happens to one rather than something one does.
- (8) Being practically wise involves seeing one's own nature and external environment as the ultimate source of moral opportunity.
- (9) The measure of success—"profit"—for practical wisdom is an integral unity, an integrity or continuity, that is a defining quality of one's life as a whole.

Human flourishing is an entrepreneurial activity in many important respects. There is an illuminating analogy between the entrepreneur and the practitioner of practical wisdom or insight.

Chapter 8 is thus not an attempt to formulate definitions of entrepreneurship or profit. Nor is it an attempt to settle disputes among economic theorists as to whose account of entrepreneurship is best. Nor does it examine the nature of prices or unearth the nuances of the mathematical concept of discontinuity. As we make clear, the chapter is not meant to glorify the entrepreneur or engage in a discussion of the nuances of the term “hero.” These considerations may be worthwhile, but they are not what this chapter is about. Indeed, if it were, at least another book would be required.

Nor need we take up any of these activities in order to make our simple analogy. As we implied initially, much of what ES has to say, though certainly important in some contexts, is simply beside the point here. In fact, when we presented this chapter to a room full of economists, many of the nuances associated with the term “entrepreneur” were brought out. Rather than being a failing of the chapter, these senses were taken to highlight an interest in the analogy on their part and ours. In fact, *given our purpose*, the fact that Shumpeter may differ from Kirzner who may differ from Buchanan who may differ from someone else is a positive for us, since we are not trying to settle the meaning of entrepreneur among economic theorists.

Because ES “fails to see the forest,” there is little point in commenting in detail on each aspect of what she raises. No doubt some things might have been more carefully or clearly stated by us. Frankly, though, some of what seems unclear to her does not seem so to us, and in some places, she wrongly fails even to give us the benefit of the doubt. Consider ES’s claim that Chapter 8 moves from a consideration of the nature of human flourishing to an examination of the nature of entrepreneurship.⁵ This ignores what we explicitly state is our aim, as we note in our section title: “On the Analogy between Entrepreneurial and Ethical Conduct.” Moreover, to illustrate further how she does not realize the aim of this chapter, consider her comment: “What Chapter 8 actually shows, is that various features that different economists consider to be essential for their diverse understandings of the entrepreneur, *are also exhibited* in substantially modified form by ethical agents.”⁶ Yet, this characterization of our chapter, despite its claim about “substantially modified form,” is nonetheless all that we needed to do to illustrate how practical wisdom in individualistic

⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶ Ibid., emphasis added.

perfectionism is to be understood. We are not trying to argue for an identity between the activities of an entrepreneur and practitioner of practical wisdom, but only that they share at a certain level of abstraction some essential features, which we listed above.⁷

ES's commentary on the term "hero" is another example of her missing our point. Perhaps the title could have been written in a better way, but it is clear from the context that we are overstating the term in order to be provocative and suggestive, not precise. This might violate some norm ES has about doing philosophy, but it does not violate ours, or we would not have left it there.

In ES's discussion of "third-degree opportunities" (TDOs), we cannot find where we say these are "unethical."⁸ We do note that "golden opportunities" are (or "third degree opportunism" is) not ethical (*TPT*, p. 294). Yet it is clear from the context that what bothers us about *some* TDOs is the same thing that bothers Rose, namely, the incentive to violate trust and take advantage of "golden opportunities." ES is right that the mere presence of TDOs is not only not a problem, but even a good thing in trust communities. However, our intent here in discussing the issue was in situations where TDOs may not have strong trust communities. This context was simply ignored in favor of a reading that is clearly not a part of our intention.

This is also the case with ES's commentary on "insight," which trails off into a discussion of optimization.⁹ It is clear how we are using insight and optimization here, even if, in ES's view it is not the correct understanding of the terms (although one reading of her own footnotes 19 and 20 support our view). Furthermore, our point is not so much a matter of insight and optimization not being maximization, but rather that they are not to be viewed as merely the efficient use of means to ends.

Yet apart from "correcting" our definitions, it's not in the end clear what purpose is being served by ES's comments, since the forest

⁷ Moreover, the conduct of a practically wise individual is more like the conduct of an entrepreneur, as understood in various ways by economists, than that of some moral or legal authority, as the juridical model of ethics requires. This is also the chief point of contrast between the worlds of E ("the" economist) and of L ("the" lawyer), which ES also fails to grasp.

⁸ As ES claims is our claim on *TPT*, p. 303; see Sternberg, "Metanorms, Metaethics, and Metaphor," p. 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

is not at all confusing. We may have a number of failings as authors, but the unclarity ES perceives may be a function of her failing to see the overall intent of the chapter in context.

Ultimately, however, we want to thank ES for proving our chapter a success. For we drew the analogy to evoke precisely the kind of further reflection on the matter she exhibits. Despite her continually referring to how confused we are, she both understood the point we were making and managed in her own way to make further distinctions that might help others reflect on the similarities and the importance of the analogy itself. This is precisely what analogies are designed to do.

3. Self-Perfection, Practical Wisdom, and Natural Teleology: A Response to Neera Badhwar

We thank Neera Badhwar (hereafter, NB) for her thoughtful comments and insights.¹⁰ Her own work on the sorts of issues addressed in *TPT* is highly recommended.¹¹ We think that she, for the most part, understands what we are trying to achieve, but that she does not fully grasp just how radically different is an ethics inspired by the template of responsibility. We shall address two of her major concerns: (1) the relationship between human flourishing and virtue and (2) the source or ground of what is valuable or worthy.

NB states that we have a tension in our account of human flourishing that we need to resolve. On the one hand, she suggests that our position holds that we need external goods to flourish. On the other hand, she suggests that we seem to regard flourishing as being the exercise of virtue alone, particularly the exercise of practical wisdom. The latter view she claims is “wildly implausible. For if flourishing is identical to virtue, then neither the unfortunate consequences of our own or others’ actions, nor those of cruel nature, can make any difference to our flourishing. Neither, of course, can good fortune.”¹² If we are to avoid adopting a wildly implausible view, then we must revise our account of the nature of human flourishing to include a place for fortune. However, if we do that, we tend to contradict our emphasis

¹⁰ Neera Badhwar, “Individualistic Perfectionism and Human Nature,” *Reason Papers* 39, no. 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 35-43.

¹¹ See, e.g., Neera Badhwar, *Well-Being: Happiness in a Worthwhile Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

on virtue alone being what constitutes flourishing. Her overall claim, then, is that we tend toward a Stoic conception of flourishing rather than one where external goods matter significantly.

a. Relationship between human flourishing and virtue

NB recounts the story of Angela, as told by Daniel Haybron (which we examine in detail in *TPT*), which purports to show that virtue and self-perfection can be separated from flourishing. NB seems largely to agree with our response to Haybron, except that she concludes that “‘being a good entity involves activities that are in principle good for it’ doesn’t entail that its good is identical with such activities.”¹³ In the case of Angela, her choice to stay in the diplomatic career could turn out so badly that her flourishing would suffer. Hence the “good Angela” is doing things that are not good for her.

We certainly ground human flourishing in self-perfection and regard human flourishing as the exercise of one’s own practical wisdom, but we do not regard this as entailing the Stoic view that external goods are irrelevant to flourishing. We have five reasons for saying this.

First, there is a *non sequitur* in NB’s argument. It assumes that if one grants that fortune can affect the existence of human flourishing, then human flourishing cannot be identified as the exercise of one’s own practical wisdom, but must also include good fortune as part of the nature of human flourishing. However, this confuses a consideration for whether something exists with a consideration of what something is. There is a difference between noting what might be necessary for the existence of human flourishing and what is necessary for human flourishing to be human flourishing. There is a difference between fortunate circumstances, which may be necessary for the existence of human flourishing, and those activities for which one is responsible that are constitutive of the nature of human flourishing. Unless one wants to adopt the wildly implausible doctrine of internal relations, which would make every possible circumstance that could affect the existence of human flourishing part of its very nature, it is a mistake to assume that fortunate circumstances without qualification must be included in the account of what human flourishing is. In a very real sense, one’s “circumstances” are often a function of one’s practical wisdom. Thus, there is nothing about explicating the nature of human flourishing in terms of practical wisdom that requires adopting the

¹³ Ibid., p. 10.

Stoic view of human flourishing. That all depends on how one understands “fortune” and “circumstances.” (We shall return to this point below.)

Second, fortune is, at least by many definitions, not something for which we are responsible. It cannot be part of any moral standard we use to direct our conduct. Moral standards for human beings must be based on what is in principle possible for human conduct. The question under this way of looking at things thus becomes one of whether things beyond our control can affect flourishing. In NB’s world, flourishing seems to be disconnected from what we ought to do which, it seems to us, allows Haybron’s point to creep back in. In our conception of flourishing, mistakes, tragedies, obstacles, and the like (not to mention good fortune) cannot be excluded by definition from the activity of determining what one ought to do and thus excluded from what it means to flourish. (More on this below.)

Third, it does not follow from this that the Stoic claim that moral goodness is confined to an act of will alone is true. Rather, we are flesh-and-blood living things with appetites and desires who exist in space and time, surrounded by an external world with which we are engaged, and as such, can indeed be affected by fortune. Any discussion of attaining one’s flourishing or self-perfection must be done from this ontological context. As Henry B. Veatch notes in this regard, it is by exercising the intellectual and moral virtues that a human being can assure himself of “as happy and as full life *as circumstances will permit*.”¹⁴ The Stoic position is intent upon removing us from the effects of the external world upon ourselves, whereas our position is to embed ourselves fully in that external world.

Fourth, practical wisdom is for us not merely an intellectual exercise, but also involves action in and upon the world in which we live. As we note in many places in *TPT* (and in our previous works), the life of practical wisdom, which includes the attending moral virtues, is concerned with the coherent achievement, maintenance, exhibition, and enjoyment of what we have called the generic, constitutive goods of human flourishing in their *particular* manifestations (*TPT*, p. 54). It is through practical wisdom that the generic goods are made determinate and real. Indeed, these generic goods do not become actually good for one apart from the exercise of one’s own agency. The flourishing or perfecting life is thus concerned

¹⁴ Henry B. Veatch, *Rational Man* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1962), p. 128, emphasis added.

with attaining and enjoying these goods in a manner appropriate for oneself as best the circumstances will permit.

Fifth, the determination of what can or cannot be achieved in the concrete is not something that can be determined from one's philosophical armchair, but is something determined by practical wisdom itself. Even more, it is not something that is necessarily the same for each person. Which circumstances will diminish or destroy (or enhance or conserve) human flourishing is, except in extreme cases, highly individualized. Even in extreme cases, it is not always clear what can be said in general about fortune. Consider, for example, the case of Alexander Solshenitsyn who turned the Soviet Gulag into an opportunity for moral development.¹⁵ He had some control over some areas of his life and thus was able to integrate the circumstances into a unique form of flourishing. Obviously, what this illustrates is not the usefulness of coercion in creating moral excellence, but the pluralistic character of human flourishing¹⁶ and the vital importance of one's moral character.

NB seems to have what might be called a snapshot view of flourishing: things that, in the abstract, seem to benefit one contribute to flourishing, while things that harm one do not. We know this because each time a benefit or cost comes our way, we are either enhanced or diminished—that is, we are “flourished” or “unflourished.” A given benefit or cost, though, does not define flourishing. Flourishing is determined by how we manage those benefits and costs. We learn next to nothing about a person's flourishing by being told that he has suffered some tragedy or made a mistake or, by contrast, that things turned out better than expected. Flourishing is a process, not a static and discreet state of being. What people do with such events is what matters, and that is why the virtues matter.

Furthermore, there is the sense in NB's critique—perhaps due to the language typically used by philosophers—that there are “external goods” (or bads) and internal activities, such as character traits (virtues), which are separate from those external goods. We then

¹⁵ Alexander Solshenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973).

¹⁶ See Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl, *Norms of Liberty: A Perfectionist Basis for Non-Perfectionist Politics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 94.

have to find out how these two might be connected. As we noted above and in our response to Haybron in *TPT*, however, our “internal” states are already connected to the external world, which is especially true of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is *about* something, and so are the other virtues. In the abstract, the goods and harms may be what the Stoics called “indifferents.” In concrete reality, our virtues are exercised in some particular way on particular things, people, and events. The Stoic solution to *regard* the world around us indifferently is neither required by us nor implied by our position. Angela may have made a mistake, so let’s see how she deals with it before we say anything about her flourishing. That she was diminished by it is clear. That it defines her flourishing is not. An understanding of flourishing which required the absence of pain, mistakes, obstacles, and their opposites is, to say the least, wildly implausible.

If one looks at the world the way NB seems to in her criticisms of us, where benefits alone define flourishing and disadvantages alone define lack of flourishing, then it becomes difficult to imagine that anyone before our time was able to flourish or flourish as well—at least relative to us. For the level of wealth and convenience we enjoy surpasses most of what human beings have known previously. Yet there seems to be something wrong with saying that people prior to our time could not flourish at the level we do because they were missing out on benefits we now enjoy. Material well-being may ease the path to flourishing, but as just noted, it is not the stuff of flourishing itself.

b. Source or ground for what is valuable or worthy

In the section on human nature, NB seems to hold two principles that we would certainly reject. The first is that practical reason can be satisfied with what seems to be true without the need to concern itself with what is true. The second is that human nature has just as many propensities for bad things as good, so we cannot speak of the human good as being grounded in human nature, because that very same nature can produce the bad.

With regard to the first case, that people *can* hold views that seem to them to be true, but which are false, is incontrovertible. By the very fact of the distinction, we can distinguish the seemingly true from the true. Given that, it would be the case that the *virtue* of practical wisdom would involve seeking to separate the true from the seemingly true. To say otherwise would suggest that in practice what seems to be true is as good as what is true. Yet we need but recall Plato’s *Meno* to see the problems with such a view.

As to the second principle, it is based on a failure to consider adequately our extensive arguments in Chapters 5 and 6 that support a *teleological* conception of human nature, which involves an examination and critique of the so-called naturalistic fallacy. We show how individualistic perfectionism does not commit any such alleged fallacy, and indeed how there is both a basis for natural goodness and a way to understand human good in terms of it:

Life-form is the decisive factor It explains the desirability of actuality The form of a living thing determines what potentialities are to be actualized if it is to be good, and it is its life that provides the need for their actualization. Life-form provides direction to the process; in a word, it provides the telos. (*TPT*, p. 220)

Consequently, because of the human life-form, “a correct description of a human being is inherently value-laden. There cannot be any neutral or ‘bald’ facts about human nature that are devoid of value implications. . . . We are thus not deriving ethical norms from ‘first nature’ facts, so much as discovering the normative dimension within those ‘facts’” (*TPT*, p. 190). One does not commit the naturalistic fallacy in noting that basic drives and inclinations provide a basis for a general understanding of what is good for a human being, as, for example, we find in the lists of generic goods and virtues noted by thinkers ranging from Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas to John Finnis (see *TPT*, p. 38 n. 12). As Aristotle notes, it shows a want of education to think that everything must be proven.¹⁷ This is especially so regarding the generic goods and virtues for human beings (e.g., goods such as knowledge, friendship, health, and pleasure, and virtues such as temperance, courage, honesty, and integrity). When understood in a teleological context, to offer such lists is not to beg the question, but to note what is evident—but more on teleology below.

We also in Chapters 5 and 6 provide the basis for a claim that NB openly rejects. We hold the following: “For living things, there is no ontological separation between what is a good entity and what is

¹⁷ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), I.3.1094b23-27, and Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1968), IV.4.1006a5-10.

good for that entity. For living things, being a good entity involves activities that are in principle good for it” (*TPT*, p. 220). NB claims that what is good for a living thing is not entailed by its being a good living thing, because “the consequences of [a living thing’s] own good activities and the consequences of the actions of others and of nature can be bad for it.”¹⁸ Yet, her claim is a *non sequitur* and is based on the very same error we noted above, namely, a confusion or conflation about *whether* something is with *what* something is—for example, what is necessary for the existence of good living with what is necessary to be good living. A rosebush can function in a manner that is good for it, but the ability to pour bleach on it and cause it to wither does not necessarily show that how it was functioning was not good for it. Likewise, neither does being hit by a truck necessarily show that an individual practicing the basic virtues was not functioning in a manner that was good for her.

Moreover, we note in *TPT* that due to circumstances that are beyond its control, there can be occasions “where the activities of a living thing that would normally makes it a good instance of its kind nevertheless have results that are not beneficial” (*TPT*, p. 219). However, these occasions do not change the difference between a consideration of the existence of something with a consideration of the nature of something. Recognizing that the very existence of good living can require more than the good actions of a living thing does not show anything about what the nature of good living involves or, more specifically, provide any basis for rejecting the insight that “for a living thing to be a good instance of its kind, it must attain certain actualities that enable it to be a good *living* thing” (*TPT*, p. 219).

Accordingly, to be a good human being is to be an animal that uses her speculative and practical reason well in attaining her *telos*, that is, to use her conceptual capacity to engage in the task of discovering and coherently achieving, maintaining, exhibiting, and enjoying the constitutive, generic goods of human life. Since human beings are animals with desires, this involves the development of those dispositions (moral virtues) that will allow desires to assist them in using their practical reason to determine what is the appropriate conduct in a given situation. Overall, NB seems to have missed the basic import of Chapters 5 and 6, which is to give a natural, teleological, biocentric basis for ethical value.

¹⁸ Badhwar, “Individualistic Perfectionism and Human Nature,” p. 28.

Contrary to what NB seems to imply, reason considered apart from the external (and even internal world) is not the source or ground for what is valuable or worthwhile. Our discussion of the rational capacity of humans is only to note the modality through which the necessary goods and virtues of human flourishing are discovered and attained. We understand reason, in all of its facets and manifestations, to be in the service of the human *telos*. Reason's aim is not mere belief, but also the truth about what is and what ought to be done. We operate within a context of cognitive realism, rejecting constructivism in its ethical and epistemological forms.

Furthermore, NB seems to think that since some people do not actualize their potentialities, then our account of human good as fully actualized individual flourishers is somehow not based on human nature. However, to say that human beings have a potentiality for their self-perfection or to say that they have a natural inclination for the flourishing life, is not to say that they will necessarily choose it. Teleology is not compulsion. That there is evil and vice in the world says nothing other than that we should be vigilant against them.

The view that human beings have within them the capacity to do bad things is what might be said in the absence of any commitment to teleology, because it treats the potentiality of a living thing as simply a possibility. For while we have the capacity for virtue and vice, our potentialities in a teleological framework are toward our virtue, which is our perfection. Those potentialities are thereby the basis for making *normative* claims. Such propensities can be perverted and even destroyed, but teleology implies that we are oriented toward the good, which is also our good, and to our good, which is also the good.

Yet, while NB admonishes us that we cannot simply read off virtues from a description of human nature, the admonishment also applies with respect to her claim about vice. One cannot simply read off human vices as being a part of human potentialities in Aristotelian terms from human actions alone. If vice were part of human potentialities, as NB appears to claim, then this would be to endorse the Roman Catholic view of original sin, which claims that though human beings are not by nature evil, they have, at least after "the fall," an inclination toward evil. The error is the same in both cases of virtue and vice, namely, to identify something is not to understand it or to see its function in its appropriate context.

We recognize that teleology is, and has been, a controversial model for describing human nature. We cannot give a full defense in this response, but neither can it be said that we fail to give any

arguments on its behalf. Much of what we do is to work within the teleological framework to see how its conception of human nature can ground an ethical theory. The working out of that model is in itself an argument in its favor, because we show its foundational nature and fend off some central criticisms.

At the end of her comments, NB wonders how we can ever get to “the other” with our apparent requirement that all values ultimately rest in oneself. We are other-oriented, she notes, often without any concern for ourselves. In large part, we deal with this very question in our Afterword. However, the general point is that in saying that all values are grounded in our flourishing, we do not say that everything is about us. We are not, as we note in our Introduction, ethical egoists. Moreover, we also make it clear that although all values are grounded in our flourishing, this does not mean that all ethical norms are of the same type or have the same function. For example, we make a case for basic negative individual rights in terms of individualistic perfectionism.¹⁹ Nonetheless, as NB notes, we are other-oriented beings, and how we manage that is an essential part of what it means for *us* to flourish. Like any human propensity, it has to be directed by practical wisdom. Doing so does not thereby lessen our concern for others or our social nature. We are still, on our account, the ones individually responsible for our actions and we can never escape that responsibility. It is precisely the endeavor to merge the individual completely into the other, even momentarily, that we intend to resist.

4. Neither Egoism nor Communitarianism, but Individualism: A Response to David McPherson

We thank David McPherson (hereafter, DM) for his careful consideration of our work.²⁰ It has been most illuminating to review his comments, for they have helped us to see both the similarities and differences of our views to those of other thinkers in neo-Aristotelian ethics. We will respond to his major comments in the order of their appearance.

DM begins by considering our account of the pre-theoretic templates (or paradigms) of responsibility and respect. He thinks that

¹⁹ See Rasmussen and Den Uyl, *Norms of Liberty*, chap. 11.

²⁰ David McPherson, “Self-Formation and Other-Regarding Concern: Commentary on Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen’s *The Perfectionist Turn*,” *Reason Papers* 39, no. 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 35-43.

putting utilitarianism (U) in the template of respect is a little forced, because U is concerned with maximizing pleasure or preference-satisfaction.²¹ However, this confuses U, which is a consequentialistic theory of obligation, with a particular theory of the good, for example, hedonism or desire-satisfaction. U was historically associated with hedonism, but it need not be. One can be a utilitarian and have nearly any particular theory of the good one wants. We have even heard of grafting a utilitarian theory on to an account of human flourishing (obviously not ours). Yet, what matters for the utilitarian is not what theory of the good it uses, but that it expresses ethical evaluations of actions or rules in terms of their relationship to other human beings—in this case, the greatest number. It is respect for others that moves U. On many forms of U, the individual can easily be sacrificed to what promotes overall utility among people. The individual lives for the group, in other words, which is why it belongs in the paradigm of respect.

DM also does not think it is correct to classify Kantian ethics as ultimately belonging to the template of respect, since Immanuel Kant grounds perfect and imperfect duties to both self and others in human dignity. DM forgets to consider, though, that for Kant dignity and worth do not result from a flesh-and-blood individual (a so-called phenomenal self), but only from a noumenal self, which has dignity and worth only because it is an instance of the moral law (*TPT*, p. 6). Such a self, if it can even be called a self, has nothing about it that can serve as a source of individuality. There is only the duty to respect the moral law; the moral law does not involve considerations of individuality, but only universality. Stated slightly differently, our point about Kant is this: The moral law is primary, and this places the individual at the service of the moral law. In a way, the starting point is respect for the law. This seems to us to put it squarely in the category of respect. We note that, according to Kant, oneself becomes “an other” that one respects for the same reasons one respects others. This is another reason for locating Kantian ethics in the paradigm of respect.

DM accuses us of dichotomizing self-regarding and other-regarding concerns.²² At the foundational level, though, we do not dichotomize moral or ethical obligation in terms of self and others. Such a dichotomy is already the result of having adopted the template

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

of respect that sees moral or ethical obligation as resulting from relationships—either to oneself or to others. Yet, the whole point behind the template of responsibility is that moral or ethical obligation does *not* primarily result from relationships, but from an obligation to develop oneself as an individual human being. We say:

This perspective, and the one taken by us here and in the following chapters, indicates why the template of responsibility (and more particularly, an ethics of individualistic perfectionism that we advocate) is not an egoism. Indeed, the usual way of talking about egoism is to see how a proposed action or good in some way serves the self. But this is no different than making the self something to which one has a relationship; it is just proposed as the only relationship that matters. In the template of responsibility, the issue is not how something might benefit the self, but what kind of self one is making by taking on the benefit. The artificiality of egoistic actions is not just the exclusive focus upon self, but the relationalizing of the calculations upon which the actions are based. Put in ontological terms, we are not a mere node in a network of relations, but the ground for such relations. (*TPT*, p. 9)

There is a sense in which many of DM's worries about the alleged narrowness or flatness of our account of self-perfection are misplaced when it comes to our view of self-perfection. We think that the entire egoism-altruism dichotomy is born from the template of respect, which completely socializes ethics and reduces ethical norms to a single type that are primarily "juridical" in character. Rejecting this development of Modernity is a large part of our objective. Some of DM's own comments about friendship would seem to fit with our removal of such dichotomies.

DM's most basic disagreement with us has to do with our claim that ethical or moral obligation ultimately has its source in the existential and moral fact that flesh-and-blood individual human beings must make something of their lives—that they have an obligation to self-perfect, so to speak.²³ His real target, then, is not our alleged

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

egoism, but our individualism and humanism. This is illustrated in the following ways.

First, for DM, “our identity or sense of self is *constituted* by our relationship with others.”²⁴ We state that we are social animals and our human good involves relationships with others where we act for the sake of their good (*TPT*, p. 53). Furthermore, we claim that “*philia* in all its various forms of relatedness is . . . one of the basic generic goods . . . an integral feature of the good human life” (*TPT*, p. 53). We do *not* say, though, that such relationships exhaust our human good. However, DM’s vision of human good seems to require not only rejecting egoism and atomism, but also individualism. There is, in other words, nothing the individual brings to the account of human good. What each of us *is*, our very identity, is our relationship with others. This claim strikes us as ontologically implausible, an exaggeration, and is ethically dangerous.

Perhaps we misinterpret DM in this regard, however. His point may be that we cannot account for our relationship with others and characterize ourselves in a way that separates us from others. There must be other-oriented talk that does not always make reference to the self and the self’s development.

We have two responses to this possible interpretation: (1) From what we have noted already, it should be clear that self-talk is not atomistic-talk. (2) We discuss basic aspects of this issue in our Afterword, “Big Morality.” That an agent must ultimately focus upon what he or she should do in terms of what he or she should be, is not to say that the object of one’s attention is only oneself.

Second, DM says that “the morally and socially constituted self, where we cannot strictly separate out self-regarding and other-regarding concern” is missing from our explanations of other-regarding concern, and that “it is noteworthy that [we] describe the good of friendship as being based on *our own* potentialities, rather than on the *friend’s* love-worthiness.”²⁵ Again, there seems to be exaggeration occurring. If William cannot distinguish concern for his good from Mary’s concern for her good and vice-versa, then there is nothing to ground the *relation* of friendship. Friendship (at least character or virtue friendship) is, as Aristotle notes, being “related to our friend as

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 39 and 40.

we are related to ourselves.”²⁶ Note that this requires that something’s being our good differs from something’s being our friend’s good. If there were nothing different about their respective goods, there would be nothing to relate. There would be nothing to celebrate regarding the closeness of values shared by beings with distinct and separable lives and goods. Collapsing all difference into an identity proves too much. Also, and more fundamentally, what DM does not grasp about our approach is that it is because we understand our selves so well, that we can understand our unity with another. Without that personal integrity, no unity is possible.

Furthermore, it is a *non sequitur* to say that because the good of friendship is based on one’s own potentialities (and thus the need to act for the sake of someone else’s good as well), that this requires ignoring the love-worthiness of the other. Love of others is a response to *their* goodness, and this is part of the activities that make up one’s human good. We quote Scott MacDonald’s observation: “One can seek the constituents of one’s own good for their own sakes, and also for the sake of the good of which they are constituents” (*TPT*, p. 53).

Third, DM’s fundamental point seems to be that we do not offer any criterion for love-worthiness that isn’t a reference back to the self. He thus notes that “it is helpful to appeal to Charles Taylor’s account of ‘constitutive goods’.”²⁷ He then elaborates:

The key point to see here is how our own self-perfection . . . cannot be ‘the source of all norms’ since it includes concerns for things that are ‘worthy of being valued’ beyond this self-perfection, where their value is not merely derivative upon the value of self-perfection. In fact, the relationship goes the other way, as constitutive goods constitute the goods that define for us the good life.²⁸

DM offers Taylor’s account of constitutive goods (hereafter, TCGs) as the source of any account of the good life; thus DM seeks to show not only the inadequacy of self-perfection as an account of moral norms,

²⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.4.1166a31.

²⁷ McPherson, “Self-Formation and Other-Regarding Concern,” p. 40.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

but also the dependency of self-perfection on TCGs. However, the basic issue here is just what is it that TCGs are supposed to constitute, if in understanding them we are supposed to get beyond our self-perfecting human life? What is the whole of which they are supposed to be the parts? Are these metaphysical goods that are part of the hierarchy of being? Furthermore, TCGs are supposed to be worthwhile not merely because they are desired, but because they are desirable—that is, worthy of desire. Although some TCGs make up the good life, they do not owe their worthiness to being instrumental to or constitutive of the flourishing or self-perfecting life. The fundamental question is: Why are they worthy? What makes them desirable for us? Since these TCGs have, besides a constitutive function, a motivational function, we can also ask: Why should we care about them? Why do they motivate us? DM is curiously silent on this.²⁹

Regarding our account of human good, we attempt to answer these questions in Chapters 5 and 6 of *TPT*. Yet, the point here is that the desirability and motivational character of TCGs need to be explained and justified, if we are to suppose they constitute an alternative basis for the good life. In this regard, we should note that though we do not spend much time on Taylor, we devote a considerable amount of time evaluating Stephen Darwall’s attempt to find a standard of worthiness outside of self-perfection. Perhaps TCG is a different theory, but we thought that Darwall’s was the best to get at this issue.

DM also states: “The language of ‘flourishing’ has a biological and indeed botanical connotation And so we are encouraged to see human flourishing as being on par with the flourishing of a dog or an apple tree.”³⁰ Indeed, our theory is biologically grounded. We fully endorse Philippa Foot’s claim that “life will be at the centre.”³¹ However, we note in many places and explain in detail in Chapter 6,

²⁹ DM is not entirely silent about our inclusivist view of human good. He notes (*ibid.*, p. 40 n. 9) that Taylor would call our account of constitutive goods “life goods” (which includes *philia* in all of its forms) and sees them as derivative from TCGs. However, this is the point at issue. Can an account of the goods that constitute human good make sense apart from any reference to the life-form of a human being?

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³¹ Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 5.

“Because,” that our biologically based, naturalistic approach is non-reductive. Human flourishing is not reduced to mere survival. Furthermore, this charge ignores the numerous times in the text where we discuss the self-directed character of human flourishing. It ignores our description of human flourishing as “the exercise of one’s own practical wisdom” (*TPT*, pp. 33 and 55). Finally, in our discussion of this very example, we remark that “human beings can have ends due to their nature as living beings without having to assume, as Tibor R. Machan once put it, that human flourishing is the same as the flourishing of the rosebush” (*TPT*, p. 280).

DM has a wider concern about self-formation. Since our response to NB develops our discussion from *TPT* of the example of Angela, there is no need to repeat that discussion here. We will just note that in the self-formation process, there are as many processes as there are individual human beings. Each is unique. We also note in our response to ES that despite the differences among economic theorists regarding the definition of entrepreneurship, there is an illuminating analogy between the insight of an entrepreneur and the insight of a practitioner of practical wisdom. The nine points of similarity we list in that response should also assist in understanding how we regard the self-formation process.

Finally, our ethics is an ethics of individualism, but we are not nominalists. We have presented an ethics of not only individual good, but human good. Our ethics is ultimately humanistic as well, and we think that just may be the basic disagreement between ourselves and DM.

5. Closing Remarks

In conclusion, we wish to thank again our commentators for taking the time to consider our work and the arguments we make on behalf of individualistic perfectionism. We find value in all of their comments. In ES’s we see a recognition of the value of pre-theoretic considerations. In NB’s there is an appreciation of our individualism. With DM’s, we find an appreciation for the type of ethical alternative we are offering. In all cases, we learned from the criticisms and gained a better understanding of our own position. We hope our responses provide some further clarification for our readers.

Our response opens with a quotation from Maimonides. We think it is only proper to close with a quotation from Veatch’s *Rational Man*, which serves as the epigraph for *The Perfectionist Turn*. Together, we think these capture the essence of our project:

In Aristotle's eyes, ethics does not begin with thinking of others; it begins with oneself. The reason is that every human being faces the task of learning how to live, how to be a human being, just as he has to learn how to walk or to talk. No one can be truly human, can live and act as a rational man, without first going through the difficult and often painful business of acquiring the intellectual and moral virtues, and then, having acquired them, actually exercising them in the concrete, but tricky, business of living.³²

³² Veatch, *Rational Man*, p. 132.

Symposium: Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans*

A Case for Gratitude:
A Response to Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans*

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1. Introduction

In *Gratitude toward Veterans: Why Americans Should Not Be Very Grateful Toward Veterans*,¹ Stephen Kershner serves as a much-needed philosophical gadfly, challenging received views on an issue too frequently taken for granted by academics and non-academics alike. Indeed, when it comes to the issue of what society owes military veterans, we find too often within mainstream discourse an assumed debt to veterans coupled with the prevalence of two dominant, unquestioned narratives of “veteran as hero” or “veteran as victim.” Such knee-jerk lionization or pitying of veterans can frequently stymie more nuanced discussions concerning the normative foundations of our presupposed debts to veterans as well as the ethics of particular wars with which the concept of veteran gets too frequently conflated.² Kershner's polemical work therefore functions to question many of these assumptions and forces the reader to consider seriously, perhaps for the first time, the normative underpinnings of the duty of gratitude citizens are supposed to have toward veterans. While I do not agree with Kershner's overall conclusions, I sympathize with the general

¹ Stephen Kershner, *Gratitude toward Veterans: Why Americans Should Not Be Very Grateful to Veterans* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014). All references hereafter are in parenthetical citation in the text.

² For further criticism of this trend, see Jeff McMahan, “Supporting Our Troops?” at *Left2Right*, December 6, 2004, accessed online at: http://left2right.typepad.com/main/2004/12/supporting_our_.html.

spirit of inquiry from which his argument flows and believe it to be a valuable and necessary contribution to the ongoing civilian-military dialogue.

In Section 2, I provide a brief summary of Kershnar's two main theses and the sub-arguments he employs to motivate them. In Section 3, I unpack some of Kershnar's major sub-arguments and offer a response to each. I conclude in Section 4 by considering to what extent Kershnar's arguments apply to veterans specifically.

2. Kershnar's Argument

Kershnar advances two main theses:

Gratitude for the Past: In the United States, citizens should not be very grateful to veterans.

Gratitude for the Future: In the future, United States citizens should avoid being grateful to veterans.

In defending these two theses, Kershnar explicitly or tacitly relies upon the truth of the following claims:

- (1) Gratitude is a duty.
- (2) Gratitude is a *directed* duty.
- (3) *Groups* are apt conferrers and apt bearers of (aggregated) gratitude.
- (4) The specific group of U.S. veterans, both past and future, does not satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for being the proper bearers of gratitude from U.S. citizens. These conditions include (p. xiv):

Motivation: The benefactor's primary motivation was to provide benefit.

Trying: The benefactor tried to provide a significant benefit.

Epistemic Condition: The benefactor's effort was reasonable, that is, it rested on adequate evidence.

Kershnar therefore concludes:

(5) US citizens do not have a positive duty of gratitude toward past and future U.S. veterans.

For the sake of brevity, I will not comment on all of Kershnar's claims and sub-arguments. Instead, I will focus mainly on only those which I find most philosophically interesting or controversial.

3. Response

a. Gratitude as a directed duty

I would like to begin my response by questioning the coherence of one of the major claims upon which Kershnar's overall project rests, namely, the idea that persons can have duties of gratitude at all. As he notes (pp. 16-18), one common challenge that his argument faces is that we do not have a duty to express gratitude since others do not have a correlative claim-right to such an expression. Kershnar replies to this challenge as follows:

A claim-right is present in the gratitude-debtor if the following is true. First, one person acts wrongly only if she wrongs someone. Second, one person wrongs someone only if she fails to satisfy a duty owed to another. Third, if one person owes a duty to a second, then the second has a claim-right against the first. (p. 17)

I believe this might be too quick. Particularly, I believe that it is plausible that the first premise in the quotation is false; one can act wrongly without necessarily wronging any particular person. For instance, one way someone might act wrongly without wronging anyone is to act without proper regard for important moral (and epistemic) *reasons*. Put another way, this is to say that the moral universe extends beyond just the familiar Hohfeldian framework of correlative duties and claim-rights.³ With regard to gratitude, one alternative account might be to hold that there are good moral reasons to be grateful to certain persons but that these reasons do not rise to the level of duties such that those persons would then have claim-rights against us to fulfill such duties or that third-parties could justifiably enforce such duties. What's more, when it comes to the area of

³ Wesley Newcomb Hohfeld, "Fundamental Legal Conceptions as Applied in Judicial Reasoning," *Yale Law Journal* 26, no. 8 (June 1917), pp. 710-70.

population ethics, many philosophers explain the wrongness of certain Parfitian non-identity cases⁴ by invoking a notion of moral reasons that are impersonal in nature and lack any specific target of wrongdoing. For what it's worth, I myself am agnostic as to whether or not gratitude should count as a directed duty thereby generating a correlative claim-right or whether it is a moral reason short of being a duty. For the sake of argument, I will grant to Kershnar that we can talk coherently about "duties of gratitude," but I believe that it is at least worth flagging that his argument rests on this controversial premise which is not settled and probably warrants greater defending.⁵

b. Motivations

Kershnar argues, for several reasons, that it is false that all veterans *equally* warrant significant gratitude. For one, it is fair to say that of the total set of motivations to join the military, the average veteran's motivations are, at best, mixed. They are mixed insofar as persons who typically join the military are likely motivated by a variety of altruistic as well as self-interested motives. These motives can range from a robust sense of patriotism and civic duty to a desire for educational and economic benefits, finding a sense of meaning and purpose, achieving social esteem, vindicating a traditional masculine identity, wanting to test one's mettle, or satisfying a primal desire for risk and violence.⁶ Accordingly, Kershnar argues that it is false that every veteran's primary motive for joining the military is to benefit American citizens. Given that many if not most veterans are not primarily motivated to join the military on account of wholly selfless, altruistic motives, Kershnar concludes that they do not warrant gratitude from U.S. citizens.

It is not clear to me that a benefactor always needs to be motivated primarily by concern for a beneficiary in order for that

⁴ Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁵ I thank Lars Christie for this insight about gratitude being a reason and not a duty. See also Thomas Sinclair, "The Claimability of Directed Duties," Oxford Moral Philosophy Lecture Series, January 2017.

⁶ This list of veterans' possible motivations is a combination of what Kershnar explicitly states and what I have personally added.

beneficiary to owe him or her a debt of gratitude. Consider the following case:

Daredevil

I am on a sinking raft and cannot swim. As I am about to drown, a thrill-seeking daredevil, motivated purely by the adrenaline rush, swings in on a rope and saves me from certain demise.

In such a case, even if I knew that the daredevil's motivations were purely self-interested, it seems to me that I would still be obligated at least to say "Thank you" to him. This would seem even more appropriate if the daredevil had other, less morally praiseworthy options to choose from in order to satisfy his adrenaline fix but chose to save my life nonetheless. In the case of veterans, the average veteran's motivations are likely not nearly as close to the purely self-interested motivations of the daredevil, but are, in fact, likely a mixture of altruistic and egoistic motivations as Kershnar suggests. If it seems at all plausible that I could owe a "Thank you" to the purely self-interested daredevil, then it therefore seems to me even more plausible that I could owe a similar sentiment of gratitude to the veteran who ostensibly acted from a set of motives that were mixed. Something similar might also be said with regard to mothers. We have a notion of what constitutes a good, selfless mother, but do I no longer owe my mother any gratitude if she is or was motivated by a positive sense of personal identity associated with being a good mother? Despite our intuitions about such a case, Kershnar's view makes it difficult to see how such a debt of gratitude would obtain.

c. Efficacy, sacrifice, and risk

In addition to motivations, Kershnar also points out that even if a primary motive of veterans was to benefit civilians, it is nonetheless false that all veterans equally benefit civilians to a significant degree. Indeed, many veterans' causal contributions to overall civilian benefit are minimally efficacious at best. The benefit they provide to society at large is often equaled or surpassed by the contributions of other groups within society, such as farmers, sanitation workers, intellectuals, etc., which are groups we typically don't think warrant any special debt of gratitude.

One common reply to this point, which Kershnar readily anticipates and responds to, is that what makes veterans special in

terms of warranting a debt of gratitude from society at large is the unique degree of physical sacrifice and *physical* risk that accompanies the military profession. Much like in the case of efficacy, Kershnar points out that all soldiers do not in fact always place themselves in situations of high physical risk, and that the undertaking of such risk can adequately be captured by a notion of *contractual* risk. Kershnar further notes that it is not at all clear that the physically risky acts that certain soldiers perform are all that causally efficacious in benefitting the average U.S. citizen when compared to the overall benefits provided by groups like intellectuals and farmers.

In responding to Kershnar on this particular point, I'm not sure if we should readily accept the presumed binary between gratitude toward veterans and gratitude toward civilians that he sets up. The empirical fact that farmers, sanitation workers, and intellectuals are often under-appreciated in society does not entail that we ought not appreciate them or that we ought not appreciate veterans either. It might be the case that we ought to be grateful to veterans (for their particular risks, sacrifices, etc.) *and* we ought to be grateful to certain civilian groups (for their particular risks, sacrifices, etc.)—and that society as a whole is just failing at both of these duties. Hence, gratitude needn't be zero-sum in the way Kershnar seems to presuppose.

What's more, I think it is at least an open question as to whether or not the kinds of risks and sacrifices undertaken by soldiers are in fact comparable to those undertaken by certain civilian groups and whether or not such sacrifices and risks are more or less causally efficacious in bringing about some important social good that couldn't be achieved otherwise. Engagement of such considerations quickly takes us down a path toward a more general debate regarding issues of commensurability and parity, a debate that is well beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that the physical risks and sacrifices endemic to combat, as well as the specific benefits they achieve, might not be as comparable or reducible to those found in the civilian sphere as Kershnar assumes.

For the sake of argument, however, even if we grant that a given soldier's risk-taking acts are wholly inefficacious in bringing about the social good of national defense (or some other worthy cause), I nonetheless argue that, *ceteris paribus*, such a soldier would still warrant some form of gratitude on the part of U.S. citizens. Take, for example, a case where I am playing with my exceptionally well-trained German Shepherd and an unwitting bystander, mistakenly believing

that I am about to be mauled, leaps in between me and the dog, fully believing that she is putting herself in harm's way in order to save my life. Even though I know full well that I am in no physical danger whatsoever and even though I know that her attempt to save me is wholly inefficacious, it still seems to me that I am at least obligated to thank her, if only for the well-intentioned attempt. Where the analogy breaks down, of course, is in those cases where a soldier's actions are not merely inefficacious and morally neutral but in fact contributing to the prosecution of an unjust war or an unjust act in war. These are, however, contingent and not necessary features of being a veteran, and therefore not ones which we should assume always obtain for all U.S. veterans. If, however, the veteran has taken part in a war that has satisfied all *ad bellum* criteria for justness and she has conducted herself justly and honorably in battle, then even if the soldier puts herself at risk inefficaciously or at no risk at all, I argue that such an attempt still warrants gratitude on the part of U.S. citizens, however ineffective and unnecessary the attempt might be.⁷

What's more, even if a soldier is never at any physical risk and never believes herself to be at physical risk at all, there is at least still something to be said for the voluntary act of raising one's right hand and consenting to the *possibility* of one day being placed in such risky situations if the state deems that necessary.⁸ That someone was at least willing to try "to pull his or her own weight" (and pull much more than his or her own weight by consenting *possibly* to make the ultimate sacrifice) seems to me to be a morally significant act of no short order, one which warrants recognition even if such an opportunity never presents itself. That one was willing to subject oneself to the moral luck of war and the decision-making of the state (at least partially on account of an altruistic motivation) seems to warrant some form of gratitude, especially when compared to the overwhelming majority of

⁷ As Saba Bazargan points out, the soldier who is wholly causally inefficacious is at the very least, in principle, signing on potentially to be a "willing human shield"; see Saba Bazargan, "Killing Minimally Responsible Threats," *Ethics* 125, no. 1 (October 2014), pp. 114-36.

⁸ It is important to note that Kershnar spends a lengthy chapter discussing the issue of draftee veterans and why draftee veterans also do not warrant gratitude from the American public. For the sake of brevity, I will restrict my inquiry here to volunteer soldiers.

the rest of the American population who consciously chose to avoid (even potentially) being placed in such contexts.

Additionally, I do not think that Kershnar properly recognizes the full spectrum of risks soldiers may undertake while in uniform. In addition to the many *physical* risks soldiers may be exposed to, there are a great number of *moral* risks that soldiers may be exposed to as well. Moral risks are often much greater in complexity and severity than anything readily recognizable within civilian society. In other words, when a soldier enters the military profession he not only agrees possibly to expose himself to scenarios that are potentially physically risky, but he also agrees potentially to place himself in some of the most morally risky decision-making contexts fathomable.⁹ In so doing, such persons agree possibly to be placed in situations where incurring “moral residue” or “dirty hands” is likely, if not inevitable. Insofar as we think that exposure to physical risk ought to be as equitably apportioned among members of society as possible, so too should we think that exposure to moral risk and the likelihood of moral residue should be apportioned equitably and fairly within society. Presently, American soldiers find themselves to be frequent and repeated bearers of such moral risks and exposure to moral residue, disproportionately so compared with the overwhelming majority of the American population. This might then explain, if only partially, the disproportionate number of reports of “moral injury” among veterans when compared to civilian jobs of comparable or greater physical risk.¹⁰

4. Conclusion

Upon reading *Gratitude toward Veterans*, I am unsure who exactly Kershnar takes himself to be responding to and I am also left wondering what group or groups, if any, he would consider worthy bearers of gratitude from U.S. citizens. If his claim is that *all* veterans

⁹ This is to say nothing of the physical, psychological, and moral risks as well as risks to character and identity that soldiers in the future may soon take on as a result of “soldier enhancement” via physiological and/or neurological augmentation.

¹⁰ For an extensive account of moral injury and soldiers, see Nancy Sherman, *Afterwar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). For an account of soldiers’ incurring moral risk and moral residue, see Michael Robillard and Bradley Jay Strawser, “On the Moral Exploitation of Soldiers,” *Public Affairs Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (April 2016), pp. 171-96.

are not *equally* worthy of gratitude from American citizens in *all* cases (for reasons having to do with motivation, effort, epistemic conditions, etc.), then I'm not sure what is philosophically interesting or controversial about such a conclusion, nor do I know that many people would hold such an unqualified, categorical view. Once Kershnar begins qualifying and hedging on the initial claim suggested by the book's controversial sub-title, he ends up taking us to a place that I believe is reasonable and acceptable to many, namely, that U.S. citizens should have complex, fine-grained pro- or con-attitudes toward veterans, taking into account the specifics of each veteran's case to include considerations such as purity of motivation and effort. In so doing, however, much of the initial bite suggested by the book's sub-title ends up getting lost.

What's more, if the necessary and sufficient conditions Kershnar lays out for being worthy of gratitude fail to be satisfied by U.S. veterans in particular, it seems like a similar argument could nonetheless be leveled against any other group in society as well. For it is similarly false that *all* doctors, lawyers, farmers, intellectuals, and mothers are primarily altruistically motivated, equally trying to benefit U.S. citizens, and equally demonstrating the same reasonableness of effort. Members of such groups are not all equally sacrificing, equally risk-taking, or equally efficacious in their given pursuits as well. Perhaps a more accurate sub-title for his book should be something to the effect of, "Why Americans Should Not Be Very Grateful to Veterans . . . or Any Other Group for that Matter." Kershnar's criteria for gratitude-aptness seems equally applicable to any other group within society and therefore seems to make his special focus upon veterans in want of further explanation.

I found Kershnar's book to be both challenging and refreshing. It helped me to re-examine and clarify much of my own thinking with regard to what we think society owes to its veterans. Despite the specific criticisms I discuss above, I believe Kershnar's work to be a thought-provoking and original contribution that veterans and non-veterans alike should be grateful for.

Comment on Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans*

Pauline Shanks Kaurin
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1. Introduction

Veterans are everywhere. They run for public office, are pundits on cable television, serve as advocates in many political and social causes, write fiction and non-fiction, and are highly visible on social media. Phillip Klay, a fiction author and writer of non-fiction essays, spoke on the military-civilian culture gap at the Brookings Institute in the summer of 2016. Veteran Paul Rieckhoff founded Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and is a regular presence on cable television and social media, where he advocates on a variety of veteran-related issues. These are only two examples of how popular culture is replete with manifestations of special gratitude and valorization of veterans (and their families by extension) as heroic. Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans: Why Americans Should Not Be Very Grateful to Veterans*¹ asks whether or not such gratitude is justified and why. He ultimately argues that it is misplaced and needs to be reassessed. I highlight several questions and concerns that I have with this line of argument, but ultimately will argue that his argument raises an important issue that merits further discussion and debate.

2. Overview of the Argument

The overall thesis of Kershner's book is that the U.S. is very grateful for veterans and has been in the past, but that the grounds for gratitude are flawed. Therefore, we should not be grateful in the future

¹ Stephen Kershner, *Gratitude toward Veterans: Why Americans Should Not Be Very Grateful to Veterans* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014). All references hereafter are in parenthetical citation in the text.

to veterans—both as individuals and as a group (p. xiii). First, he establishes that Americans are, in fact, very grateful to veterans, arguing that the best explanation of the various celebrations, displays, and phenomena like “Thank You For Your Service,” is that they are evidence of this feeling of gratitude. Second, he takes up the issue of collective gratitude to consider whether we can be grateful to a group. Since he argues in Chapter 1 that veterans as individuals do not intend to provide benefit in joining the military, then we cannot owe gratitude to veterans as a group. Third, he argues that we should not be very grateful to veterans because the grounds of gratitude toward veterans—motivation and benefit—are flawed. Both of these arguments hinge on the reasons or intentions of veterans in being members of the military, the extent of the actual benefit they provide in comparison to other groups, and whether they intend to provide benefit.

Fourth and fifth, Kershnar takes up the issue of the draft, arguing that we should not be very grateful to draftees and against the draft, respectively. These arguments seem related to an argument later in the book that the duty to obey orders is weak, and to a more general concern that if veterans are motivated either by the draft or more generally to obey orders, this seems a kind of benevolence that warrants gratitude (p. 81). If the case for the draft and obeying orders is weak, then it furthers the case that there is not benevolence or benefit here and that gratitude is not justified.

Sixth, Kershnar argues that in the future we should avoid being grateful (at all?) to veterans. One core point here is that this gratitude is not necessary to garner the protection that members of the military provide, so we can be protected without all of the displays and feelings of gratitude (p. 79). Finally, he addresses the idea of lack of gratitude and virtue to make the claim that lacking significant gratitude toward veterans is not a vice, thus one can still be virtuous. Hence, we are not doing anything immoral if we fail to demonstrate gratitude toward veterans, although perhaps we still could, but he thinks such gratitude is unfounded.

The book is brief and tightly written, with a style familiar in the Anglo-American analytic tradition of philosophy that focuses on formalized logic. Accordingly, it will be important to address this aspect of his premises, line of argument, and conclusions when determining whether or not he has made his case.

3. Being “Very Grateful” and Degrees of Gratitude

One of the central questions I raise about *Gratitude toward Veterans* revolves around what exactly the central claim is. Is Kershnar arguing that we ought not be “very grateful” to veterans? Is he arguing that a lesser degree of gratitude is appropriate? Or is he arguing that any degree of gratitude is not appropriate?

Multiple times in the first half of the book, Kershnar claims that we ought not be “very grateful” to all veterans or to veterans as a group for their sacrifice and service. He is clearly critiquing the traditional narrative of the military as those who serve and sacrifice on behalf of the nation, arguing, “[v]iewing your life in the military as a service or sacrifice is not only false, but also prevents you from focusing on what should guide your decisions” (p. 2). On the face of it, his argument seems to be that the current degree of gratitude (very grateful)—that we see embodied in civilians’ saying, “Thank You For Your Service,” applauding uniformed military personnel in public, and providing patriotic displays on Veterans and Memorial Day—is uncritical.

At other times, it seems that he is hinting at arguments for lessening the degree of gratitude that ought to be owed, while the title of Chapter 6 seems to suggest that in the future we should avoid *any* gratitude toward veterans. I would point out that the three questions above are really three different positions, so I would have liked more clarity as to which of them he is defending. Perhaps a more helpful framing question would have been to ask what degree, if any, of gratitude is morally required or appropriate toward veterans and on what grounds such gratitude would be justified. Kershnar is clearly interested in and spends most of the book engaging the question of what the grounds of such gratitude would be (eliminating what he sees as the most plausible candidates). However, if these grounds fail, it is not clear whether that means no gratitude is justified or whether these failures lessen the degree of gratitude that is owed but do not eliminate it (p. 32).

Kershnar argues that there are reasons, some self-interested, why people join the military and that for many there are aspects of the job that they find attractive and enjoyable, presumably undermining the claim that veterans join to benefit and serve society or as an act of patriotic sacrifice. His claim is that it is a job or career like others and that it should not be treated in a special way. Even if this claim holds, he does not address the fact that at least some of the jobs in the military carry with them a significant amount of physical, psychological, and

moral risk and chance of serious, life-altering injuries. This is the same issue as with other professions, such as law enforcement, emergency medical technicians, and firefighters, where individuals undertake certain kinds of risks for the protection and service of a public good. The fact that they may enjoy or be attracted to this kind of work does not mitigate or reduce the risks involved or the public good aspect of the work.

At this point, he would raise the issue of educators and farmers who also presumably are engaged in pursuits that are designed to benefit the public good, but who do not receive the same level of gratitude: “[C]itizens have an especially strong debt of gratitude that is not owed to other groups” (p. 38). The question is, then, whether there is something that warrants this level of gratitude. The most obvious answer, in his view, is the patriotic narrative of service to the nation and sacrifice, but that does not take into account the issue of risk that I raise above.

What is the point of the patriotic narrative? Kershnar argues that if the point of holidays and celebrations that are part of the manifestation of this special gratitude is to communicate a message of patriotism and sacrifice, the focus on what he views as the false belief in gratitude owed to veterans is problematic (p. 41). If we look more closely, though, I think that the message of Veterans and Memorial Day observances (and also Independence Day celebrations) is in fact public recognition of the sacrificial and service-oriented aspect of military service, which is viewed as requisite for the freedoms and liberties that civilians enjoy. If he is right, then these observances and celebrations are themselves problematic, as is the part of the patriotic narrative that claims that the sacrifice, especially death, of veterans is necessary to secure and preserve our nation in ways similar to police, fire, and other such professionals.

4. The Meaning of Gratitude

According to Kershnar, “Veterans do not join the military and once in it, do not do their jobs for purely beneficent motives” (p. 31). The argument implied here is that since veterans serve for mixed motives and do not intend solely to provide a benefit, then any benefit that comes from their service is merely a side-effect and does not warrant gratitude. Kershnar seems to want to require purely beneficent motives in order to ground gratitude—but why? Additionally, he argues that veterans as a group cannot intend to benefit others, and so gratitude to them as a group is not justified (p. 29). This seems odd,

since much military action is collective and so must involve collective intentions, or at least individual intentions carried out in concert and coordination to achieve some kind of collective end.

There are two parts to the claim here, which I shall distinguish. First, let's examine the claim that if motives are not pure, then there is no intention to benefit. No one claims that veterans have only beneficent motives—certainly not veterans themselves—so this is a bit of a non-starter. We agree that there are mixed motives. However, it does not follow from this that one of the motives cannot be sacrifice, that is, service with the idea of benefitting society or being a servant for the public good. For example, veterans who had joined the military after 9/11 explicitly cite this as one reason for joining, including ex-football player Pat Tillman. I might join to get money for college, job training, or out of a desire to serve my society. Mothers do not have purely unselfish motives, but we would not say that they do not provide and intend to provide a benefit to their children, nor educators or farmers who Kershnar thinks intend to provide benefits for the public good.

Second, we'll turn to the claim that if there is no intention to benefit, then there ought not be gratitude, or alternatively, a lesser level of gratitude is justified. Let's look at an example where my young son goes to bingo night at his school and wins a prize. He does not want the particular prize (bubble bath), and so chooses to give it to me. He did not intend to benefit me. He got a prize that he did not want; rather than just throw it away, he gives it to his mother. He did not set out to make me happy; it is a side-effect, so I should not be grateful. But I am! Why? Because my son gave me something that I value or like. The gift is something that shows he cares about me, even though that was not his original intent; he demonstrated benevolence toward me. He did not intend to play bingo to get a prize for his mother; he merely wanted to win a prize. The point here is that an intention to benefit may not be necessary to generate some degree of gratitude.

In addition, I think there is a difference between *showing* gratitude and feeling or *believing* that one ought to be grateful, where Kershnar takes the first as evidence of the second. I think this is highly problematic because of the military-civilian culture gap and the disengagement that many civilians have from matters of the military and war.² I would say that such actions discussed above as

² As documented in Sebastian Junger, *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (New York: Hackett Book Group, 2016); see esp. pp. 110-11 on the disconnection with the U.S. population.

demonstrations of gratitude are evidence that civilians think that they are *expected* to show gratitude and *want* to be seen by veterans and members of the military as grateful, but none of this shows that they *actually* are grateful. My kids know that they are to say, “Thank you,” when they receive a gift from their grandparents. It hardly follows that they *actually feel* grateful for that knitted, neon orange sweater.

In the case of civilians, few are able to articulate exactly what they are grateful for, in Kershner’s terms, concerning the nature of the benefit received (pp. 21-22). To the degree that they are able to articulate what the gratitude is for or what the benefit is, it is vague and unformed. This would seem to support his argument that there is not really a clear benefit here, or at the very least, that we overestimate the importance of the benefit, as we underestimate other benefits by other groups.

Another critical point Kershner makes is whether all veterans warrant gratitude and, if so, whether they all warrant the same level (pp. 24 and 29). This is important, since it universally valorizes veterans and military members (and by extension their families) as morally heroic. We valorize all who serve, despite the fact that only some throw themselves on grenades and die to save others, while others serve without distinction or even serve immorally. As I have argued elsewhere, there are many problems with the idea of universal valorization, which has political reasons undergirding this.³ This then gets us back to what the real point of the patriotic narrative is, what role service and sacrifice have in that narrative, and whether there ought to be some kind of equality between citizens’ contributions. Why are military service contributions more valuable? Do they provide more benefit? Is the issue of risk at play? Is the public any better able to articulate these benefits? What if the problem is not the benefit, but being knowledgeable of and being able to articulate it?

5. Military Professionalism versus Mercenaries

Finally, Kershner argues that we can be protected by the military without gratitude (or much gratitude?) (p. 79). We accrue benefits from educators and farmers without these “excessive” displays, so he thinks that the same could be true for the military. His

³ See Pauline Kaurin, *The Warrior, Military Ethics, and Contemporary Warfare: Achilles Goes Asymmetric* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014); see esp. pp. 21ff on the Politics of Courage.

view is that we pay them and provide benefits to do the job of protecting the country, and so gratitude need not be part of the equation.

I think this argument is problematic because it ignores the important moral and practical distinctions between members of the military and mercenaries (or contractors, if one prefers a less pejorative term). It also ignores completely the role of military professionalism that is internalized and taken seriously as a part of military culture, especially for officers and non-commissioned officers.⁴ The military thinks of itself and operates as a rigorous profession, especially in the sense of having an expert body of knowledge, being self-regulating, serving the common good, and having socially sanctioned permission to kill people and destroy property. In this way, they are like the police, fire, legal, and medical professions. All of these professions receive a certain kind of public respect and approbation, as noted in the discussion above.

As I have argued elsewhere, the various oaths that military members take entail joining a certain kind of moral community, which for many involves taking up new moral obligations and sense of identity.⁵ An oath in this context is complex and represents a multifaceted obligation to the state, the American people, the Constitution and laws of the land, peers, superiors and subordinates within the military organization, and the values and norms that are part of these overlapping communities. The literature on military professionalism is important to consider here, especially in the light of Kershnar's critiques of the duty to obey; this literature provides insight into why the military is viewed in a fundamentally different way by the civilians and the military itself.

It may be the case that Kershnar is right that there is no obligation to be "very" grateful, but how grateful ought one be? The argument, if he is making such an argument, that there is no obligation to show any degree of gratitude is odd. The discourse around valorizing public servants (especially ones who take great risks) is part

⁴ See Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1981), a classic text on military professionalism; see also Department of the Army, *ADRP-1: The Army Profession* (Washington, D.C., 2015), for examples of this discussion.

⁵ See Kaurin, *The Warrior, Military Ethics, and Contemporary Warfare*, pp. 83ff.

of this, and seems to be rooted to some degree in the military-civilian culture gap and the disengagement of the American public from matters of national security, rather than in the idea that the military is not providing a unique benefit that warrants approbation.

I do think there are fair questions here about how much and what kinds of public gratitude veterans ought to expect and civilians ought to demonstrate. There are also important questions about whether we ought to make distinctions about the kinds of gratitude that are warranted. That would require more knowledge, engagement, and a willingness to make distinctions about the kinds of service veterans render, which moves us away from treating veterans as individuals rather than as a group. A move to finer-grained discrimination and assessment of the service and contributions of individual veterans would fit with Kershnar's rejection of the idea that they provide or intend to provide a collective benefit.

6. Future Questions to Consider

While I have raised some critical questions and objections relative to Kershnar's account, I think that there are three core questions that merit further discussion and examination of this topic. First, what degree of gratitude, if any, is warranted to extend to veterans—either as individuals or as a group? He seems to push us toward the conclusion that no gratitude is warranted. However, I am inclined to think that the issue should be what level of gratitude is warranted, given the unique aspects of the military as a profession and the risks and sacrifices involved.

Second, recent discussion of military-civilian relations, especially in regard to moral injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, raise important questions about what this service costs, and whether we ought to consider the moral, mental, and psychological risks that military members undertake as part of their service. It may be that part of the "excessive" gratitude that Kershnar highlights has less to do with the protection and service to the state rendered by the military, but what costs they, their families, and communities are expected to bear. These are costs that seem above and beyond what we expect from other jobs and professions, so that needs to be part of the equation.

Third, Kershnar raises an important question of whether there are other groups of public servants that warrant appreciation at this level. Perhaps the issue is that all persons who serve the public good should enjoy the same level of valorization and approbation as veterans

receive. Or should it be the case that public gratitude for all those who serve the public good be supererogatory rather than obligatory?

Avoiding Excessive Gratitude toward Veterans and
Why It Matters:
A Response to Michael Robillard and Pauline Shanks
Kaurin

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1. Introduction

In *Gratitude toward Veterans: Why Americans Should Not Be Very Grateful to Veterans*, I argue for the following theses:

Thesis #1: Gratitude for the Past. In the United States citizens should not be very grateful to veterans.

Thesis #2: Gratitude for the Future. In the future, United States citizens should avoid being grateful to veterans.¹

I focus in this article on the first thesis, the argument for which is:

(P1) If one person should be very grateful to a second, then the second tried to benefit the first in the relevant way.

(P2) If (P1), then if one group should be very grateful to a second, then in general, the second tried to benefit the first in the relevant way.

(C1) Hence, if one group should be very grateful to a second, then in general, the second tried to benefit the first in the relevant way. [(P1), (P2)]

(P3) It is false that as a group, veterans tried to benefit the citizens in the relevant way.

¹ See Stephen Kershner, *Gratitude toward Veterans: Why Americans Should Not Be Very Grateful to Veterans* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

(C2) Hence, citizens should not be very grateful to veterans.
[(C1), (P3)]

The theory of gratitude that underlies this argument is as follows. One person is grateful to a second if and only if the first is thankful or appreciative of the second for having done a beneficent act. One person should be very grateful to a second if and only if the second tried to benefit the first in the relevant way. The second person tried to benefit the first in the relevant way if and only if the second reasonably attempted to provide a significant benefit to the first and the second was primarily motivated by concern for the first's well-being. Perhaps this could be met if the person were strongly motivated rather than primarily motivated.

By significant gratitude, I mean gratitude that is frequent and intense. It is the sort of gratitude that is significant in the sense that it sets apart the person to whom gratitude is owed from the bulk of people with whom one normally interacts. The widespread public celebrations of veterans and thoughts that motivate and accompany these celebrations meet these conditions.

The following conditions, then, are necessary for significant gratitude.

Condition #1: Motivation. The benefactor's primary motivation was to provide the benefit.

Condition #2: Trying. The benefactor tried to provide a significant benefit.

Condition #3: Epistemic Condition. The benefactor's effort was reasonable. That is, it rested on adequate evidence.

In *Gratitude toward Veterans*, I argue that U.S. citizens should not be very grateful to veterans for what they've done in the past because they don't meet these conditions.

Michael Robillard and Pauline Shanks Kaurin provide superb comments and criticisms of the book.² It is a real pleasure to have such

² Michael Robillard, "A Case for Gratitude: A Response to Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans*," *Reason Papers* 39, no. 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 65-73; Pauline Shanks Kaurin, "Comment on Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans*," *Reason Papers* 39, no. 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 74-82.

outstanding philosophers raise significant lines of criticism. I address what I find to be the three most interesting. First, they criticize the conditions for gratitude. Second, they criticize my concern that if veterans meet these conditions, then so do other groups. Third, they argue that the individual variation on veterans satisfying the conditions for significant gratitude makes the book's conclusion trivial. Let us consider these objections in turn.

2. The Conditions for Significant Gratitude Are Mistaken

a. The motivation condition is mistaken

Robillard and Kaurin argue that the three conditions on significant gratitude are mistaken. That is, they reject (P1). Robillard argues that it is not clear that a benefactor needs to be motivated primarily by concern for a beneficiary in order for the latter to owe him or her a debt of gratitude. He provides the following case in support of this claim.

Case #1: Daredevil

I am on a sinking raft and cannot swim. As I am about to drown, a thrill-seeking daredevil, motivated purely by the adrenaline rush, swings in on a rope and saves me from certain demise.

In such a case, even if I knew that the daredevil's motivations were purely self-interested, it seems to me that I would still be obligated at least to say "Thank you" to him.³

There are some concerns I have about this case. First, this case is misleading because it is difficult to imagine the daredevil choosing to save the person on the sinking raft without having any beneficent motivation.

Second, the issue here is when a beneficiary should be very grateful. Even if the daredevil's beneficiary should be grateful to a small degree, this is not enough to show that significant gratitude is owed. Third, the cases discussed below suggest that in the case of Daredevil, the beneficiary owes him no gratitude rather than a small amount. It might be virtuous to express gratitude, when another person benefits us, as a sign of awareness of the value of other people's time and energy without this expression reflecting real gratitude. This might

³ Robillard, "A Case for Gratitude," p. 69.

occur, for example, when a woman expresses gratitude to a sports legend whom she greatly enjoyed watching when she was a child. This is also similar to how a man might apologize if, due to no fault of his own, his brakes failed and his car smashed into a pedestrian. There is nothing for him to be sorry for, yet it seems polite, and perhaps virtuous, to acknowledge that he was connected to the pedestrian being seriously injured and that he is feeling bad about the result and his connection to it. In contrast, consider the following cases where the benefactor is not motivated to benefit the beneficiary.

Case #2: Oil

Al benefits Seth by making him rich. Al invests much of his money and gets badly injured drilling for oil. He discovers a massive oil deposit under both of their properties. Once he begins to extract it, Seth does the same and gets rich. Al couldn't care less about Seth and didn't try to help him.

My intuitions are that Seth need not be very grateful to Al. Perhaps he should have some gratitude, although even that is intuitively unclear to me.

Case #3: Husband

I am drowning, as is my mistress. I lose consciousness and slip underwater. Her husband throws in a life preserver and begins to pull her into shore. She wraps her legs around me and pulls me to shore with her. I live. Her husband does not know I am in the water and would not have saved me had he known.

Again, in this case the narrator need not be very grateful to the husband. These cases are clearer than Daredevil because they illustrate a benefactor who does not care about or, in the second case, know about his beneficiary. In both cases, it intuitively seems that the beneficiary need not be very grateful to the benefactor.

Robillard might be arguing that gratitude, rather than significant gratitude, is owed. I don't have that intuition, but, in any case, we are interested in significant gratitude. One might be glad that the daredevil, Al, and the husband exist and acted the way they did, but this is different from being grateful to them.

Robillard might instead be arguing that significant gratitude is owed when one person knowingly benefits another. This is incorrect. Consider, for example, cases when Al and the husband know they are

benefitting another, but have neither the motivation nor intention to do so. Again, it intuitively seems that significant gratitude is not owed. It is unclear whether any gratitude is owed.

b. The trying condition is mistaken

The trying condition indicates that the person purportedly owed gratitude did something to try to make another person's life go better. My claim is that a person who is motivated to benefit another but who did not try to do so is not owed significant gratitude. Again, it is unclear if she is owed any gratitude. My intuition is that she is not, although one might be grateful for her motivation. Motivation might be an accomplishment that results from past actions. In some cases, one person has to invest time and energy into another person before she becomes motivated to significantly benefit the other. In contrast, Kaurin argues that the trying condition is not necessary for generating significant gratitude. Here is her case.

Case #4: Son

[M]y young son goes to bingo night at his school and wins a prize. He does not want the particular prize (bubble bath), and so chooses to give it to me. *He did not intend to benefit me.* He got a prize that he did not want; rather than just throw it away, he gives it to his mother. He did not set out to make me happy; it is a side-effect, so I should not be grateful. But I am! Why? Because my son gave me something that I value or like. The gift is something that shows he cares about me, even though that was not his original intent; he demonstrated benevolence toward me. . . . The point here is that an intention to benefit may not be necessary to generate some degree of gratitude.⁴

My intuition is that the mother (Kaurin) should not be very grateful to her son for giving her the prize because he did not try to benefit her. Perhaps she should be grateful for his love. Even this is unclear if the child did not work toward it. For example, if we neuro-manipulate a neighboring child so that he loves Kaurin as much as her son does, intuitively, she should not be very grateful to him. Kaurin might be very glad her son loves her so much, but this is different from being very grateful to him. If her son did not work toward loving her, then he

⁴ Kaurin, "Comment on Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans*," p. 78 (emphasis mine).

would not deserve anything for his love. At least this would be true for types of desert that rest on hard work or sacrifice.

What is driving our intuition in Son is that Kaurin loves her son in part because he loves her. Love differs from gratitude because they are different attitudes with different grounds. This can be seen in the following case.

Case #5: Daughter

A mother has cancer and is suffering. Her adult daughter wants to help her, but can't because she is in prison for robbery. As a result, the mother gets rock-bottom institutional care and is desperately lonely while she wastes away. Eventually, she dies neglected and alone.

In this case, the mother does not owe the daughter gratitude for trying to benefit her because she did not try to do so (on account of her imprisonment). She still might love her daughter and be grateful for her daughter's love.

Even if Robillard and Kaurin were correct and neither motivation nor trying were necessary for significant gratitude, the epistemic condition must still be met. This condition requires that the benefactor's effort was reasonable, that is, it rested on adequate evidence. This would not be met by veterans who knew or should have known that they would likely participate in wars that are imprudent or unconstitutional. Here, I merely raise the issue of whether volunteers should have known this about World War I and about American involvement in Vietnam (at least later in the war), Serbia, Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

That the epistemic condition is plausible can be seen in cases such as the following.

Case #6: Bad Doctor

Bob is suffering from a treatable cancer. Physician Charley (also known as "good-time Charley") is an incompetent drunk. He tries to treat Bob but because he confused different types of cancer medicine, he ends up having no effect on the spreading cancer or its symptoms. Charley was grossly negligent in not looking up types of medicine or checking with his colleagues. He did, however, try hard to remember the medicine-types.

Intuitively, Bob should not be very grateful to Charley because his effort was unreasonable.

c. Significant gratitude is owed, at least in part, for something other than one person trying to benefit another in the relevant way

Robillard and Kaurin also argue that there is a fourth condition for gratitude or, perhaps, significant gratitude. Robillard implicitly suggests that gratitude should track sacrifice when he discusses the sacrifices made by soldiers. This can be seen in Robillard's argument that members of the military take significant moral and physical risks:

I do not think that Kershner properly recognizes the full spectrum of risks soldiers may undertake while in uniform. In addition to the many *physical* risks soldiers may be exposed to, there are a great number of *moral* risks that soldiers may be exposed to as well. Moral risks are often much greater in complexity and severity than anything readily recognizable within civilian society.⁵

He argues that such risks should be equitably apportioned to members of society and, instead, are concentrated in the military.⁶

One problem with this line of reasoning is that a risk is not itself a harm, but some probability of harm. As a result, it is not something that is, by itself, bad for someone. It is preferable to focus on the harm (or sacrifice) when it occurs rather than on the chance that it may happen.

A second problem with Robillard's concern is that it is unclear why such risks should be equitably apportioned. People often trade off risk for money, excitement, friendship, and so on. Also, the same level of risk affects people differently insofar as they differ in risk-aversion. Given trade-offs and difference in risk-aversion, it is unclear why risk should be equitably distributed to members of society rather than equitably distributing a more fundamental good such as well-being, opportunity, or primary goods.

⁵ Robillard, "A Case for Gratitude," p. 72.

⁶ For a discussion of moral risk and injury, see Michael Robillard and Bradley Jay Strawser, "On the Moral Exploitation of Soldiers," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 30 (2016), pp. 171-96, and Nancy Sherman, *Afterwar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Consider the notion that combat veterans took great risks in fighting overseas. Not all veterans saw combat. In addition, different jobs have different costs and benefits. A person is free to take a job or not take it. If he takes it, particularly if he does so because he likes the cost-benefit package, then so long as he is paid and faces predictable costs and risks, he has no business demanding gratitude. Nor does he merit it.

In order to see this point, compare the fatality rate of three jobs: military, logging, and fisherman. Mortality rates are lower among U.S. military members than their civilian counterparts. During the years in which major combat operations were ongoing, fewer members of the military died from war-related injuries than died from other injuries (for example, transportation accidents and suicides).⁷ According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, fatality rates/average salaries for other professions in 2008 were: fisherman (0.13%) and logging (0.12%).⁸ The salaries of fishermen and loggers are lower than that of the military and the fatality-risk is roughly the same. Fishermen and loggers miss out on some hardships (for example, they might spend less time away from their families), but they also miss out on some benefits (for example, they might not form the same lasting friendships or take as much pride in what they do). Factory workers might take far less risk than members of the military. On the other hand, members of the military have jobs that are more exciting, allow them to see the world, make them more proud of who they are and what they do, have much less chance of layoff or firing, allow for early retirement, and pay more. The attractiveness of various cost-benefit packages varies from person to person. If someone chooses one package (for example, military) over another (for example, factory) knowing the costs and risks, it is difficult to see why Americans should be grateful to him.

On a side note, it is difficult to see why members of the military serve others rather than merely work for them. Yet is it often said that soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines serve, whereas factory

⁷ See Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center, "Deaths While on Active Duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, 1990-2011," *Medical Surveillance Medical Report* 19, no. 5 (2012), pp. 2-5.

⁸ See Bureau of Labor Statistics, "News," *National Census of Fatal Occupation Injuries in 2008*, August 20, 2009, accessed online at: https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/cfoi_08202009.pdf.

workers, government lawyers, and librarians work. It is an interesting issue whether the different expressions are mistaken in a way related to mistaken gratitude.

Robillard might concede that perhaps we shouldn't be grateful to veterans or combat veterans, but we should be grateful to the ones who were injured or killed. To see why this is mistaken, consider people who win a lottery. The lottery is fair if it was reasonable to the lottery players and owner when the ticket was purchased. If it was reasonable to both, then neither party need be grateful to the other. Next consider a reverse lottery where players get a good sum of money in return for taking a small risk of death or severe injury (perhaps, they will have to donate an organ). Again, if reasonable, no gratitude is owed. Military service is like a reverse lottery. If the contract was reasonable when members signed up, then Americans need not be grateful to those who sign it.

Kaurin suggests that gratitude can be owed for the professionalism of the military.⁹ By this, she means that members of the military act as a profession in that they meet a set of criteria that are akin to those of other professions:

[Kershner's theory] ignores completely the role of military professionalism that is internalized and taken seriously as a part of military culture, especially for officers and non-commissioned officers. The military thinks of itself and operates as a rigorous profession, especially in the sense of having an expert body of knowledge, being self-regulating, serving the common good, and having socially sanctioned permission to kill people and destroy property. In this way, they are like the police, fire, legal, and medical professions. All of these professions receive a certain kind of public respect and approbation.¹⁰

⁹ For an interesting discussion of professionalism, see Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1981). For an account that ties professionalism into a sense of identity and shared moral obligations, see Pauline Kaurin, *The Warrior, Military Ethics, and Contemporary Warfare: Achilles Goes Asymmetric* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).

¹⁰ Kaurin, "Comment on Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans*," p. 80.

She also discusses, but does not endorse, the idea that gratitude is owed for being the source of the patriotic narrative. This narrative views military membership as involving service, sacrifice, and protecting American freedom.

The problem with these ideas is that an individual's participation in a profession that contributes to a patriotic narrative warrants gratitude only if she satisfies the three conditions of motivation, trying, and epistemic condition. It intuitively seems that Americans should not be very grateful to, for example, Senators, despite their participation in a profession that has a patriotic narrative because they do not satisfy the three conditions to a significant degree. Instead, professionalism and patriotic narrative are relevant, if at all, because they are ways that workers try to benefit significantly the American people. If so, Kaurin's point fits into my overall argument.

d. Using clear cases to test the conditions for significant gratitude

Another way to see that the three conditions are correct is to see whether they categorize clear cases in the right way. Consider most mothers. They often act from beneficence and make a great effort to provide a significant benefit to their children. Hence, in most cases, their children should be very grateful to them. Consider, next, National League Football (NFL) players with regard to the fans. In most cases, they do not meet these conditions. For example, they often do not act from beneficence to fans. Hence, in most cases, their fans should not be very grateful to them. These results intuitively seem correct. We can now ask to which group veterans are more similar.

With regard to Americans, veterans are more similar to NFL players than to mothers. It is unclear whether they are more beneficently motivated to benefit Americans than NFL players are to benefit their fans. Neither has the incredibly strong beneficent motivation of a mother. Nor is it even clear whether on an individual basis they try to provide a greater benefit. It is also unclear whether an individual member of the military contributes more to Americans' well-being than do NFL players contribute to their fans. There are far fewer players than there are members of the military. A particularly talented general or admiral might greatly affect Americans' aggregate well-being, but such individuals are rare. In addition, a particularly talented coach or player might do the same for their fans.¹¹ Even the

¹¹ On common economic assumptions, a person's contribution to others' well-being roughly correlates with his income. This rests on three free-market

comparative sacrifice is unclear. While members of the military risk death and various psychological ailments, members of the NFL risk brain and musculoskeletal injury and do so more frequently.¹² Hence, not only do the three conditions get the intuitively right result with regard to significant gratitude for mothers and NFL players, they further support the notion that Americans should not be very grateful to veterans.

Kaurin notes that mothers do not have purely unselfish motives, and Robillard similarly notes that not all mothers are primarily altruistically motivated.¹³ This might be true, but so long as the vast majority act from very strong beneficent motives, and my guess is they do, the average mother is owed significant gratitude from her children.

e. There is no duty to be grateful

Robillard and Kaurin object that the notion of a duty of gratitude that is (at least in part) satisfied by an attitude is mistaken. Robillard argues that there might not be a duty to be grateful, merely a reason to be so.¹⁴ Kaurin argues that there might be a duty to show gratitude rather than actually be grateful.¹⁵ With regard to Robillard's

assumptions. First, the more something makes someone's life go better, the more it satisfies his prioritized desires. Second, the more something satisfies someone's prioritized desires, the more he is willing to pay for it. Third, the market aggregates people's willingness to pay for something. Thus, if Tom Brady is worth \$180 million, then, in the aggregate, he has contributed a lot to people's lives. For Brady's net worth, see "Tom Brady Net Worth," *Celebrity Net Worth*, accessed online at: <https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-athletes/nfl/tom-brady-net-worth/>.

¹² For the notion that NFL players regularly suffer from traumatic brain injury, see Tom Goldman, "Study: CTE Found in Nearly All Donated NFL Player Brains," *NPR.org*, July 25, 2017, accessed online at: <http://www.npr.org/2017/07/25/539198429/study-cte-found-in-nearly-all-donated-nfl-player-brains>.

¹³ Kaurin, "Comment on Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans*," p. 78, and Robillard, "A Case for Gratitude," p. 69.

¹⁴ Robillard, "A Case for Gratitude," p. 68.

¹⁵ Kaurin, "Comment on Stephen Kershner's *Gratitude toward Veterans*," p. 79.

point, I am skeptical of an impersonal non-consequentialist reason. With regard to Kaurin's point, I am skeptical of a non-contractual duty to show gratitude that does not include or rest on a duty to be grateful. Even if these objections are correct, they do not set back the overall argument because the argument can be restated in terms of a gratitude-related reason or in terms of the duty to show gratitude. Such a restatement leaves intact the thrust of the overall argument.

3. The Argument That If Veterans Are Owed Significant Gratitude Then So Are Other Groups Is Mistaken

In *Gratitude toward Veterans*, I mention the following comparative argument against significant gratitude to veterans:

- (1) If we should be very grateful to veterans, then we should be very grateful to farmers, sanitation workers, intellectuals, first responders (police and firefighters), and teachers.
- (2) We should not be very grateful to farmers, sanitation workers, intellectuals, first responders, and teachers.
- (3) Hence, we should not be very grateful to veterans. [(1), (2)]

The idea behind (1) is that Americans' lives would be horrendous if no one were to perform any of these jobs. If the baseline is people other than the current members occupying these jobs, though, it is not clear that Americans would be much worse off with the likely replacements. If the focus is on an individual, then it is likely that the American people as a whole would not be much worse off with his likely replacement. Few individuals have a big effect on their country or the people who constitute it.

Robillard and Kaurin discuss the notion that significant gratitude is owed to veterans as well as several other groups that, in the aggregate, contribute greatly to our well-being. They discuss rejecting the second premise of this argument, although they do not clearly endorse it. Kaurin states, "Perhaps the issue is that all persons who serve the public good should enjoy the same level of valorization and approbation as veterans receive."¹⁶ One reason that we should accept (2) is that if ought implies can, it is not clear that we can be very grateful to all of these groups.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 81-82.

American people are very grateful to members of the military. This gratitude can be seen in explicit and implicit expressions. The former takes the form of Presidential statements, holidays, statues and memorials, and public praise. The latter takes the form of generous compensation and affirmative-action benefits. Imagine if the country tried to do the same for other groups. Five times as many holidays, statues, memorials, elevated compensation, etc. would harm the economy, clutter public spaces, significantly increase taxes, and cause a serious shift in public expenditures. This assumes there are only five other groups sufficiently similar to veterans and that some have not been left out (for example, health professionals). In addition, there would likely be gratitude fatigue. Significant gratitude to too many groups might result in the American people not being very grateful to any of them. Even if expanding gratitude to all of these groups were financially and psychologically possible, and I am not sure it is, it is not practical.

4. The Book's Conclusion Is Trivial

Robillard and Kaurin argue that if the book finds merely that veterans differ in the amount of gratitude they are owed, this is trivial and uninteresting. According to Robillard:

If [Kershner's] claim is that *all* veterans are not *equally* worthy of gratitude from American citizens in *all* cases (for reasons having to do with motivation, effort, epistemic conditions, etc.), then I'm not sure what is philosophically interesting or controversial about such a conclusion, nor do I know that many people would hold such an unqualified, categorical view. Once Kershner begins qualifying and hedging on the initial claim suggested by the book's controversial sub-title, he ends up taking us to a place that I believe is reasonable and acceptable to many, namely, that U.S. citizens should have complex, fine-grained pro- or con-attitudes toward veterans, taking into account the specifics of each veteran's case to include considerations such as purity of motivation and effort.¹⁷

Given this criticism, it is worth setting out the book's controversial claim and why it matters. The controversial claim is that for the

¹⁷ Robillard, "A Case for Gratitude," pp. 72-73.

average veteran, Americans should not be very grateful to him. This is in sharp contrast with American attitudes and practices. In particular, it conflicts with common attitudes and with Presidential statements, holidays, statues and memorials, public praise, generous compensation, and affirmative-action benefits. The book raises the issue of whether Americans should be far more grateful to veterans than they are to farmers, sanitation workers, intellectuals, and so on. They currently are far more grateful.

There are three reasons this claim matters. First, mistaken gratitude might provide inefficient inducements for people to go into the military rather than other fields. Second, if mistaken gratitude is wrong or bad, then it is wrong or bad here. The incredible frequency with which these mistaken attitudes are held makes the problem worse. Third, mistaken gratitude might bleed into unrelated areas, such as elections and policy decisions. The overrepresentation of military men and women in Congress and the White House suggests that this concern is a real one. This might also be seen in the tendency to double down on failing policies in which significant numbers of veterans' lives have been lost and to treat such sunk costs as a reason to continue the policy in question. Hence, the theses matter and, perhaps, matter a lot.

Article

Selling Genocide II: The Later Films

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1. Introduction

In the first article of this series,¹ I pointed out the difference between using propaganda to advertise a political brand (i.e., a political party or ideology) and using it to sell specific governmental policies or programs. The Nazis, masters of deceitful propaganda, used it for both purposes. However, my focus there (and here) is on the use of film propaganda specifically to sell the policy of making Germany (and later Europe generally) *Juden-frei* (i.e., devoid of Jewish people and culture). This anti-Semitic campaign changed rapidly from expulsion to extermination as the regime's mission evolved. I employed Hans Speier's classic sociological study of types of war to suggest that the Nazis' campaign against the Jews (unlike their wars against France, England, and Russia) was from the start an "absolute war"—one with genocide as its goal. I then asked: What sort of propaganda is likely to be utilized to sell genocide?

There, I offered a two-pronged hypothesis to answer that question. First, propaganda aimed at arousing support for or tolerance of genocide would employ the standard psychological mechanisms used in ordinary marketing and propaganda, such as contrast, reciprocity, social proof, authority, association (both positive and negative), and salience, as opposed to unusual or unique psychological mechanisms. Second, the focus of the message would be on arousing feelings of difference of, disgust for, and danger from the targeted group.

I found that the earlier two major anti-Semitic films *Robert and Bertram* and *Linen from Ireland* (both released in 1939) were

¹ Gary James Jason, "Selling Genocide I: The Earlier Films," *Reason Papers* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2016), pp. 127-57.

drenched with the message that Jews are profoundly different from non-Jews (especially “Aryans”) physically, culturally, and morally. These differences were all portrayed as differences for the worse, that is, that Jews are physically ugly as well as culturally and morally inferior. Finally, the films try to induce in the viewer the feeling that Jews are dangerous in lusting after political and financial power as well as Aryan women, and in disguising themselves as ordinary citizens while in fact giving their allegiance to their fellow Jews. This last message is strongly conveyed in the two earlier films, despite the fact that they were comedies.

The three anti-Semitic propaganda films I shall examine here all appeared in 1940 and were produced at the explicit behest of Joseph Goebbels. Each of the three Nazi-controlled studios was asked to produce an anti-Semitic propaganda film. Saul Friedlander holds that Goebbels wanted to counter three British films that appeared in 1934, but all of which sought to *criticize* anti-Semitism.² Thus all of the 1940 German propaganda films were what might be called “reversal remakes,” in which an original story is twisted in the new film, so that the new version conveys the opposite of what the original movie conveyed.

The first film released, originally named *The Rothschilds*, was soon recalled for reworking, and appeared renamed as *The Rothschilds' Shares in Waterloo* after the release of the second film, *Jew Suss*. I will first review *The Rothschilds' Shares in Waterloo*, then *Jew Suss*, and finish up by reviewing *The Eternal Jew*. In each case, I will show how the feelings of difference, disgust, and danger are conveyed, as well as draw some contrasts between the later films and the earlier ones. My thesis is that between the two earlier 1939 anti-Semitic propaganda films and the three 1940 ones, there was a massive increase on the virulence of attacks upon the Jews. I show this by a close analysis of the later films in comparison with the earlier ones. The propaganda intensified because with the onset of the war, the Nazi regime apparently decided that it has to eradicate the Jews. This shift from pressuring Jews to emigrate to killing them was caused not merely by a hardening of their ideological position, but also by the need to confiscate Jewish assets to pay for the war.³

² “The Eternal Jew,” *Wikipedia*, accessed online at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Eternal_Jew_\(1940_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Eternal_Jew_(1940_film)).

³ For a defense of the claim that the Nazi regime was funding its war machine (and delivering material goods to its citizens), see Gotz Aly, *Hitler's*

2. *The Rothschilds' Shares in Waterloo*

We'll start with *The Rothschilds' Shares in Waterloo* (*Die Rothschilds Aktien auf Waterloo*) (hereafter *Rothschilds*).⁴ This film was intended to amplify anti-Semitism, as well as arouse hatred of the English by advancing the theory that England was (in Goebbels's phrase) "Judafied," that is, that the English were "the Jews among Aryans." It was put into production in 1939, after the British declaration of war against the Germans. The message of the film was muddled by the sympathetic portrayal of some of the English characters, however, so the Nazis pulled the film and reworked it. By the time it was re-released, the much more popular *Jew Suss* was out and the war against Britain had stalled. Still, the film sold nearly as many tickets as *Robert and Bertram* and *Linen from Ireland* combined.⁵

Rothschilds opens with an intertitle telling us that the film—based on historical fact—takes place in the year 1806. Prince William of Hesse has to flee Napoleon's troops. He stores part of his fortune with a Jewish agent, Mayer Rothschild, in Frankfurt am Main. The film aims to explain how "the International Jewish House of Rothschild founded its power with the [Prince's] money and thus paved the way for the Jewish [take-over] of England."

A precis of this complex film is in order. It opens with Prince William visiting Mayer's house in the Jewish district of Frankfurt. He deposits 600,000 pounds in British government bonds bearing a 5% interest. After haggling over the fee, William leaves, and Mayer tells his younger son James that these bonds will be sent to his older son Nathan (who runs the Rothschild operations in London) to "invest in England." The money reaches Nathan at his opulent London home.

Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

⁴ The original 1934 Hollywood production of this movie is available on the Internet, as is the 1940 Nazi reversal remake. The Hollywood version can be viewed online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfsqmfRyT_I. The Nazi version can be viewed online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM-t28B4dgM>.

⁵ David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-1945* (London: I. B. Taurus & Co. Ltd., 2007), p. 269.

We cut to a club, and meet the film's other main characters: the biggest British bankers Turner and Baring; Lieutenant Clayton, an honest soldier; Turner's wife Sylvia; and Baring's daughter Phyllis. We learn that Phyllis and Clayton are in love, but Baring disapproves because Clayton is not wealthy.

The action starts with Nathan learning from his industrial spy, Bronstein, that there is going to be war with Napoleon and that the English are to send troops to Spain under General Wellington. The British government is going to auction off gold to London's big bankers, who will be tasked with moving that gold from London to Wellington's army headquarters to pay for the army's expenses. Nathan, who we find is a parvenu disdained by the other British bankers, wins the bidding war by using the bonds sent by his father. The other bankers go to Treasury Minister Herries to complain about the "Jewish stranger" intruding into their circle. Herries responds by asking whether Nathan used illegal means or has insufficient funds, and reminds them that these auctions are open to everyone; they shouldn't be so sensitive to "one Jew."

The bankers leave disgruntled, and we next see Nathan in Herries's office. Herries and Nathan haggle over Nathan's fee for shipping the gold to Wellington's army. When Herries observes that this is the first time Nathan has done business with the British government, Nathan sanctimoniously replies, "All for my country . . . I'm English," to which Herries sarcastically rejoins, "Since when?" Herries tells Nathan to meet with Wellington to work out the details of shipping the gold.

An intertitle reads, "The Jew mints the gold, seeks and finds access to the leading circles of England," and we see Nathan arrive at Wellington's home. Nathan warns him that as the gold moves from England through Europe to Wellington's Spanish headquarters, many hands will touch the gold, and some of that gold will stick to every one of those hands. While Wellington calls this "organized fraud," the viewer has little doubt that he will go along with the scheme.

After a scene in which we see Wellington's army marching from London with crowds cheering, Nathan now sends word to Mayer to arrange smuggling routes to get the gold to Wellington's base in Spain. This Mayer does, which involves setting up James with banking operations in Paris. When James evinces fear—he will, after all, be helping smuggle gold to France's enemy—Mayer assures him that Paris has many Jews, and Jews always protect Jews.

After an intertitle that reads, “The Jewish International [Network] goes to work,” we watch the gold move from city to city, with Mayer’s agents all taking shares of it. Only half of the original amount reaches Wellington, who also takes a cut. We find out that while Clayton has been away at war, Phyllis has had his child, been expelled from her father’s house, and has unknowingly been supported by Nathan (who has designs on her).

An intertitle next takes us to Paris in 1811. The French Minister of Justice has discovered that James has been smuggling gold out to Wellington, but instead of arresting James, he demands a 15% cut for himself. We cut to London where Bronstein and Nathan are talking about Napoleon’s invasion of Russia. After a scene where we see Nathan once again try to enter British high society (this time by having a lavish banquet), only to be humiliated by Turner (who arranges a banquet nearby at the same time), we see Crayton enter Turner’s house and tell Sylvia that the war is over. Sylvia tells him that Phyllis has had his son, and he joyously joins them.

Another intertitle tells us that while Napoleon was defeated at Leipzig, the “powers of money” continued the fight in London. We learn that during the war, Nathan has risen in wealth and power from his manipulation of money.

We next see Bronstein telling Nathan that Napoleon has returned to France and is marching on Paris. Nathan learns that the English will again send its army under Wellington against Napoleon. Nathan goes to Wellington’s house and finds Clayton there, waiting to reenlist. Nathan tells Wellington that they can make money again, this time from the stock market, but Nathan will need a man close to Wellington’s army to report on events. Wellington agrees, and Nathan then convinces Clayton to be that man. After Clayton leaves, Nathan tells his agents to spread out over Europe and that the first to report who wins the war will be rewarded. As the agents depart, an intertitle pronounces “All for money. While nations bleed on the battlefields, huge speculations are being prepared at the stock exchange in London.”

We see Baring reading the newspaper headlines to the other bankers, that the Prussians (England’s allies) have crossed the Rhine to engage Napoleon. Turner tells the bankers to buy government bonds. When the bankers learn that Wellington’s army will fight Napoleon somewhere near Brussels, Turner tells them to keep buying bonds, even though they have noticed Nathan isn’t buying any. When Nathan

learns from Clayton via carrier pigeon that the battle has commenced, Nathan tells his assistant to sell all the bonds they have.

Meanwhile, Clayton, watching the ferocious battle, is told by the pigeon handler that they are only there to help Nathan make money. Clayton, enraged, frees the pigeons and goes to join the fight. However, another of Nathan's agents, Ruthworth, who is staying in a Belgium port town, learns that Napoleon has lost and goes to London to inform Nathan. Nathan now recognizes his chance. He tells his agents to spread the rumor that Napoleon has won, and Nathan is sick with grief and stress. As the other bankers panic and dump their bonds at low prices, Nathan surreptitiously buys all he can get. At the end of the trading day, he learns that he has netted 11 million pounds from his rigged game and driven the other bankers broke. He gloats and crows, "My Waterloo!"

At the end, we see Mayer return the original loan to Prince William, the 600,000 pounds in bonds plus the agreed-upon 5% interest. The Prince observes that this amounts to very little, and asks Mayer what the Rothschilds' made off the capital. Mayer replies that "honor has always been the strictest principle in the Rothschild house," to which the Prince sarcastically responds that "nothing is more disgusting than one pickpocket lying to another."

We then see Nathan in Herries's office. Nathan smirks and shows Herries on a map of Europe the extent of the Rothschilds' influence: Nathan in London, brother Salomon in Vienna, brother Carl in Naples, brother James in Paris, and father Mayer in Frankfurt. On a blank piece of paper, Nathan draws lines connecting these cities with Gibraltar and Jerusalem, and we see the Star of David. When Herries asks whether Nathan wants to open a branch in Jerusalem, Nathan replies, "The other way around, dear Herries. We are the branches of Jerusalem."

The film ends showing the Star of David imposed over Britain, and an intertitle tells us, "By the completion of this film, the last of the Rothschilds have left Europe as refugees. The struggles against their accomplices in England, the British plutocracy, continues."

The anti-Semitic messages in this film are many. They fall into the leitmotifs of difference, disgust, and danger.

Regarding physical appearance, the film portrays Jews as different and disgusting in many scenes. For example, Mayer tells his assistant, Hersch, not to worry about getting wet (a dig at the supposed lack of hygiene among Jews); Sylvia tells her husband that Nathan "looks different" from the other bankers; Bronstein, who is slovenly, is

told by Nathan that his children will learn to clean themselves; and Jewish agents on the continent who are moving the gold often appear in caftans, caps, and beards.

Now consider culture. Jews are portrayed as having different and disgusting cultural values. To begin with, the Jews in this film are presented as being universally focused on material wealth in numerous scenes. Mayer tells James, "Remember, my son, you can only make a lot of money with a lot of blood." Jewish agents greedily take half of the gold as it moves through Europe. Several intertitles proclaim: "The Jew mints the gold"; "The Jewish International goes to work"; and "All for money. While nations bleed on the battlefields, huge speculations are being prepared at the stock exchange in London." Nathan bribes people to get him information on Waterloo, so that he can rig the stock market. Bronstein cheats the English Ruthworth out of a reward, and Nathan gloats over the millions he has cheated other dealers out of (by spreading false rumors).

In terms of moral principles, Jews are portrayed in various scenes as dishonest, sneaky, manipulative, and deceitful. Examples include the following. Mayer finds out surreptitiously that Prince William has English bonds. Nathan is shown giving gifts to Sylvia, so as to ingratiate himself into the banking community, and to Phyllis, apparently hoping to seduce her. James lies to the French about where the gold is going. Nathan tells an assistant to send 9,000 guineas to Paris, after we just saw that Wellington was forced to write a receipt of 10,600 guineas. Nathan sanctimoniously claims devotion to "his country" England, to the derision of Herries. Turner points out to Herries that the Rothschilds work against France in Britain, and against Britain in France.

Many scenes portray Jews as dangerous. There are intertitles reading: "the International Jewish House of Rothschild founded its power with the Prince's money, and thus paved the way for the Jewish [take-over] of England"; "The Jew mints the gold, seeks and finds access to the leading circles of England"; "The Jewish International goes to work"; "All for money. While nations bleed on the battlefields, huge speculations are being prepared at the stock exchange in London"; and "The Jewish high finance is earning, the people pay, and lose." The message here is that Jews form an international gang that is conspiring to rule the world. Mayer reassures his son James that Jews will always protect fellow Jews. This scene reinforces the anti-Semitic shibboleth that Jews are clannish and will work against the "host" society. James deceives the French Ministers about helping to fund

Wellington's army. This scene suggests that Jews disloyally conspire to acquire power at the expense of the rest of society. Nathan funds the new King of France after forcing him to appoint James an agent of the French Treasury Ministry. Again, the danger portrayed is of Jews conspiring to take over the government. Nathan boasts that he has earned enough money to buy England and that his successful manipulation of the stock exchange was his Waterloo. This insinuates the power of the international Jewish banking cartel. A smirking Nathan connects the cities that have Rothschild banks with Jerusalem, which shows a Star of David, boasting "We are the branches of Jerusalem." This purports to show the extent to which the major international European banks are already tools of the Jews.

A new element is also present in *Rothschilds* that the 1939 films lacked: the subtext of Jewish exploitation of German soldiers. The film portrays the initial capital which the Rothschilds used to build their fortune (i.e., the Prince's 600,000 pounds in English bonds) as having been wrung from the blood of the Prussian soldiers, who had been "rented out" to fight foreign wars. Moreover, Nathan's manipulation of the English stock market was made possible by what the film portrays as the Prussian victory over Napoleon at Waterloo.

Two final points regarding this film are worth noting. First, its power as propaganda was limited by both internal and external factors. Internally, it aimed at savaging both the British and the Jews, specifically by showing the "Judaification" of the British, but this had some problems. The Nazis made the film about the time Britain declared war on Germany, and appeared in its first version in July of 1940. The film did indeed present the English, especially the English bankers, as being generally vile. However, while in theory there is no reason why one propaganda film cannot target two groups simultaneously, in this film several of the English characters are portrayed sympathetically, even after the film was withdrawn and redone. Examples include the ordinary Englishman Ruthworth (cheated by Bronstein), as well as the manipulated Phyllis and Clayton. This undercuts the intended anti-British tone.

Moreover, the British, whom the viewer is encouraged to despise, are portrayed as themselves viciously anti-Semitic. Led by Turner, the bankers repeatedly shun, ridicule, collude against, and humiliate Nathan. If viewers are encouraged to hate a nationality that is virulently anti-Semitic, doesn't that possibly incline the viewers to sympathize with the Jews? Indeed, seeing Nathan humiliated but resolved to elevate his people might well have aroused some sympathy

for him in the audience. Finally, while the Jewish characters are shown as being greedy and pocketing money as it moves from London to Spain, so do Wellington, the French customs agents, and even the French Minister of Police. This would incline at least some viewers to think that perhaps not only Jews but in fact everyone is greedy.

Externally, the war against Britain commenced in the summer of 1940, and by the time the film was re-released, the air war (the Battle of Britain) was being decisively lost by the German Luftwaffe. Thus, the subtext of the film, namely, that the English under Wellington were inferior warriors who had to be rescued by the Prussians, rang hollow in the face of the English victory in the battle.

The second point worth noting is that a general theme central to *Rothschilds* (one that we'll see recurs in *The Eternal Jew*) is that the most prominent bankers in the world form a powerful conspiratorial network—often called the “illuminati”—that is not loyal to any country, but only loyal to itself and seeks world domination (a “New World Order”). Numerous conspiracy theories are built around this paranoid conceit. This conspiracy theory existed before the Nazi regime (and indeed exists to this day),⁶ But the Nazis simply equated the illuminati with the Jewish bankers. As Jonathan Neumann puts it, “Any conspiracy theory that connects a tiny portion of the population . . . with exploitative banking practices is susceptible to anti-Semitic undertones.”⁷

3. *Jew Suss*

The 1940 Nazi production of *Jew Suss* (*Jud Suss*) was a reversal remake of the eponymous 1934 British movie, which starred German émigré actor Conrad Veidt.⁸ The Nazi propaganda film was

⁶ This is not uncommon even now, as the reader can verify by reading the comments that accompany the YouTube presentation of *Rothschilds*.

⁷ Jonathan Neumann, “Occupy Wall Street and the Jews,” *Commentary*, January 2012, p. 27.

⁸ The 1934 British production can be accessed online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfGHMmfyMAk>; the 1940 Nazi production can be accessed online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOvYT11kRYM>. For a detailed discussion of the British version, see David Sterritt, “Power aka Jew Suss (1934),” in Turner Classic Movie weblog (2015), accessed online at: <http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article.html?isPreview=&id=410440%7C409944&name=Power-aka->

produced by famous German director Veit Harlan. It was by all reckoning the most powerful of the films (as I explain below), and richly illustrates the leitmotifs under discussion.

The film's opening shot is of a Star of David with a menorah in front, after which we see an intertitle reading, "The events in this film are based on historical facts." The story takes place mainly in the city of Stuttgart (in the state of Württemberg) in the 1730s. The main characters include Karl Alexander, the new Duke; Sturm, the head of the State Council; Dorothea, Sturm's beautiful daughter; and Faber, Dorothea's fiancé and Secretary to the Council. We open with Sturm swearing in the new Duke, the oath requiring the Duke to work with the State Council for the good of the people. The Duke is driven to the palace while being cheered. At the palace, we see the Duke kiss his wife (promising her a regal gift soon). Surveying the cheering crowd, he tellingly murmurs, "My people! My land!"

We move to the Jewish Quarter in Frankfurt where we meet the other main characters. The Duke has sent a representative to meet with Suss Oppenheimer ("Jew Suss"), a wealthy gold and jewelry merchant and money-lender, in order to buy the Duchess her promised gift. Levy, Suss's assistant, lets the representative in, while a number of stereotypical Jews look on from the street. Suss (also stereotypically dressed and bearded) opens a large safe filled with treasures and shows the representative a pearl necklace. Suss offers it on credit, but only if the Duke will deal with him in person. The representative reminds Suss that Jews are legally banned from Stuttgart, and his looks brand him, but Suss counters that the Duke can give permission for Suss to visit and Suss can change his looks so as to appear Gentile. The representative says it will be arranged. At a State Council meeting, the representatives are upset that the new Duke has demanded a new opera/ballet house and a personal guard (in effect, his own private army). The council votes (with Faber collecting the ballots). Meanwhile, Suss (clean-shaven and well-dressed) enters town, having been given a ride by Dorothea (to whom he shows great, if unrequited, attraction). He first stops at Sturm's house, where Faber recognizes him and suggests he leave by the next coach. Suss replies that he is staying on business and asks Faber whether he can recommend a good inn. When Faber says no inn will take Jews, Suss looks at him with hatred.

Jew-Suss.

We next see the Duke admiring the pearls. He tells his aide, Remchingen, to have Suss come in. Suss flatters the Duke and wins him over by dumping gold coins on his desk and agreeing to finance what the Duke wants (which the State Council had refused to do). We next see ballerinas practicing, and the Duke has Remchingen summon one of them to meet him. Suss gives his ring to the Duke to give the young ballerina as a bauble. Remchingen informs the Duke that he is now in debt to Suss for 350,000 talers. Suss arranges with the Duke to lease the city roads for a decade, during which time Suss will fix them in exchange for the tolls he can collect from the people. Suss points out to the Duke that Kaiser Leopold of Vienna also has a “money-making Jew” and that “power is money.”

The effect of all the taxes on the citizens is that their food prices rapidly inflate. But we learn from Sturm that “the Jew did . . . buy the Duke his [personal army],” so he advises his family to “be careful.” Two incidents testify to Suss’s increased power. First, a blacksmith refuses to pay a toll for the road past his house, and Suss has part of the man’s house knocked down. When Suss later drives by with his Aryan mistress beside him and gloats, the blacksmith attacks the carriage with a hammer.

Second, we see Suss organize a ball, inviting all of the town’s young women. Suss has the youngest girls dance for the Duke; while the Duke toys with a seventeen-year-old, Suss forces his attentions on Dorothea. Sturm takes her home, while Faber and a few other young men start shouting insulting rebukes at Suss, including the taunt that Suss “gambles for Württemberg. A Jew plays for your daughters and the Duke holds the bank!”

Suss complains to the Duke and reports the blacksmith’s attack, but presents it as though the Duke is being attacked. He warns that as long as Jews are banned from the city, the Duke will continue to be attacked. The Duke agrees to allow Jews into the city and orders the blacksmith to be executed.

We subsequently see the blacksmith hanged (while Suss and his blonde mistress watch). We then see a horde of dirty and shabbily dressed Jews entering the city. These events outrage the people and spur the Council to action. A group of councilmen goes to the palace and confronts the Duke, telling him that the people want all of the Jews, especially Suss, expelled. One of them quotes Martin Luther’s admonition that “after the Devil thou hast no worse foe than a real Jew.” The Duke, angry that the Council is “terrorizing” him, shouts “Your Luther is nothing to me!” He threatens to arrest the Councilmen

and orders them to leave. After they are gone, he calls in Suss and wonders aloud how to handle the Council. Suss advises replacing the Council with a new cabinet of “trusted persons” (i.e., flunkies). When the Duke says that this is a dangerous path, for it courts civil war, Suss urges him to “trust the stars,” saying that there is an expert astrologer who can read the stars for the Duke.

Suss then uses his Rabbi, Loew, to con the Duke. Suss suggests that Loew tell the Duke “the truth our [i.e., the Jewish] way,” and work in to what he tells the Duke the Duke’s motto, “He who dares.” When they meet, in response to the Duke’s question about whether the stars are “favorable” to his plan to eliminate the Council, Loew replies cryptically that the stars neither favor nor oppose the action, but will “obey he who dares.” The Duke falls for the charade and, believing that he is fated to win, tells Suss to prepare the new cabinet.

Suss offers Sturm the position of Chairman of the new cabinet, and Suss offers to marry Dorothea. Sturm angrily refuses both offers, and that night allows Faber to marry her. Upon learning this, an enraged Suss has Levy charge Sturm with treason. Sturm is arrested and brought in front of a rigged court headed by Levy. Sturm defies the court and is jailed.

At Sturm’s house, Von Roeder informs Faber and Dorothea that Sturm is imprisoned by the Duke. Von Roeder and Faber then go to the Council meeting. The Council votes to resist with force the Duke’s takeover. At the palace, the Duke knows of the Council vote and declares the State Council dissolved.

Von Roeder goes to the palace to give the Duke a final warning, but is turned away. The Duke bemoans the resistance, so Suss proposes hiring troops from a neighboring city. The Duke initially rejects the idea, but when crowds gather outside the palace, he agrees to the proposal, wondering where the money to pay for the troops will come from. Suss tells him that the Jews in the city will contribute. Rabbi Loew allows Suss to address the congregation, who tells them that they need to collectively pay so that the Duke will be the absolute ruler and will protect them forever.

There is now open rebellion. Faber rushes to join Von Roeder and they discover the Duke’s plan to bring in foreign troops. Faber volunteers to get past the armed guards and warn the countryside that they only have three days before the foreign troops arrive, but he is captured. Meanwhile, the Duke, afraid of the coming civil war, follows

Remchingen's suggestion to go to the Kaiser's ball in another city and return after a few days as absolute tyrant.

Suss is now firmly in charge. He has Faber tortured, but when Dorothea arrives at the palace to petition for mercy for her husband, Suss has her listen to Faber's cries as he is tortured. Suss says he will let Faber go, if she consents to have sex with him. She gives in and Faber is freed, but she runs through the woods wild with shame and drowns herself. Faber finds the body and brings it to the palace doors.

Von Roeder and Faber ride to the Kaiser's ball and confront the Duke and Suss. When Faber tells the Duke that Suss had him tortured and raped Dorothea, driving her to suicide, Suss begins to fight him. At this point, the Duke collapses and dies from a heart attack. Without the Duke to protect him, Suss is arrested. The movie ends with Suss in a dock. He is found guilty of all charges, and Sturm reads the law, "Whenever a Jew mingles his flesh with a Christian woman, he should be hanged." We then see him dangling in a cage, begging for his life, until he dies. The judge orders all Jews expelled from Württemberg.

Let us turn to the issue of the power of the film as an anti-Semitic propaganda piece. While Hitler preferred *The Eternal Jew* (reviewed below) because it purveys its message directly and in detail, Goebbels felt it was so crude and harsh that many viewers were put off by it. Goebbels felt that *Jew Suss* was excellent because the message was subliminal, that is, covered up by an interesting story, good acting, and an effective score. He wrote in his diary after seeing the film for the first time, "An anti-Semitic film of the kind we could only wish for. I am happy about it."⁹ Heinrich Himmler also loved the film, ordering members of the police and SS to watch it. It was shown to all SS units and Einsatzgruppen before they were deployed in the East, as well as to the non-Jewish populations in areas where Jews were being rounded up.¹⁰ It was also a favorite shown at Hitler Youth events.

It is easy to see why Goebbels and Himmler were so happy with this film. For the three leitmotifs (difference, disgust, and danger) are not just present in this film, they are elaborated to monomaniacal intensity.

⁹ Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team, "Jew Suss" (2015), accessed online at: www.HolocaustResearchProject.org.

¹⁰ Ibid.

First, let's examine the theme of physical appearance. Many scenes portray Jews as both different and disgusting in their looks. For example, in the opening scene in the Jewish Quarter in Frankfurt, we first see Levy and the two Jewish men across the street all with caps, caftans, and beards. The one in the window with an eye-patch is especially repellent, and he is seated next to a disheveled, provocatively dressed woman. These three Jewish characters look similar, and this was deliberate. The same actor, Werner Kraus—the German film industry's equivalent of America's Lon Chaney, that is, a character actor capable of appearing in many different guises—played all three characters. He also played two other Jewish speaking roles (including Rabbi Loew) and perhaps eight of the non-speaking Jewish roles as well. The film's director, Harlan, said he did this deliberately “to show how all these different temperaments and characters—the pious patriarch, the wily swindler, the penny-pinching merchant, and so on—were all ultimately derived from the same [Jewish] root.”¹¹ The effect is subliminally to reinforce the anti-Semitic shibboleth that all Jews are essentially alike.

Other scenes also push the theme that Jews are physically different and repellent. For example, when we first meet Suss, the Duke's representative says that “anyone could tell you're a Jew.” Also, Faber recognizes Suss as Jewish, even though Suss “fixed his looks.” In addition, hundreds of Jews are shown as dirty and disheveled when entering the city.¹²

Second, even more numerous are the scenes portraying Jews as having a different and inferior culture. The idea that Jews focus on material wealth and an egoistic lifestyle is conveyed by many scenes. For example, Suss's office has a sign that reads “Coins and Jewelry”; Suss's safe is filled with silver, gold and jewelry; Suss pours gold coins on the Duke's desk; Suss tells the Duke that “power is money”; Suss tells the blacksmith that he (Suss) owns the road; Suss and his Jewish agents use their taxing power to impoverish the citizens; Suss

¹¹ “Jud Suss (1940 film),” *Wikipedia*, accessed online at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jud_S%C3%9F_\(1940_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jud_S%C3%9F_(1940_film)).

¹² The film also conveys the message that the difference between Jews and non-Jews is discerned by Jews as well. We see this in the scene where the Jewish man in the window asks, “Who is that goyische-looking prig?” We also see this in the scene where Suss says he will change his looks and when he compliments Faber's “discernment.”

enjoys winning money in cards, gloating “money has no smell”; Suss tells the Duke to hire soldiers, which the Duke labels “A Jew’s way of thinking”; and Suss is seen to have been involved with the Duke’s younger wife, which prompts the Duke to observe that Suss only cares about his own interests and profits. This portrayal takes an especially sinister turn when Suss rapes Dorothea, after trying to buy her favor with a ring.

The view that Jewish culture doesn’t share the romantic view of love (in contrast with the “Aryans”) is conveyed in numerous scenes. Faber shouts, “A Jew plays for your daughters,” and Suss procures young women for the Duke. Suss gives money to his mistress, tries to buy Dorothea’s affection before raping her, and is confronted by the Duke for having an affair with the new Duchess. In vivid contrast are the numerous scenes of the pure, romantic love between Faber and Dorothea—at the piano, at the altar, in her father’s house, as he gets ready to take part in the revolt, and when she hears him being tortured.

The theme that Jewish culture is clannish and “cosmopolitan” (i.e., identifying with “their own people” rather than the country in which they reside) is conveyed by a wide variety of scenes. For example, Suss brags to Levy, “I shall open the door for all of you. You’ll wear velvet and silks, tomorrow or the day after”; Suss tells Dorothea that his “homeland” (*heimat*) is the world; Jews move into Stuttgart *en masse* and Suss tells Loew that he has nearly turned Stuttgart into Israel; Suss instructs Loew to tell the Duke “the second truth” (implying that Jews say one thing to each other and another to Gentiles); Suss proposes to hire troops from another city to fight the Duke’s people; and Rabbi Loew appears frightened that Jews will be soldiers (in a Gentile civil war), but urges his congregation to pay so that the Duke can hire foreign troops to put down his own people. Most strident in pushing the theme that Jews are clannish is the scene in which a desperate Dorothea cries, “My father in Heaven,” only to hear a vindictive Suss tell her to “Pray to your God But . . . we Jews have one too.”

Third, the theme that Jews have different and degenerate morals—specifically, that Jews are generally dishonest, devious, and manipulative—is also conveyed in numerous scenes. Suss changes his appearance to gain entrance to the city, Suss gets the Duke to lease him roads to pay off debt, Levy tells the farmer who is complaining about the taxes just to raise prices on the citizens, Suss destroys half of the blacksmith’s house because it encroaches on the road Suss controls;

Suss encourages Loew to deceive the Duke about the Duke's chances for success in eliminating the State Council; and Levy twists logic and law to find a way to destroy Sturm in a kangaroo court. The message that Jews are manipulative is certainly conveyed in all the scenes where Suss manipulates the Duke by appealing to his materialistic desires for money, power, and sex.

In a country as uniformly Christian as was Germany, the scene of Suss tempting Sturm with the offer of worldly power must have been especially resonant. For prominent in the New Testament is the story of Satan's temptation of Jesus in the desert. The Third Temptation is Satan's offer to Jesus of worldly power in exchange for Jesus's allegiance to Satan. Indeed, the scenes portraying Suss as using temptation as a tool for manipulation would subliminally (if not consciously) literally demonize him—Satan being the Tempter. Similarly, by portraying Suss as a pathological liar reinforces the view of Suss as Satanic—Satan being the Father of all lies. Demonizing Suss by extension demonizes Jews generally.

This film introduces a new message in the attack on alleged Jewish values, namely, that Jews are cowardly. A number of scenes convey this message: Levy, so tough when he has power, cowers in fear when the outraged citizens break down the palace door; Loew fears Jews being soldiers; and Suss begs for his life prior to being hanged. These scenes sharply contrast with the courage displayed by many of the non-Jewish figures: the blacksmith faces hanging without a whimper, Sturm tells Suss that he (Sturm) fears neither dungeon nor death, Faber faces torture bravely, von Roeder fights fearlessly, and the rebellious townspeople are brave in the face of professional troops.

Finally, just as in the 1939 films reviewed earlier, Jews are portrayed as being dangerous to non-Jewish Germans. Yet Suss isn't merely a villain like Biedermeier and Ipelmeyer (in *Robert and Bertram*) or Kuhn (in *Linen from Ireland*). He is a super-villain like Professor Moriarty (in the Sherlock Holmes stories), Lex Luther (in the Superman comics), or the Joker (in *The Dark Knight*). That is, Suss has all the lust for money and financial power that the Jews of the earlier films had, but with even more intensity. Suss also wants political power. While Biedermeier, Ipelmeyer, Kuhn, and Rothschild all obviously want to bed beautiful "Aryan" women, Suss appears to have had any number of gentile women. And while Kuhn and Nathan Rothschild tell their assistants that they are working to open the door for Jews to enter mainstream society, Suss uses his power to empower massive numbers of Jews to enter the city. A clear message of the film

is that Jews are dangerous in power; when they are in power, they use their positions to benefit “their” people, not the people of the “host” country. This is a message about what “dual loyalty” really means: Jews in power are only superficially loyal to the host country; their real loyalty is to the Jewish people.

Also worth noting is how Suss’s greed in squeezing steep taxes out of the farmers and merchants rapidly causes steep inflation of food prices. This subliminally conveys the message that Jewish financial machinations are the cause of inflation. To a German public that doubtlessly had vivid recollections of the Weimar Republic’s hyperinflation (1921-1924) deeply ingrained in their memories, this message had to have aroused fear.

The alleged danger of racial pollution is also pushed in *Jew Suss*. This is portrayed by Suss’s actions: he has an “Aryan” mistress, seduces the Duke’s new young wife, shows interest in the young girls in the palace, and pursues and rapes Dorothea.

Of all five of the German anti-Semitic propaganda movies under review here and in my previous article in this series, *Jew Suss* was undoubtedly the most popular. It grossed about 6.5 million Reich marks, but cost only 2 million to make.¹³ It was the sixth most popular film made during the Third Reich. Perhaps the biggest reason for this is that the director was highly accomplished and the movie cast were popular film stars. As film historian Linda Schulte-Sasse puts it, “If you want to understand the movies that people actually paid to go and see, Veit Harlan is the one. He was the Steven Spielberg or James Cameron of his era, and so you have to imagine ‘Jew Suss’ as a movie with Meryl Streep, Jack Nicholson and Brad Pitt.”¹⁴

Her point is apt. The movie was viewed by 20.3 million Germans. In 1940, Germany had 80 million people, counting Austria and the Sudetenland, including about 52 million adults. That means upward of 40% of all German adults saw this picture (assuming no repeat ticket purchases). Compare that to Spielberg’s adult-oriented hit *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), which sold domestically about 46 million

¹³ Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-1945*, p. 269.

¹⁴ Quoted in Larry Rohter, “Nazi Film Still Pains Relatives,” *The New York Times* (March 1, 2010), accessed online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/02/movies/02suss.html>.

tickets.¹⁵ There were about 271 million Americans at the time of that film's release, of which about 213 million were adults, which means that about 20% of all American adults saw the movie (assuming no repeat ticket purchases). That gives you an idea of the success of *Jew Suss*: it was roughly *double* the hit *Saving Private Ryan* was, measured by ticket sales per capita.

4. *The Eternal Jew*

Let us finish by examining *The Eternal Jew* (*Der ewige Jude*) (or *The Wandering Jew*, depending upon your translation).¹⁶ The film was done in documentary style and was directed by Fritz Hippler, who faced charges after the war for making it. The film has three broad focuses: negatively portraying Jewish ghetto life, attacking various values supposedly characteristic of Jews, and criticizing Jewish religious customs.

The film opens against the backdrop of ominous music, with the title card reading: "A documentary film from DFG based on an idea by Dr. E. Taubert." The man referred to here was Eberhard Taubert (1907-1976), a lawyer and committed Nazi who worked in Goebbels's propaganda ministry and wrote the screenplay. It then shows the message, "The civilized Jews we know in Germany give us but an incomplete picture of their true radical character. This film shows actual shots of the Polish ghettos. It shows us the Jews as they really look . . . before concealing themselves behind the mask of civilized Europeans." The film's narrator—popular German actor Harry Griesse—tells us that the Polish campaign (the 1939 invasion) has taught Germans the real nature of the Jews, and that "there's a plague here—a plague that threatens the health of the Aryan people."

We cut to a Jewish home, which is filthy and neglected, with flies swarming as the men at the table (with beards, dark clothes, and hats) get up and pray. We are told that the Jews are not poor, but choose to live this way and "horde" their wealth. A shot of the street shows Jews bartering, which we are told is all Jews do, because they don't like work: "[Judaism] makes cheating and usury a divine duty."

¹⁵ Pamela McClintock, "Steven Spielberg's Top 10 Box Office Successes," *The Hollywood Reporter* (June 2015), accessed online at: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/steven-spielberg-s-top-10-803126>.

¹⁶ *The Eternal Jew*, accessed online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIQp31Oyn70>.

We see “Aryan” workers deriving joy from honest work and then, by contrast, a Jew counting money. The narrator assures us that Jews are “a race of parasites.” We see scenes from 1918 (when Germany lost WWI) showing disorder in the streets and are told that in Germany’s times of trouble, Jews—especially Bolsheviks—“knew how to terrorize a great and tolerant nation.” Furthermore, we are told, while the “Aryan” Germans suffered economically, “immigrant Jews acquired fantastic riches not through honest work, but through usury, swindle and fraud.”

The film then pushes the theme that Jews are rootless, and shows a world map that displays the alleged movement of Jews out of the Mideast around the Mediterranean into modern Europe. We are shown another map and told that the spread of the Jews was mirrored by the spread of the rat. We are told that rats destroy food and spread disease wherever they go as we watch swarms of rats crawl all over each other eating grain from sacks. In the most infamous scene from the film, while we are told that rats represent sneakiness and destruction, just as do the Jews, we cut from seeing the rats to a view of Jews in Ghetto streets. The film then cites without evidence bizarre figures about the role of Jews in crime, such as that in 1933 Jews were 1% of the world’s population but “accounted for” 98% of all prostitution.

We next see a Jew with a beard and then without, while the narrator tells us that Jews, especially German Jews who have intermarried with Aryans for generations, can be difficult to distinguish from Aryans. Then we are shown scenes from the 1934 American movie about the Rothschilds, where the patriarch of the family, Mayer, has his family hide their wealth from the tax collector to show that Jews use money to control the “host” company.

The film turns to the alleged Jewish destruction of healthy culture: music, art, even science. Under Jewish influence, “Germany’s cultural life was niggerized and bastardized.” As the film shows pictures of classic art as “European-looking,” we are told, “we now know the Hebrews of the Bible could not have looked like this.” Instead, we see Polish Ghetto Jews, all in Orthodox dress. We also see footage of the Jewish slaughter of animals by slashing the animals’ throats. We hear that “European science” condemns this practice, but “Jewish law has no love for animals in the Germanic sense.” (Of course, the film never shows us “Aryan” slaughter-houses.) *The Eternal Jew* displays the decree passed and signed into law by Hitler outlawing such practices: “And just as with ritual slaughter, National

Socialist Germany has made a clean sweep of all Jewry, Jewish thinking and Jewish blood will never again pollute the German nation. Under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, Germany has raised the battle-flag against the eternal Jew!”

The film ends with Hitler speaking before the Reichstag in January 1939. It is in this speech he uttered his infamous warning, “Should the international finance Jews inside and outside Europe push people into another world war, the result will not be a victory of Jewry, but the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe.” Hitler is applauded in the chamber and saluted adoringly outside.

As in the others we have discussed so far, this film pushes the message that Jewish physical appearance, culture, and values are all different and disgusting. However, since *The Eternal Jew* is a documentary-style film, it has broader power to create or amplify feelings. In addition to showing the viewer pictures of Jews and Jewish life, it can make claims and cite figures directly. That is, the visual images are interpreted and underscored by verbal narrative.

Regarding physical appearance, the film conveys difference and disgust through the scenes of the ghettos—after, of course, the Nazis had forcibly concentrated Polish Jews into them. Numerous scenes show how Jews differ in dress and (with the men) facial hair. Their alleged lack of hygiene and general dirtiness is suggested by the scenes of the squalor of their homes, especially the shots of Jews eating in a kitchen swarming with flies. This portrayal of Jews as dirty is verbally underscored by the narrator’s claims that these Jews aren’t poor, but choose to live in homes that are “filthy and neglected” because they “horde” their money.

The film again conveys difference and disgust with respect to Jewish culture. The scenes of bartering in the ghetto allegedly show that bartering (as opposed to “honest” or “regular” work) characterizes Jewish life. No footage at all is shown of Jews engaged in other economic activities, such as teaching, farming, performing skilled trades, and so on. In other words, Jews are all portrayed as “middlemen” in an economy, with the Nazi pejorative connotation of the middleman as some kind of economic parasite. These scenes are underscored by the narrator’s comments throughout: “Seldom are Jews found doing useful work”; “These Jews don’t want to work, but barter”; “The Jew buys and sells but produces nothing”; and Jews moved to German cities “not to work in the factories—they left that to the Germans.” Statistics cited in the film purport to show that Jews

were underrepresented in the “working class” (i.e., laborers) and overrepresented in business and professions.

Unlike the two 1939 films and the other two 1940 films discussed above, this film seeks to arouse a new antipathetic feeling about Jewish culture: that it is degenerate. The feeling that Jews are psychologically and culturally degenerate is reflected in scenes of modern art (contrasted with classical art), images of pornography (which the film associates with Jews), and footage of *avant garde* German films of the time (which Jews were supposedly responsible for). The assertions made clarify and amplify the message that Jews cannot fathom the “purity and neatness of the German concept of art.” The Jew, “without roots of his own, has no feeling, and what he calls art must gratify his deteriorating nerves—the stench of disease must pervade it, it must be unnatural, perverse or pathological.” Furthermore, “[i]n the guise of scientific discussion, [Jews] tried to direct mankind’s healthy urges down degenerate paths.”

Regarding Jewish values, we again see the image portrayed that Jews are dishonest, sneaky, manipulative, and deceitful. The feeling that Jews are dishonest and greedy is pushed by the shots of Jews trading and counting money, along with the scenes of the Rothschilds hiding their money to evade the tax man.¹⁷ These scenes are underscored by numerous explicit claims: “Jewish morality . . . claims that unrestrained egoism of every Jew to be divine law”; “His religion makes cheating and usury a divine duty”; “How [Jews] get [money] makes no difference [to them]”; the Jews are “a race of parasites”; “The Jew is a perpetual sponger”; and “Jews acquired fantastic riches not through honest work, but through usury, swindle and fraud.” All of this is buttressed by statistics allegedly showing that criminals are disproportionately Jewish.

In addition to conveying such ideas about Jews, *The Eternal Jew* reflects the antipathetic feeling that Jews are cruel. This feeling is pushed in part by scenes of the celebration of Purim, calling it a “feast of revenge.” More prominently, the feeling that Jews are cruel is seen in the powerful footage of kosher slaughter, where animals thrash

¹⁷ Ironically, the scenes showing the Rothschilds hiding their wealth from the tax man are in fact taken without attribution from the pro-Semitic fictional American film made about the Rothschilds in 1934 (and shown in Britain). In that film, while the Jewish banking family is hiding wealth from the tax collector, it is because the tax being collected is a tax targeting only Jews, and hence is discriminatory and unjust.

about after having had their throats cut. Narration underscores the imagery: “[Jews] let the animals bleed to death while conscious.”

Let us move on to the leitmotif of danger. *The Eternal Jew* puts more explicit focus on arousing the feeling that Jews are dangerous. First, it reflects the theme that Jews have dual loyalty, an accusation found in the other four films as well. This feeling is promoted by scenes showing the Rothschilds moving to various cities in Europe and becoming citizens, but retaining their core clan loyalty, as well as scenes of New York, called the center of world Jewish capitalism. The notion of “dual loyalty” thus involves the notions of clannishness and cosmopolitanism.

Along with the danger of “dual loyalty,” the film advances the idea that Jews are trying to achieve world power. This is presented most bluntly in a scene in which a rabbi instructs his class of young boys: the narrator tells us, “But it is not religious instruction—the rabbis are not peaceful theologians but political educators. The politics of a parasitic race must be carried out in secret.” The Jews want to control the planet, the Nazi propaganda line had it, but the Party line here was somewhat schizophrenic, with two strands.

One strand is the Nazi hatred of their arch-competitors, the Bolsheviks. This strand of the narrative pushes the view that the Bolsheviks are Jews and they work by destroying a country’s political and economic institutions. This danger is highlighted by the footage of the demonstrations and chaos of the era after 1918, when we are told that the Jews “saw their chance” and took control of the government. Even more radical Jews advocated “a revolt against everything, incitement of the masses to class warfare and terrorism.” The tiny population of Jews was nearly able to bring down a great nation by being unified and organizing the rabble: “[Jews] knew how to terrorize a great and tolerant nation.”

The second strand is the Nazi view that the Jews have awesome financial power. This is the main message in the footage of the Rothschilds, especially the picture of the numerous other (presumably) Jewish banking families. It is emphasized in the narrative that this banking power enables the Jews to “terrorize world exchanges, world opinion and world politics.”

Notice the similarity and difference between the accusations here. On the one hand, the Bolsheviks are Jews who wish to destroy capitalism and nationalism, and they do this by terrorizing a nation. On the other hand, the greedy uber-capitalist international Jewish bankers

who wish to take over all world capitalism do this by terrorizing world markets.

The Eternal Jew adds a new feature not seen in the other four films under discussion. The feeling of danger is conveyed by the use of the potent image of the rat. Rat images are used to elicit the explicit view of Jews as two things: parasites in and of themselves (disease *agents*) and carriers of disease (disease *vectors*).

The notion that Jews are economic parasites, living off the hard work of the “host” nation—note the sly use of “host”—is raised repeatedly throughout the film. They are alleged to be parasites in that they take resources from the host nation without themselves creating resources. This notion is present at the outset, where the narrator intones that when “we Germans look at the ghetto now we no longer see the most . . . comical of the questionable ghetto figures—this time we recognize that there’s a plague here—a plague that threatens the health of the Aryan peoples.” It recurs in the various scenes of Jews bartering, with claims such as “the Jew buys and sells but produces nothing” relying on the populist economic fallacy of the middleman, that is, that people who buy from the immediate producer and sell to the ultimate end-user (consumer) are somehow parasites. This fallacy is to this day common among many economically illiterate people, despite being debunked in the mid-1800s by Frederic Bastiat.¹⁸ Moreover, the idea that money-lenders are evil parasites is common to all of the Abrahamic faiths, and is an economic sophism widespread to this day.

The notion that Jews are vectors of disease¹⁹—specifically, genetic bearers of “racial pollution”—is pushed in the scene showing

¹⁸ Frederic Bastiat, *Selected Essays on Political Economy* (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Foundation for Economic Education, 1995 [1848]).

¹⁹ “Pathogen stress theory” may give additional insight into the power of the anti-Semitic message to the German public that Jews are disease vectors. Under this theory, much of human culture can be explained by behavioral immune responses, that is, patterns of behavior evolutionarily selected to enable animals to ward off infections (by viruses, bacteria, fungi, or parasites). For example, in an ant colony, sick ants will often leave and die outside the nest; only a small minority of ants carries out the dead, which seem to be behavioral immune responses.

The theory holds that geographic regions that have more infectious diseases (such as tropical regions) have a higher degree of pathogen stress, and this has cultural effects not just on narrow areas (such as food choice—most spices are potent germicides, and most tropical cultures favor spice

how Jews can “pass” for “ordinary” Germans, when the narrator says that even aristocratic Jews who have intermarried with Aryans for generations remain foreign bodies threatening the host nation.

While Hitler viewed *The Eternal Jew* as the best of the anti-Semitic propaganda films, Goebbels viewed it as lacking subtlety.²⁰ It appears to have been the least successful of the group of 1940 anti-Semitic propaganda flicks, selling by one estimate²¹ about one million tickets, or about 1/20th as many as did *Jew Suss*. Whether that is due to its drawbacks as a film, because it was released right after *Jew Suss*, or because people generally hated Jews so much by then that they didn’t want to see films about the Jewish Problem anymore (as at least one report by the SS on audience reaction suggested), is difficult to say. Some film scholars have been dismissive of the effectiveness of *The Eternal Jew* since it is (to modern eyes at least) a transparent pseudo-documentary with baseless charges against Jews. For example, Larry Rohter calls the movie “a notorious screed,” contrasting it with the much bigger hit *Jew Suss*.²² But *The Eternal Jew* was often shown in schools and at youth group meetings, so it had an influence far beyond its commercial showing. It is banned in Germany to this day.

foods), but on the tendency of the culture to be xenophobic and ethnocentric: “Keeping strangers away might be a valuable defense against foreign pathogens And a strong preference for in-group mating might help maintain a community’s hereditary immunities to local disease strains.” See Ethan Watters, “The Germ Theory of Democracy, Dictatorship, and All Your Most Cherished Beliefs,” *Pacific Standard Magazine* (March 3, 2014), accessed online at: <http://www.psmag.com/health-and-behavior/bugs-like-made-germ-theory-democracy-beliefs-73958>. While Germany is not a tropical country, the theory suggests that the 1918 Flu Pandemic (which killed up to a half-million Germans) may have heightened public receptivity to the message that Jews are bringers of disease.

Whether this theory will ultimately be proven true, only time will tell, but it is worth noting here. My thanks to Ryan Nichols for pointing out this theory to me.

²⁰ “The Eternal Jew.”

²¹ Ibid.

²² Rohter, “Nazi Still Pains Relatives.”

5. Comparison of the Earlier and Later Films

Having examined in depth five major Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda films, I will observe both similarities and differences between the two groups of films. With regard to the similarity of messaging, I hypothesized that in order to arouse the antipathy necessary to get a large percentage of the public to support (or at least tolerate) the systematic extermination of an out-group, the in-group leaders will need to arouse *specific* antipathetic feelings, namely, difference, disgust, and danger. First, leaders of the in-group try to persuade their members that the out-group is systematically different in major ways: appearance, culture, and especially shared moral values.

Second, the in-group leaders will try to arouse disgust toward the out-group. After all, I might as an American tourist view the Irish, say, as being significantly different, but view them as charming, that is, different in ways that are perfectly fine in their own right. To feel that a group is different is not perforce to feel that they are inferior or bad. That takes more effort, so it is necessary to get the in-group to view the out-group additionally as ugly in appearance, inferior in culture, and evil in values.

Third, it isn't enough even that the in-group view the out-group as both different and disgusting. A person might view beggars or the homeless as different and repellent, but not want to expel them, much less torture and murder them *en masse*. The in-group leaders must also inculcate the feeling that the out-group members are existentially dangerous to the in-group. That is, in-group propaganda must arouse the feeling that the out-group intends to take over, dominate the out-group, and take the in-groups' females for mating (thus producing more out-group members).

Despite the five films sharing these similarities, there are differences worth noting. Recall that the two earlier films were comedies: *Robert and Bertram* was a musical comedy and *Linen from Ireland* was a romantic comedy. I suggested that they were thus inherently limited in the degree to which they could stress danger. It is difficult to make people feel afraid and amused simultaneously.

The later three films, in contrast, are not at all comedies. *Jew Suss* and *Rothschilds* are both docu-dramas based on true historical events and people, as is stated clearly at the beginning of each film. *The Eternal Jew* is a documentary. Consequently, the later films are more capable of pushing the feeling of danger, which is caused by the sense of authority conveyed by the narrator's tone.

Moreover, if we compare *The Eternal Jew* with all four of the other films, we see an illustration of a point I made in a previous article,²³ namely, that we judge the degree to which a given film is irrational propaganda along a number of dimensions, such as transparency of purpose and truthfulness of content. Looking at *Robert and Bertram* and *Linen from Ireland*, one obvious reason they are propaganda is that while they appear as harmless entertainment, they were in fact intended to deepen the audience's anti-Semitism. In this they exemplified Goebbels's maxim that good propaganda doesn't appear to be propaganda. In contrast, *The Eternal Jew* is clearly labeled as a documentary, and from the opening it is clear that it is meant to persuade us that Jews and Judaism are evil.

Yet, regarding truthfulness, since they are purely fictional, the two comedies are not full of falsehoods as such. Documentaries, however, can be evaluated for factual accuracy. On this score, *The Eternal Jew* fails grotesquely, so on that basis alone it can be viewed as propaganda in the most pejorative sense. It is full of falsehoods, including the following: (1) Jews forced to live in ghettos are Jews as they "really look." (2) Jews who live outside the ghetto try to disguise themselves. (3) Polish Jews didn't fight the German invasion or otherwise didn't feel the pain of war. (4) Jews choose to live in ghettos and were not forced to move there *en masse* by the Nazis themselves. (5) Jews are generally wealthy. (6) Jews choose to live unhygienically. (6) Jews were not barred from many if not most professions historically. (8) Jewish morality is egoistic and approves of cheating. (9) Jews never make and derive satisfaction from making beautiful and useful things. (10) Jews produce nothing. One could add dozens of other examples.

Consider next the psychological mechanisms employed. In the earlier films, we see a heavy use of negative association, contrast (of Jews with "Aryans"), social proof (showing the townspeople supporting the "Aryans"), and sympathy (for the Aryan lovers imperiled by the manipulation of the wealthy Jews, and, in *Linen from Ireland*, for the humble local linen makers). All of these mechanisms are used in the later films as well. Certainly, Jews are again contrasted with "Aryans" and found wanting. We are also urged to feel sympathy for the English bank customers who lose their savings and the soldiers who suffer "horrific casualties" (in *Rothschilds*), the suffering citizens

²³ Gary James Jason, "Film and Propaganda: The Lessons of the Nazi Film Industry," *Reason Papers* 35, no. 1 (July 2013), pp. 203-19.

taxed ruthlessly by Suss (in *Jew Suss*), and the ordinary German citizens who find their country “sold out” (in *The Eternal Jew*). Especially egregious is the use of negative association in *The Eternal Jew*: the cut from scenes of Jews crowded together to the scenes of rats crawling all over each other is association of the crudest and most manipulative sort.

6. Future Work

At the end of our extended analysis of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda films, two questions can be raised that shall be the basis of future projects. Both of them concern the effectiveness of this sort of propaganda.

The first question concerns the generality of the thesis I’ve put forward, namely, that to manufacture support for an absolute war against an out-group, in-group leaders need to foment feelings of difference, disgust, and danger toward the out-group. This thesis seems clearly to be supported by the case of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda films, but are there other cases of propaganda films from other times and cultures that support the thesis?

The second question concerns the true causal effectiveness of the Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda campaign. The evidence I have presented is purely internal. Looking at the content of the Nazi anti-Semitic films shows that they indeed put forward strong messages that Jews are different, disgusting, and dangerous. But is there any external evidence that the propaganda campaign succeeded? That is, although the Nazis were able to wage genocide against European Jewry, did their propaganda campaign really help them win support for their actions? Or was the anti-Semitic campaign in reality causally irrelevant, with the regime achieving its goals by applying its police power to implement its policies?

Review Essay

Review Essay: Allan Gotthelf and Gregory Salmieri's (ed.) *A Companion to Ayn Rand*

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Over thirty million copies of English-language editions of Ayn Rand's books have been sold since the 1940s, with many more in dozens of other languages, and sales have not slowed down (p. 15 n. 1). This popularity has occurred and continues despite academia being largely silent about her work and the mainstream media usually being hostile even to the mention of her name.¹ Selections from some of Rand's non-fiction work (e.g., "The Objectivist Ethics") have occasionally been anthologized and a small handful of scholars publish research about Rand and her philosophy, Objectivism. However, her moral theory has often been mischaracterized as a version of psychological egoism or utility-oriented hedonism when paired with (or entirely displaced by) pieces that challenge egoism.² Such

¹ A small sample of vitriol hurled at Rand's work in popular media includes: "complete lack of charity"; "execrable claptrap" and "a personality as compelling as a sledge hammer"; "crackpot . . . an historical anachronism and a wretched novelist"; "an absurd philosophy" and "a total crock." See, respectively, Bruce Cook, "Ayn Rand: A Voice in the Wilderness," *Catholic World*, vol. 201 (May 1965), p. 121; John Kobler, "The Curious Cult of Ayn Rand," *The Saturday Evening Post* (November 11, 1961), p. 99; Dora Jane Hamblin, "The Cult of Angry Ayn Rand," *Life* (April 7, 1967), p. 92; Geoffrey James, "Top 10 Reasons Ayn Rand Was Dead Wrong," *CBS News Moneywatch* (September 16, 2010), accessed online at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/top-10-reasons-ayn-rand-was-dead-wrong/>.

² For examples of this phenomenon, see, e.g., the widely anthologized James Rachels, "Ethical Egoism," in his *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2003), pp. 76-90, and Louis Pojman, "Egoism and Altruism: A Critique of Ayn Rand," in *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*, 9th ed., ed. Louis Pojman and Lewis Vaughn (New York: Oxford University

responses have usually been grounded in ignorance of her literary and philosophical work or in significant misunderstanding of her unconventional ideas.

A Companion to Ayn Rand—one of the most recent volumes in the prestigious Blackwell Companion to Philosophy series—provides a necessary and welcome correction to the professional lacunae on Rand’s contribution to philosophy.³ Editors Gregory Salmieri and Allan Gotthelf have done well in bringing together fellow contributors for the task of presenting Rand’s ideas in an accessible yet scholarly respectable way. It will also go far, for those who take the time to read this carefully distilled essence of Rand’s work, in dispelling the many falsehoods and misrepresentations that abound about her ideas. Regardless of whether one agrees or not with the tenets and applications of her philosophy, this volume depicts the full range of Rand’s intellectual achievement, enlightening those unfamiliar with her work and enriching the understanding of those who know it well.

The volume is divided into six parts and a coda. Part I (“Context”) is composed of Salmieri’s “Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study of Ayn Rand” and Shoshana Milgram’s “Chapter 2: The Life of Ayn Rand.” Although the chapters of this volume can be read independently of one another, Salmieri explains that there is an organizing principle behind the ordering of the chapters, so readers could benefit from following their order: context, ethics, society (economics, politics, and law), history/culture, and art. He also helpfully identifies challenges that readers may face in pursuing the worthwhile task of taking Rand’s work seriously. These include her framing traditional philosophical issues in unusual ways that many find alien and difficult to grasp, often employing a polemical tone, and being a systematic thinker who did not present her philosophy systematically. These challenges underscore the need for a volume such as this one.

Milgram offers a brief biography of Rand, structuring it—as Rand probably would have endorsed—in terms of the stages of her work. Born in 1905 and raised in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution, Rand knew from the age of nine that she wanted to be a writer. Dedicating herself to that goal involved fleeing communist

Press, 2014), pp. 482-87.

³ Allan Gotthelf and Gregory Salmieri, eds., *A Companion to Ayn Rand* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016).

Russia in 1926 to seek freedom and pursue her life's vision in the United States. Milgram explains how Rand's life until her death in 1982 was intricately and consciously woven with her choice to be a novelist-philosopher (p. 22). Originally working in film and theater on screenplays and scripts, Rand moved on to penning novels—culminating in her magnum opus *Atlas Shrugged* (1957)—in which she depicts her heroic view of “the ideal man.” Although Rand's novels gained an ardent popular audience, the ubiquitously vicious, negative critical reception of her work led her to realize “the urgency of the need for fundamental philosophical and cultural change” (p. 31). She devoted the rest of her days to non-fiction by writing essays, delivering lectures, and giving interviews about her radical new “philosophy for living on earth” (p. 31).

Part II (“Ethics and Human Nature”) delves into various aspects of Rand's distinctive moral theory, arguably the centerpiece of how to “live on earth.” Salmieri's “Chapter 3: The Act of Valuing (and the Objectivity of Value)” unpacks the nature of valuing and how Rand's view involves objectivity. The act of valuing reflects one's choice to live meaningfully, not merely exist (p. 49). This is not an intellectual exercise. We also need to produce values in the world, to cultivate our spiritual aspect (i.e., our consciousness, mind, emotions, character) in order to remain materially in existence as the kind of being we are. Two key points are involved here. The first is that while productive work, which Rand has *The Fountainhead's* Howard Roark refer to as “the meaning of life” (p. 60), is focused on the livelihood one pursues to earn a living, she understands it more broadly and fundamentally as the work of being human. This involves bringing into existence all of the values one needs to live, including love, friendship, and art. The second point is the objectivity of valuing. It's not enough that we are passionate and independent about the values we hold and that we live with integrity according to them. We also must value rationally in accordance with the requirements of our nature: “The *choice to think* is the basic act of valuing. In engaging one's mind, one embraces the world and one brings oneself into existence as a thinking being. Reason is the faculty by which human beings discover our needs, circumstances, and abilities . . . and by which we project values” (p. 64).

In “Chapter 4: The Morality of Life,” Gotthelf (completed by Salmieri⁴) outlines the structure of the Objectivist ethics. Rand first

⁴ This chapter was completed by Salmieri because Allan Gotthelf passed away on August 30, 2013.

addresses a crucial question prior to puzzling over which moral theory we should live by: Why do we need values at all? It's because of the "*conditional character of life*" (p. 77). All living beings face the alternatives of life and death; life makes value possible for each organism. Each thing's kind of life is its standard of value, and its own life is its purpose. Since humans by nature have a rational, volitional consciousness, "man's survival *qua* man" requires that he choose to think, to use his rational faculty to discover and produce "the values one's survival requires" (p. 78). Man's life is our ultimate value, which is constituted and realized by the values of reason, purpose, and self-esteem (p. 81). The way by which we produce these values and experience the happiness that results from achieving them is through their concomitant virtues: rationality, productiveness, and pride—with independence, integrity, honesty, and justice being aspects of rationality (pp. 81-96). Contrary to popular belief and prominent rival moral theories (such as duty ethics and utilitarianism), this makes morality and virtue "selfish," that is, in one's self-interest properly conceived. A wholehearted commitment to one's happiness across a lifespan is thus extremely demanding, making those who truly live "moral heroes" (p. 97).

Onkar Ghate, in "Chapter 5: A Being of Self-Made Soul," explains that Rand sought through literature and philosophy "to understand what man is and what he can and ought to be" (p. 105). As beings of volitional consciousness, choice is central to revealing and shaping who we are. Human free will is "the power to activate one's conceptual faculty and direct its processing, or not," making one's "primary choice" the choice "to exert the full mental effort required to initiate and sustain one's conceptual awareness of the world or to refrain (partially or fully) from doing so" (p. 108). Choosing to think rationally is key to human survival; no matter how welcoming or hostile our environment, one always retains "sovereign control over [one's] mind" (p. 113). We each are beings of "self-made soul," but only rational choice creates efficacy. This makes the proper use of free will tightly connected to achieving full self-esteem and having a positive "sense of life" (pp. 116-23).

In "Chapter 6: Egoism and Altruism," Salmieri focuses on how Rand's ethical egoism is similar to and different from other versions of egoism, as well as on the contrast between egoism and altruism. All versions of egoism hold that "action is taken with the ultimate goal of benefiting oneself" (p. 131). *How* this is done accounts for the

differences between egoistic theories. Rand holds that ethical egoism is pursued by rational choice, not by some innate, nonrational drive, as psychological egoists hold (e.g., Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner) (p. 133). She also believes that one's self-interest is attained by one's "own rational achievement of a self-sustaining life," not by taking any actions whatsoever that might maximize some psychological state (e.g., pleasure), as egoistic consequentialists hold (e.g., Thomas Hobbes and Epicurus) (p. 134). All of these views are contrasted with altruism ("other-ism"), a word coined by August Comte in defense of the view that "self-sacrifice is a moral ideal" (p. 139). Rand regarded altruism as immoral for many reasons, including that it subverts the positive purpose of life by demanding one to give up a higher value for a lower one, is incompatible with love and benevolence, and makes suffering rather than health morally primary (pp. 141-44). Rand defends the "virtue of selfishness" against those who misunderstand the self and self-interest. Salmieri sums up how the selfish heroes of Rand's novels fly in the face of conventional, false views of selfishness: "They are respectful of the rights of others, have deep friendships and romantic relationships, and are committed to long-range values and abstract principles" (p. 145).

Building on Rand's ethical insights, Part III ("Society") draws out the implications of Objectivist ethics for human interaction at the social levels of economics, politics, and law. Chapters 7-10 repeatedly echo Salmieri's point that Rand's version of egoism leads to something completely different from what's predicted by conventional views of selfishness. Daryll Wright explains, in "Chapter 7: 'A Human Society,'" Rand's view of life in a society of rational egoists. Since individuals are focused on the achievement of spiritual and material value, they deal with each other through trade. Rand calls this the "trader principle" (pp. 159-60), which involves recognizing one another as ends-in-ourselves with our own lives to live (pp. 163-67). Rational actors' interests harmonize, not conflict, since what's of value is not only the material or spiritual object sought, but also the *way* by which we achieve it (pp. 167-72). Such benefits cannot be gotten under anarchy, which lacks the objective rules provided by political, legal, and economic institutions to protect "the individual's ability to function as a moral agent" (p. 173).

Enter the role played by government, the subject of Fred D. Miller, Jr. and Adam Mossoff's "Chapter 8: Political Theory." Government's purpose is limited, on Rand's view, to the "protection of individual rights," that is, of allowing individuals "freedom of action in

a social context” by prohibiting (and punishing) the initiation of force against one another (p. 187). Proper functions of the state include military, police, and law courts; governments are enabled to do all of this by “hold[ing] a legal monopoly on the use of physical force,” “possess[ing] exclusive *territorial* sovereignty,” and enforcing objective rules of conduct (p. 188). Each person’s right to his life is identified as the “source of all rights,” with “the right to property [as] their only implementation” (p. 195). Because Rand views humans as integrated beings possessing spiritual and material aspects, “all property is fundamentally intellectual,” for we need mind and body to produce the values needed to live as “man *qua* man” (p. 199).

Tara Smith explains, in “Chapter 9: Objective Law,” that it’s the “objectivity of the legal system,” via morally grounded Rule of Law (versus Rule of Men), that constrains government and allows it to do its job of protecting individual rights. All and only those laws needed for this purpose are justified (p. 212). One of the greatest threats to the protection of individual rights occurs when non-objective law creeps into the legal system, whether by vaguely worded laws, unconstitutional and unchecked judicial interpretation, or failure to apply valid laws. An objective legal system needs constant vigilance against lobby groups that seek to gain special favors through “political pull,” a maneuver that violates rights and turns citizens into adversaries (pp. 210-15).

In “Chapter 10: ‘A Free Mind and a Free Market Are Corollaries,’” Ghate outlines Rand’s moral defense of capitalism. It’s grounded in man’s nature, which requires freedom for individuals to choose to think, form their own value-judgments, and live with the outcome of acting on their judgment. Law should thus “prohibit the government from interfering with the economic judgments and lives of citizens: there must be full freedom to produce, contract, and trade” (p. 223). Since each person is free to create value and responsible for earning his way in a market, there is no guarantee of success; free markets enable wise choosers to succeed and poor choosers to fail. All learn valuable information by not being shielded from the effects of their choices. Ghate explains how Rand addresses those who refuse to accept the outcomes of free markets: the alternative of interfering with the economy amounts to shackling and being paternalistic toward producers and consumers. Those who seek to control markets through legal-political mechanisms bypass individuals’ conceptual faculties and substitute their own judgment, asserting either that they have

insight into what's intrinsically valuable or that the needs of the many trump any individual's judgment (pp. 228-29 and 233-36).

We are introduced to "The Foundations of Objectivism" in Part IV, which are anchored in metaphysics and epistemology. Central to Rand's view of the nature of reality, Jason Rheins explains in "Chapter 11: Objectivist Metaphysics," is the "primacy of existence," which "holds that there is a mind-independent reality, which can be perceived and understood by (human consciousness), but which is not created or directly shaped by consciousness" (p. 246). This metaphysical principle involves three axiomatic concepts: existence, identity, and consciousness. That is, entities exist that have natures we can perceive and objectively know by means of the active conceptual faculties of our consciousness (pp. 246-48). Rheins also unpacks more fully Rand's view of our volitional nature by exploring how we have "direct introspective awareness" of exercising free will (p. 261). Rand's view of volition is known as "agent-causation." According to this view, our natures are caused by something outside of our control, but our choices are caused by us, making us "self-determining" beings (p. 261)—or, as Ghate noted, "beings of self-made soul."

In order to discuss what exists, one must grapple with *how* we know what exists. Salmieri thus tackles Rand's theory of knowledge in "Chapter 12: The Objectivist Epistemology." He contextualizes her view of reason in the history of philosophy and outlines the structure of her rigorous method for acquiring knowledge. Rand is a "direct realist" about perception, which takes as given what's perceived through our senses (p. 281). We then form basic and higher-level abstractions through an active process of differentiation, integration, and measurement-omission (pp. 284-89). Concepts are objective by being grounded in and corresponding to existing entities (pp. 290-92). We define concepts based on "whichever essential characteristic(s)" explain the most others "*relative to a given context of knowledge*" (p. 293). Our conceptual faculty is cognitively efficient and powerful in enabling humans to move beyond the perceptual level and allowing us to grasp, organize, and convey through language vast amounts of understanding about ourselves and the world.

Part V ("Philosophers and Their Effects") examines both Rand's place in the history of philosophy and Rand's views about intellectual history—where it's come from and where it could go. In "Chapter 13: 'Who Sets the Tone for a Culture?'" James Lennox explains that since Rand sees philosophy as no idle armchair activity, but as vitally important in how well or poorly human life goes, she

developed a method for studying intellectual history. According to Rand, one should boil down the thought of key influential thinkers (e.g., Aristotle and Immanuel Kant) into “philosophical essentials,” maintain “objectivity of definitions” to avoid mischaracterizing schools of thought and differences between them, and trace cultural trends “back to their philosophical sources” (pp. 324-25). Studying history generally, and the history of philosophy in particular, this way allows us to generalize accurately, see how ideas have consequences, and to apply lessons learned from history in our future choices.

“Chapter 14: Ayn Rand’s Evolving Views of Friedrich Nietzsche,” by Lester Hunt, may seem like an odd chapter to include in this volume, since it’s the only one about a specific thinker (who isn’t Rand) rather than an area of philosophy. However, Hunt explains that Nietzsche “is no doubt the one philosopher with whom Ayn Rand is most often associated in popular discussions of her ideas” (p. 343). Since this is a false and widespread association, it’s important to correct systematically the error in a brief chapter of its own. While Rand had read Nietzsche when she was young and even found inspiring some of his aphorisms taken out of context, she early on rejected his philosophy for several fundamental reasons: Rand defends reason and the objectivity of value, while Nietzsche is an irrationalist; she defends free will, while he is a determinist; she thinks that man’s power to create value for his own life is good, while he advocates the “will to power” over others; she defends the voluntary “trader principle,” while he sees human relationships in terms of a master-slave dynamic (pp. 345-48).

Salmieri and John David Lewis, in “Chapter 15: A Philosopher on Her Times,”⁵ sketch the two stages of Rand’s work as a cultural critic. Having lived through some of the horrors of Russia’s communist revolution, she dabbled in anti-communist writing and activism from 1936-1946 (pp. 352-55). As already noted by Milgram, Rand realized the philosophically bankrupt state of American culture—on both the Right and the Left—after the culmination of her literary career in 1957. This led, Salmieri and Lewis explain, to Rand’s embarking on a second wave of cultural criticism from 1959-1982. This time, she sought to develop philosophically grounded “intellectual ammunition” to do what’s now referred to as “applied philosophy.” That is, she explained how Objectivist principles apply to a wide variety of issues and

⁵ Salmieri co-authored, and also completed, this chapter because John Lewis passed away on January 3, 2012.

policies of her day, from antitrust legislation and the draft to civil rights and abortion.

Art is the subject matter of Part VI. In “Chapter 16: The Objectivist Esthetics,” Harry Binswanger describes the special place that Rand accorded art in man’s life. Not utilitarian, but useful, not mystical, but spiritual, art provides the “emotional fuel” (p. 409) necessary for “the preservation and survival of [one’s] consciousness” on which one’s physical survival depends (p. 405). Art is able to evoke this emotional response in us, as both creators and consumers of art, by embodying in concrete form one’s view of life and providing a perceptual source of inspiration (p. 409). Aesthetic judgments should be rendered on artistic criteria—namely, “how consistently, clearly and powerfully it expresses *its* philosophic viewpoint” (pp. 419-20)—not on the validity of the creator’s viewpoint.

Judging an artist’s viewpoint is a moral assessment, and Rand has clear views about what she takes to be the morally defensible approach to art. Tore Boeckmann explains what this is, in “Chapter 17: Rand’s Literary Romanticism.” Rand calls her aesthetic approach “Romantic Realism.” Romanticism recognizes the “principle that man possesses the faculty of volition” (*contra* Naturalism’s determinism) and emphasizes “an individual’s vision of what ought to be” (*contra* Classicism’s traditionalism) (pp. 428-29). Central to creating Romantic literature that projects the author’s values are carefully crafted plot, theme, and characterization. What makes this Realism is that the imaginative projection of “what is possible to human beings” is objectively grounded in man’s nature (pp. 444-45).

The volume closes with a Coda, “Chapter 18: The Hallmarks of Objectivism,” by Gotthelf and Salmieri. Two hallmarks of Objectivism—the “benevolent universe premise” and the “heroic view of man”—are crucial, they maintain, for understanding both the “tremendous emotional resonance” that Rand’s ideas have with people who love her work and the “visceral hatred” for Rand’s work experienced by those who reject her views (p. 453). The first hallmark involves the belief that our world is one in which humans can successfully live, where happiness can be the expected result of diligent rational choices made over a lifetime (pp. 454-58). The second one holds that each person can commit to “realizing his highest potential,” and thus it’s possible for each to “achieve a heroic stature” (pp. 459 and 460).

Since the volume’s purpose is not to advocate Objectivism, but to serve as an introduction or guide to the study of Rand’s work (p. 6),

I will not evaluate the philosophical ideas and arguments presented in each chapter. Instead, the focus will be on whether the volume has achieved its purpose of being a *companion to Ayn Rand* by providing information about its subject to its intended audience. Fortunately, those who have been *companions of*—that is, people who have become closely acquainted with and knowledgeable of—her work, serve as the contributing authors.

Structurally, the volume's topics may appear to the philosophical eye to be out of logical order. As indicated by the title of Part IV, epistemology and metaphysics are the foundations of any philosophical system. However, as Salmieri notes in Chapter 1, beginning with Rand's ethical theory rather than metaphysics and epistemology, offers readers a more "natural path through the subject matter" (p. 14). This decision reflects a wise pedagogical point made by Aristotle: "One must begin from what is known, but this has two meanings, the things known to us and the things that are known simply. Perhaps then we, at any rate, ought to begin from the things that are known to us."⁶ Aristotle's point here is that we know things through our perceptual and immediate experience as well as through reasoning to first principles with our intellectual faculties. We cannot reach higher-order conceptual knowledge *a priori* without first experiencing the world and reflecting on those experiences. Applying this (Objectivist-sounding) principle to Salmieri's reason for structuring the volume the way he does, we can see that humans are far more familiar with facing meaningful ethical choices from a young age (e.g., "Should I tell my parents that I am the one who ate the cookies?") than they are with grasping the nature of reality and how we can know it. Hence, most people would find that starting with ethics provides an easier entry point into Rand's philosophy.

Another good structural decision about *A Companion to Ayn Rand* concerns the choice to gather citations and detailed commentary at the ends of the chapters as endnotes rather than in footnotes at the bottom of each page. At a whopping 77 pages of endnotes and 27 pages of bibliographical references (out of 461 pages), over 20% of the volume's main contents are composed of such material. Non-scholars would find that much material gathered at the bottoms of pages to be visually cluttered and distracting, not to mention daunting to read. Scholars, on the other hand, can turn back and forth eagerly to the copious endnotes. They will see how the volume's contributors, each

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), I.4.1095b2-4.

of whom is a specialist in his respective field, engage extensively (unlike Rand herself) with the relevant academic literature on each topic.

One structural quibble that I have is the choice to place the two “hallmarks of Objectivism” at the end of the volume as a coda. In Chapter 1, Salmieri explains that he and Gotthelf show in Chapter 18 how the hallmarks “follow from the more technical aspects of Rand’s philosophy covered in the earlier chapters” (p. 15). This is not an unreasonable justification for placing such material in a coda. However, based on my own experience as well as having discussed with countless numbers of people over the course of thirty years (since I first read *The Fountainhead* in 1987) their experience with reading Rand’s novels, it is precisely these hallmarks of Objectivism that readers find so magnetic. Giving a sense of this benevolent and inspirational experience at the opening rather than the closing of the volume could intrigue and entice new readers to continue turning the pages of this massive companion. The ensuing pages would then slowly reveal the philosophy that undergirds that positive sense of life.

In terms of the volume’s content in relation to its purpose, two major positive points (with one minor caveat) are worth noting. First, given the fact that Rand wrote tens of thousands of pages worth of fiction and non-fiction material—spanning four novels; hundreds of essays, lectures, and newsletter pieces; and a plethora of journal and letter materials—the contributors to *A Companion to Ayn Rand* have done an admirable job of essentializing and systematizing a vast amount of material. They have also accomplished this in a largely accessible way, so that non-scholars can nearly always follow the complex discussion. The reason why I qualify this first point is that there are a few places throughout the volume (primarily in the longer chapters on ethics and epistemology) where discussions get technical to the point of verging on being confusing for those not steeped in the relevant philosophical literature. A few examples include presentations about the meaning of “life as man *qua* man” (pp. 78-80), eudaimonism (pp. 91-92 and 134-36), and defining reason (pp. 273-79). These debates are fascinating to me, but they perhaps could have been condensed in a clearer fashion with some of the material moved to the endnotes.

Second, these chapters highlight the myriad ways in which Rand’s philosophy is a new and radical departure from previous ways of thinking. Like history’s greatest thinkers before her, she explodes false dichotomies, enabling formerly intractable problems to be

resolved by a “third way.” We see evidence presented for this throughout the volume. To identify a few examples: Gotthelf explains how Rand’s ethical egoism serves as a moral alternative to duty ethics and utilitarianism (pp. 74-76). Salmieri contrasts her version of egoism with other forms of egoism (e.g., psychological and consequentialistic) as well as with altruism (e.g., nationalistic and utilitarian) (pp. 132-41). Smith explains how Rand’s view of objective law differs from the traditional alternatives of Natural Law and Legal Positivism (pp. 216-18). Salmieri shows how Rand’s solution to the “problem of universals” in metaphysics differs from those offered by realists, nominalists, and conceptualists (pp. 289-92). Finally, Boeckmann explains how Rand’s literary theory of Romantic Realism is different from the historically dominant schools of Classicism and Naturalism. Although some of Rand’s ideas (primarily in logic and epistemology) were inspired by insights from the one she regarded as the “greatest of all philosophers”⁷ (i.e., Aristotle), the novelty of her system of thought in intellectual history is undeniable. Like it or not, her work cannot be written off as unimportant or unoriginal.

With the addition of *A Companion to Ayn Rand* to the slowly growing corpus of scholarship on Objectivism,⁸ we can perhaps at last

⁷ Ayn Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” in Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 14.

⁸ It began as a tiny trickle in the 1980s with work produced by a small cadre of philosophers inspired by Rand’s ideas, including David Kelley, *The Evidence of the Senses: A Realist Theory of Perception* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986) and *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*, ed. Douglas Rasmussen and Douglas Den Uyl (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984). Scholarship on Rand gained some momentum in the 1990s and has picked up speed in the 2000s across different fields of study, with (1) the production of a few volumes based on Ayn Rand Society sessions held at the American Philosophical Association, such as *Concepts and Their Role in Knowledge: Reflections on Objectivist Epistemology*, ed. Allan Gotthelf and James Lennox (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); (2) the appearance of some biographies, including Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Anne Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009); and (3) the publication of some full-length studies of Rand’s fiction and non-fiction, such as: Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), Tara Smith, *Ayn Rand’s Normative Ethics: The Virtuous Egoist* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and *Essays on Ayn Rand’s Atlas Shrugged*, ed. Robert Mayhew (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

get beyond both glib, ill-informed dismissals of Rand's work and the polemical tone of some of her writing. The latter can unfortunately distract readers from the content of her ideas, but it's forgivable in being driven by her earnest concern that we take our lives seriously; the former has no such excuse. Overall, Gotthelf and Salmieri's edited volume successfully weds the twin goals of introducing professional scholars to Rand's ideas in a clear, rigorous, and fair manner and of offering non-scholars an accessible, systematic presentation of her work.

Afterwords

“*Opinio copiae inter maximas causas inopiae est*”:
On Mistranslating a Latin Quotation in Mill’s
*The Subjection of Women*¹

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John Stuart Mill had an unusually intensive classical education that enabled him to read Greek and Latin as a young man with a fluency that few people today manage in a lifetime.² His achievement was extraordinary even in his own day, but in nineteenth-century England a basic working knowledge of Latin was still part of virtually every ordinary educated person’s repertoire. Accordingly, Mill, like many other authors, sometimes used Latin phrases and quotations in his works without translating or citing them, expecting that his readers would understand the Latin and perhaps recognize its source. For better or worse, ordinary educated readers today no longer know basic Latin as a matter of course, and so more recent editions of older works like Mill’s tend to add helpful footnotes when Latin appears. Such footnotes can only be helpful, however, when they get the Latin right. Usually they do. Occasionally they do not.

It turns out that there is a common tendency to get the Latin wrong in an important passage of Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*.³

¹ This article is a slightly revised version of a blog post at *Policy of Truth*, June 5, 2017, accessed online at: <https://irfankhawajaphilosopher.com/2017/06/05/opinio-copiae-inter-maximas-causas-inopiae-est-on-mistranslating-mills-latin-quotations/>.

² Mill recounts this education in some detail in his autobiography. See John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. John M. Robson (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

³ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869).

This passage comes in the first chapter, in the midst of an argument that men are not in a position to suppose that they understand even the particular women they know, let alone women's "true nature," if there be such a thing. Given the conditions of enforced dependence and servility that women live under, men cannot reasonably infer that the attitudes and behaviors of most women reflect their "true nature" rather than the peculiar dispositions that their standing in society has encouraged them to cultivate. Men cannot even presume to know the minds of their own wives so well as they might come to know the minds of other men with whom they interact on a basis of equality. This will be so, Mill writes, "as long as social institutions do not admit the same free development of originality in women which is possible to men. When that time comes, and not before, we shall see, and not merely hear, as much as it is necessary to know of the nature of women, and the adaptation of other things to it."⁴ He then continues, and here we get the Latin quotation in question:

I have dwelt so much on the difficulties which at present obstruct any real knowledge by men of the true nature of women, because in this as in so many other things 'opinio copiae inter maximas causas inopiae est'; and there is little chance of reasonable thinking on the matter, while people flatter themselves that they perfectly understand a subject of which most men know absolutely nothing, and of which it is at present impossible that any man, or all taken together, should have knowledge which can qualify them to lay down the law to women as to what is, or is not, their vocation.⁵

The Penguin Classics edition, edited by Alan Ryan, gives a footnote on the Latin expression: "*opinio . . . inopiae est*: Latin, 'popular opinion is deficient in most matters,' Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620)."⁶ Anyone with even a rusty knowledge of Latin will

⁴ John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Volume XXI, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 280.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and The Subjection of Women*, ed. Alan Ryan (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 246.

recognize that this is most definitely *not* what the Latin says, nor is it an acceptable paraphrase. But Ryan's edition is, surprisingly, not unusual in rendering it this way. Susan Moller Okin's Hackett edition translates the sentence as "popular opinion is deficient on most matters."⁷ Michael Morgan's *Classics of Moral and Political Theory* reprints the note from Okin's edition verbatim.⁸ The widely read Dover Thrift Edition offers "general opinion is inadequate on most matters," and we find the same rendering in the recent edition published by Cosimo Classics.⁹ *The Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought* gives "popular opinion is deficient on many matters."¹⁰ There's some disagreement about whether Mill is talking about *general* opinion or *popular* opinion, though those may amount to the same thing. There's some slightly more significant disagreement about whether such opinion is inadequate or deficient on *most* matters or merely on *many*. Aside from these minor details, the editions all agree. The footnote in Okin's and Morgan's editions goes one step further, offering a nuanced observation to help us appreciate how sly Mill is: "By using the present *est* instead of the subjunctive *sit*, Mill misquotes Bacon, thereby making a *more* pejorative judgment of the views of the many."¹¹ This part of the note is bizarre, because it shows

⁷ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Susan M. Okin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1988), p. 27.

⁸ John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, 5th ed., ed. Michael Morgan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011), p. 1116.

⁹ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Stanley Appelbaum and Susan L. Rattiner (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), p. 25; John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2008), p. 25. Though the editorial work in the Cosimo Classics volume is unattributed, it seems to be identical to that of the Dover Thrift Edition.

¹⁰ John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *The Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought: Essential Readings*, ed. Andrew Bailey, Samantha Brennan, Will Kymlicka, Jacob Levy, Alex Sager, and Clark Wolf (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2012), p. 680.

¹¹ Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Okin, p. 27; Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, 5th ed., ed. Morgan, p. 1116.

that whoever is responsible for this bit of editorial sophistication knows at least enough Latin to distinguish the indicative and subjunctive forms of the present tense of *esse*, ‘to be,’ but not enough to spot the mistaken translation. But the trouble here is not just that the translation is wrong; it’s that the Latin is not making any kind of point about popular opinion at all, except rather indirectly.

A literal translation of the Latin might read: “opinion of plenty is among the greatest causes of poverty.” Like many literal translations, this one is not good English; for the awkward and ambiguous “opinion of plenty” we might instead opt for something like “believing that you’re rich.” Some editors get the translation right. The Modern Library Classics edition, with notes by Dale Miller, gives a somewhat old-fashioned rendering: “opinion of store is one of the chief causes of want.”¹² We find more idiomatic contemporary translations in the Oxford World Classics editions. The earlier edition by John Gray offers “thinking that one is wealthy is one of the main causes of poverty.”¹³ The more recent edition by Mark Philip and Frederick Rosen gives a slight variation: “thinking that one is wealthy is one of the greatest causes of poverty.”¹⁴ These are the only English editions I have been able to find that do not mistranslate the Latin. Notably, the French translation by Françoise Orazi gets it right with “l’idée qu’on a de la richesse est l’une des plus grandes causes du besoin.”¹⁵

This isn’t just a pedantic Latinist’s point. The mistake affects how we understand what Mill is saying in the passage. On the prominent mistranslation, he’s simply saying that most people’s opinions aren’t worth much, and saying it in a snooty elitist way by putting it in Latin. But while Mill clearly believes that popular opinion is deficient in most or many matters, that’s not the point he’s making

¹² John Stuart Mill, *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. B. Schneewind and Dale E. Miller (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 318.

¹³ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 592.

¹⁴ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, ed. Mark Philip and Frederick Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 534.

¹⁵ John Stuart Mill, “L’asservissement des femmes,” in *John Stuart Mill et Harriet Taylor: Écrits sur l’égalité des sexes*, ed. and trans. Françoise Orazi, accessed online at: <http://books.openedition.org/enseditions/5570>.

here. He is instead making the far more important point that we are especially liable to go wrong in our thinking if we simply assume that we *of course* are in a perfectly good condition to know what's what. Unlike the hackneyed dismissal of popular opinion, this is not a point that highly educated and snobbish readers can afford to ignore as not possibly applying to them on the grounds that they are, after all, not among "the many." Even we enlightened Victorian gentlemen might be blind to the poverty of our own opinions because we do not appreciate how abysmal our epistemic position is; if we think we already have perfectly adequate evidence and that we are in a perfectly good position to interpret and assess it, then we are bound to reject Mill's arguments out of hand and thereby, he thinks, persist in holding severely mistaken views about women, views that contribute to sustaining their unjust subordination. This is a thought that many of us men would do well to keep in mind even today when thinking about women and what we think we know about them. By contrast, the mistranslations make it seem as though Mill's point is simply that most people are idiots. Hardly a trivial difference!

The footnote in Okin's and Morgan's editions is doubly bizarre, because it adds the faux erudition of letting us in on a purported subtlety that demands a special knowledge of Latin. In fact, however, the difference between Mill's indicative *est* and Bacon's subjunctive *sit* does not have the force that the footnote attributes to it. Bacon used the subjunctive for a simple reason: the verb in the preface to the *Great Instauration* appears in a subordinate clause introduced by the conjunction *cum*, which can be causal or explanatory ('because' or 'since') only if its verb is in the subjunctive mood, and will otherwise be temporal ('when,' 'while,' etc.). Mill, however, has inserted Bacon's Latin maxim into an English causal clause ("because in this as in so many other things . . .") and omitted the *cum*, and so uses the indicative to avoid the suggestion of other possible meanings of the subjunctive used without *cum*. This is only somewhat less straightforward than changing the tense of a quoted verb from past to present because the present fits the context better; if you want to quote *A Tale of Two Cities* to describe urban life *today*, you'll say "it is the best of times, it is the worst of times" instead of using Dickens's past tense. The difference between Mill's *est* and Bacon's *sit* therefore has nothing to do with making the point more pejorative. Presumably, the author of the note has remembered that subjunctives are used in Latin to express potential facts or states of affairs, as English does with modal auxiliary verbs like 'could,' 'would,' or 'may,' but has either

forgotten that this is only one of many uses of the subjunctive or simply has not bothered to go look at the passage in Bacon to see how he uses it there. In short, the footnote adds an unnecessary interpretive gloss that is not only mistaken, but linguistically incompetent.

How does this sort of thing happen? How do editors selected for their special expertise persist in printing a mistaken footnote that cannot fail to mislead the readers who need to consult it? One obvious cause is that fewer people today with reputations for expertise in the history of political philosophy know any Latin. But that is neither surprising nor especially problematic. What is surprising and problematic is that someone who could not pass a second semester Latin course *thought* that he or she was perfectly competent in Latin, and then various editors simply copied and pasted the mistake with a bit of variation and without bothering to ask anyone who *does* know Latin whether the note was right. So part of the story is sheer editorial sloth, but that is not the whole story. What we have here is the spectacle of ignorant people presuming that they know perfectly well how to understand something that they are quite evidently not in a position to understand.

The great irony of this tale is, of course, that this mistake is precisely what Mill's Baconian Latin maxim warns us against. "*Opinio copiae inter maximas causas inopiae est*": not "Oh, look at how stupid *hoi polloi* are, they won't even understand this Latin!" but rather, "Be careful not to suppose that you are in a position to know what you are in no position to know." Would that more of Mill's editors had taken this advice!¹⁶

¹⁶ I am grateful to Dhananjay Jagannathan, Irfan Khawaja, and John Ryan for their suggestions in response to an earlier draft of this article.

Toward an Integrated Theory of Fictional Narrative

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A quest for an integrated theory of fictional narratives must begin by asking why human beings listen to and tell stories. Jonathan Gottschall contends that we are genetically wired for story: “Like a flight simulator, fiction projects us into intense simulations of problems that run parallel to those we face in reality . . . Fiction is a powerful and ancient virtual reality technology that simulates the big dilemmas of human life.”¹ So fictional narratives expose us to what life’s concretes can teach us, without endangering our lives every minute of the “lesson.” Ayn Rand has a different emphasis. She contends: “The primary value [of art] is that it gives him [man] the experience of living in a world where things are *as they ought to be*.”² Both purposes seem legitimate: solving current problems and providing a vision. Our integrated theory must be inclusive. At times, only a glorious vision can make some aware of a “current problem.”

We can learn via concepts and abstractions, too, but that’s relatively new in human history and certainly too difficult for children under six to do. Life’s first lessons, then, must be imparted via concrete illustrations that exemplify the abstraction. Because we may be genetically geared (through our “ancient virtual reality technology”) to be fond of narratives, we remain fond of receiving these “lessons” well into adulthood. Indeed, most humans don’t stop consuming stories until they die.

Fictional worlds do affect us—and not just during the reading or viewing. They seem capable of changing our worldview. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* may have changed a nation by

¹ Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), pp. 57 and 58.

² Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto*, Centennial ed. (New York: Penguin Group, 1971), p. 163.

painting a blueprint of a world that wasn't there yet.³ Hence Rand's preference for art to be visionary; in that context, she quotes Aristotle: "[H]istory represents things as they are, while fiction represents them 'as they *might be* and *ought to be*.'"⁴

Is the "might be" paintbrush the only one that "ought to be" used, though? We must also ask what purposes are served by observing historic folly as against getting lost in a utopian vision.

Tribal elders told stories to the tribe's young "by the campfire." In the modern world, we have publishers, producers, and financiers who seek to make a profit in the "entertainment" industry, which capitalizes on the human predisposition to consume stories.

And the storytellers? Most novelists, playwrights, filmmakers, screenwriters, and the network-show creators know that they must entertain, but their inner drive is also typically fueled by purposes they may consciously identify in their soul. Their purposes may instead be subconscious, but are nevertheless achieved when the audience is highly engaged.

Can we exhaust these purposes in a conceptual framework with a limited classification? I believe we can. The aims of the artist who writes narrative fiction are often not stated explicitly and may not even be in the artist's conscious awareness. However, one could categorize them all into the following:

- (1) Persuasion: To persuade people to a point of view.
- (2) Situational Empathy: To incite an empathy for, or understanding of, a faraway situation, people, or problem, in a risk-free and low-cost environment, including exposing readers and viewers to two or more alternate viewpoints.
- (3) Assuaging: To assuage negative feelings, such as grief, fear, or helplessness, by having the protagonist experience similar emotions. In this case, the immersion experience may have a soothing rather than a curative effect on the individual with negative feelings.
- (4) Inspiration: To inspire people to do courageous things (or things they otherwise may not attempt).

³ Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, "Impact of Uncle Tom's Cabin, Slavery, and the Civil War," *Harriet Beecher Stowe Center website*, accessed online at: <https://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/utc/impact.shtml>.

⁴ Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto*, p. 162.

- (5) Sense-of-life Experience: To convey the experience of a positive sense of life (as with laughter) or a sense of wonder and joy (often from comedies and musicals), or a negative sense of life such as despair or helplessness (often from tragic stage plays or print literature).

These goals can overlap and most narratives have more than one objective. At the creative end of the spectrum, then, we have these purposes. At the financing and consuming end, though, we mostly have the desire to be “entertained.” The artists must therefore entertain while attempting to accomplish their innermost objective.

Before we move our theoretical framework to the synergy, or lack thereof, between purposes and entertainment, we must ask what it actually means to be “entertained.” Since, “enjoyment may be derived from the arousal of any emotion, including those which on their face would not seem enjoyable, such as sadness,”⁵ I offer the following definition: “Entertained” is a state in which a person has emotion (whether of joy, fear, excitement, sadness, trepidation, etc.) much higher than normal, and the person is moved between opposing states—from joy to grief or anticipation to surprise or fear to relief, and so on—or across differing states, typically while sitting stationary in a comfortable and safe place.

Hence, the higher the emotion and more frequent the changes in emotion, the more one is *entertained*. At first glance, this makes no sense, but we do seek entertainment that causes affect. We seek songs that induce sadness in us much more than music that does not move us at all. We love and remember films that made us laugh *or* cry, and feel cheated by ones that leave us detached. The longer the narrative, higher seems the requirement to move our emotional state to keep us engrossed.

For fiction to heighten a person’s emotional state and vary it, it must succeed in transporting the individual to the world of the narrative to such an extent that she becomes almost unaware of her surroundings during the engagement. Cognitive Science research calls this state of becoming and then staying almost unaware of surroundings, “transportation” or “immersion.” Melanie Green defines transportation as “[A] state of cognitive, emotional, and imagery engagement. Transported individuals are completely focused on the

⁵ Rick Busselle and Helena Bilandzic, “Measuring Narrative Engagement,” *Media Psychology* 12, no. 4 (2009), pp. 321-47.

world of the story; they may lose track of time or fail to notice events going on around them.”⁶

Entertainment, therefore, has three components: emotional heightening, emotion-state variation, and transportation. These three components are interrelated. Narrative cannot heighten the emotion of an individual who stays detached. The narrative that *varies* the emotion-state during engagement of a transported individual does a better job of maintaining the immersion in the story world.

Of the three components, which comes first? Transportation. Once the individual is transported, her emotional state must be heightened to maintain the immersion in a deep state. In order to keep her lost in the story universe, it must *stay* heightened, which is easier if the state is varied (from joy to fear to trepidation, and so on).

How, then, do we contrast the *effectiveness* of fiction, that is, the ability of narratives to achieve their implied purposes, and how does that relate to fiction’s ability *to entertain*?

Cognitive Science research tells us that fiction’s effectiveness and its ability to entertain are tightly intertwined. What we know today about the “science of narrative” is that *transported* individuals:

- (1) stay better transported if emotional states vary during engagement⁷;
- (2) experience the engagement as typical of humanity, even though the sample of key characters is too few to be a statistical sample⁸;
- (3) imbibe the messages of the narrative more readily since a heightened emotional state numbs the brain’s critical, reflective faculty⁹;

⁶ Melanie Green, “Research Challenges in Narrative Persuasion,” *Information Design Journal* 16, no. 1 (2008), p. 47.

⁷ Robin L. Nabi and Melanie C. Green “The Role of a Narrative’s Emotional Flow in Promoting Persuasive Outcomes,” *Media Psychology* 18, no. 2 (2015), pp. 137-62.

⁸ Jeffery Strange and Cynthia Leung, “How Anecdotal Accounts in News and in Fiction Can Influence Judgments of a Social Problem’s Urgency, Causes, and Cures,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 25, no. 4 (April 1999), pp. 436-49.

⁹ Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal*, p. 151.

- (4) retain the messages when the emotional highs of engagement end¹⁰;
- (5) integrate the messages with their existing worldview to alter it¹¹;
- (6) reinforce and actually strengthen the integration by changing the lens by which the world is subsequently seen¹²;
- (7) are more likely to perceive the real world to be a just world if they immerse in fiction often (as fictional worlds are often just)¹³; and
- (8) perceive a realism in the narrative world, that is, even though they are aware that the narrative world is unreal.¹⁴

The greater the immersion, the stronger the belief that the story events are plausible, that they could eventuate in real life. Thus, facilitating, deepening, and maintaining transportation is critical to enhancing the effectiveness of fiction, if the storyteller has implicitly or explicitly any legitimate objective.

Now that we have inexorably entwined entertainment, emotion-state heightening, and artistic purposes, we can seek to integrate into this framework a model (or models) of entertainment that work as methodological prescriptions for artists and critics.

Let's ponder the situation of death. Death affects us far more, the closer we are to the people who have passed, the more we know them, and the more we love them. Since "mirror neurons" can embody in us the actions, thoughts, and feelings of other people, including

¹⁰ Michael Dahlstrom, "The Persuasive Influence of Narrative Causality: Psychological Mechanism, Strength in Overcoming Resistance, and Persistence Over Time," *Media Psychology* 15, no. 3 (2012), pp. 303-26.

¹¹ Markus Appel and Tobias Richter, "Persuasive Effects of Fictional Narratives Increase Over Time," *Media Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2007), pp. 113-34.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Markus Appel, "Fictional Narratives Cultivate Just World Beliefs," *Journal of Communication* 58, no. 1 (2008), pp. 62-83.

¹⁴ Melanie Green, "Transportation into Narrative Worlds: The Role of Prior Knowledge and Perceived Realism," *Discourse Processes* 38, no. 2 (2004), pp. 247-66.

fictional characters,¹⁵ we should expect that if the make-believe situation is to trigger our mirror neurons, we must first get to know the fictional characters *before* they are placed in jeopardy: a gradual immersion, then the shock. In industry parlance, the shock is called “an inciting incident” or “the catalyst.”

What else does classical structure involve? Increased jeopardy. That’s good for emotion-state heightening.

Why bother with dramatic highs and lows? The long narrative needs emotion-state variation.

Why a resolution? Unless the artist wants to inculcate a sense of life characterized by ineffectualness, he will resolve the situation or conflict. Ironically, Aristotle is still the master most quoted at screenwriting school, even as Hollywood delves more frequently into unresolved drama. His words ring true: “[A] well-formed plot is therefore closed at both ends, and connected in between.”¹⁶

Why does the archetypal structure need a *climactic* resolution? The emotion has been pushed to its zenith. Now is the time to convey the final message, when the brain’s reflective faculty is most numbed, and then commence the final downturn on the roller coaster.

Why include a soul-searching moment for the characters before the external climax? Because, by this time in the narrative, we are them and they are us; it’s like making us delve into our own conscience. Ideally, the jeopardy will rise to its peak if the character crosses the Rubicon, choosing to risk even death to achieve his life-affirming objective.

Our theoretical framework affirms what’s known as the classical storytelling structure, fed down over the centuries without the imprimatur of neuroscience. We can and should test our theory. Major studios and networks have started using biometric technology to track engagement.¹⁷ Furthermore, there is now a new field of study called

¹⁵ Norman N. Holland, “Stories and the Mirror Inside You,” *Psychology Today*, accessed online at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/is-your-brain-culture/201108/stories-and-the-mirror-inside-you>.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), p. xxiii.

¹⁷ “The Biometrics Lab Project: AFTRS at the cutting edge of the biometric measurement of audience engagement,” *Australian Film, Television, and Radio School website*, accessed online at: <https://filmink.com.au/public-notice/biometrics-lab-project-aftrs-cutting-edge-biometric-measurement-audience-engagement/>.

“Neurocinematics.”¹⁸ This is one reason why novelists seek beta readers for manuscripts. But we can test the end-product as consumers, too.

Let me take you on my brief journey of one such test. You can do the same any number of times, that is, introspect *after* the consumption event.

In July 2017, I indulged twice in the pleasure of cinema. A *pleasure*? Here we go, paying to sit in a darkened, air-conditioned hall, with our partners and a bunch of strangers, to watch visuals of a narrative that can make us laugh and cry and feel its “suspense.”

I saw *The Promise* and, one week later, *Dunkirk*.¹⁹ Both are survival stories, set against the backdrop of war: the Armenian genocide and World War I in the former, World War II in the latter. However, one left me in tears, and the other left me disengaged.

My two immediate *ex post* questions were: Why? And *does it matter*? I reminded myself that the level of my emotional engagement matters a lot—to me, obviously, but also to the storytellers.

Then a third, more baffling question briefly invaded my consciousness: Why was I “crying” in one if this was supposed to be “entertainment”? Was it? Of course it was. Let’s remember this: emotion-state heightening, no matter the direction.

I pondered why one narrative seemed so empty to me, and the theory was vindicated. In classical structure, we must first get to “know the character.” *Then* they get an obsessive goal, most often due to an inciting incident. *Dunkirk*, though, dispenses with the concept of character. We never get to know anyone. Even main characters have no names. While too much exposition gets preachy in a “show, don’t tell” visual medium, too little exposition leaves viewers with no context—neither historical nor, more importantly, of the characters’ decisions. In *Dunkirk*, the beast of Postmodernist nothingness sinks to a whole new low.

¹⁸ Uri Hasson et al., “Neurocinematics: The Neuroscience of Film,” *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind* (2008), accessed online at: http://www.cns.nyu.edu/~nava/MyPubs/Hasson-et-al_NeuroCinematics2008.pdf.

¹⁹ *The Promise*, directed by Terry George (Open Road Films, 2016); *Dunkirk*, directed by Christopher Nolan (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2017).

A “slice of life” narrative often doesn’t paint the “ought to be,” but, in our framework, a slice-of-life narrative is not without attendant benefits; it can assuage us. It can also provide a situational empathy, historical or imagined, but one heightened by emotion.

Despite that potential benefit, for our mirror neurons to be activated, we need characters to feel for. A narrative’s classical structure must involve characters with goals and internal and external conflicts that fill the journey with jeopardy and difficulty.

For a story to lack classical structure is one thing, but for a film to lack a story? That’s a whole new low. *Dunkirk* takes us well beneath the low of the naturalistic “slice of life,” which must at least strive for authenticity, and characters who affect our mirroring neurons. The drive for a play, novel, film, or even journalistic book or documentary, has always been “I want their story to be told” or “I want to tell this story.”

We arrive at last at why *Dunkirk* leaves so many, albeit not all, unengaged. During the screening, I was well aware of the theater, and my companion and I even moved seats; immersion was low. Anecdotally, some who appreciated this film seemed to do this as an afterthought, after becoming aware of the context that was missing, or worse, to play along with critics who praised it. Superbly shot scenes strung together in gimmicky non-linear time doesn’t a narrative make, *Warner Brothers’* \$100 million-plus movie budget notwithstanding. David Cox at *The Guardian* sums it beautifully, citing, to boot, *Dunkirk’s* betrayal of history in its facts, let alone the heroism.²⁰

But can one show a “slice-of-life” full of despair and yet inspire, too? *Dunkirk’s* fans contend that the event was a military disaster, a retreat. In fact, the evacuation was a success, albeit needed because it was *preceded* by a miscalculation.

On the other hand, we have *The Promise*, which made me smile and cry, in about equal proportions. Quite possibly, it’s the most expensive “indie” film ever. It cost an estimated \$100 million to produce, all financed by the man who bought and sold MGM thrice, the late tycoon Kirk Kerkorian.²¹ Director Terry George (*Hotel*

²⁰ David Cox, “Bloodless, Boring, and Empty: Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk* Left Me Cold,” *The Guardian* (July 26, 2017), accessed online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2017/jul/26/bloodless-boring-empty-christopher-nolan-dunkirk-left-me-cold>.

²¹ Brent Lang, “‘*The Promise*’: The Armenian Genocide Epic Kirk Kerkorian Spent a Fortune to Make,” *Variety* (October 20, 2016), accessed online at:

Rwanda) takes a situation far worse than Dunkirk's. In Dunkirk's famous evacuation, estimates are that England may have lost 100,000 soldiers to death or captivity, but over 300,000 survived in part due to civilians in little boats who entered the theater of war to rescue their soldiers; there *was* heroism to celebrate if one wanted to.²²

The genocide of Armenian Christians, however, cost an estimated 1.5 million lives; the French navy rescued a mere 4,100.²³ George cleverly focuses on us getting to know only two of them well, Mikael and Ana, fictitiously caught in a love triangle with an American journalist. It's actually a "love rectangle" of sorts, for Mikael is betrothed, with the betrothal tied to his survival. I was immersed. Once we get to *know* Mikael and Ana, we feel their incessant jeopardy. Death lurks—it waits for every forward step, but it will come for you if you stop or retreat, too. And so we shed tears, of joy at the humor they steal in the face of danger, of relief every time they escape Death's ever-widening locus, and grief for their plight, which, in the darkened, air-conditioned room, becomes ours.

If financier Kirk Kerkorian wanted situational empathy, he got mine. If director and co-screenwriter Terry George wanted to inspire me, he did.

When Mikael's Christianity conflicts with his desire for revenge, Ana answers with the narrative's sense-of-life theme:

Mikael: God help me, I want revenge.

Ana: I don't care. Hey, our revenge will be to survive.

And that is how one can find a heroic sense of life when it looks like there is none—via a packet of inspiration neatly constructed within a

<http://variety.com/2016/film/news/promise-film-armenian-genocide-1201892838/>.

²² BBC Press Office, "Dunkirk—A Few Facts," *BBC* (September 24, 2014), accessed online at:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/02_february/03/dunkirk_facts_figures.shtml.

²³ Weekly Staff, "French Rescuers of Musa Dagh Honored," *The Armenian Weekly* (October 16, 2010), accessed online at:

<http://armenianweekly.com/2010/10/16/french-rescuers-of-musa-dagh-honored/>, and "The Armenian Genocide," *Wikipedia*, accessed online at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Genocide.

lava of genocidal despair, all the while sticking to classical structure. Terry George, take a bow; you don't need the theory.

Feel free to try this exercise. Go to the theater and reflect on the experience *afterward*, not during, with a focus on purposes, emotional engagement, and story structure—the building blocks of a unified theory of fictional narrative.²⁴

²⁴ The author benefited from comments made by Sarita Rani, Donna Paris, Carrie-Ann Biondi, and Shawn Klein on earlier drafts of this article.

