

Liberty University School of Divinity

Mythology, Morality, and the Messiah:

How Natural Moral Law and Hero Myth Entail that Jesus Christ is the Best Possible Hero

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the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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To my brother Corey, with whom I
spent many hours exploring the
myths of movies, video games,
table-top games, comic books, and
our glorious imagination. I love you.

Although this Logos is eternally valid, yet men are unable to understand it—not only before hearing it, but even after they have heard it for the first time.

—Heraclitus

Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?

—Socrates

The Judeo-Christian God owes a considerable debt to art, may even be seen as a work of art. The doctrine of the Trinity is a celestial aesthetic celebration of internal relations.

—Iris Murdoch

The truth is that the Church was actually the first thing that ever tried to combine reason and religion. There had never before been any such union of the priests and the philosophers.

—G.K. Chesterton

We have to be able to persevere in morality even if we do not believe that most other people are morally virtuous.

—John Hare

With great power comes great responsibility.

—Spider-Man

The resemblance between these myths and the Christian truth is no more accidental than the resemblance between the sun and the sun's reflection upon a pond...

—C.S. Lewis

O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?

—The Apostle Paul

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Abstract

Natural moral law and hero myth are intrinsically connected. Any society that produces a robust calculation of natural moral law will also produce a detailed hero myth. As hero myth and natural moral law progress in tandem within a society, the prototypical hero will embody the characteristics and qualities compelled by a logically-consistent natural moral law. The prototypical hero also points towards an atypical best-possible hero. In comparing natural moral law and hero myth, it will be concluded that the best possible hero solves the biggest possible problem, which is death. In both myth and reality, Jesus Christ is the best possible hero because he solved the biggest possible problem of death. Therefore, when considered jointly, natural moral law and hero myth describe Jesus Christ.

The phrase “natural moral law” will generally refer to “The notion that there are true, universally binding moral principles knowable by all people and rooted in creation and the way things are made.”¹ From this definition, there are a number of responses or reductions to that natural law, which can be employed to establish normative values and standards: the good. The reductions to the natural moral law set and limit the value concepts of any ethical system from which it is derived. The reductions are as follows: nihilistic good, subjective good, nominal good, arbitrary good, finite prescriptive good, and the infinite prescriptive good. The “good” in the context of the reductions refers to the standards and values that inform one the reasonable scope of his ethical system and claims—not all ethical theories concerning value concepts are logically consistent with their corresponding reduction.

¹ J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 427.

As a practical means of connecting hero myth with natural moral law, the notion of a “heroic Tao” was developed. The heroic Tao is a pithy and simple phrase or concept, which grounds a hero’s attitude and conduct. Every hero has a code (heroic Tao) and every code corresponds to one of the reductions of the natural moral law. To determine the best possible hero, token examples of heroes and their corresponding reductions will be evaluated. The nature of heroism, various types of heroes, and the nature of story (specifically myth) will also be examined and it will be concluded that moral realism is inherent to each.

Essentially, this dissertation is an abductive argument for Jesus Christ being the best possible hero. The abductive argument is concerned with the synthesis of several different disciplines: natural theology, general revelation, ethics, natural law (meta-ethics),² literary criticism, biblical criticism, and mythology. When synthesized, the most reasonable conclusion for the data is that Jesus Christ is the best possible hero.

All of the disciplines work together: Natural theology establishes the axiological basis for moral realism and moral knowledge. General revelation acts as a universal imprinter, which not only imbeds man with moral knowledge, but also with inherent notions of heroism. Heroism and the monomyth are examples of natural revelation. Natural law, via moral philosophy, determines if the prescriptions of an ethical system, as well as a hero’s code of conduct, properly correspond to the prescriptions inherent to their relative reductions. Literary criticism also aids in evaluating heroes and heroism. Jesus is the true myth and the best possible hero, he is the figure described in general revelation via the monomyth, and his exploits of heroism are revealed in the Scriptures.

² Since the reductions to the natural law determine values, while not identical, natural law and metaethics will be considered conjointly.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Natural Law

“What is right and true is also eternal, and does not begin or end with written statutes.”¹ Cicero’s endorsement for natural law has been echoed throughout the history of men. Plato and Aristotle were early proponents of a transcendent natural law,² and Augustine and Aquinas continued the work of those ancient philosophers. Hugo Grotius marked the transition of natural law from mere metaphysics to something rational³ and laid the groundwork for international law.⁴ John Locke’s work on natural law influenced the founding fathers of the United States; conversely the Nuremburg trials concluded that the rise of the Nazi regime was due (in part) to the failure of adhering to natural law.⁵ Martin Luther King Jr.’s civil rights were based on inherent human rights found in natural law.⁶ Natural law has always played a significant and good role in the lives of

¹ Cicero, *The Republic and The Laws*, ed. Jonathan Powell, trans. Niall Rudd, Reissue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 145.

² R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 53.

³ Matthew Levering, *Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85.

⁴ Henrich Rommen, *The Natural Law: A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 12.

⁵ Henrich Rommen, "Natural Law in Decisions of the Federal Supreme Court and of the Constitutional Courts in Germany", *Natural Law Forum* 1, no. 26 (1959). 4.

⁶ Jacqueline Lang and Russell Wilcox, eds., *The Natural Law Reader* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 237.

men and society.⁷

Myth

Joseph Campbell argued that myths are significant because they serve several key functions:

1. The Mystical function.⁸ The vast universe elicits notions of wonder and intrigue. The role that man is meant to play within this immense universe, or rather what his purpose is, produces the mystical function. The beauty and power of myth occurs when one attempts to answer existential questions of meaning through the reading or writing of myth.

2. The Cosmological function.⁹ While, the first function was focused on individualistic wonder, the second function focuses on a global scientific wonder; in that, even when scientific or philosophical knowledge increases, there will always be an element of mystery and awe. There is a difference between origin science and operational science, and even as operational science progresses in efficiency and man continues to know more about how the universe operates, the mystery inherent to origin science—how the universe began—will always produce a global sense of astonishment.

3. The Sociological function.¹⁰ This function refers to the reasoning behind various customs and cultures of a given society. These various customs and cultures can, depending on the myth, result in vastly different or even contradictory standards.

⁷ Robert Audi, *Rationality and Religious Commitment* (2011; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 137.

⁸ Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor, 1991), 38.

⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰ Ibid.

4. The Pedagogical function.¹¹ This function refers to how one is to live a lifetime under any circumstances. Myths often embody prototypical people with atypical attributes who persevere through difficult circumstances. These myths give humans a supernatural example of perseverance and the importance of “doing the right thing” despite the consequences

The power of myth has waned in the West since the enlightenment. This problem occurred, in part, due to the inability to differentiate between the imaginative and the imaginary.¹² The result was that the West lost her proverbial soul. While some modern philosophers, such as Alasdair McIntyre, have appealed to classical thought forms to save moral philosophy from the pit of the enlightenment, there has been little effort to save aesthetics and mythology from the same pit.

Aesthetical thought has devolved into “the spontaneous reactions” one makes towards external stimuli.¹³ And while one should not discount the subjective significance of art, it is the unchanging idea of the good in aesthetics, which is meaningful for the study of myth. Art should be considered like the Platonic notion of the forms: a work of art is not a material object. Of course, some works of art must be materially engraved to receive predication and reaction, but things like poems or symphonies are not material entities.¹⁴ Even the material arts (sculptures or paintings) exist independently,

¹¹ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 39.

¹² G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (Seaside OR: Rough Draft Printing, 2013), 65.

¹³ Colin Lyas, *Aesthetics* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2002), 12.

¹⁴ Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (repr., London: Penguin Books, 1994), 2.

immaterially, and initially as an idea in the imagination of the artist.¹⁵

Myth is the combination of aesthetics and ethics. While there is a difference between aesthetics and ethics, both philosophical fields suffer from the same weakness: a lack of a readily-definable measuring rod. The general standard for the measuring rod is the same for both fields: the good. Further, the same reductions that attempt to explain the ethical good (nihilism, subjectivism, the arbitrary, nominalism, finite prescription, and infinite prescription) can also be applied to aesthetics as well. Aesthetics too can be saved from the pit of the enlightenment via classical thought. Aesthetics is given new understanding in this work through the employment of the heroic Tao. The heroic Tao allows both aesthetics and ethics to be properly evaluated.

Plato and Aristotle always considered that morality was not a product of humans. Rather, it was something transcendent¹⁶ and that it was only through that transcendent nature that undesirable ethical notions, such as moral nihilism, could be refuted.¹⁷ Socrates eventually realized that the search for “Eudaimonia” was ineffectual if there were no man-independent realities or forms, so also it must be true that aesthetics requires the realm of the forms in order to avoid aesthetic nihilism.¹⁸ Since the Platonic notion of the forms is in reference to archetypes, universals, and general concepts as being distinct from particular entities, then myth itself can be considered a type of universal (form) and therefore it can be a profitable teaching tool to explain moral virtue,

¹⁵ Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 3.

¹⁶ Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge*. 42.

¹⁷ John M. Rist, *Real Ethics: Reconsidering the Foundations of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19.

¹⁸ Ibid.

justice, and ethical roles.¹⁹

Heroes and Myth

Just as every society will create a series of laws and customs, so also will every society create stories of heroes that will enforce and explain those laws and customs. Cultural myths and customary myths tell of heroes who enforce the cultural/customary laws of a people group or a society. A relatively simple culture would be quite unified in the exaltation of a hero with the prototypical attributes that that culture finds appealing. Darwin mentions that in his study of “barbarians” that they displayed a clear moral code.²⁰ While Darwin does not write specifically about the myths or stories that these men praised (since myth is always found within a society),²¹ it would follow that barbarians would tell stories of an “ideal functional barbarian,” which the average barbarian would think of as good and worthy of emulation.

“To every age, and to every nation, there is a peculiar ideal of heroism, and in the popular legends of each age this ideal may be found.”²² State-duty myths are the natural progression from cultural myths to a broader and yet more detailed myth that guides a much larger group of people. Cultural myths are descriptive,²³ not prescriptive, in the

¹⁹ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 10.

²⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London, 1871), 26.

²¹ Rank Otto, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero - A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology* (Alcester, UK.: Grove Press, 2015), 7.

²² M. I. Ebbutt, *Hero-Myths & Legends of the British Race* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library, 1910), Introduction.

²³ The myths of barbarians were still prescriptive in the sense that the myth was enforcing a specific behavior or set of behaviors. But it was *not* prescriptive in the sense that it

sense of universal application. State-duty myths are meant to be prescriptive. M. I. Ebbutt presents prescriptive myths in his work *Hero-Myths & Legends of the British Race*. His thesis is that the British Empire was shaped and guided in virtue by myths such as Beowulf, Robin Hood, and King Arthur—all examples of state-duty myths. These types of myth are similar to the previously-mentioned type in that the lessons gleaned may or may not be transformed into universal standards depending on how consistently those lessons correspond to a transcendent natural moral law. Due to the intents of cultural myths and state duty myths, one is much more likely to find universal lessons within latter.

Science of myth is the synthesis of universal law and particular law, or rather it is a mixture of cultural myths and state-duty myths. It was actually Socrates' attempt to synthesize universal and particular law, which led to his charge of corrupting youth. Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* is an example of science of myth, as he attempted to combine universal law with the particular law of a society, but he found that a society that resists truth will also condemn truth bearers. A logically consistent science of law and science of myth should be the goal of any society. A society's science of law informs one what his society's academics think of man, while a society's science of myth informs one what the society's artists think of man.

Assumptions, Definitions, and Foundational Principles

As a means of arguing for the universality of hero myth, it will be attempted to limit the examples to a select few. All of the primary examples will belong to a different

could be used to create a categorical imperative or a universal moral principle that could be applied elsewhere. Customary myths may be accidentally prescriptive if they happen to correspond to universal moral principles.

genre of myth: classic literature, contemporary literature, film, comic book, and video game. The specific sources for evaluation that correspond to those mediums are the following: Homeric myths, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, *Superman*, and *The Legend of Zelda*. Each of these sources represents exceedingly esteemed myths; they are myths that embody the highest order of storytelling and heroics. If the heroic good is going to be determined, defined, and explained, it seems likely that it would be found within one of these sources. Likewise, since these myths employ epitomized heroes, if one of the reductions of the good is held by one of these heroes and that reduction is proven untrustworthy, then, as a prototypical hero, the failure of the reduction should be applicable to any other hero and myth that similarly holds to the same reduction.

There is only one primary presupposition: the existence of any and all deities or gods. Their existence is presupposed so that the focus and attention can remain on the hero and his code, and not on philosophical arguments for the existence or non-existence of any deity.

The following definitions and principles are secondary presuppositions. The universe is governed by a series of natural laws. A natural law is a body of unchanging universal principles. When a natural law is broken or fails, it will generally be referred to as an act of disharmony. A disharmony can be in reference to a false proposition, a contradiction (especially evident with the law of non-contradiction), a failure of a normative function or faculty, a breaking of a morally good societal law, or the breaking of a natural moral law. Music was chosen as the basis of evaluation because it is a type of natural law: various notes and their harmonic overtones have mathematical relations. Inherent in these relations are consonance (harmony) and dissonance (disharmony). In

short, certain notes "sound good" together because of their mathematical relations to each other. All of this is so, not because of any human-made construct, but because of the nature of sound itself.²⁴ Natural laws and hero myth should be understood in the context of music in that certain actions or philosophies can be, depending on the context, harmonious or disharmonious with one of the natural laws. The various types of natural laws will be explained in this section and which of the natural laws supersede the others will be explained throughout the dissertation.

In order for a complex song to exist (at least) two things are required: melody and harmony. Melody represents the rational universe. Harmony is the proper response to the melody or to the natural laws incumbent to the rational universe. Dissonance occurs when the interpretation of the rational universe does not correspond to the melody. The types of natural laws that are pertinent to this evaluation are as follows: logical, biological, environmental, societal, and moral. Natural laws are comprised of two varieties: necessary and contingent. The only necessary natural laws are logical and include anything that is true in every possible world that contains rational moral agents: the laws of logic, the Cogito, axioms, and various mathematical principles. Dissonance occurs from contradictions, denying the laws of logic or any of the necessary truths. For example, if one were to suppose, "I do not think, therefore I am not," he has committed two incidences of logical dissonance: contradiction and denying the Cogito.

Contingent natural laws are not logically necessary, but they are universal. The laws are universal because all life shares common tendencies: the environment is always governed by natural laws, societies always create laws and have customs, and there is

²⁴ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37.

always, despite societal laws, an overarching sense of transcendent morality. Knowledge of these laws and the proper function of them are probabilistic in nature, but it can be readily determined through introspection if these laws have been broken. For example, an environmental law is a normative natural process that occurs without external aid: gravity, weather patterns, self-sustained eco systems, etc. Considering gravity, if the only force acting on an object is gravity, it will accelerate at a rate of 9.8m/s^2 toward the center of the earth. This is universal and independent of human aid, but it is still probabilistic. Suppose that a spatial anomaly was discovered, and in a limited location on the earth the rate of acceleration was determined to be 9.9m/s^2 . Since the force of gravity is not a necessary truth, then it is conceivable that a spatial anomaly could occur, and if it did occur, it would be an example of dissonance because it is breaking the normative standard of how gravity is meant to function.

Biological natural laws are regular behavior patterns, intrinsic dispositions, and tendencies found in all life. While these types of laws are normative, their perfect function is not guaranteed. If a beaver were to cut down a tree and make a dam with it, this would be an example of consonance because it represents a proper function of a beaver. However, if after making a dam, a river was diverted causing a flash flood that caught several people off guard resulting in their death, the result would be an act of moral dissonance, but not on the part of the beaver. Though the death of the people is an example of natural evil, and therefore a kind of moral dissonance, it cannot be considered morally disharmonic on the part of beaver because animals lack moral aptitude and intentionality, which are required for moral culpability. Curiously, if the beaver instead chose to chew on a rock in an attempt to build a dam from it, since this is a breaking of

the normative functions inherent to “beaverness,” then the act would then become disharmonic to the beaver.

There are two aspects crucial to biological natural law that must be made evident: the will to live is universal and altruism is harmonic, but not moral. Friedrich Nietzsche considered Arthur Schopenhauer to be the most significant moral philosopher.²⁵

Schopenhauer purported the ethical notion of “will-to-live.” The will to live is what will be referred to as “the high law.” The high law is the propagation of life at all costs. It is the high law because all life attempts to obey it. From the high law, Nietzsche based his ethical notion of “will-to-power.” With humans, if a society lacks a consistent and good implementation of the natural moral law, the will-to-live will evolve into the will-to-power and moral disharmony. The “low law” is any ethical system derived from the high law. Darwinian ethics is an example of a low law.

There are three primary problems with the low law:

1. The low law is always subject to the high law and the high law is not concerned with moral goodness. If the high law truly is the highest law, then no matter how good an ethical system derived from it may be, that low law must base all ethical and moral tendencies and conclusions on the propagation of life. For example, with Darwinian evolution, the highest good is not moral goodness but the high law,

It must not be forgotten that although a high standard of morality gives but a slight or no advantage to each individual man and his children over the other men of the same tribe, yet the advancement in the standard of morality and an increase in the number of well-endowed men will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another.²⁶

²⁵ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 57.

²⁶ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 66.

Or that moral goodness is profitable only if it results in fertile offspring with desirable attributes.²⁷ If the low law is true and man's highest good is mere procreation, the result would be what many would intuitively think of as "evil," but it could not be delineated as such because the high law would reign over moral philosophy—the only moral philosophy would be an apology for the high law.

2. It is impossible for objective, universal, unchanging, and morally good ethical systems to exist within a low law. If the high law is true, then the only objective moral tendency is whatever one can accomplish to achieve the propagation of life. This second problem will be discussed throughout this dissertation.

3. The result of the low law is "the abolition of man." The final problem with the low law is that it will eventually result in a diminished view of man. Moral prescription must be founded on man being something that is set apart from the animals. While man shares the same biological tendencies with animals, there is no true commonality in the realm of ethics or morality. If the distinction between man and animal becomes blurred, and man is reduced to mere animal,²⁸ then man is nothing more than a highly sophisticated biological computer²⁹ who has no more inherent value³⁰ than any other combination of cells.

There is a substantial and evident dissimilarity between animals acting on the high law and humans acting on the high law. When animals act on the high law, life

²⁷ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 39.

²⁸ Ibid., 37.

²⁹ Fred Smith, *Developing a Biblical Worldview: Seeing Things God's Way* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 13.

³⁰ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 44.

flourishes. If all of human life were to suddenly go extinct, the animal kingdom, despite continual death and dominance, would still flourish nonetheless. Conversely, history has continually proven that when humans, especially if they consider themselves genetically superior, act on the high law, the result is a death and dominance that demeans and limits life, and the result is moral disharmony.

The second crucial aspect of the biological natural law is that altruism is harmonic with nature, but it is not necessarily moral.³¹ Suppose that an antelope put himself into a dangerous position to protect members of his herd. This is harmonic because it allows for life to flourish, but since it is still within the realm of normative biological function in fulfillment of the high law independent of a moral agency, it is not a moral act. If the antelope however did not act on his altruistic and natural tendencies, and rather chose to protect himself at the expense of the herd, this would be an act of disharmony.

The confusion concerning morality and altruism occurs due to a conflation between biological and moral laws.³² If a man were to save himself from a house fire, but left his family alone to fend for themselves, this may or may not break a series of natural laws. It depends on the fuller context and the types of laws involved. First, consider the biological natural law: If the man were of prime fertile age, if prime fertile women were prevalent, and if the attempt to save the family might kill or severely injure that prime fertile man, then it would be harmonious for the man to save himself and only himself from the fire. The man is justified for saving himself because the biological law is subject to the high law. Since saving himself would result in the capacity to still further the

³¹ John Kekes, "Morality and Altruism," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 15, no. 4 (January 1, 1981): 265.

³² Frans de Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 28.

species, he did not break a biological law, and he is therefore biologically justified; however, he is not necessarily morally justified.

The man could likewise break the biological natural law: Suppose the genetic diversity of a small village of people required a certain family's genetic information in order for life to flourish. If a house fire occurred and the man did not do all that he could to save his family, then he would have broken the biological law and the high law. He broke the biological law because his actions did not result in the flourishing of life—it would be an act of disharmony.

The key features in determining the justification of the man's actions are as follows: what kind of laws did he keep and what kind of laws did he break? Natural moral laws are the inherent moral tendencies that are universal to all men.³³ While the precise content of this law is debated, this notion of natural law has also given rise to another type of natural law: societal. Societal laws must be factored into the fire thought experiment. A society may enact a law that states that "A man must do all that is in his power to save his family from a disaster." If a society were to enact such a law, then the man would not be justified in his actions from a societal standpoint. In such a society (the small village example), the result of would be societal and biological disharmonies, and possibly a moral disharmony.

Sacrifice, not altruism, is something that is usually considered morally good, but it is not necessarily biologically or societally good. Suppose that a society enacted a law: "A man cannot risk his own life while attempting to save someone else from a disaster." In a society prevalent with prime fertile females and laws that prohibit the risking of

³³ J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 82.

one's life, if a man chose to save his family from the fire, he would be breaking biological and societal laws. He would be breaking biological laws because he could continue to propagate the species despite the death of his family. He would be breaking societal laws simply because he broke the law of that society. However, many people would claim that the actions of the man are heroic and an example of moral goodness. The moral goodness of sacrifice cannot be related to altruism due to the relative intent—the intent of altruism is the fulfillment of the high law. The intent of sacrifice is to save someone else despite the breaking of the biological, and in some cases societal, law. If a man were to save his family despite biological and societal laws, and yet his actions are still considered justified in some sense, then the issue is one of the natural moral law and morality. Since many would not hesitate to consider the man's actions as heroic, then one may be justified in supposing that the natural moral law is in some way related to heroism.

The Good

Every intentional act or pursuit is meant to achieve some end, and this end is called the “good.”³⁴ The good is both the means to the end and the end itself: medicine is meant to achieve health, shipbuilding is meant to achieve a seaworthy vessel, and strategy is meant to achieve victory. The good must factor into the means or process if a good end is to be achieved. For example, the shipbuilding of a seaworthy vessel requires proper seaworthy-vessel attention and craftsmanship throughout the entire building process. Without such consideration, the end of a well-constructed and seaworthy vessel

³⁴ This sense of the good is different from the one presented earlier. The earlier good was represented standard and this good represents Aristotelian goodness: proper function of intended purpose.

cannot be achieved. The good of the ship then begins long before the actual construction commences. The initial good comes from the shipwright as she studies the laws of hydrodynamics, physics, and motion to ensure that the ship is logically capable of obtaining the good. The shipwright draws plans, selects wood and tools, and hires skilled workers; if the plans, wood, tools, or workers are flawed in some way, the good of the ship will be tarnished. The more compromises or shortcuts the shipwright takes, the more likely the good will be diminished. The increase of composite or partial blemishes corresponds directly to the complete or whole good, and partial flaws proportionally diminish those ends, which correlate to those specific diminished means—if the means are not good, the end will not be good either. For any process, the proper means will result in the proper end, and that is the good.

There must be an end if the good is to be achieved. If there is no end, if there is no finished project or desired state, then the good cannot be attained. Therefore, the notion of the good is related to the idea of a “telos”: an ultimate aim or goal of something or someone. Telos is a relatively complicated Greek word that finds its origin in Homeric myths. A telos can be segmented into two classes: duty and office.³⁵ Classically moral philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle argued that duty and office are directly related to morality. They argued that man had a duty to act morally, and that human goodness was contingent upon the fulfillment of that duty. While duty refers to a state of action, office refers to a state of being—man is meant to both *be* and *act* morally. Without duty and office, the moral good cannot be achieved.

Incumbent to a telos is the proper function of a human agent. The moral good is

³⁵ Z. Philip Ambrose, “The Homeric Telos,” *Glotta* 43, no. 1/2 (1965): 38.

achieved through a telos when a moral human agent, with knowledge of his required duty and office, acts upon an infinitely prescribed intentional tenet. Without such prescription, the result is moral convolution and chaos.³⁶ However, due to rising criticisms inherent to non-cognitivism, error theory, and Darwinian ethics, the necessity of moral duty and office as a requirement for the human good is difficult to prove. However, the proper understanding and evaluation of hero myth may circumvent the criticisms cast by non-cognitivism, error theory, and Darwinian ethics. While it is debatable that a human is required to act consistently as a moral agent if he hopes to achieve human goodness, it is impossible to deny that a hero can consistently deny his moral agency, duty, and office if he is to achieve the good—it is true by definition that a hero act heroically.

Likewise, the hero, if he is going to achieve the good, must progress towards some end. The goal of the following chapters is to explain what exactly the heroic good is, and how that heroic good is achieved. The achievement of the heroic good is contingent upon four main factors: (1) a transcendent moral code (the natural moral law) that the hero appeals to and acts consistently with, (2) the solving or the attempt at solving a disharmony or evil, (3) the right type of story (which is a myth), (4) and the right type of hero (the lawfully good). All four must be present and properly ordered if the heroic good is to be achieved. Further, it is imperative to delineate both the heroic good and the heroic great. The heroic great is the heroic good achieved by the best possible hero. The heroic great has much loftier requirements than the heroic good: the best possible standard (the infinite prescriptive good), the solving of the greatest disharmony (death), the best possible story (a divine mega-narrative myth), and the best

³⁶ Lyle Downing and Robert Thigpen, “After Telos: The Implications of MacIntyre’s Attempt to Restore the Concept in ‘After Virtue,’” *Social Theory and Practice* 10, no. 1 (1984): 39–54.

possible hero (Jesus Christ).

Natural Moral Law and the Reductions of the Good

Kant argued that the concept of the highest good occurs when one continues on in a state of happiness, motivated by virtue, and guided by the moral law.³⁷ As a myth progresses, the hero's happiness is based on meeting a goal or solving a specific problem: the hero's happiness is the telos.³⁸ The mere meeting of the goal, however, is insufficient for true happiness to occur. The hero, like Kant's moral man, must be motivated by virtue and guided by a moral law. The virtue that motivates the hero, the moral law that guides the hero, and his responses to them are what determines the type of hero he is and his level of happiness. It is the hero's response to whatever moral law reduction he holds to that determines both the status of himself as a hero and the functionality and goodness of his reduction. As previously explained, access to a natural moral law and knowledge concerning it can be reduced to nihilistic, subjective, arbitrary, nominal, finite, and infinite prescriptions.

The main issues concerning the natural moral law are (1) what is the content and (2) how can that content be known?³⁹ The dispute concerning the content of the natural moral law is "what is the good?" There are three basic notions of goodness. These notions of the good are the various responses or reductions to the natural moral law or morality in general: arbitrary, nominal, and prescriptive. From these all prescriptive

³⁷ Stephen Engstrom, "The Concept of the Highest Good in Kant's Moral Theory," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, no. 4 (1992): 747.

³⁸ Jeffrey S. Purinton, "Epicurus on the Telos," *Phronesis* 38, no. 3 (1993): 281.

³⁹ John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 35.

ethical theories are derived. There are two other reductions that will not be given the same attention as the others, nihilistic and subjective because these reductions cannot produce consistently good heroes.

The Nihilistic Good and Some Infinite Prescription

The nihilistic good, like the subjective good, is not really a good at all—neither can present consistent morally good standards. This view denies the existence of evil and goodness altogether, denies the possibility of a heroic end, and ultimately promotes the meaninglessness of life.⁴⁰ If a view denies the existence of morality, of rightness and wrongness, it is impossible for a hero to move towards a heroic end and to achieve the heroic good. Both the nihilistic and subjective views are forms of moral skepticism.⁴¹ Moral skepticism can never produce the heroic good because the hero has no compass to guide him.⁴² He has no means of progressing towards virtue or digressing from vice because in these views there is no moral progression or digression. If the virtuous and the vicious are undecipherable, then so is heroism. A hero cannot fight against evil if he cannot know what should be universally defined as evil and what should be universally defined as good—subjectivism. A hero cannot fight against evil if the fighting of evil is meaningless and impossible—nihilism.

It does not matter to what reduction a character holds, every view presents the capacity for evil. While the infinite prescriptive good allows for the best possible good, it

⁴⁰ Jasper Doomen, “Consistent Nihilism,” *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 33, no. 1/2 (2012): 103.

⁴¹ David Copp, “Moral Skepticism,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 62, no. 3 (1991): 203.

⁴² Russ Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). 50.

does not mean that a hero, just because he claims to adhere to this view, is incapable of evil or treachery. The infinite prescriptive good merely provides the groundwork for the best kind of heroic goodness; it does not guarantee that goodness in all situations. The biblical character David held to the infinite prescriptive good, and his belief in relation to that Prescriber allowed him to be a conquering hero able to best the daunting foe and champion of the Philistines, Goliath. However, the same man later in life, while still adhering to the infinite prescriptive good, made a series of transgressions or compromises against the good that resulted in adultery and murder.

Villains can hold to any of the reductions as well. The reductions that allow for the greatest capacity of evil are actually on the opposite ends of the moral spectrum: infinite prescription and nihilistic. Infinite prescription allows for the capacity for knowledge concerning the moral and heroic good, but the *capacity* is insufficient to ensure that the proper moral and heroic good is *always* achieved. The more dogmatic one is about the veracity of his view, the less likely he is willing to compromise on what he considers acceptable means for the moral and good end. But just as a hero whose motivation is grounded on the infinite prescriptive good is able to make a series of compromises that mar his ability to achieve the heroic good, a villain could likewise either choose to be ignorant of the content of the prescription, willfully deny the adherence of the prescription, or be fooled into a false means of engaging in the prescription—all of which may result in evil. It is not the intent of this section to explain how to differentiate between goodness and evil in the context of infinite prescription, but merely it is used as a tool to contrast nihilism.

There are a couple of different examples about how evil can exist within the

context of infinite prescription. The Devil is one example found in reality. The Devil has a clearer knowledge of moral demand and the content of natural moral law than even humans. And yet the Devil still makes willful decisions that are contradictory to the infinite good. Inherent to moral dilemmas is the choice to act on the good when it is determined. But since humans (and angels) do not always act in rational moral accord, the status concerning the goodness of infinite prescription is still not proven false. Again, the infinite prescriptive good only allows for the possibility of human moral goodness, but it does not ensure it.

Another example is found in *The Lord of the Rings*. Some people do not know that outside the four primary books of the mythos, Tolkien had begun writing a fifth book. He explains:

I did begin a story placed about 100 years after the Downfall, but it proved both sinister and depressing. Since we are dealing with Men, it is inevitable that we should be concerned with the most regrettable feature of their nature: their quick satiety with good. So that the people of Gondor in times of peace, justice and prosperity, would become discontented and restless—while the dynasts descended from Aragorn would become just kings and governors—like Denethor or worse. I found that even so early there was an outcrop of revolutionary plots, about a centre of secret Satanistic religion; while Gondorian boys were playing at being Orcs and going around doing damage. I could have written a 'thriller' about the plot and its discovery and overthrow—but it would have been just that. Not worth doing.⁴³

He explains that the next story was too depressing to continue. *The Return of the King* storied the destruction of the ring of power, the halting of the age of Orcs, and the devastation of the source for meta-evil. What gave Tolkien pause about writing the new book was that since there was no longer a meta-evil behind the scenes to deceive and corrupt men with nefarious ploys and plots, the conflict would have to come from the

⁴³ J. R. R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien, and Humphrey Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2000), 344.

inherent desires of men. After only 100 years since the destruction of meta-evil, men were already clamoring for the expansion of territories and the adding of glory and spoils. The desire to expand and conquer was not from some sinister puppet master, but was based solely on the restless hearts of men. While the Fellowship put an end to meta-evil, the destruction of the ring of power did not change the disparaging nature of man, nor alter his free will.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, nihilism also has a great capacity for evil, though, of course, under such a view “evil” cannot even rightly exist. However, it is for this very reason that such a view is so disquieting—if nothing is evil, everything is acceptable and nothing condemnable. Nietzsche called for the challenging of traditional values and claimed that since God was dead then likewise conventional morality was also dead. He argued that the only true “moral” code was the “will to power.” In rejecting the soft values of Christianity, he promoted the hard values of the “Superman.” Supermen were the people who had the “moral” sense to rise up and assert power and dominion over the weak.

Fictional characters that adhere to nihilism are accurately considered the most sinister. Evil men, even irrational evil men, can be reasoned with and influenced to at least a small degree. But reason to the nihilist can only be understood as a tool that he exploits to bring about whatever reality he has the power to achieve. Reason cannot be used to dissuade him because reason, in terms of influence, is merely a soft value of the weak and powerless. Nihilist villains are at their core chaotic. They deny traditional values, and they worship at the altar of whatever is achievable. The prime example of a nihilistic character is The Joker. As the perpetual nemesis of Batman, the Joker believes

that man is at his core a primal and frenzied beast whose nature is that of destruction and disarray. He considers his torture and mayhem to be in service to mankind as he is merely returning man to his natural state. He cannot be reasoned with, and the only means of stopping him is with force.

While any of the reductions may result in a hero acting treacherously, it is impossible for a hero to be at all heroic if he adheres to the subjective or nihilistic good. Since neither of those views have the capacity to bring about any heroic goodness, only the remaining four will be evaluated to a further degree.

The Subjective Good

The subjective good is similar in some respects to the arbitrary good. The arbitrary good, despite being arbitrary in nature, is meant to represent a universal moral code. While Sam Harris' assertion that "human wellbeing" can objectively ground moral thought independent from theism, such an assertion (though it results in objectivity) is nonetheless an arbitrary standard.⁴⁴ The subjective good is a standard that is arbitrary in that it is sourced in a person, yet it is not meant to act as a universal guide. The difference between the two is that it is possible for one to have a relatively consistent epistemology while adhering to the arbitrary; whereas, this is not possible with subjectivism. The arbitrary is also similar to the subjective view because both groups of adherents tend to respond to the natural moral law in a capricious and malleable manner.

Some liberties with this view have been taken. First, the epistemic and moral notions of subjectivity have been conflated and will be responded to conjointly. These concepts have been confined because anyone who holds to the subjectivity of truth

⁴⁴ A refutation of Dr. Harris' work was originally included within this dissertation, but it strayed too far from the thesis and was excluded.

usually also holds to the subjectivity of morality. Since epistemic subjectivism greatly diminishes one's capacity for knowledge, moral subjectivism cannot be considered a viable means of determining heroism or moral goodness. Even though many epistemic subjectivists do not realize the consequences of such inconsistency, it will become apparent after a brief analysis.

Also conjoined are the moral notion of relativism and the moral notion of subjectivism. Classically, the difference between moral relativism and moral subjectivism is that subjectivism refers to a person-by-person morality, while relativism refers to a society-based morality. It is much better to consider these issues in tandem because they are essentially the same view, and considering them jointly makes the refutations much simpler. If one can prove that every single tile on a floor is green, she has likewise proven that the floor itself is green. If one can prove that a person-by-person morality is unworkable, she can likewise prove that the culmination of people and their moral inclinations are correspondingly unworkable as well.

The subjective good is both an epistemic and a moral inclination. It has epistemic and moral implications because in this mindset, it is impossible to differentiate between the two. The subjectivity of truth entails the subjectivity of morality. One cannot make a moral judgment if moral judgments are based on a tenuous and malleable epistemology. This view is a self-refuting good that cannot be maintained by any logically consistent person. The subjective good cannot be considered "good" because the good is both indefinable and unimaginable.

It is impossible to deny the connection between moral virtue and practical reason

and wisdom.⁴⁵ The beginning of moral thought and the beginning of the heroic good is based on theoretical reasoning.⁴⁶ As one considers his environment and deliberates on the natural ebb and flow of causality, he begins to understand the nature of external function within his world and in the internal function of reason. Cause and effect are the bedrock of moral thought. A moral person is someone who is able to compare his past and present actions or motives and then make a judgment call as to the goodness of those actions.⁴⁷ Subjectivism denies both the objectivity of the external world and the usefulness of one's own reason. While accurate thinking will not suddenly make an evil man become good, the poison of subjectivism removes even the capacity to properly consider morality⁴⁸—it even removes the capacity to “consider” at all.

The danger of subjectivism is not what follows necessarily (knowledge and morality are forfeited) but rather what follows practically: one is unable to consistently and clearly delineate between cruelty and non-cruelty.⁴⁹ The espousing subjectivist may not realize the capricious nature of her beliefs, but if moral philosophy were reduced to personal choice and personal preference, it could hardly be considered a workable moral philosophy at all.⁵⁰ The value of justice would become valueless;⁵¹ objective justice

⁴⁵ Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart*, 37

⁴⁶ C. S. Lewis, “Poison of Subjectivism,” *Poison of Subjectivism*.
<http://www.calvin.edu/~pribeiro/DCM-Lewis-2009/Lewis/The-Poison-of-Subjectivism.doc>.

⁴⁷ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 65.

⁴⁸ Downing and Thigpen, “After Telos,” 39.

⁴⁹ Francis A. Schaeffer, Lane T. Dennis, and J. I. Packer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy: Three Essential Books in One Volume* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990), 100.

⁵⁰ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 21.

would be impossible to express because objective language and thinking are required⁵² but conversely absent from the subjective good.⁵³

The subjectivist does not deny the existence of good and evil, rather merely supposes that good and evil are chosen either by a person or the person's community. Subjective personal choices are esteemed as completely "true" as long as one sincerely holds to that belief. Within this view, there are no moral decisions or inclinations prior to humans considering them. While objective moral realism is not possible with this view, the subjectivist still endorses a genuine, albeit contradictory, view that moral standards based on human decision are sufficient for a moral reality.⁵⁴

Since the subjectivist maintains the existence of good and evil, he needs to explain what the moral office and duty of a person resembles. He also needs to explain when an act of moral virtue has occurred and how anyone can differentiate moral virtue from moral vice. He needs to explain what happens if one person's moral duty and office conflicts with another person's. Further, he needs to explain what would happen if a person's "genuine" moral belief resulted in something that any reasonable person might consider "unadulterated evil." But the subjectivist cannot answer any of these questions. If a person decides what is moral virtue, how can such a virtue be rightly differentiated from moral vice? How can the subjectivist ground either moral vice or moral virtue? The only grounding that the subjectivist can cling to is the inherent moral inclination of a

⁵¹ Rist, *Real Ethics*, 18.

⁵² Erik J. Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 60.

⁵³ Rist, *Real Ethics*, 18.

⁵⁴ Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?*, 10.

person and her tendency to simply “know” when certain things are good and true. But since nearly every ethical theory can likewise build a case around such a framework, it cannot rightly justify the unjustifiable good of subjectivism.

If a hero, while adhering to the subjective good, were to witness a man being mugged, he would have no reason to save him. How could the hero know that mugging is always something bad? If truth and morality are subjective, it would be impossible to differentiate between the evil of mugging and the good of saving. If a hero cannot delineate between vice and virtue, then he cannot obtain the heroic good.

Concluding Thoughts

Plato is perhaps most well-known for his *Allegory of the Cave*. *The Cave* is often invoked as a thought experiment concerning the reliability of the senses. However, perhaps the allegory has an overlooked aspect: *The Cave* is also a hero myth. Consider a more detailed and fleshed out Cave allegory: *The Matrix*. *The Matrix* is a story of hyper-skepticism based (in part) on the thought experiment of Hilary Putnam and his brain-in-the-vat thought experiment. *The Matrix* is a highly complex and evolved retelling of Plato’s cave allegory. Within both of the hero myths there is a real sense of rightness and wrongness that is not dependent on any person (moral realism), there is a central figure that accomplishes what no one else can do, and there are a number of universal themes found in these and all of story and myth in general.

Tertullian in the second century asked, “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?” This question is perhaps more loaded than even Tertullian knew at the time. The ancient Greeks not only set the stage for natural law by the works of philosophers but also set the stage for hero myth by the Greek tragedies and comedies. Independent from

Christianity, both Augustine and Thomas would have been brilliant philosophers, but it was only because of and through Christianity that each man was able to fully realize the works of Plato and Aristotle. Just as *The Matrix* would not have been a very compelling movie without a hero, Augustine would merely have been another Neo-Platonist and Thomas a Neo-Aristotelian if not for Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the real myth that was able to grant an objective good that neither Plato nor Aristotle were able to produce.

CHAPTER 2: THE HEROIC TAO

Evaluating the Heroic Tao

Of the perpetual themes common among myth and story, one of the more universally pervasive is that of external aid. No hero journeys alone. Even the lone hero who has no comrades on his journey does not adventure alone because at some point all heroes receive aid. No hero can forge himself; no hero is self-taught or ultimately self-motivated. The hero is trained, equipped and empowered, and the person that trains, equips, and empowers the hero is her mentor. While the physical training and equipment is highly beneficial to the hero, it is the transcendent teaching or code passed from the master to the pupil which offers the most significant aid.

All heroes have a code. These codes are always transcendental in nature. The origin of the code is usually related to the mentor or a mentor-like source. Jor-El's (Superman's father) farewell speech to his son both explains the nature of the transcendent code and is a transcendent code itself:

You will travel far, my little Kal-El. But we will never leave you, even in the face of our deaths; the richness of our lives shall be yours. All that I have, all that I've learned, everything I feel, all this, and more I, I bequeath you, my son. You will carry me inside you all the days of your life. You will make my strength your own, and see my life through your own eyes, as your life will be seen through mine. The son becomes the father, and the father, the son. This is all I, all I can send you, Kal-El.¹

Batman refuses to kill. Spider-Man lives by the mantra, "With great power comes great responsibility." Captain Jack Sparrow has the Pirate Code. Even the serial killer anti-hero Dexter has his "code." Heroes always have a code. The code is his ultimate guide of conduct. And the code is directly related to the natural moral law.

¹ Richard Donner, dir., *Superman - The Movie* (Warner Home Video, 2001).

The code is usually related to a mentor-like figure. Batman refuses to kill, not because he was taught this by his father, but due to witnessing the murder of his father and mother. Spider-Man was taught his mantra by his Uncle Ben. Captain Jack received the Pirate Code from the previous generation of pirates. Dexter was taught to control his killer instincts by his father who, through the code, allowed him to unleash his homicidal tendencies on those worthy of indignation. The code serves as an uninterrupted transcendent connection between the hero, the mentor, and the good.

So then, the mentor's teaching is more than mere aid; it is an overarching source for government and conduct. The basis or motivation for that teaching will always represent one of the reductions to the natural moral law. The teaching transcends not only the connection between the hero and mentor, but it also applies directly to the story listener. The listener can know the fullness of the code as well as what it entails and can watch as it unfolds throughout the story. The listener can even evaluate the code and test how well it holds up to philosophical and practical scrutiny in the real world. The code is more than mere lesson and verse, as it represents and establishes the heroic means employed to obtain heroic ends: the heroic good. The teaching of the mentor is both a guide to the hero and the guide to the heroic good itself; it is both the means of the hero and the means of the heroic good itself.

The teachings are not the reductions, but they represent the reductions. The mentor's teachings or code is to be known as the "Tao" of the hero: the heroic Tao. The Tao is loosely translated as "the way," but it is also accurately translated as "the truth," "reason," and "nature."² The original notion of Tao was the proper understanding and

² Ellen Marie Chen, "The Meaning of Ge in the Tao Te Ching: An Examination of the Concept of Nature in Chinese Taoism," *Philosophy East and West* 23, no. 4 (1973): 457.

implementation of an acceptable harmony of the ultimate opposites—goodness and evil.³ This notion seems to be a fitting description for the hero's code due to the complex nature of the hero and his persistent struggle against evil. The hero must fight evil without giving into the nature of evil. He must fight demons without becoming demonic. He must make split-second decisions on the battlefield that may result in loss of life. His Tao, his way or guide, allows for a universal moral compass to which he can reference to ensure that an apposite balance of goodness and evil ensues.

The hero follows a Tao, or way, and through that seeks to solve some problem. While on his adventure, *truth* and *reason* must constantly be employed to ensure a proper good and moral end. During the adventure, he is not only at war with his enemies but his very *nature*: his temptation to compromise or give up. His Tao represents a constant and all-encompassing idea⁴ that grounds the tempted or confused hero—it keeps him true.

His Tao reveals what the hero's view is concerning the natural moral law and morality itself. Even a simple mantra like, "With great power comes great responsibility," requires foresight and thought as to how it should properly be employed—a mantra in and of itself can only lead a hero so far. The hero must make a series of interpretations and practical implementations for his heroic Tao. How the heroic Tao is implemented and interpreted lays the groundwork for actions, which can be morally evaluated. If after the heroic Tao has been field-tested and the hero continues on with it, then the heroic Tao reveals what is of prime moral importance to the hero and the nature of heroism—it reveals his view on natural moral law and morality.

³ Antonio S. Cua, "Opposites as Complements: Reflections on the Significance of Tao," *Philosophy East and West* 31, no. 2 (1981): 123.

⁴ George D. Chryssides, "God and the Tao," *Religious Studies* 19, no. 1 (1983): 3.

Since the heroic Tao acts equally as his guide, motivation, and measuring rod, then any character of substantive value, that is sufficiently developed, will eventually reveal what he considers to be the Tao by his conduct. The Tao reveals what is of prime importance to any character. Through the Tao, the heroic good can be evaluated.

While story type, hero type, and the solving of a problem are all crucial in determining the heroic good, it is the hero's response to his transcendent code, his heroic Tao, which is the most impactful to the hero. How closely he keeps and follows his code can even change him from one type of hero into another. Changing the hero type can change the story type in some cases. The relationship between the hero and his code reveals either something about the hero or something about the code. The hero's Tao reveals his inherent reflection toward the code based on how readily he is willing to compromise on that code. Compromise is the ultimate measure for the hero and his heroic Tao. If the hero compromises his code, it either entails that the code is not good or that the hero is not good. For the remainder of this chapter, various examples of each of the reductions of the good and the corresponding heroic Tao will be examined. The evaluation will consider the more crucial stages of the hero's journey (the incidences wherein the hero has to put his code to the test) and then evaluate the hero's responses to the situations to learn either something about the hero or his heroic Tao.

The fear and reality of compromise is a universal theme that is found in every myth that contains a pedagogical factor—all myths contain a pedagogical factor. Depending on the situation or context, the compromise may be great or small. Small compromises occur when a hero compromises on a less significant aspect of his overall code. A large compromise occurs if the hero compromises on the central tenet of his

heroic Tao. In story, these moments are always the most compelling and appear at the story's climax, usually during the cave threshold. The hero is forced to make a difficult decision; he must make the best decision that either corresponds to his code, contradicts it, or corresponds to it; and then the hero must deal with the consequences of his choices. His choice determines if the heroic good is obtained.

If a hero compromises his Tao, one needs to determine which is at fault, the hero or the code. The first step in differentiating between the codes and determining which code leads to the heroic good is evaluating the hero's response to it. Such an evaluation occurs through asking three questions: (1) Does the hero think the code is good? (2) Does the hero's response to the code reflect the ultimate good that the hero is attempting to achieve? (3) Who is at fault if the hero commits a compromise, the hero or the code?

(1) Does the hero think his Tao is worthy and good? If he does, then he should be willing to give up his own personal desires to accomplish and bring about the fulfillment of his heroic Tao, which should be the heroic good. If the hero believes his code is worthy of the sacrifice of personal desire and even his own wellbeing, then he should remain steadfast in his adherence of it. If a hero thinks of himself as a hero who acts accordingly heroically, then obviously his code must be able to achieve those heroic means and ends. If the hero does not think his code is worthy of emulation or that it can achieve heroic goodness, then he should probably not follow the code and search for a new one.

The second step of evaluating the heroic Tao is to determine if the hero's response to the code properly reflects its scope and intent. This step is meant to determine if any given heroic deed or failure was related to the code or not: if the consequences of the

hero's actions are due to the code or despite it. If the hero acts in accordance with the intent of the code, does that action result in what would reasonably be considered an act of heroism? If the code results in what one would reasonably consider acts of heroism, then one must ask if it is because of the hero's code that he was able to achieve such heroism or if hidden or external premises of the code or the nature of heroism itself exist, which are either ignorantly or blatantly ignored. No matter the case, if the code has aspects that are held in either ignorance or intentional violation of the code, then it cannot be considered a good code. A good code must cause heroism.

Finally, if a hero gives in to compromise, which is at fault: the heroic Tao or the hero? Once the first two questions have been answered, the answer to the third question should be readily apparent.

Arbitrary Good

Homer's *Iliad* takes place in a pre-civilized Greece.⁵ Since the *Iliad* predated the *Polis*, there was no real venue to intellectually discuss the nature of man, the need for civil laws, or to develop a coherent moral philosophy.⁶ In many respects, the world of the *Iliad* reflected the pre-Mosaic world of Genesis.⁷ Pre-law and pre-moral societies as depicted in the have a single universal guide that one can appeal to: honor.

⁵ Mary Scott, "Pity and Pathos in Homer," *Acta Classica* 22 (1979): 1–14.

⁶ Annette Lucia Giesecke, "Mapping Utopia: Homer's Politics and the Birth of the Polis," *College Literature* 34, no. 2 (2007): 194.

⁷ Louis Markos, *From Achilles to Christ: Why Christians Should Read the Pagan Classics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 50. Dr. Markos' book was very influential in formulating the idea of the Heroic Tao. He began his sections on Achilles and Odysseus by first ascribing to them their codes: Xenia and Oikonomia. It was his descriptions of Xenia and Oikonomia that initiated this research on them. His evaluation of the characters, especially Achilles, proved an invaluable guide for this work.

Honor, in and of itself, cannot be measured without a predicate, and in ancient Greece, it was measured by the notion of “Xenia.” Xenia is the basic overarching heroic Tao in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Xenia is honorable hospitality toward fellow men, and it is related to the finite prescriptive good reduction. It is an example of a finite prescription because it is based on a prescription from Zeus.⁸ In the *Iliad*, Homer ascribes to Zeus the task of enforcing Xenia on a global scale.⁹ Zeus is even given the title and office of “the god of hosts” or “Zeus Xenos.” Since Xenia is enforced on a global scale by a transcendent being, then it should be considered a prescriptive good; however, since Zeus is a contingent and finite being, the prescription must likewise only be considered finite.

The theme of Xenia is hospitality or guest-host relationship. The guest-host relationship is the moral yardstick; every moral or heroic encounter in Homeric myths was measured in terms of one’s adherence or lack of adherence to Xenia.¹⁰ The concept was a cultural institution whose origin was found in ancient Greece. And while Xenia would act as a front-runner to the Greco notion of democracy, the concept as presented in the *Iliad*, resulted in moral ambiguity.¹¹ Xenia was applied in a variety of ways, such as taking an oath, keeping an oath, friendship, and familial bonds. The bond of Xenia was very strong and verged on the point of contractual. To break Xenia was to lose honor, which was considered a moral failure.

Xenia was a reciprocal pact between a host and guest. The host would receive the

⁸ Markos, *From Achilles to Christ*, 50.

⁹ Elizabeth Asmis, “Lucretius’ Venus and Stoic Zeus,” *Hermes* 110, no. 4 (1982): 458.

¹⁰ Markos, *From Achilles to Christ*, 51.

¹¹ Seth L. Schein, “The Iliad & Odyssey In Sophocles’ Philoctetes: Generic Complexity and Ethical Ambiguity,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*. Supplement, no. 87 (2006): 129–40.

guest and provide for him food, drink, and a bath. The guest was given a comfortable chair, and in incidences of honored guests, the host would even give up his own seat. The first duty of the guest and the host was the mutual assurance of safety. This safety began when the host would disarm the guest, and conversely, the guest would allow himself to be disarmed. The disarmament was the first reciprocal act since the guest was freely giving up his weapon. The host would respond with recognition of that trust, likewise ensuring the protection of the guest. The guest was meant to be engaging, charming, and interesting. The guest was expected to bring to light the reason for his visit in a timely manner, so as to not exploit the hospitality of the host. After business had been concluded, the host sent the guest off with a gift, and the two departed in peace.

The guest-host relationship was applicable in several different contexts as well. In the *Iliad*, Achilles' oldest friend was a man named Patroclus. Peleus (Achilles' father) adopted Patroclus, and the friendship of Achilles and Patroclus was born. The two formed a Xenia relationship as both brothers and brothers-in-arms. They fought together, protected one another, and ensured the safety of each other. Without the bond of Xenia, the relationship between the two men would not be as lasting and significant as a relationship of mere acquaintances.

Xenia even applied to enemies. In battle, a victorious captor is expected to show mercy to the defeated enemy if the enemy asks with contrition. If the defeated soldier grabbed the legs of the victor and begged him for mercy, the victor (the man with the upper hand) was honor-bound by Xenia to spare his life.¹² At the request for mercy, the victor took on the role of host, and the defeated man took on the role of guest. The guest

¹² Elizabeth Belfiore, "Xenia in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *The Classical Journal* 89, no. 2 (1993): 115.

was given sanctuary, but the host was entitled to ransom if the guest's side wished to buy him back.¹³

Achilles

The central character of the *Iliad* is the brash and glory-driven Achilles. Like many epic heroes, Achilles has semi-divine origins, as he was the son of Zeus. Like Zeus, Achilles was a hotheaded but fierce warrior. Louis Markos likens Achilles to the biblical character of Samson:

Of all the characters of the Old Testament, the one most like Achilles is Samson: he of the uncontrollable wrath whose ability to save is surpassed only by his ability to destroy. Neither warrior seems to understand fully the nature of his own strength, yet both burn to fulfill what they see as their mission. Samson is perhaps the most flawed of the Old Testament heroes...¹⁴

Samson and Achilles were similar in that their heroic Tao was fluid. Samson's heroic Tao should have been based on the infinite prescriptive good, but like Achilles, it was based more on the arbitrary notions of pride and praise. Neither man seemed to understand the nature of the Tao which they were meant to ascribe. Samson did not understand the humility required to serve his God, and Achilles lacked the humility to act honorably in all situations as required by Xenia. Their heroic Tao was simply a means to whatever ends they desired.

The war between Greece and Troy began as a breach of Xenia. Paris, the charming son of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy, visited Helen and her husband Menelaus. Helen was the daughter of Zeus and Leda, and in Greek mythology, she was considered to be the most beautiful woman in the world. Menelaus was the king of

¹³ Markos, *From Achilles to Christ*, 51.

¹⁴ Ibid., 57.

Mycenaean Sparta, and he received the visit from Paris with full Xenia. Paris, however, broke the bonds of Xenia by seducing Helen and fleeing with her back to Troy. The response to Paris's disregard of Xenia was swift and severe.

Since Xenia was applied across familial bounds, the brothers of Paris and Menelaus became involved. The brother of Menelaus was Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae. Agamemnon pledged his troops to his brother to bring Helen back. The Greek force was far superior to that of Troy, but Paris had two advantages over the Greek war machine: his brother Hector and the wall of Troy.

Hector was the greatest fighter of Troy. He was also a man of great honor and did not think that the war between Greece and Troy was a just or good war. It is likely that he knew the transgression of his brother was unconscionable under the prescription of Xenia, but since he likewise had the same familial allegiance to his brother, he allowed him sanctuary behind the great wall of Troy. The wall presented a daunting task to the Greeks, as it was unscalable and impenetrable.

The Greeks had superior numbers, but Troy had the superior defense. Agamemnon knew that if Greece were to be triumphant, they needed a wild card, the greatest warrior of Greece: Achilles. Achilles had no Xenia connection to either Menelaus or Agamemnon. The *Iliad* does not portray Achilles as someone who was truly motivated by Xenia at all. When Achilles talked of war, he focused on the praise of his superior fighting skills, gold and plunder, and women—Xenia was not his motivation. Achilles was confident on the battlefield, and his weakness was not found within his warrior-based acolytes, but rather his pride. If his skill as a warrior was ever questioned, he would become enraged and feel compelled to prove himself. The Greek warrior

culture was based on pride, envy, and praise,¹⁵ and Agamemnon exploited Achilles' pride, the call for glory, and the possible spoils of war to motivate him to join the assault on Troy. Achilles' true "Achilles' heel" was his easily manipulated self-importance.

Achilles' heroic Tao was hardly heroic at all. Someone cannot rightly be considered a hero if one's pride is central to his motivation. Achilles' heroic Tao was different from the other warriors because it was not actually based on Xenia or honor. To Achilles, Xenia was merely a tool that he exploited for his own gain. The heroic Tao of Achilles was not based on any sort of prescription, but it was based on his own desire; it was arbitrary in nature. An integral aspect of the heroic good is that the hero must progress towards some end, and, since there is no end to a prideful man's ego, Achilles was exhaustively chasing an unachievable and unworthy end. It is impossible for Achilles to be considered a true hero at all.

Achilles did not care about the honorless actions of Paris. He did not fight for Xenia. If Xenia were his motivation, he would never have ceased his assault on Troy once the fighting had begun. It was apparent from Agamemnon's and Achilles' early dialogues that the two had a colorful and storied past, and the two men despised each other.¹⁶ It was only for Agamemnon's promise of glory, gold, and girls that Achilles even accompanied the armies in the first place. However, when Agamemnon refused to allow Achilles to have the woman he wanted, he retreated from the battlefield to sulk. When Achilles retreated, Troy began to gain momentum, but he did not care. The pride of being denied his spoil was greater than being denied the glory of war.

¹⁵ P. Walcot, "Odysseus and the Art of Lying," *Ancient Society* 8 (1977): 1–19.

¹⁶ Robert Schmiel, "Wily Achilles," *The Classical Outlook* 61, no. 2 (1983): 41–43.

Many Homeric commentators maintain that Achilles claimed to follow Xenia. However, if a hero *claims* to hold to a code, such an admission is insufficient grounds for one to be justified in believing that he actually *follows* such a code—belief and disposition must correspond. The hero's actions and response to that code must be examined to truly determine his code. How a hero deals with adversaries, troubles, and setbacks begins to expose how much the hero adheres to his code. Taken further, pain, killing, and difficult odds expose a bit more of what the hero thinks of his heroic code. A crucial reveal, a crucial test, for the hero is how he deals with the deep loss of a loved one and the sting it leaves behind. Achilles had heroically handled the onslaught of adversaries, the death associated with war, and the pain of fighting, but he was not prepared for the death of his best friend Patroclus. It was the death of Patroclus and his response to it that revealed the true nature of Achilles.

Hector had taken the life of Patroclus. The death of Patroclus transformed Achilles. The rage of Achilles was so great that any semblance of him being a noble or honorable warrior was completely lost, and he became a mindless killer. His motivation for war had changed; suddenly his heroic Tao of Xenia had supposedly been activated due to the death of his "brother." It was likely due to guilt that Achilles became so angry because the death of Patroclus was directly related to Achilles' tantrum, refusal to fight, and sending Patroclus to fight in his place.¹⁷ The guilt was further amplified by the memory that Achilles had unjustly and severely mocked him not long before his death. His guilt and reckless aggression¹⁸ set the stage for his tragic ending.¹⁹ He no longer

¹⁷ Ruth Scodel, "The Word of Achilles," *Classical Philology* 84, no. 2 (1989): 91–99.

¹⁸ Schmiel, "Wily Achilles," 41.

cared about gold or any other spoils; his brother had fallen to another, and he demanded revenge. His rage was matched only by his wrath as he began cutting through the enemy lines to reach Hector.

Achilles appeared to be having something of an existential heroic Tao dilemma. His original motivation for glory and spoils could not appeal to this situation, so he disregarded it. But the true fulfillment of *Xenia* required the capacity for compassion and mercy.²⁰ He had been warned previously that his anger was incompatible with honor, but he did not care.²¹ Unfortunately, mindless brute rage is unharmonious with *Xenia*. As Achilles cut through the lines, he came across Lykaon, a young nobleman, and easily bested the man in combat. Appealing to *Xenia*, Lykaon fell to his knees, grabbed the legs of Achilles, and begged for mercy. Achilles was not moved by pity, but by wrath and revenge. Eventually, Achilles chased down Hector, killed him, and then dragged his body behind his chariot into the Greek camp.

The plight of the divine and semi-divine hero is often one of questioning his status amongst men. The hero struggles to understand his role in the world as he belongs neither in the midst of gods nor in the midst of men. It is a life of isolation, wherein the hero is not given the full status of god, resulting in his acolytes and efforts often being overlooked. The nature of the struggle with Achilles was he had no code that properly suited him and his desires. At first, he wanted nothing but the praises of men and the spoils of war, but the desire for such things results in a vapid and meaningless existence

¹⁹ David E. Eichholz, "The Propitiation of Achilles," *The American Journal of Philology* 74, no. 2 (1953): 138.

²⁰ Markos, *From Achilles to Christ*, 70.

²¹ Judith A. Rosner, "The Speech of Phoenix: 'Iliad' 9.434-605," *Phoenix* 30, no. 4 (1976): 315.

that could never result in the heroic good. Eventually, he wanted to disregard his original code in order to defend the honor of his Patroclus, but the honor code of Xenia did not allow for mindless mechanical massacre.

Achilles never displayed any inclination that he cared for the code of Xenia at all. The only code that he cared for was personal glory. At best, personal glory can be considered an arbitrary good. But one's natural instincts concerning the heroic good seem to demand that a hero have a semblance of selflessness and sacrifice. Achilles' arbitrary good of personal glory, something that should be relatively easy to obtain for a skilled hero, cannot result in a heroic good because a good hero cannot act selfishly. Even when he appeared to switch to a less selfish, honor-based code, he failed in maintaining that code because he was unwilling to apply the restraint that such a heroic Tao demanded. No code suited him.

No code suited Achilles because he did not wish to be limited by any given code. The tragedy of Achilles is the same plight of all tragic heroes; a hero with unrivaled skill and passion was devoid of self-control and humility resulting in his destruction. Ultimately, his Tao was based on the mere arbitrary good. Achilles chose the Tao he wished to follow and even changed it as he saw fit. Returning to the evaluation questions: (1) Does the hero think the code is good? Due to Achilles' inclination to switch his code and then break the code that he switched to, it hardly seems that he thought either code was good. And while he eventually learned the lesson of humility and grace incumbent to Xenia by sparing the life of Hector's father Priam, it seems unclear whether the decision was due to his view on the goodness of Xenia or that he was merely broken over the death of his friend. He did not think his code was good; in fact, it does not appear that he

even contemplated the goodness of his code. The inherent recklessness to his poorly defined code made it impossible for Achilles to *consider* it good, let alone for it to actually *be* good.

(2) Does the hero's response to the code reflect the ultimate good of what the hero is attempting to achieve? Achilles' response to the code did reflect the ultimate good the hero was attempting to achieve, but this only occurred because that good was the morally corrupt ends of his own pride. The good of the code reflected the intent of the hero, but that good was not morally good. The goodness of the hero and the goodness of the code did not result in anything that appeared to be a morally just heroic goodness. Achilles was not a hero, and his heroic Tao did not result in heroism.

(3) Which is at fault, the hero or the code? Both. The arbitrary Tao—especially the one employed by Achilles—cannot result in the heroic good.

Finite Prescriptive Good

The world of the *Odyssey* was much more established within a moral and civil law framework than the *Iliad*. Homer's first epic portrayed a world of obscure ethical standards, resulting in an indecipherable ethical rift between a morally questionable protagonist, Achilles, and a morally honorable antagonist, Hektor.²² Achilles forfeited the title of hero through selfishness, poor motives, and because he did not progress towards a good and noble end. The hero of the *Odyssey*, although selfish and prideful as well, was more of a hero because he progressed toward a good and noble end, but his heroism was diminished because he did not employ good and noble means while progressing towards that end. While the *Odyssey* ends in heroic fashion, in that the hero defeats a clear

²² Markos, *From Achilles to Christ*, 79.

injustice and evil, as the crucial encounters and unnecessary compromises made throughout the *Odyssey* are evaluated, it will become apparent that although the hero has a heroic and good end, it is despite how he employs his heroic Tao and not because of it.

The contrasts between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are further cemented in the differing story types: tragedy and comedy. Tragedies always end in death, while comedies always end in marriage. The different stories resulted in different heroes, different heroic Taos, different means, different conflicts, and different resolutions. Any ambiguity that was present in the *Iliad* as to the true antagonist and protagonist is completely missing in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus is the primary protagonist and the suitors (the men attempting to marry his wife Penelope) are the primary antagonists.

Oikonomia

Xenia is the overall finite prescription of the *Odyssey*, but Odysseus provides a unique interpretation and motivation for that prescription. The “hero” Achilles lived and eventually died by the sword—it was his means and ends. The hero Odysseus (supposedly) was motivated by love—it was his means and ends. While Odysseus was no stranger to a sword, the sword was only a tool to achieve his end, which was (supposedly) the love he had for his family. The *Odyssey* takes place after the fall of Troy and has been referred to as a “domestic epic”²³ because the hero Odysseus (supposedly) desired more than anything to return to his home to be with his beloved wife and family. “Oikonomia” exemplifies his more specific notion of Xenia—it is his heroic Tao.

Oikonomia is where the modern usage of the word “economy” comes from. Both usages of the word are meant to convey notions of rational frugality and prudence, but the

²³ Markos, *From Achilles to Christ*, 81.

main distinction between the classical and modern usage is that the classical usage has an inherent ethical component.²⁴ Oikonomia is related to the guest-host relationship in terms of duty. Oikonomia is not as concerned with the notion of the guest, rather it is more concerned with the host and him safeguarding and ensuring proper household management.²⁵ The paterfamilias was compelled by Xenia and Oikonomia to ensure that his household was in proper order. The Apostle Paul even employed this term in the New Testament to refer to “stewardship” and “divine office.”²⁶ Oikonomia as a divine *office* warrants a transcendent prescription, subsequent to rational and intentional *duty*. Morally upright Greeks considered Oikonomia to be an issue of honor, and the call for such a standard was thought to ultimately be a divine calling.²⁷

As the evaluation of the *Odyssey* progresses, a certain universal theme inherent to hero myth arises. The hero’s more compelling challenges are always related to his heroic Tao. While a hero is often challenged outside of his heroic Tao, these challenges seem as mere formalities. As Achilles cut through the enemy lines to reach Hektor, there was little doubt that he would reach him; the real issue was how Achilles would respond to pleas of honor and mercy. It was the heroic Tao of Achilles that made him unable to achieve the status as a true hero because it did not allow him to act heroically. His refusal to grant mercy was the climax of the story; it regulated and reduced him to tragic “hero,” though

²⁴ Dotan Leshem, “Retrospectives: What Did the Ancient Greeks Mean by ‘Oikonomia?’,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 1 (2016): 226.

²⁵ Bradley A. Ault, “Oikos and Oikonomia: Greek Houses, Households and the Domestic Economy,” *British School at Athens Studies* 15 (2007): 259.

²⁶ John Reumann, “Oikonomia = ‘Covenant’; Terms for Heilsgeschichte in Early Christian Usage,” *Novum Testamentum* 3, no. 4 (1959): 282.

²⁷ John Reumann, “‘Stewards of God’: Pre-Christian Religious Application of Oikonomos in Greek,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77, no. 4 (1958): 341.

more aptly: tragic anti-hero.

The more significant challenges of the hero are proportionally related to the degree that he believes in the goodness of his heroic Tao. Achilles was primarily challenged in the areas of pride, and every time his pride was challenged it resulted in a compromise, and the compromise was obvious. Odysseus was often challenged in battle and wit, but it is doubtful that any reader ever feared that he would be defeated by sword or tongue. Since Odysseus' Tao was based on his (supposed) love for his family and his desire to return home, then the most significant encounters challenge this desire. And while he does overtly and constantly claim his motivation is to return home and set to order the affairs of his house, he constantly compromises in the area of his heroic Tao—in the end his pride rivaled that of Achilles.

The majority of the characters within the Homeric epics are relatively static and do not change. Achilles changed constantly, but the changes that he made were more about the feeble nature of his character and code. Achilles transformation from a semi-honorable warrior into a killing machine was instantaneous. Odysseus seemingly underwent a significant transformation, though it was slow and subtle, but it was ultimately a facade. While Odysseus was a character in the *Iliad*, and he played a significant role in that it was his clever tactic that circumvented the great wall via the “Trojan horse,” the fullness of his character was not revealed until the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad*, Odysseus required little assistance;²⁸ as a suave man and a gifted warrior, he was able to either talk his way out of trouble—even if it entailed nefarious tactics—²⁹ or fight

²⁸ P. R. Coleman-Norton, “Odysseus in the Iliad,” *The Classical Weekly* 21, no. 10 (1927): 74.

his way out. However, in the *Odyssey*, he required divine assistance on a number of occasions to overcome insurmountable barriers. Odysseus' pride grew throughout the *Iliad*, but it had to (supposedly) diminish throughout the *Odyssey* if he were to make it home. His pride needed to ebb because without the acceptance of divine intervention, he would have never made it home; however, his use of assistance eventually amplified his pride. Although initially it seems that Odysseus, by the end of his adventure, had learned a bit of humility, the sum of his actions proved that his pride never actually left him. Both Achilles and Odysseus are governed by pride. Achilles never attempted to hide his pride, while Odysseus was quite talented at feigning humility. The heroic and good ending of the *Odyssey* obfuscates Odysseus' moral and heroic shortcomings.

Although the preliminary image of Odysseus weeping uncontrollably while bereft of hope, weary from war, and longing for his love summons sympathy, one's sympathy for Odysseus should end there. While the scene depicts an outwardly broken Odysseus, as he progressed through the epic, he made thoughtless decisions that only a prideful and arrogant man would make, and not the decisions of a humble man who longed to return home. He quickly and continually proved himself unworthy of compassion.³⁰ While he claimed he was motivated by love, Odysseus constantly resorted to needless lies, trickery, and deceit.³¹

The first significant encounter that challenged Odysseus' heroic Tao was with Calypso. At first, Odysseus was the victim, captured by the alluring nymph and

²⁹ Joseph F. O'Connor, "Odysseus the Liar," *The Classical Outlook* 53, no. 4 (1975): 41–43.

³⁰ Emily Nicole Howell, "Odysseus Deconstructed: Crossing the Threshold into Critical Thinking," *The English Journal* 102, no. 1 (2012): 63.

³¹ O'Connor, "Odysseus the Liar," 41–43.

glamorous goddess who, knowing of his heroic exploits, thought him to be a fitting husband. While he was initially a reluctant captive, he did eventually take Calypso on as his lover and engaged in sexual intercourse with her. If love, if Oikonomia, were Odysseus' motivation and hope, he should not have given in to her advances. He was with her on the island for seven years, and while divine intervention was required to facilitate his escape, seven years seems too long of a time for a man as cunning as Odysseus to not plan and execute an escape. On many occurrences throughout the epic Odysseus was able to outwit gods, why was he unable to do so in this situation, especially after seven years? He was able to outwit many clever foes via quick thinking and improvisation, one would think that after seven years he would have deduced a number of plausible escape plans. One might be justified in believing that Odysseus relished the attention of the goddess and enjoyed the sexual liaison—he did not want to escape, he was not concerned with Oikonomia.

At the command of Zeus, Calypso relents and agrees to release Odysseus, but she first offers him immortality. Odysseus responds with what some might confuse as “humility.” He admits that it is illogical to deny such an offer, that the beauty of Calypso is superior to that of his wife, and that it would be foolish for a man to give up an immortal life with a beautiful goddess. While this seems like a powerful incidence of his unwavering love for his wife and family, this is merely the first of many incidences wherein Odysseus employs a false sense of humility as a means to puff his pride. Odysseus seemed content “lamenting” for home while engaging in sex with a gorgeous goddess when no one else knew of his situation, but as soon as Zeus sent Hermes to free him, he knew his sins were no longer hidden. He likely surmised that his fame would

grow if he became known as the man who walked away from immortality with an enchanting goddess just so that he can return home to his aging wife. All of the evaluated encounters enforce the conclusion that Odysseus' pride and people's lofty *perception* of his devotion to Oikonomia—as opposed to *actual* Oikonomia—motivated him.

Odysseus' next significant encounter was with the Cyclops Polyphemus who was a son of Poseidon. Poseidon hated Odysseus and often hindered him on his journey. Upon landing on the island, Odysseus assembled an elite contingent of his finest men to search for supplies. Odysseus concedes to series of prideful and unwise decisions while on the island, which only resulted in more prideful and unwise decisions. The consequences of his choices lead to the needless loss of life of *some* of his crew and the complete loss of morale from *all* of his crew. The first two ill-thought choices set the stage for the rest. First, despite knowing that the one-eyed brutes occupied the island, and that only a fool would enter such a treacherous environment with debilitated capacities, he decides nonetheless to bring a large amount of wine with him onto the island. Only a prideful man would willingly diminish his faculties while in the midst of such fierce warriors. Second, after consuming the wine, he experiences "A sudden foreboding told my righting spirit I'd soon come up against some giant clad in power like armor-plate—a savage deaf to justice, blind to law."³² However, despite the epiphany, he pressed on undaunted and underprepared. Later he came across a cave filled with sheep, crates of milk, and cheese. The cave had all the supplies they required and fulfilled the very purpose for landing on the island. Odysseus' companions urged him to collect the much-needed supplies and move on, but Odysseus ignored the good advice, his dark omen, and chose to remain

³² Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 9.

nevertheless.

The cave belonged to Polyphemus, and upon returning to his home he asked the strangers who they were. Odysseus had told many meaningless lies throughout his journey, and yet while faced with a menacing hulk, and likely the warrior his premonition warned him of, he decided to actually tell the truth. He said that they were returning from the conquest of Troy and warned the monster that Zeus was protecting them. Odysseus knew that the Cyclops worshiped Poseidon and that Poseidon was the fierce rival of Zeus. Polyphemus mocked the authority of Zeus. Despite Polyphemus rebuffing the authority of Zeus, Odysseus immediately appealed to Xenia, begged for mercy, and threatened Polyphemus with the wrath of Zeus if Xenia were denied. Begging and threatening are oxymoronic and imprudent; Odysseus merely used the guise of ‘honor’ to taunt the giant. Why would Odysseus appeal to Zeus after Polyphemus had already scorned the authority of Zeus? The asking for Xenia seemed to be nothing more than a provocation. Polyphemus was not concerned with Xenia and Odysseus knew this—Odysseus really just wanted to pick a fight.

He wanted to pick a fight that he knew would be difficult to win, and lest his men think him to be a reckless glory-driven warrior, he concealed his motives behind an innocuous appeal to Xenia, which he knew would only make matters worse because his premonition had already warned him that the monster had no concern for law or justice. Ostensibly he could later maintain his lack of culpability by claiming something like, “The honorless savage would not accept Xenia, what choice had we but to fight?” Odysseus wanted to fight the monster, but he knew there would be collateral damage to him and his men, so he wanted it to appear as if the fight was inescapable because Xenia

was denied.

Odysseus' unwillingness for sensible duplicity and his brash taunting cost him the lives of two of his crewmates. Polyphemus immediately killed and ate two of Achilles' men. After being captives to the Cyclops, Odysseus employed his cunning nature and skill to blind the brute and escape with the much-needed supplies. But escaping with a minimal loss of men while still obtaining the necessary supplies was still not enough for the pride of Odysseus. Odysseus could have escaped without further incidence as he had made it back to his ship and began to set sail. Instead of escaping, he chose to reveal his true identity as a perpetual enemy of Poseidon. At this point, Odysseus had yet to reveal who he actually was and chose a moment of danger to reveal himself. It was not enough for Odysseus to escape from and injure the fearsome brute; he needed the brute to know who had injured him—once again pride was his motivation. "Cyclops, if any mortal man ever asks you who it was that inflicted upon your eye this shameful blinding, tell him that you were blinded by Odysseus, sacker of cities. Laertes is his father, and he makes his home on Ithaka."³³ The Cyclops hurled giant boulders at the ship.

As if the revealing of himself as an enemy of Poseidon was not enough to placate Odysseus' pride, and the fear of being crushed by a boulder was not unnerving enough, he continued to needlessly mock, "Would to god I could strip you of life and breath and ship you down to the House of Death as surely as no one will ever heal your eye, not even your earthquake god himself."³⁴ This taunt did not help Odysseus' quest to restore Oikonomia, it was a meaningless and derisive gesture, which resulted in severe

³³ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 9.

³⁴ Ibid.

consequences. Upon discovering the identity of Odysseus and hearing the insults, Polyphemus cried out to Poseidon. The result of the prayer caused the ship to run ashore on the far side of the island. The crew was already weary, tired, and injured, but now due to the pride of Odysseus they were also unnecessarily demoralized, and the journey was pointlessly delayed once again.

One of the more significant and character-revealing encounters occurred with the Sirens: wicked creatures who lured sailors to their death through impossibly irresistible magical song. Odysseus was warned to avoid their song, but he decided that he wanted to get a taste of their bewitching tune and ordered his men to sail close enough to hear the alluring melody. In preparation for the Sirens' song, the crew placed beeswax in their ears and tied Odysseus to the mast. As the crew sailed near, he became overcome with the enchanting sound and ordered that his tether be loosed. The crew responded by adhering to the original instruction and tightened the restraints to prevent Odysseus from staggering mindlessly overboard and to his death.

The incidence with the sirens displayed once again the perpetual theme of Odysseus' gratuitous compromise through the testing of fates. If Oikonomia and love truly guided and motivated Odysseus, then why would he even put himself in a situation wherein he was forced to be bound by his crewmates? Why would he deviate his course to hear a voice of death if his primary motivation were Oikonomia? Many commentators have argued that since Odysseus was an adventurer and had an inherit lust for exploration and discovery, this was merely an example of a man's curiosity getting the better of him. He had merely put himself into a position to experience something unique but did so with precaution as to prevent negative repercussion. The men were safe due to the beeswax,

and surely, they were able to subdue him even if he were to break the restraints and scramble towards his imminent doom. But why would he even put himself in that position? Such brashness once again displayed that Odysseus considered his pride above Oikonomia.

It does not seem too far-fetched to suppose that he thought he could resist the sound of the witches, and he merely used the sirens' song as another means of amplifying his legend. He knew his feat would be dangerous, but his pride would not be denied, so he hedged his bets. His pride told him he could overcome the irresistible song, but due to the fear that he might be swayed, he had his crew tie him to the mast. He likely suspected that he would sail through the waters unscathed. Once through the danger, the crew would likely marvel at the will and commitment that Odysseus had to return to his home—it would bolster his legend and ego. However, the consequences of failure and the possibility—albeit slight in his mind—of being unable to resist the enthralling melody were too severe to leave unaccounted for. The goddess Circe warned him that no mortal man could resist the charismatic draw of the Sirens. If he failed, his men would likely surmise, “Of course he could not resist, no man could resist, but such courage to try.” It was a win-win for the pride of Odysseus: either he was successful and his legacy amplified, or he failed with no negative consequences, but he would nonetheless still receive praise for his courage. Once again Oikonomia was not his guide, it was his pride.

The final significant encounter in the *Odyssey* is the most revealing as to the true nature of Odysseus and his heroic goodness. After returning home, defeating the suitors, reuniting with his family, and restoring Oikonomia, Odysseus decided to meet with his father Laertes. Laertes had longed for the return of his son as much as, if not more than,

Penelope. Odysseus found his father working in the garden and approached him as a stranger. They greeted each other, and Laertes asked him his business. Odysseus knew that his father longed to see him, but instead of revealing himself, he claimed to be looking for Odysseus. Laertes began to weep. Instead of revealing himself at that point, he chose instead to watch as grief overcame his father. Laertes asked if the stranger knew the fate of his son, but Odysseus claimed to have not seen him for five years, which is when he left sailing for home, and that he hoped to find him here. Laertes knew that if Odysseus had left for home five years ago, he should have returned by then, and that his absence meant something tragic had likely happened to him. “At those words a black cloud of grief came shrouding over Laertes. Both hands clawing the ground for dirt and grime, he poured it over his grizzled head, sobbing, in spasms.”³⁵ Odysseus finally ended the torment of his father and revealed his true identity.

Odysseus could have run to his father and announced his safe return without deception, but he chose the route of cruel obscurity instead. Even at the sight of his father weeping was not enough for Odysseus to break his ruse. It was not until he saw with his eyes the deep lament of a mourning old man that he revealed the truth. It is possible that Odysseus subterfuge was a tactic to determine if his father was still committed to his family, but if his father had turned against Penelope and their *Oikonomia*, it is likely that Penelope would have revealed such treachery to him immediately. It is more likely that Odysseus’ pride motivated him once again. Instead of immediately pacifying a broken and tired man, he wanted to stroke his ego a bit more and saturate in the glory of being missed so severely—love or an ordered house did not motivate such deception. Nothing

³⁵ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 23.

could have motivated such a scene but unrelenting pride. The adventure had been completed, and while nefarious and trickster-laden tactics may have been justified at various times for survival, after the fighting had ended there was no need for such deception. The deception of the father was merely another attempt at an ego boost.

Odysseus' heroic Tao fares only slightly better than Achilles.' (1) Does the hero think that the code is good? Throughout his odyssey Odysseus continually vocalizes his deep longing for Oikonomia and to be reunited with his love. His expressed desire for reunification was apparent, but a corresponding disposition to that desire never followed. If the love for his family were truly his motivation, then why would he make so many unnecessary compromises and add preventable burdens and hardships to his journey? The vocalization of intent is insufficient to suppose that that intent was true, and for Odysseus his intent was not love, it was selfishness. He used Oikonomia as a tool for self-promotion and ego massage.

While it seems that Odysseus had a genuine love for Penelope, he acted as if the love was nothing but a tool that could add to his mystique—Penelope was just another instrument for inflating his pride. Odysseus' killing of the suitors seemed more motivated by the idea of, "Don't you know who I am? I was a hero of the conquest at Troy; I have outwitted men and gods, and bested monstrous foes. You would dare attempt to take over my house?" As opposed to, "You have broken the covenant of Oikonomia, the divine calling for order, love and goodness. For these transgressions you are worthy of incurring wrath." Odysseus thought his code to be good only to the degree that his praise remained on the lips of men.

The second question, (2) Does the hero's response to the code reflect the ultimate

good that the hero is attempting to achieve? Like Achilles, Odysseus did not move toward a worthy good because the good that he was moving towards was his own pride. *Prima facie*, he was moving toward the good that was the reunification and the proper standing of his household—and he did achieve that good—but to him Oikonomia was merely an exploitable tool used to exalt himself. Therefore, the hero's response to the code does not reflect the ultimate good that the hero was attempting to achieve.

So then, (3) Who is at fault, the hero or the code? Once again, both are at fault. Odysseus is at fault because he never really attempts to keep the code. Had he really attempted to keep the code, he would not have placed himself in so many precarious situations. If love were his motivation, then he would not have slept with Calypso, taunted the Cyclops, listened to the Sirens' song, or lied to his father. While his words touted the goodness of the code, his actions proved that the code did not influence his actions.

Oikonomia fails as a successful guide because it lacks any true directional value. Like many heroic Taos that are not based on the infinite prescriptive good, the result is a tautology that does not progress toward any morally or heroic end, but merely defaults to the high law: the flourishing of life at all costs. If a hero were to follow Oikonomia as his heroic Tao, his motivation would be an ordered house. While having an ordered house can result in good means and ends, that good does not transcend human life. If the good does not transcend human life, the deceptive tumble into utilitarianism and the dangers of the high and low law become unavoidable.

The high law manifests itself if one attempts to explain his heroic Tao: "I am divinely called to order my house. The ordering of my house will achieve the heroic

good. A non-existent house cannot be ordered; therefore my house must exist if it is to be ordered. Since the ordered house is the heroic good, I must do whatever it takes to ensure that it exists and exists correctly. If the ordering of my house comes into conflict with the ordering of someone else's house, I must strive hard to ensure that my house is the one that is ordered so that I may achieve the good."

Oikonomia, and similar heroic Taos will always default into the high law because the good of an ordered house can only be measured with the flourishing of the house or rather the flourishing of life. However, if the flourishing of life is good because life should flourish, the result is a mere tautology. While no consistent ethicists would maintain that the flourishing of life is bad, the point is that the ultimate notion of morality and heroic goodness must transcend that of mere survival or the flourishing of life. If morality or the heroic Tao does not transcend survival, then morality cannot be measured as anything other than what brings about the high law.

One might maintain that Oikonomia does transcend mere survival because it is a "divine calling" given by gods. However, if Oikonomia were a divine calling, then by what right did Odysseus have to deny the offer of immortality presented by Calypso? Because Calypso was a god, she had sufficient authority to literally proclaim a "divine call." Since it was a divine calling given by a divine source, Odysseus should be required by his heroic Tao to accept her offer. In fact, what she offered him was a loftier Oikonomia than what he could have achieved with his wife because a union and marriage with Calypso could have the potentiality to last forever since the two would be immortal. Her offer for immortality would overcome the problem with tautology and utilitarianism.

The refusal of a divine Oikonomia could only be justifiable if there existed a higher prescription to which even the gods were also subject.

It is possible that there exists a transcendent infinite prescription that is purely nominal in nature. If a nominal infinite prescription were logically possible, then it would explain the law to which contingent gods and people may appeal.

Nominal Good

It is difficult to conceive of how something can be infinitely prescriptive and nominal at the same time, but one of the greatest myths of all time is based on such a notion: Star Wars. Star Wars represents a universe that can provide an infinite prescription due to the idea of “the Force:” “Well, the Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us; it binds the galaxy together.”³⁶ The Force governs all of existence and its ultimate goal is to maintain balance between good and evil. No gods of the Egyptian, Greek, Roman, or Norse pantheons, nor any other collection of contingent gods, yield the type of power that the Force does. The Force, in theory, is capable of producing a true overarching and universal prescription and is able to do so from an infinitely grand perspective.

“May the Force be with You”

Similar to “Xenia,” heroes and villains alike share in the same heroic Tao: “May the Force be with you.” This heroic Tao is unique from the previously examined because the heroic Tao of the Star Wars universe is something of a meta-Tao. It is a meta-Tao because the Force is concerned with the balancing of opposing sides (goodness and evil),

³⁶ George Lucas, *Star Wars: A New Hope* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 1977).

which is also the explicit purpose of the heroic Tao in general. The heroic Tao incumbent to the nominal prescription of the Star Wars universe details what heroism resembles when balance itself is both the moral and heroic good. The palpable apprehensions concerning the implementation of “balance” as the heroic means are two-fold: balance does not progress toward any end (it cannot obtain Aristotelian goodness), and the goal of balance does not result in moral or heroic goodness.

Nominal morality is based on balance or opposing forces. With balance, there is no inherent good or inherent evil; to claim that a thing is inherently good would be similar to maintaining that the attractive force of magnets is inherently good, and the repulsive force of magnets is inherently evil—neither attraction nor repulsion are inherently good or evil because they are merely opposing forces. In nominal morality goodness is merely a label or a name that represents the opposite of evil, but the labels of goodness and evil are ultimately arbitrary. The goal of the nominal good is balance. Balance itself is a problematic heroic Tao because it does not progress toward any end other than to continue on in a state of balance. Balance is a state that requires constant guidance because there is no end to the attention required for a balancing act—it is an unending process. If a process is endless, then that process cannot obtain Aristotelian goodness. This would be similar to a shipwright who takes an infinite amount of time building her ship and she never actually allows it to prove that it has sea-worthy-goodness. Obviously no physical process can last an infinite amount of time, but suppose that this shipwright comes from a long line of shipwrights. Each generation is fully trained in every area of the ship building process, but each generation focuses solely on a single ship. Experienced sailors and shipbuilders trained the first generation of

shipwrights, and together they created an identical reproduction of a ship the sailors knew to be sea-worthy. However, instead of putting the vessel to sea, the shipwrights decided to re-check their work and measurements. This process of checking and rechecking the vessel continued with each new generation. The shipwrights would continually examine and reexamine the original blueprints for error, replace parts of the ship when the wood and cloth festered from time, and would recurrently examine every aspect of the ship to ensure that its specifications were on par with a sea-worthy vessel. However, if the ship were never put to sea, then it could never actually obtain Aristotelian goodness.

A ship cannot begin to obtain Aristotelian goodness until it proceeds towards its intentional and good end: a sea worthy vessel is built. However, the building of a good ship is insufficient for true goodness because it must be measured against the thing that displays its goodness: the ship is tested by the sea and is sailed. If the ship is never sailed, then it can never actually be considered truly Aristotelian good. Similarly, since there is no end to balance, then the Force can never obtain Aristotelian goodness in the context of morality.

Goodness and evil are merely nominal in the Star Wars universe, but even the nominal morality requires constant attention so that the balance can be maintained. The process of correction and overcorrection would occur forever without balance ever being fully achieved. As long as creatures with free will can make decisions, then the balance of goodness and evil would require constant attention. “Balance” can never achieve any end because by nature the process is endless; however, even if the Force were able to achieve the continued and stable end of balance, this would entail that the Force would have to act equally on the opposing sides because balance cannot occur if only one

polarity receives attention. But if balance were the predicate for goodness and both of the opposing sides require attention, then the Force would have to actively engage in, author, prescribe, and enact evil—if the Force only engaged in, authored, prescribed and enacted goodness, balance could not occur.

Balance as a meta-Tao does not result in moral goodness. “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?” The sting of Epicurus’ famous quotation concerning the problem of pain and the existence of God has been rendered innocuous due to philosophers such as William Lane Craig and Alvin Plantinga. Craig has argued that it may be impossible, even for an omnipotent being, to create free-willed creatures that do not sin (or cause evil). Similarly, Plantinga has argued for the notion of “transworld depravity:” God is unable to actualize a world that contains moral goodness in a world free from moral evil. Plantinga and Craig’s arguments remove God’s culpability by appealing to human free will. However, in the case of the Force, it must actively create and encourage evil if balance were to remain—Epicurus’ criticism casts doubt on the Force being able to produce moral goodness.

The Force creating and guiding moral agents further coerces that balance cannot obtain either Aristotelian or moral goodness. Since the ultimate goal of the Force is balance, then when it chose to create moral agents (or allow them to be created), the agents must have been created with the intent of being amoral or rather purely neutral agents. Since the goal of the Force is moral neutrality and balance, it would not make sense to create creatures with true moral agency, a desire to do what is good, or even free

will at all. In fact, if true goodness were found in balance, why create any moral agents at all? It seems there are only two surefire ways for balance to occur: never create moral agents or simply wait until all moral agents have died.

Why does freedom exist in the Star Wars universe if the goal for man and reality is to obtain moral balance? Evil is something that is only possible if agents are given free will. The Force would have been able to achieve the infinite goodness of balance if it had merely created man without free will. Craig and Plantinga's arguments cannot rescue the Force from Epicurus' condemnation because the introduction of freedom is not necessary in the Star Wars universe if the end is balance. Balance could have been achieved had the Force never granted any creature moral agency. Why then did the Force allow for free will?

Since balance is the goal, then the Force cannot overcome the logical problem of evil. In his book, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Plantinga argues that since God is able to use evil to bring about a greater good, the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God is not incompatible with the existence of evil. Plantinga's argument only works if God has the capacity to bring about a greater good, but his argument would fail if God were unable to produce a greater good. The weight of the logical problem of evil cripples the Force because it has no desire to bring about a greater good, but rather mere balance. Further, since the goal of the Force is balance, then if a greater good were to occur, the result would be a more troubling and damning evidential problem of evil.

It is reasonable to suppose that the Force, in light of mounting evil, is justified in responding with competing goodness to vanquish that evil. But would not the Force likewise be compelled to act identically in light of mounting goodness? Would not the

Force require a reciprocal response of evil in order to quell a rising goodness and restore balance? The evidential problem is even more significant in the context of the Force because the amount of evil, if the right conditions obtain: there is too much goodness, must purposefully and willfully be increased by the Force. If balance is the goal, then the Force must diminish goodness if it were to become too prevalent.

The evidential problem of evil is further compounded and the problem of balance as a heroic Tao is likewise heightened when one considers how balance is implemented or even not implemented. Suppose a man were raised on a peaceful primitive planet; there is no war, famine, or even natural disasters—life flourishes. There are two means that the Force may maintain balance in light of such a peaceful planet: it could either cause bloodshed and war to breakout on the peaceful planet or allow another planet to experience global war, famine, and natural disasters so it can be balanced against the planet of global peace. Both of these conclusions increase the evidential problem of evil. The Force is not morally justified in making a peaceful planet a warzone or increasing the fighting and killing of a planet already engaged in war.

One may argue that it is impossible for a peaceful planet to exist due to the inherently evil nature of moral agents. But this argument is weightless because why would the Force allow moral agents to be either inherently good or evil? And why would one assume that moral agents must be inherently evil? While the Judeo-Christian notion concerning “sin nature” explains man’s inclination towards evil, there is no evidence that any moral creatures of the Star Wars universe must default to inherent evilness. The Star Wars universe, as with all myths, rely on either an implicit or explicit “fall,” which explains the existence of evil and suffering. In Star Wars, the fall is implicit. Moral

creatures in the Star Wars universe are mirrored off of the moral creatures in a fallen world, but there is no justified reason why creatures in such a universe should ever endure a fall since a fall entails a previous state of goodness. A previous state of goodness, however, would only be possible if moral agents were originally created to be good. Since balance is the goal, there should not be either an inherent goodness or evilness in man, but rather inherent balance. Moral agents in the Star Wars universe do not require free will or an inherently good or evil nature to obtain the Force's notion of moral or Aristotelian goodness; therefore, it does not make sense to suppose that there is a divinely-imbued evil or good inclination in man, only a divinely-imbued balance. But if man is divinely imbued with balance, where does goodness and evil come from?

Setting aside why the Force did not simply revoke moral agency and create a perpetual and "good" neutral nature for man, it is still problematic if the agents are born with either an evil or a good nature. If the Force created moral agents with an evil nature, this would entail that it must rise up heroes to combat that evil. But what would be the nature of those that it rose up to fight the inherently evil? If those creatures too are inherently evil, then it must change their nature to goodness so that the other evil natured creatures can be diminished and balance maintained. But if the Force is able to change a nature, then why not merely change the nature of the inherently evil to inherently balanced?

What if the Force created moral agents with a good nature? The consequences are much more severe than agents being born with an inherently evil nature. While the same problem would occur, in this scenario the Force, if it changed one's nature from good to evil, would be compelled to actively corrupt inherently good moral agents so that those

agents not corrupted would have something to fight against so that balance can occur. If the Force created moral agents with a good nature, this would entail that it must rise up villains to combat the goodness. Again, what is the original nature of the villains? Is it goodness? If yes, then the Force must corrupt good-natured moral agents in order to make them villains merely to create a balance.

As the evaluation of the nominal Tao progresses, it will become apparent that the Star Wars universe does not actually have heroes or villains, but merely people who are on one side of the opposing Force. The rest of the examination will focus on the actual implementation of the heroic Tao within the myth. The examination of Star Wars will be different from the examination of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. What makes this evaluation different is that one has readily available access to the justification and motivation behind the moral philosophy of the myth's creator: George Lucas.

The Force balances good and evil and this balance is implemented through two opposing factions. Monastic warrior-peacemakers known as the Jedi enforce the good or light side of the Force. The Sith order opposes the Jedi and enforce the evil or dark side of the Force. Originally the Sith were members of the Jedi order but disagreements concerning the nature of the Force caused a schism, and the two groups separated. Since the separation, the two factions have been in constant conflict. The Sith employ passion and power to seek the good of the Force, while the Jedi employ wisdom and self-control to seek the good of the Force.

Jedi vs. Sith

A series of "good" and "evil" characters will be evaluated, but as this evaluation proceeds it will become more and more apparent that the labels of "good" and "evil" only

represent, like the Force, opposing ideologies and not inherent or clear values of goodness or evilness. This conclusion is apparent because, while there is a capacity for infinite prescription with the Force, there are no means to determine what that actual goodness or evilness is. Moral ineffability becomes obvious due to the contradictions of the characters. No matter the affiliation, the Sith or the Jedi, both hold to contradictory notions of morality and heroism, and the result is a prescriptive good that lacks all possibility of practical prescription or even knowability—it is merely nominal. The nominal inclination is directly related to the poison of subjectivism. Since epistemological subjectivism will always result in moral subjectivism, and moral subjectivism will always result in epistemological subjectivism, it does not matter what type of subjectivism is examined as both will result in the impossibility of the heroic goodness being achieved.

Obi-Wan is the original mentor to the series' prime protagonist Luke Skywalker. The earliest advice given to Luke from Obi-Wan is tainted with subjectivism. In their first onscreen encounter, as Obi-Wan begins to introduce the ways of the Force to Luke, he encourages Luke, "You must do what you feel is right of course."³⁷ Obi-Wan is a seasoned Jedi and grew up in the prime age of Jedi tutelage wherein the journey begins as young children, and his sage advice to fulfill the will of the Force, to fulfill the infinite prescriptive good, is for Luke to make a subjective choice based on feelings. Such advice is troubling for two primary reasons: it is impossible to create an ethical theory based on feelings and basing what is true and good off of passions (feelings) is exactly what caused the schism between the Jedi and the Sith in the first place. Both of these troubling

³⁷ Lucas, *Star Wars: A New Hope*.

conclusions will continually manifest during this evaluation.

If feelings were considered a reasonable and reliable source for truth and goodness, how could two people with competing feelings ever be justified in what is true or good? Feelings often prove themselves to be quite unreliable guides. Since the law of non-contradiction is necessarily true in all possible worlds, it is impossible for both of the competing agents to be correct, one of the agents must be mistaken about his feelings, but how could one ever know which person is mistaken concerning their feelings? The problem with feeling-based justification is that it is ultimately an inert (innocuous) hypothesis. Some things cannot be proven to be true, and some things cannot be proven to be false. Since it is impossible to differentiate between these two things, the duel of feelings between two subjective individuals becomes an inert hypothesis.

Compounding the issue further, when Anakin Skywalker³⁸ was Obi-Wan's apprentice, he gave him the completely opposite advice. Anakin saw that his love was in trouble while he was on an important mission. He wanted to leave the mission and save his love but Obi-Wan told him, "Anakin! Don't let your personal *feelings* get in the way!"³⁹ Which is it? How is one meant to know the will of the Force? Is one meant to follow his feelings or to deny them? And how does one know which is meant to occur and when? Moral and heroic goodness cannot be based on feelings.

Subjectivism obfuscates. It is impossible for anyone to adhere to subjectivism without obvious contradiction. Once Anakin had given over to the dark side he had a duel

³⁸ Anakin Skywalker is the father of Luke Skywalker. He was fabled to be the Jedi who was meant to put an end to the Sith. However, instead of putting an end to the Sith, he ended up becoming one. The result was Anakin transforming into the fearsome Darth Vader, slaughtering a multitude of Jedi, and ruling the universe with a remorseless iron fist.

³⁹ George Lucas, dir., *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2002).

with Obi-Wan. In the epic and passionate battle between Obi-Wan and the now Darth Vader, Vader challenges his former master, “If you're not with me, then you're my enemy.”⁴⁰ With intensity and stoicism Obi-Wan responds, “Only a Sith deals in absolutes...”⁴¹ Obi-Wan’s assertion is paradoxical. To what degree is he certain of his own statement? If he does not believe it at all, then why would he utter it? If he had little belief in it, then why would he say it with such zeal? And yet if he absolutely believes that only a Sith deals in absolutes, what does that make Obi-Wan? If his own reasoning follows, then Obi-Wan has betrayed the Jedi order and has fallen in with the evil Sith himself. It seems obvious that Obi-Wan is absolutely certain about many things, but most consequently, that it is good for one to be a Jedi, and it is bad for one to be a Sith. However, is Obi-Wan is *absolutely* sure there is a discernable difference between the Jedi and the Sith, let alone that one faction is good and the other one is evil? Is that not also dealing in absolutes? Would that not result in Obi-Wan becoming what he is attempting to fight against? The employment of absolute truth is an insufficient criterion to differentiate the Sith and the Jedi or the heroic good from pure viciousness.

Further, what of the conversation that Obi-Wan had immediately before his confrontation with Vader? There was a horrific event at the Jedi temple and many Jedi—even the “younglings”—were slaughtered. While examining the carnage Yoda noted that many young Jedi had been killed by a lightsaber (the weapon of the Jedi). Obi-Wan feared that his apprentice had fallen to the dark side but needed to know for sure. Obi-Wan wanted to check the security footage, but Yoda warned him that if he looked at the

⁴⁰ George Lucas, dir., *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005).

⁴¹ Ibid.

footage the only result would be pain and grief. Obi-Wan was insistent claiming that he had to know “the truth” about Anakin Skywalker. He did not want to know “*some* truth,” or “*a* truth,” he wanted to know “*the* truth.” But if Obi-Wan desired to know “the truth” about Anakin, does that not presuppose that there is but a single truth that grounded the events surrounding the massacre? But if a single truth grounded the situation, and that truth is knowable, is not an example of an absolute truth?

Obi-Wan’s view on morality and truth does not correlate with an infinite prescriptive good, but it seems to point toward the subjective good. If the Sith are known for following their passions and seeking power, and if they truly believe and feel that such a means fulfills the will of the Force, then by what right does Obi-Wan have to fight against the Sith order? How does one justify a conflict of warring feelings? Is it possible for any sort of ethical system to be developed from a group who bases the will of the infinite prescriptive good on a subjective response to it? Subjective responses cannot differentiate goodness and evil.

Yoda was a Jedi master who had trained Jedi for 800 years. He was one of the most powerful and wisest Jedi ever to have live. Surely, he should be able to provide insight as to the content of the infinite prescriptive good inherent to the Force. Unfortunately, Yoda too merely appeals to feelings and contradictory teachings. While continuing the training of Luke Skywalker, Luke asks Yoda how he will be able to tell the difference between the goodness and evil. Yoda responds, “You will know when you are calm, at peace. Passive. A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense, never for attack.”⁴² So the sage advice from one of the most powerful and wisest Jedi of all time, is

⁴² Irvin Kershner, dir., *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 1980).

that good and evil can be discerned if someone is calm and at peace. But calmness and peace can hardly be sufficient criteria for the knowledge of the good—sociopaths are quite calm and peaceful about horrific actions to which they commit.

How does Yoda's advice compare to the Sith? The series' prime antagonist is a Sith Lord named Darth Sidious. When Anakin was talking to Senator Palpatine (Sidious in disguise) about how the Jedi use their power for good, he responds, "Good is a point of view, Anakin. The Sith and the Jedi are similar in almost every way, including their quest for greater power."⁴³ Palpatine spoke with a calm and peaceful demeanor, and it definitely seemed as if he felt as if he was seeking and fulfilling the good of the Force. If goodness is based on the subjective feelings of a person and goodness can be known through being at peace, in what sense could the "evil" Sidious be incorrect? In what sense could Sidious even be evil? While Sidious could be curt in discussion and vicious in combat, for the majority of the series he was definitely at peace, calm, and passive. It does not seem that Sidious considered himself to be evil at all, but rather operating from merely a different perspective than the Jedi.

Many consider the difference between the Jedi and Sith to be merely that the Jedi seek to flourish and protect life, while the Sith seek to exploit people and gain in power, but even this difference is not warranted. Anakin was having a series of nightmares, which were premonitions of the possible loss of his wife and love. Yoda responds to his fears with the advice, "Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose." He also taught, "Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force. Mourn them do not. Miss them do not. Attachment leads to jealousy. The

⁴³ Lucas, *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*.

shadow of greed, that is.”⁴⁴ Such thinking contradictory because it essentially entails to “let go of letting go,” or “desire to not desire,” such paradoxical thinking is unworkable. It is unworkable because if a hero is meant to let go of what he fears to lose because if life is not worth protecting, then how can he act heroically? What if a person is being assaulted? The hero should let go of his desire to help? What if a person is being killed? The hero should not intervene but rather rejoice because that person is about to become one with the force? It is impossible to act heroically with Yoda’s teaching.

Yoda’s actions prove that his advice is unworkable. He not only constantly and vigorously fights against “evil,” which contradicts his notion of letting go of what he fears to lose, but he also never acts as if one should rejoice in death. In one scene Obi-Wan and Anakin are fighting against the powerful Sith Lord Count Dooku. The Jedi know that if they can defeat Dooku before he retreats, they will be able to prevent a universe-wide conflict that would ultimately cost the lives of millions. But the Jedi were no match for the powerful Sith Lord. Dooku’s victory was short-lived as Yoda arrived to confront the fallen Jedi. Yoda too, knew the stakes of defeating Dooku, and after quickly proving himself a superior warrior to the Sith, Dooku fabricated a “moral dilemma” to slow down Yoda so he could escape. Dooku used the Force to crumble the ceiling above the incapacitated Anakin and Obi-Wan. Yoda had a choice: he could either save his fellow Jedi or stop the Sith Lord from escaping and beginning a war that would lead to the death of millions. Dooku’s tactic worked, and Yoda allowed Dooku to escape so that he could save his fellow Jedi.

Yoda’s choice was an impossible one, but it was not impossible for the reason

⁴⁴ Lucas, *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*.

that most would suppose. Many would errantly suppose that Yoda was forced to act on a moral dilemma, but the scenario that Yoda was placed in should by no means be considered a moral dilemma. Yoda's moral philosophy does not allow for a moral dilemma concerning the preservation of life. Yoda's choice was impossible because either choice would not make sense based on his own teachings. Why should Yoda even hesitate to allow the debris to crush his students? Should he not allow it so that he could rejoice in them becoming one with the Force? One could argue that Yoda wanted to protect life, and that is why he chose to save his comrades. But if this were his motivation, then what about the millions of people who would die, the planets that would be devastated, and the cultures that would be ruined due to the galactic-scale war that would result from Dooku's escape? Surely allowing his students to die would protect more life than a galactic war. Yoda's choice is impossible because he must choose between one of two anti-heroic decisions: let his students die and rejoice in their death or prevent their death and rejoice in a universe wide holocaust—a hero rejoicing in any amount of death hardly seems heroic. George Lucas claimed that the essential difference between the dark side and the light side was greed and compassion.⁴⁵ Was Yoda's choice to let two of his friends die at the cost of millions an example of greed or compassion? It is impossible to answer that question because Yoda's choice, no matter what he decided, would be both greedy and compassionate. It is greedy to save his students because, despite his affections for them, he should rejoice when they become one with the force. Therefore, to let them live is greedy. However, obviously due to man's basic moral intuition, it is apparent that to save others is an act of compassion. Therefore, Yoda saved

⁴⁵ Bill Moyers, *The Mythology of Star Wars with George Lucas and Bill Moyers*, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/groups/183185/videos/38026023>.

them due to compassion. Such a moral philosophy is simply unworkable.

Can one even rightly argue that the Sith truly only care about destruction? When Luke Skywalker had his first major confrontation with Darth Vader, Vader told him, “Luke, you do not yet realize your importance. You've only begun to discover your power! Join me, and I will complete your training! With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict, and bring order to the galaxy.”⁴⁶ Vader’s desire was for conflict to end. Obviously, the antonym of conflict is peace—Vader wanted peace. He also wanted there to be order rather than chaos. Since Jedi are galactic peacekeepers, does not Vader’s desire for order and peace not align with the intent of the Jedi?

The differences between the Jedi and Sith seem to be relatively minimal. Both hold to subjective notions of truth and morality. It is impossible for a hero to truly act in accordance with the subjective good and still resemble one’s most basic and intuitive understanding of heroism—Star Wars has proven this point. The only redeeming factor for Star Wars is that Luke Skywalker, and the majority of the “good” characters, did not act as if truth, goodness, and heroism were really subjective at all. Lucas was forced to write the story in a way that was contradictory to the moral philosophy of the characters because without moral realism, without a real hero fighting a real villain, the story is not compelling—there would be no story at all. Humans identify with heroes because heroes represent the ideal actions of man. If the subjective philosophy of Star Wars followed suit, it would be impossible to rightly differentiate between Luke Skywalker and Darth Sidious.

George Lucas explained his intent for creating Star Wars, “I am telling an old

⁴⁶ Kershner, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*.

myth in a new way.”⁴⁷ But his new way of telling myth erred on that which is central to all philosophy and myth: the existence of absolute or universal truth. Without universal truth, communication could not occur between two people. Without universal truth not only could one not discern the difference between good and evil, but one would not know the difference between up and down. The poison of subjectivism mars everything. Fortunately, Lucas, like most subjectivists, did not act as if subjectivism were true. He posited subjectivism as the overarching moral and epistemic philosophy but disregarded it for purposes of sensibility and a desire to tell a good story.

Lucas’ view on religion reflects his wayward view on truth. Lucas is not an atheist. He believes that some sort of God exists, but he wonders why if that there is only one God, then why are there so many religions? He concluded that all religions are true, and that each religion merely sees a different part of the same God.⁴⁸ This is helplessly absurd. The law of non-contradiction does not allow for Lucas’ view of religion. If a religion claims that only one God exists, and another claims that multiple gods exist, they cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time; one of the religions must be true and one must be false. Lucas holds to such a contradictory view for two primary reasons. First, he is attempting to appeal to a postmodern audience that has rejected concrete moral and epistemic thoughts.⁴⁹ And, he does not welcome the inexorable conclusion of his moral philosophy. Without the constraints of universalism, Luke Skywalker, and every hero who seeks to solve a problem while committing the fewest compromises possible, inevitably and unavoidably points towards Christ. This point will be argued to a

⁴⁷ Moyers, *The Mythology of Star Wars with George Lucas and Bill Moyers*.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Downing and Thigpen, “After Telos,” 40.

further degree in the final chapter, but it is interesting to note that even with a contradictory moral and epistemic philosophy, even with the poison of subjectivism, even with the intent of universalism, Lucas must rely on the goodness inherent only to the infinite prescriptive good and even with the conflicting philosophies and intent, Luke Skywalker resembles a Christ-like figure.

Luke Skywalker is a true hero in the sense that he did not commit any true compromise. While it is true that under the weight of subjectivism it is virtually impossible for someone to compromise (because there are no concrete moral standards of which the hero can compromise against), intuitively though, humans can recognize that Luke Skywalker is truly what a hero is meant to look like. However, is the result of Luke's heroism the result of his code? (1) Does the hero think the code is good? Luke does seem to think that fulfilling the will of the Force is good. By following the code, he was able to put an end to the Galactic Empire, see the end of Darth Sidious, and redeem his father. No moral agents can rightly argue that these ends are not morally good.

(2) Does the hero's response to the code reflect the ultimate good that the hero is attempting to achieve? The hero's response to the code does not reflect the ultimate good that the hero is attempting to achieve simply because there is no moral goodness found within the Force or the Star Wars universe. Luke may have desired what many reasonable people consider to be moral goodness, and Luke may have fought against what many reasonable people consider moral evil, but the Force cannot differentiate between goodness and evil—the code fails

So then, (3) who is at fault if the hero commits a compromise, the hero or the code? While Achilles and Odysseus failed as heroes and their codes were proven

unsuitable, Luke Skywalker proved himself to be a true hero even though his code lacked the ability to create such a hero. Luke did not compromise. Luke was a hero despite the moral confusion inherent to his code. How it is possible that Luke, despite his code, is still a hero will be discussed later.

Conclusion

Notions of heroism are apparent in any myth that contains heroes and villains. It is not the intent of this chapter to suppose that heroism is only possible under the infinite prescriptive good, but rather that none of the other reductions consistently and rightly prescribe heroism based on their heroic Tao and the corresponding reduction. No reduction of the good can properly allow for true heroism except for the infinite prescriptive good. Nihilism denies the existence of good and evil, and if there is no such thing as goodness, then a hero cannot act according to it. Subjectivism cannot differentiate between goodness and evil, and a hero who cannot differentiate between goodness and evil cannot act heroically. Finite prescription allows for the possibility of heroism, but if the prescription is from a finite or contingent source for goodness, to what is the finite or contingent source based on? If there exists a notion of goodness that even the pagan gods are subject to, then the finite prescriptive good is contingent on something loftier: the infinite prescriptive good. An infinite prescriptive good must be the source for morality and the heroic good. If the infinite prescription is so obscure that it merely results in a nominal good, then the problems inherent to subjectivism resurface and destroy the possibility of moral goodness and heroism. The only possibility for true heroism and moral knowledge is if there exists a true person-independent infinite prescribing God similar to the Judeo-Christian notion of God. Without a single master,

without an overarching mega-narrative, there cannot be justice or goodness—true heroic and moral goodness can only rightly be derived from a single transcendent prescription that is loftier than the pagan gods and is not concerned with balance.

CHAPTER 3: THE INFINITE PRESCRIPTIVE GOOD

Moral realism, “that some ethical truths are necessarily true”¹ is difficult to deny. It is difficult to deny because of man’s intuitive knowledge of moral virtue and vice,² and his guidance based on the reductions of the natural moral law. While it might seem reasonable to suppose that intuitive and inherent moral knowledge would cause very little moral disagreement amongst people,³ the problem of moral disagreement actually further enforces the infinite prescriptive good reduction and moral realism.⁴ It is not merely a problem of man’s knowledge of morally real propositions. Instead, the problem with humans is that humans act contradictory; all people have a natural propensity to know and make moral claims, but man also has a propensity to not act in accordance with those moral claims—man needs divine assistance to know and to be morally good.⁵ The initial step for that divine assistance will be explained in this chapter. It is not the intent of this chapter to defend moral realism or objective moral truth. The goal is to argue that if objective or necessary moral truths exist, they must come from a single source: the infinite prescriptive good. Then efficacy of the law can be explained in light of that single source.

There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Iluvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made. And he spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad. But for a long while

¹ Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason*, 88.

² Schaeffer, Dennis, and Packer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy*, 100.

³ Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge*, 117.

⁴ David Enoch, “How Is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Realism?,” *The Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 15–50.

⁵ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 7.

they sang only each alone, or but few together, while the rest hearkened; for each comprehended only that part of the mind of Iluvatar from which he came, and in the understanding of their brethren they grew but slowly. Yet ever as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in unison and harmony.⁶

J.R.R Tolkien imagined God to be something of a celestial maestro and the act of creation was a work of art wherein the product of that art was asked to become a part of the orchestra. The single source for music beckoned all other voices to join in harmony. C.S. Lewis, fellow Inklings member and good friend of Tolkien, presented a similar musical aesthetic for his fictional creation myth.

In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing...it seemed to come from all directions at once...Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard...Then two wonders happened at the same moment. One was that the voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. They were in harmony with it.⁷

It is curious that two of the most esteemed experts on myth both employed music as the aesthetic basis for their respective creation myths. While Tolkien's myth was far more complicated than Lewis', the reason both men used music as their foundation was due to the inherent symbolism and nature of melody, harmony, and disharmony. Melody is the rational universe. A melody, even a subjective melody, allows for objective aspects of harmony and disharmony. Without a melody there cannot be harmony. The melody is the standard from which all goodness is derived; harmony is an attempt to achieve the good. Without a melody there cannot be disharmony; without an objective standard there is also no objective evil. The melody of creation establishes the world in terms of thesis and

⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 15.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970), 98-99.

antithesis, consonance and dissonance, the straight and the crooked—through it the rational universe is known and knowable.⁸

The Genesis Rabba is a part of the Jewish Talmud that predates Plato. The Genesis Rabba is a Midrash or a type of rabbinical literature which acted as an imaginative commentary of a given biblical passage. A passage from Genesis Rabba could provide some insight as to the motivation of Lewis and Tolkien:

There was Yahweh, who in earth is called Adonai; and he made first the Malakhim, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made. And Yahweh spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad. But for a long while they sang only each alone, or but few together, while the rest hearkened; for each comprehended only that part of the mind of Adonai from which he came, and in the understanding of their brethren they grew but slowly. Yet ever as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in unison and harmony.

And it came to pass that Adonai called together all the Malakhim and declared to them a mighty theme, unfolding to them things greater and more wonderful than he had yet revealed; and the glory of its beginning and the splendour of its end amazed the Malakhim, so that they bowed before Adonai and were silent...

Then Adonai said to them: 'Of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Ruach Ha Kodesh,⁹ ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song...¹⁰

The divine melody creates an objective standard—"something is good or evil

⁸ Schaeffer, Dennis, and Packer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy*, 7.

⁹ Modern Christians would consider "Ruach Ha Kodesh" to be something of the equivalent of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Ancient Jews did not think of the Holy Spirit as a divine person but rather a divine guiding force.

¹⁰ Swazo, "Bereshith and Ainulindalë" Allegoresis and Exegesis in Tension," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 16, no. 4 (64) (2006): 302.

independently of whether anybody believes it to be so”¹¹—for truth and beauty and (moral) goodness. The celestial song is the measuring rod to which all things of gradation can be measured and weighed: goodness, truth, and beauty. The aspects of reality that correspond to the song are harmonious and the aspects that diverge from it are disharmonious.

The meta-melody is the source for all truth and knowledge; it is also where the logical natural law is derived. The divine song is both completely objective while correspondingly—and seemingly contradictorily—being also subjective and objective at the same time. No matter if the song were compromised of subjective and objective truths, a divine melody will always remain an objective standard nonetheless. The only purely objective knowledge that man has is the knowledge inherent to necessary truths that can be known *a priori*: the laws of logic and the cogito. Besides things that are true by definition, all other knowledge of man is limited, and it will always lack the true objectivity inherent to necessary truths. The reason that the *a priori* is required for man to be justified in his knowledge of the purely objective is his limited knowledge, ability, and moral goodness. However, none of the aspects that limit man can rightly be applied to God. God is not moved: He is static in his omni-attributes. Therefore, if God were to provide a subjective melody or standard, this subjective song would still be to man as absolute objectivity. Due to God’s omni-attributes, man is justified that the standards given by him are truly objective and truly good.

Some have argued that since God is personal in the sense that he has volition and desire, then whatever he prescribes must likewise be subjective. God is subjective in the

¹¹ Nathan L. King and Robert K. Garcia, eds., *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 30.

sense that he is a subject and has personhood, but he is objective in the sense that he is outside of and transcends human emotions, beliefs, and values.¹² If God is the creator of all reality and his only limitations are based on the logical contradictions integral to his omni-attributes, then his “subjectivity” still results in pure objectivity. Therefore God, when compared to man, is an example of pure objectivity; however, since it is nearly impossible to prove that every aspect of reality is necessarily true (for example that ants must exist in every possible world) then there are subjective aspects to the divine melody.

Kant argued that a requirement for moral thinking was complete information and complete impartiality.¹³ Kant referred to such a hypothetical observer as an “archangel.” The archangel was meant to act as an objective third party observer. The epistemology of Kant¹⁴ and his reluctance to believe that any human could possibly bring about such a privileged and unbiased state of observance is what drove him to the employment of the categorical imperative. One variety of Kant’s categorical imperative argues that one should act as if he were a legislating member in an ideal “kingdom of ends”: a systematic union of rational beings united by common objective laws.¹⁵ The legislation of the ideal kingdom is meant to summarize various essential moral values that one would ideally hold. He suggested the ideal kingdom method because he wanted categorical imperatives to have an intuitive aspect to them.¹⁶ Kant seems to be contradicting himself though; the ideal kingdom derived from the moral intuition of man does not seem to satisfy any of his

¹² Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason*, 60.

¹³ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 19.

¹⁴ Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge*, 91.

¹⁵ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 15.

¹⁶ Thomas E. Hill, “Kantian Constructivism in Ethics,” *Ethics* 99, no. 4 (1989): 766.

requirements for categorical imperatives or the requirements of an archangel.

Lewis and Tolkien were in agreement with Kant concerning the need for an archangel, but they argued God was able to meet the necessary requirements of the archangel¹⁷ due to his very nature. The myths of Lewis and Tolkien were an apology for classical thought, as they wanted to subvert the poison of post-modernism and reclaim the clear distinction of the vicious and the virtuous.¹⁸ The initial avenue to reclaim classical thought and moral realism is found in the establishment of a creation myth. A creation myth entails that there exists a standard by which man is meant to follow. It is only through a divine “meta-melody” that the virtuous and the vicious can be known.

Comparing the need for an archangel with an argument for moral objectivity will be presented as evidence for a single source of the natural moral law and the infinite prescriptive good. William Lane Craig argues, “If theism is true, we have a sound foundation for morality.”¹⁹ He also concludes that such a proposition is also grounds for a sound basis for moral objectivity.²⁰ If moral objectivity is true, there are three means by which man may have knowledge of it: the arbitrarily objective, the axiomatic, or a personal transcendent prescriptive source. An example of the arbitrarily objective would be something like Sam Harris’s dictum that “human wellbeing” allows for objective morality independent from God. The axiomatic view is that objective moral knowledge is similar to the laws of logic, and they exist apart from God as necessary and objective

¹⁷ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 22.

¹⁸ Louis Markos and Peter Kreeft, *On the Shoulders of Hobbits: The Road to Virtue with Tolkien and Lewis*, New ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 10.

¹⁹ King and Garcia, *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?*, 30.

²⁰ Ibid.

truths. No matter the source, since man is meant to act in accordance with objective natural laws, then the sources for that knowledge must be prescriptive in nature.²¹

Not everything that exists must necessarily be created, but it is only immaterial objects that can exist without being created. Logic, for example, could be such an immaterial object. If there exists an eternal being who is rational (such as the Judeo-Christian notion of God), logic would also have existed eternally because its properties would be had by the eternal being because of his ability to reason. A foundational definition for existence is something has properties or properties are had by something: exemplification, predication, and instancing occurs.²² If this definition of existence is accurate, it seems unlikely that the axiomatic view for objective moral truth could also be accurate because if objective moral truth were only possible when a subjective person believes that she has discovered an objective, necessary, and non-intentionally derived moral law, then in what sense is that law objective and necessary? Necessary truths, if they are to be necessary require eternal predication if they are to likewise eternally exist, and the axiomatic view cannot account for this.

The attempt to ground axiomatic moral thought independent from God is based on logical positivism: a theory of knowledge which assume that one can know facts and objects with complete objectivity—this is the basis for modern scientism.²³ Historically, logical positivists would disagree that it was possible for morality to be considered as anything other than language.

The focus on language made sense to the logical positivists, for with their

²¹ Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart*, 187.

²² Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 175.

²³ Schaeffer, Dennis, and Packer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy*, 308.

verifiability criterion of meaning, a sentence was meaningful if and only if it was empirically verifiable. The meaning of a sentence was not to be identified with the intention of its speaker (with an immaterial mental state, with a metaphysically universal property present in it). Rather, meaning must fit within the purview of the natural sciences and their empirical methodology. Without universals, language could not truly involve word types (for these would be universals), but only particular word tokens, which would be physical. Meanings too had to be reduced to physical thing, and the best candidate available seemed to be language (behavior, which science could study). Hence nominalism applied to words and meanings and not just to other physical things in the world.²⁴

But if objective moral knowledge is based on mere language, then it cannot be prescriptive, but rather merely descriptive. However, "It is widely accepted within philosophy that we cannot move from the way humans or animals are to moral ideals. The first is descriptive the second is prescriptive."²⁵

Even if one were to ground objective moral knowledge on axioms, they would do nothing to explain the inherent value of humans independent from the high law. "Human value cannot be based on any specific function of humans [such as the ability to reason] because then not all humans would have equal value."²⁶ If human value was based on some sort of ability or function of a human, then one would be justified in denying that person moral consideration or to grant him human rights if he lacked that ability or function.

More difficulties with the axiomatic view will be examined as the efficacy of the natural moral law is explained. It is more reasonable that a person is the predicate for moral prescriptions: the archangel. The problem with a human archangel is that his limited knowledge will always limit his ability for proper moral evaluation. Even a

²⁴ Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge*, 112.

²⁵ Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist*, 239.

²⁶ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 117.

contingent being with a superior and privileged perspective, such as Zeus, though his perspective is superior to that of humans, also has contingent his moral knowledge. Suppose that a more privileged archangel existed; unless this archangel were a necessary being, then his knowledge would likewise be contingent, and he would fail as a moral evaluator. The source for moral goodness should also be the ultimate archangel: a being that can act as an eternal predicate for the laws of logic and objective moral truths.

Following is a basic presentation for an eternal prescribing archangel. This is presented as a basic model and it is beyond the scope of this work to argue for each of the premises. The goal of presenting this argument is that it is more reasonable that objective and necessary moral truths come from a single, personal, and infinite prescriber, than impersonal axioms that lack proper predication.

1. For any prescription p , p exists only if some intentional mental state M has p as an object.
2. Some prescription p exists *eternally*.
3. Therefore, p is the *eternal* object of some intentional mental state M (from 1 and 2).
4. But p is the *eternal* object of some intentional mental state M only if M exists eternally too.
5. But there is no *human* intentional mental state M that exists eternally.
6. So, there is some non-human intentional mental state M that exists eternally.
7. For every intentional mental state M , there is a mind that has M .

8. So, there is some eternal, non-human mind.²⁷

Establishing eternal prescription in an eternal mind, however, does not initially seem to grant one knowledge of that eternal prescription: the content of the natural moral law. The strength of the theistic case for the natural moral law is found in the capacity for the moral prescriptions to be truly objective and universal because all of creation is subject to and contingent upon God. The weakness of the theistic case for the natural moral law is, “What is the point of having an objective natural moral law, if the contents are inscrutable?” The first aspect in determining the content of the infinite prescriptive good is to explain how man has the capacity to know it. The human capacity to know the law is itself evidence for the law’s existence and purpose.

Knowledge in a Rational Universe

Suppose a man is walking in the woods. While in the midst of his journey, he discovers an area clear of trees. In this glade, there are several rows of fruits and vegetables on the left side, a circular stone table with stone benches in the middle, and an assortment of wild flowers and orchids on the right side. Upon closer inspection, the man notices that the area has somehow been damaged. The stone table is cracked, the flowers have been trampled upon, and a number of the plants have been uprooted. From this scene, the man could surmise the following: First, the order and intricacy of the glade suggests that it is a garden. Second, gardens have gardeners. And third, the traveler would probably conclude that the gardener did not intend for his garden to be damaged.

Few would dispute the first claim—that is, that such an intricate mixture of

²⁷ Eminent Metaphysician and Philosopher Andrew M. Bailey (Associate Professor of Humanities/Philosophy and residential faculty fellow at Yale-NUS College) aided in formulating this argument.

foliage should be termed a garden. It is surprising, therefore, how many people would disagree with the traveler's second conclusion. Some argue that it is possible for a garden to exist without a gardener—that objective moral laws can exist without objective moral law givers. While it is theoretically possible for something to *look* like a garden without aid of a gardener, it would be unreasonable for the traveler to surmise that the garden was produced through random physical processes. It would even be unreasonable for the traveler to not have a reaction to the garden's order and intricacy compared to the rest of the forest. Order is so often accompanied by intentionality and intelligence that it would be ludicrous for the traveler to deny that a gardener arranged this area. Suppose, however, that the above scene was produced through natural processes—that neat rows of flowers and vegetation were produced by seeds disseminated by the wind and that the stone table and stone chairs appeared through natural erosion. This naturally produced "garden" would not be a garden at all, but a mere perceived resemblance of a garden. If we deny the second claim, then we lose the first.

To fully elucidate this point, consider another example. After years of erosion on a particular mountainside, a statue resembling Thomas Jefferson was produced. In letters above the statue could be found the phrase, "This is Thomas Jefferson." Even if such an improbable event did occur, it is impossible for said statue to be a direct representation of Thomas Jefferson. Direct representation, by definition, is both intelligent and intentional; erosion is neither. Consider the following syllogism:

- 1 A direct representation requires an agent with an end goal.
- 2 Erosion lacks an agent with an end goal.
- 3 Therefore, erosion cannot produce a direct representation.

This argument serves to show that the naturally produced statue, regardless of remarkable appearances, cannot be a direct representation. Similarly, it is in one sense theoretically possible for natural processes to produce a perceived resemblance of a garden; however, it can never be a garden in the truest sense of the word.

With respect to the garden analogy, God is analogous to the gardener, and that some sort of objective natural moral law—the infinite prescriptive good—is analogous to the garden. Like a garden, an objective natural moral law cannot exist without an intelligent and intentional agent behind it. Thus, it must be the case that if a subjective observer believes that he has discovered an *uncreated* or axiomatic objective moral law, he must be mistaken. The only possibility would be that the man had merely stumbled upon a perceived resemblance of an objective moral law. It cannot actually be an objective natural moral law because an objective law simply requires an objective lawgiver. If an objective law requires an objective source, the naturalist who advocates objective law must also posit a source for the same. If he fails to posit a source other than himself, society, nature, axioms, or anything else that is either subjective or is comprised of or derived from subjective agents, or is intellectually unjustifiable, then his objective law turns out to be little more than his own subjective opinion untenably projected and packaged as “objective.” However, the very reason that humans aspire to discover and identify the contents of an objective natural moral law is due to the law’s intrinsic capacity to surpass the limitations of subjectivism—the law must be objective if it is to act as an efficient moral guide.

If a naturalist were to suppose that she has knowledge of the natural moral law because of perceived moral order in people, society, nature, and philosophy of law, she is

not actually interacting with or responding to an objective natural moral law, but rather a perceived resemblance of an objective natural law. The difference between perceived resemblance and direct representation is that the former results in moral subjectivity and the later moral objectivity. Even if erosion were to produce a perfect bust of Thomas Jefferson, it could not actually be him due to a lack of intentionality. The same follows with the natural moral law: if one merely perceives a resemblance of a law, but does not adhere to the vital intentional aspect, as well as being unable to establish an eternal predicate for the contents of that law, then she has no intellectual or moral justification for her perceived resemblance of moral order. Moral order, like the sculpting of a statue, must be derived from an intentional agent. To deny the intentional agent is to pacify and annul the efficacy of the law, which would also render it subjective and therefore useless.

Suppose a man comes across a wall. Written on this wall is a fragment of John Betjeman's poem *Slough*, "Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough, it isn't fit for humans now." Would anyone surmise, "This probably came about via natural means?" Unlikely. One would be more inclined—and more justified—to believe that this poem fragment was the product of intentional intelligence. This is, linguistically, a rather simple poem. Each line contains four iambic feet and ends with a masculine rhyme. Young poets are capable of such composition, but not brick walls. If one were to throw paint at the wall, he would be lucky to end up with one recognizable letter. It is, statistically and logically, impossible to end up with this rhyme by chance.

The previous examples of the garden, statue, and poem do not represent an *epistemological* need for an intentional agent, but rather an *ontologically* necessary need for one: the transcendental argument. Epistemologically speaking, it is possible for a

“garden” to come about via non-intentional means, just as it is possible for random scribbling to produce a “poem,” but if the poem and the garden were to come about through random and non-intentional processes, then they would not actually be gardens or poems. Metaphysician Richard Taylor explains the need for intentionality if there is going to be transference of information:

Suppose you are traveling on a train and you look out of the window and see on a hillside a collection of rocks which together clearly form the words “Welcome to Wales”. Now you are perfectly free to believe that those stones were arranged on the hill by random forces of nature, however if you do so you cannot, at the same time, believe that you are actually entering Wales.²⁸

Taylor applies this thought experiment to the idea of rationality existing in a world or universe that is not based on a rational cause and concludes that if irrationality was the ultimate cause for the universe, then even the statement, “One is never justified in believing that the universe is a product of a rational cause,” must be considered false. Or that the naturalist is at liberty to believe that all of her cognitive faculties and reasoning are the product of an irrational cause, but if all of her rationality is based on irrationality why should her thesis even be considered—one is free to believe reason got here by chance (a non-rational cause) but if true, then one would have no basis to believe that, or any other seemingly true proposition. Thus, the naturalist seems to be caught in a trap. If she is consistent with her naturalistic presuppositions, she must assume that human cognitive faculties are a product of chance or purposeless forces. But how can chance and purposeless forces yield intentional and rational ends? The naturalist appears grossly inconsistent by placing so much trust in those ultimately irrational faculties. But, if she assumes that her cognitive faculties are trustworthy and do actually provide accurate

²⁸ Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991), 59.

information concerning the world, the naturalist would be necessarily compelled to abandon one of the cardinal presuppositions of metaphysical naturalism and to conclude that her cognitive faculties were formed as a result of the activity of some purposeful, intelligent agent.²⁹

Only in a rational world derived from an eternal rational creator is one justified in believing that man even has the capacity to know any sort of external rational suppositions at all, let alone that he can have knowledge of eternal objective moral truths. The only means of concluding that this world is rational is if it is intentionally ordered by a supremely rational being: the infinitely good prescriber or God. The existence of reason presupposes the existence of a rational creator because a defense of reason by reason itself is ultimately circular and proves an impossible task—reason can only properly function and be reliable if man were the product of God. The coexistence of reason and natural law explains man’s connection to that law:

The purpose of human reason is to participate in the wisdom by which God made the universe, and one way human reason participates is to grasp the purposes that God has implanted in human nature itself. If this were impossible, natural law would be impossible.³⁰

The Efficacy of Natural Moral Law

The requirement of an intentional source for the natural moral law, however, does not aid one in determining the content of that law; it only explains man’s capacity to know it. While it will be posited that aspects of the content of the infinite prescriptive good can be known, it is also true that the content of the natural moral law is not overtly

²⁹ Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 59.

³⁰ Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart*, 109.

obvious. However, even while lacking specific examples as to the content of the natural moral law, it will be argued that knowledge of that laws' existence itself is beneficial for moral knowledge and living. Although humans can know that an objective natural law exists, they cannot always precisely identify the content. Since the natural moral law (the infinite prescriptive good) is a type of natural revelation,³¹ then absolute knowledge and clear delineation of each of the prescriptions and contents of the law is not the full and actual intent of it. The significance and intent of a natural moral law is not the content, but rather the existence of a law entails a giver of that law—prescriptions have prescribers. And, if there is a giver or a prescriber of the law, then there exists some being that has given explicit—albeit at times inexplicable—statutes for the superintendence of human life and the fulfillment of the good. *That* there is a giver of the law is *prima facie* more important than *what* the actual content of that law is.

The precise identification concerning the content of an objective natural law is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition in determining or having knowledge of the existence of that objective natural law. The ethical skeptic, however, might raise the following question: “How can a person know of something that she cannot precisely identify? How can such a law be meaningful?” The answer to this is actually quite simple. What a moral law entails—that there exists a transcendent moral lawgiver—is more meaningful than a precise knowledge of the specifics of that moral law. To explain, suppose two men are camping in a deep wood and they hunkered down in a makeshift cabin. One morning, the first man begins to walk outside to collect some water. When he opens the door, the man notices a large bear watching him. The first man quickly slams

³¹ Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart*, 180.

the door. The ruckus piques the interest of the second man.

“What is going on?”

“There is a bear outside!”

“Is it a male or a female?”

“I have no idea.”

“What kind of bear is it?”

“I didn’t get a very good look. I was too afraid—it’s a *bear!*”

“What color were its eyes?”

Finally, the first man erupts, “What does any of that matter? There is a huge predator outside?!”

What if the second man argued, “Since you cannot differentiate amongst any of the essential or common attributes of bears, then I conclude that there is in fact no bear outside—there is no danger. The distinguishing details concerning the large predator are far less consequential than the fact that a large predator, which is known to have humans for meals, is immediately outside the cabin. The first man could not clearly delineate specifics of the predator, but was precise allocation of properties a crucial task? The imminent presence or existence of the bear demanded far more attention than the specific attributes of the bear. The men would best spend their time by avoiding the outside, ensuring the cabin’s security, and remembering that when they do venture out, a dangerous beast is in the area.

The existence of a natural moral law is also correlated with the existence of human souls. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to effectively argue for the existence of souls; however, since it is a classical notion and it is still currently defended by

philosophers such as J.P Moreland, the existence of them will be presupposed. The soul is the thinking center of sentient beings; it is a non-spatial entity that allows for immaterial thought to bring about physical action in a given animal or man. To a degree, both animals and humans have souls; however, there is a vast dissimilarity between the human and the animal soul.

Plato argued that the human soul is innate, immaterial, eternal, and is a divinely placed attribute that allows man to perceive things like natural laws. For Plato, the soul was man's ability to interact with the immaterial form of spiritual truth or reality, while at the same time allowing one to act in the physical realm.³² He considered the care of the soul to be paramount and more important than any earthly possession. Aristotle agreed with Plato and argued that happiness (the fulfillment of the good) was a function of the soul,³³ and that the good of man is found with acting in accordance with virtue."³⁴

The primary difference between man and animal in the context of souls is man's unique ability to employ second-order mental thoughts, or to have thoughts about thoughts. Richard Swinburne in his book *Evolution of The Soul* argues that, while it is empirically impossible to dogmatically deny the existence of second-order thoughts in animals, based on observation, it seems man is justified in not attributing this property to animals.

Languageless animals cannot, for example, show understanding of the distinction between universality and mere normality—e.g. between “all crocodiles are dangerous” and “normally crocodiles are dangerous.” The same behavior of fleeing from crocodiles will result, and for each belief the hypothesis that the animal has that belief has the simplicity to give an integrated account of this

³² Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 11.

³³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1.

³⁴ Ibid.

behavior; either belief could result, by principles of inference which humans use, from sensory stimuli. Hence we cannot attribute to animals our concept of universality (which is so sharply distinct from mere normality).³⁵

Humans are different from animals because humans alone have the capacity to consider something (the infinite prescriptive good) that is only knowable through a uniquely human attribute: the soul.

The access of second order mental states is not an issue of intelligence, but rather it is merely a function of humanity. If the intelligence of animals were increased exponentially, it would not entail that an animal would suddenly be capable of having thoughts about thoughts. Such a conclusion is misguided because intelligence alone is not sufficient to account for second-order mental states. A computer has a potential for intelligence that is far beyond any human; it can be programmed to be a master at chess or even carry on a conversation. A computer, however, does not have the capacity for second-order mental states.

For the last few decades, discussions of AI (artificial intelligence) have had mixed reviews. While some maintain it will likely be a part of our future, some (like Philosopher John Searle) maintain that it is impossible. He explains that it is impossible for a computer to think by presenting the following example:

Imagine a native English speaker who knows no Chinese locked in a room full of boxes of Chinese symbols (a data base) together with a book of instructions for manipulating the symbols (the program). Imagine that people outside the room send in other Chinese symbols, which, unknown to the person in the room, are questions in Chinese (the input). And imagine that by following the instructions in the program the man in the room is able to pass out Chinese symbols which are correct answers to the questions (the output). The program enables the person in the room to pass the Turing Test for understanding Chinese, but he does not understand a word of Chinese.

³⁵ Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 208.

Searle explains that the man in the room is analogous to a computer. While computers process information at an incredible rate, this does not entail they have the capacity to think about what they process, which would be the rough equivalent of a second-order mental state.

Therefore, intelligence is insufficient to account for second-order mental states, which is one factor that distinguishes humans from animals. This is pertinent to the discussion of the natural moral law because it demonstrates that humans are the only creatures on this earth that have the aptitude to discern that natural moral law. Swinburne argued that universal thoughts require the capacity for second-order mental states. Therefore, humans are the only beings capable of universal thoughts, since they are the only beings that are capable of second-order mental states. This ability exclusively allows humans to make universal moral claims, such as, “A man should *always* try to rescue his family from a burning house.”

The existence of the unique human function itself acts as a sufficient means for man to know something about the law. Consider the scene from the first Superman movie wherein Lex Luthor uses a unique frequency to broadcast a personal message to Superman: “This is Lex Luthor. Only one thing alive with less than four legs can hear this frequency, Superman, and that's you.”³⁶ Due to Superman’s faculties, he was able to hear the message directed to him. Because of humanity’s faculties, he is able to hear the message directed to him: he has universal moral thought and can comprehend the existence of a natural moral law. A message capable of being discerned by a specific group is a message for that specific group—humans alone can discern a natural moral law

³⁶ Donner, *Superman - The Movie*.

therefore the natural moral law is a direct message to humanity.

Humans have the unique function of moral awareness in order to assess behavior against a moral paradigm: the natural moral law. It is incumbent upon those who deny this claim to explain why humans have this function if it is not to allow them to recognize and apply the natural moral law. Natural law and the human ability to interact with it correlate so well that establishing the existence of one strongly suggests the existence of the other.

Since humans alone have the capacity for second order mental states, two vital conclusions manifest. The first, because humanity's innate ability to discern natural moral law is limited to him alone, man is justified in knowing that the content of the law is directed at him alone. If the content of the law is aimed at man alone and man alone is capable of abstract moral thought, then the purpose of the natural law is for man to know that he *ought* to obtain moral goodness, even though the natural moral law cannot fully explain how such goodness is obtainable. The second, natural moral law is not only a moral imperative, but it is also a rational directive—natural moral law is inlaid with a command for humanity to employ her intelligence to seek that moral oughtness. The natural moral law is not just a blanket moral standard placed on the hearts of men, but it is also a commission for him to engage his cognitive faculties and rationality to determine the content of the infinite prescriptive good—natural moral law is a general command for both moral and intellectual excellence. But the content of the law is still unknown.

Even though the specifics of the natural moral law might initially seem inscrutable, the infinite prescriptive good is still quite relevant because it aids in achieving the heroic good. The existence of the natural moral law, as already made clear,

entails the existence of a lawgiver. If the lawgiver exists, then this results in at least, but not solely, some kind of moral accountability. The infinite lawgiver acts as the ultimate archangel. Even if no other aspect of the natural moral law could be determined at all, the law is still effective because the existence of a transcendent being that holds humans morally accountable—because that transcendent being infinitely prescribes objective moral goodness—should itself be effective at regulating conduct. At the realization of a transcendent moral lawgiver, any reasonable person should examine if he might be living within or without of the moral bounds of the law. The result is a type of existential morality: *that* the infinite prescriptive good exists is more important than *what* the content of the infinite prescriptive good entails. The existential morality is effective because knowledge of the existence of the law results in and acts as the law's content. Man's knowledge of an archangel prescribing moral law should cause him to formulate a moral philosophy to determine the content of that law. In such a scenario, Kant's notion of the categorical imperative represents an acceptable attempt at determining the content of the infinite prescriptive good.

A curious means of determining the content of the infinite prescriptive good is through deviance. Though humans have strayed and continue to stray from the precepts that seem apparent to the infinite prescriptive good God, it is actually through deviance that a moral standard can still be discerned. Consider again the man who found the ravaged garden in the woods, based on harmony and disharmony, the man, even if he had never seen any of the vegetation before his encounter, would be able to determine what the garden was meant to look like. If the man notices a stalk of corn broken and lifts the stalk upright and back into its original position, he would be justified in believing that

this is how the corn was meant to look even if he had never seen such a plant before. He would quickly determine that the flowers and vegetables cannot thrive outside of the soil and therefore should remain planted if they are to grow. Through surveying what nature is meant to look like and then comparing the damaged state, the man has an idea of what the garden is meant to look like. Likewise, by surveying the deviant behavior in men, one can loosely discern the content of the natural moral law.

Deviance from a standard may lead to knowledge of the standard itself. Deviance is disharmony, and moral disharmony is evil. The existence of evil is helpful in discerning the content of the infinite prescriptive good. It is only through an infinite prescriber that knowledge of evil can be known: A godless universe “has no problem of evil at all; in fact, it doesn’t really have evil. But then it doesn’t have good either. It has molecules and atoms.”³⁷ Without an infinite prescriber, there is no standard to be broken. Since deviance, as seen with the garden example, can inform one of a standard, then clear instances of evil may aid one in determining the content of the law.

To elucidate the point on deviance, suppose that there are two men in a room. One man is a professional trumpet player, while the other knows nothing about music; the second man cannot read music and in fact does not like listening to it. The trumpet player begins playing the chromatic scale. After playing five notes, the trumpeter plays the wrong note, and for some reason he cannot remember what the correct note is. The other man, even though he hardly knows anything about music, is able to notice, without doubt, that the trumpeter has played the wrong note. The second man is able to do this without any specific musical knowledge, training, or emotional attachment. Further, the trumpeter

³⁷ Karl Giberson and Donald A. Yerxa, *Species of Origins: America’s Search for a Creation Story* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 186.

begins to play random notes attempting to figure out what the correct one should be. Based on the progression of notes leading up to the error, the man listening can know that each note that does not follow the progression must be incorrect. In the midst of this process of the trumpeter attempting to figure out the correct note, the second man is able to recognize the correct note when it has been played, and he is able to achieve this without having any knowledge of what the man was attempting to produce musically.

How is it possible for the second man to be able to notice that the wrong note had been played even with practically no knowledge of the chromatic scale? Further, how is it possible that he is even able to realize what the correct note should be without skill or experience in the area of music? As Jeremy Begbie points out, there is a natural order to music. Various notes and their harmonic overtones have mathematical relations. Inherent in these relations are consonance and dissonance. In short, certain notes "sound good" together because of their mathematical relations to each other. All of this is so, not because of any human-made construct, but because of the nature of sound itself.³⁸ The second man has no technical skills in music and accordingly could not name the note. He could not say, "The note you are trying for is an A-sharp." Nonetheless, the second man could know that the wrong note had been played and what the correct note *should* be, even without being able to clearly define the correct note.

The infinite prescriptive good, much like the natural mathematical properties of music, allows for humans to notice a disharmony between how people *actually* behave and how people *should* behave. Further, it seems that this notion of the natural moral law, similar to the nature of music, does not owe its existence to human effort, but rather

³⁸ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 37.

exists independently from humans. If the law exists outside of human constructs, but yet humans can know when an event is disharmonious, then this entails that though the infinite prescriptive good does not guarantee knowledge of the harmonious, the disharmonious is much easier to identify. Similar to the listener, a person who notices a moral disharmony may not be able to clearly define why it is disharmonious or what would be harmonious, but yet is still be justified in thinking that it is actually disharmonious.

Consider again the prescription, “Torturing babies for fun is immoral.” Nearly everyone would agree that this prescription is objectively true, but it is impossible to know that this is objectively true without an objective prescription. However, an objective prescription is not possible without an objective prescriber. The tension between the truthfulness of the statement as objectively true and the impossibility of having objective tenets without an objective prescriber leads one to conclude that perhaps such a proposition is actually related to the content of the infinite prescription. Part of the content of the law is found in the moral sentiment derived from the torturing babies proposition. The proposition elicits primal notions of protection, that a man ought to protect those who are unable to protect themselves. It might be reasonable to conclude, based on this readily knowable objective moral tenet, that part of the content of the infinite prescriptive good is not merely moral goodness, but heroic goodness—heroes protect those who need protection.

So then, the purpose and a portion of the content of the infinite prescriptive good is a general call for man to be rational and moral and to employ those properties in correlation with each other while attempting to live virtuously in light of the existence of

an infinite archangel prescriber. However, one of the more readily knowledge objective moral truths seems to be concerned with protection, therefore the content of the prescription also has something to do with heroism. The synthesis and culmination of rationality, morality, and heroism might be part of the content of the infinite prescriptive good, and such a synthesis can be tested by an implementation of a logically consistent moral philosophy and the testing of that moral philosophy via a logically consistent hero myth.

Since the infinite prescriptive good is concerned with a general call for intellectual and moral justification, then an initial approach to the law should be made with humility and a desire to determine how one is meant to act. The initial approach is that of moral faith: “the trust that things are so ordered that my future well-being is consistent with my trying to live a life that is morally good.”³⁹ Kant explained that moral faith is simply the type of moral character a person desires to have.⁴⁰

The Heroic Tao of Frodo

The Heroic Tao of Frodo is difficult to define. It is not a simple phrase that one could readily point to and defend. His Tao is based on several fundamental key features of moral goodness. The only means of effectively arguing for the Tao is to explain the motivation of Tolkien coupled with the plight of all moral creatures. Once this has been established, the Tao can be explained and the effectiveness of it while employed by Frodo can be examined.

Tolkien had no affection for allegory. The fictional world of *The Lord of the*

³⁹ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 92.

⁴⁰ Joseph S. Trullinger, “Kant’s Two Touchstones for Conviction: The Incommunicable Dimension of Moral Faith,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 67, no. 2 (2013): 369–403.

Rings was not an allegory for his Christian faith, but rather it was a retelling of his Christian faith. Tolkien's relationship with his faith and his love for myth is part of the reason why myth is so difficult to accurately define. Obviously, the works of Tolkien are fictional, yet C.S Lewis referred to the stories as "true."⁴¹ But how can a fictional work be true?

Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary "real" world.⁴²

Tolkien considered the chief purpose of life was to increase according to one's capacity his knowledge of God by any means,⁴³ and to be moved by it to give praise and thanks.⁴⁴ To this end, he considered that *The Lord of the Rings* was a "fundamentally religious and Catholic work."⁴⁵ If the purpose of man is to know God and to give him praise, and *The Lord of the Rings* is a religious series, then it would seem that his story was an act of praise that contained aspects of both the natural moral law (the infinite prescriptive good) and the special moral law (the Scriptures).

However, except for a few obscure references to worship and prayer, the world of Middle-earth seems to be devoid of religious devotion.⁴⁶ Consider the similarities

⁴¹ Devin Brown, *The Christian World of The Hobbit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 17.

⁴² Tolkien, Tolkien, and Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 144.

⁴³ The name of "God" within *The LORD of the Rings* is "Eru Ilúvatar." For all intents and purposes, Eru Ilúvatar will be considered as being fundamentally identical to God of Judeo-Christianity. Therefore, if God is mentioned, it is both a reference to Yahweh and Eru Ilúvatar.

⁴⁴ Louis Markos and Peter Kreeft, *On the Shoulders of Hobbits: The Road to Virtue with Tolkien and Lewis*, New ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 22.

⁴⁵ Tolkien, Tolkien, and Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 172.

⁴⁶ Brown, *The Christian World of The Hobbit*, 24.

between *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Iliad*. The worlds are nearly identical in regard to their relative location in the progression of history.⁴⁷ They both occur before some type of Socratic character can bring to light the fundamental issues of goodness, truth, or justice. There is no formal philosophy of law like the one eventually developed by the Greeks. The societies both function as shame/honor cultures and both praise the skilled warrior and the conquering king. Both worlds are filled with mystical beasts and fierce creatures. In *The Lord of the Rings*, men must contend with angels (Ainur) and demons (Umaiur), while in the *Iliad* men must contend against the similarly powerful gods of the pantheon. The worlds were pagan,⁴⁸ full of evil and conflict, and man was in the midst of the storm attempting to figure out his place and role in the universe.

The striking difference between the two worlds is there is definitely a sense of moral realism within *The Lord of the Rings*. The reason there is moral realism within Tolkien's work is because the world is the product of a Judeo-Christian-like God. Though the world of the *Iliad* was very similar to Middle-earth, moral realism is only evident in Tolkien's work. The moral philosophy incumbent to the pagan *Iliad* does not allow for moral realism due to shifting and chaotic notions of goodness inherent to paganism. The gods of the pantheon were as immoral and petty as the men that they tormented, but in Middle-earth, while there are evil and despicable acts, each person, each character, is always given the choice to do what is good or to do what is evil.⁴⁹ It is each person's

⁴⁷ Tolkien, Tolkien, and Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 272. Tolkien explained that story must be understood within the context of, "...the world of tales is conceived in more or less historical terms."

⁴⁸ Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview Behind the Lord of the Rings*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 50.

⁴⁹ Brown, *The Christian World of the Hobbit*, 36.

decision to do what is good, which is the starting point in determining the Heroic Tao of Frodo.

There are essentially two means of which “God” can act in earthly history: miracles and providence. While there are miracles within the *Silmarillion*, there are none within *The Lord of the Rings*. God is left to act via providence.⁵⁰ Tolkien prefers the providential route because it requires the involvement and use of people, which results in moral goodness, heroism, and—if proper moral goodness and heroism is achieved—worship. Long before the events of *The Hobbit*, the series’ primary antagonist Sauron was initially defeated by a “miracle:”⁵¹ his external body was destroyed, and he was reduced to “a spirit of hatred borne on a dark wind.”⁵² God could have destroyed Sauron a second time with a miracle and without the use of Hobbits or Rangers or Elves, but God chose to employ the longer and more strenuous route of using moral and contingent creatures to bring about his good and desired end.

By taking the longer and indirect route of providence, God allowed the characters of Middle-earth to take part in his divine melody. There is a clear and yet obscure longing within *The Lord of the Rings* that compels characters to search, seek, and act; they long for an unspoken absent component. The desire to fill the longing is real, but how to accomplish such a task proved elusive.

Throughout their adventure, characters from Bilbo to Treebeard recite verses of what they sense is an epic tale being told, a talk in which their lives somehow play a part. Each song seems to be merely a fragment of a majestic symphony being written and conducted by an all-knowing composer. But as the chorus of Gimli reveals, [“The word was fair, the mountains tall In Elder Days before the

⁵⁰ Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien*, 54.

⁵¹ Tolkien, Tolkien, and Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 279.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 280.

fall.”] something is wrong. Part of the harmony isn’t right, like a dissonant chord invading the sweet melody of life, refusing resolution.⁵³

C.S Lewis argued that any creature that has a desire would likewise have a corresponding means of satisfying that desire. A person thirsts and the desire for that thirst can be satisfied with water. But when Lewis considered his own inexorable and ineffable desire, he realized that there was no means of satisfying the existential dilemma of man and concluded that this relentless desire was evidence of a deeper and realer reality and truth. Tolkien instills his characters with a similar perturbation.

The unsatisfied desire is both brutally clear and frustratingly elusive. It is a bit oxymoronic to consider the waning desires of man as being equally tangible and intangible, knowable and unknowable, but this very struggle is not limited to the characters of Tolkien, but rather reflects man’s initial approach to the infinite prescriptive good. If a person were asked for reasons behind the choices he made, and then asked for the reason for those reasons, and so on, eventually and quickly he would come to a standstill as he has reached the bedrock of all reason. The deepest reasons of man are the primary precepts of the natural moral law.⁵⁴

Man, in reality and in *The Lord of the Rings*, are left with an indescribable longing and desire, which seems to be based on the content of the infinite prescriptive good: rationality, morality, heroism. Man is unable to satisfy his emptiness. Kant argued that humans are born with an original predisposition to the good, but the desire for good is overlaid with an innate but imputable proclivity for evil. He thought that the evil could be overcome only through a revolution of the will, but a revolution of the will is only

⁵³ Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware, *Finding God in The Lord of the Rings* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2006), 1.

⁵⁴ Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart*, 61.

possible through “divine supplement” or divine assistance.⁵⁵ Without divine assistance, man is left with a fear of cosmic alienation and no means of fulfilling his desire. It is only through moral goodness and divine assistance that man can begin to satisfy his desire.

Frodo’s—and man’s—initial step to fulfilling the desire is through moral faith, which is faith itself. Moral faith is necessary for continuing on in a moral life. While reason alone cannot account for morality, moral faith allows for the proper use of reason: “The structure of moral argument is that as long as reason in its theoretical employment cannot rule out the legitimacy of moral faith, reason in its practical employment requires it. If moral faith is possible, then it is necessary.”⁵⁶ Moral faith is a necessary condition for the moral and heroic goodness, but it is not sufficient because faith (divine assistance) is required as well.

Faith in *The Lord of the Rings* is based on the providence of God. The providence of God is an undeniable aspect to the natural order of Middle-earth.⁵⁷ The providence in Middle-earth is based on the divine melody. The divine melody entails that anything that harmonizes with the meta-melody is good and anything that disharmonizes is evil—nearly everything within the work moves towards one of these ends. This necessitates that nearly every aspect of Middle-earth is involved with the meta-melody in some way. In literary criticism, this is known as the “pathetic fallacy.”⁵⁸

The pathetic fallacy is the idea of attributing aspects of human emotion and

⁵⁵ Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 7.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁷ Mark Eddy Smith, *Tolkien’s Ordinary Virtues: Exploring the Spiritual Themes of the Lord of the Rings* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 78.

⁵⁸ Smith, *Tolkien’s Ordinary Virtues*, 78.

volition to the mindless things of nature. How the pathetic fallacy is employed in the writings of Homer is different than Tolkien. If Tolkien and Homer were to write about a fierce wave amongst a tempest, they would have completely different responses or understandings of that wave. Some writers would want to refer to the wave as “raging,” but Homer would not think of the wave itself in such terms, nor that the wave was actually capable of raging, but rather there is something that rages the wave itself: a god.⁵⁹

Tolkien would consider the wave as a force of evil or good depending on one’s response to it, but he would agree with Homer that someone could manipulate the wave for goodness or evil. “Throughout the tale, the weather seems an active, almost proactive agent in the adventure, sometimes for evil and sometimes for good.”⁶⁰ If the weather aided the Fellowship of the Ring or the meta-melody, then it is good, if it hinders the Fellowship or the meta-melody, it is evil. The aid of non-volitional aspects of nature within *The Lord of the Rings* is based primarily on one’s response to it. For example, Louis Markos argues that “the road” is actually a character.⁶¹ The pathetic fallacy allows for everything to be a character, even a road. The goodness of the road is not based on anything that the road is, but rather one’s response to it and how one responds to the idea of travel and adventure.

(Bilbo) used often to say there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs were at every door step, and every path was its tributary. It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door,” he used to say. “You step into the Road,

⁵⁹ Robert Cantwell, “Folklore’s Pathetic Fallacy,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 114, no. 451 (2001): 56–67.

⁶⁰ Markos and Kreeft, *On the Shoulders of Hobbits*, 41.

⁶¹ Ibid.

and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.

There is only one road because the road represents something greater: adventure. Adventure is how many people hope to satisfy their inherent desire and longing. The road actually acts as the first threshold guardian for Frodo. The road can be intimidating, not only because it represents a series of external dangers, but it also forces one to consider his weaknesses and fears, "The Road is akin to a living thing with which you must relate, struggle, and negotiate. It draws and lures you, tests and challenges you, either punishing or rewarding you for your troubles."⁶²

Threshold guardians are trials that a hero must endure. Usually a threshold guardian is meant to challenge the resolve and purity of the hero. A threshold is meant to represent a rite of passage of sorts. Joseph Campbell explains,

The standard path of the mythological adventures of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of the passage: separation-initiation-return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of super-natural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.⁶³

The road is a threshold guardian that tests the humility of the hero. The hero, at the thought of the road, should be filled with humility and doubt—the hero should be afraid. If a hero is not met with fear at the onset of his journey, then he has failed the test of the road. Without fear there is no humility, without humility there is no faith, without faith there is no submission, without submission there is no divine assistance, and without divine assistance there is no worship. Worship was the goal of Tolkien's work, and it

⁶² Markos and Kreeft, *On the Shoulders of Hobbits*, 42.

⁶³ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008), 23.

seems reasonable that he would encourage one of his primary protagonists to act in accordance with the means of properly obtaining a similar worship.

To achieve the providential ends, God is forced to enlist contingent and limited creatures. Because God is necessary and limitless in his attributes and abilities, when he is recruiting heroes to fulfill a task, he is not looking for someone who is physically strong since no amount of strength can compare with God's strength. God is looking for the opposite: those who seem weak. The weak look to God for divine assistance. The weak are humble. Through the humble, God can achieve his tasks. The Apostle Paul explains this concept to the Corinthian church,

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

The Bible is comprised of many instances of moral faith and divine assistance. When Israel was confronted with the daunting foe of Goliath, God had two means of defeating such an enemy: miracle or providence. God could have taken the shepherd David and transformed him into an ironclad immovable super giant that dwarfed Goliath in size, strength, and ability. Through a miracle, "Super David" could have easily crushed Goliath, but then neither the Israelites nor the Philistines would marvel at the power of God but would instead marvel at the feats of Super David. Since the marvels of the miraculous often become twisted to focus on the creature rather than the creator, Super David would not result in proper worship. No one would have looked at David the humble shepherd boy standing over the corpse of Goliath and think, "Wow, what a

mighty warrior.” Since David was young, timid, and green, everyone who saw him standing over the corpse of Goliath would have thought, “Wow, what a mighty God he serves.” The providential route results in proper worship.

Hobbits often passed without notice because of their unassuming and humble nature. God used Hobbits for the very reason that he used David: they were weak in the eyes of the world, but being weak in the eyes of the world is no metric for moral courage.⁶⁴ God uses the weak because the weak are aware of their weakness, and being aware of weakness leads to humility and submission. Frodo passed the test of the road as a threshold guardian because even though his fear was evident, he accepted the call while specifically asking for assistance: “I will take the ring to Mordor, but I do not know the way.” Frodo accepted the unnerving duty of laboring under the guise of providence—he set out on faith.

It is quite easy to confuse luck with providence, “The word *luck* appears twenty-five times in *The Hobbit*, *luckily* is used eleven times, and the word *lucky* nine times. We find these luck related words used by Tolkien so regularly that readers may begin to wonder if the author is suggesting by this frequency that there is more than mere luck at work, that what may seem like luck at the time is really the hand of Providence.”⁶⁵ If luck truly played such a crucial role in *The Lord of the Rings*, it seems reasonable to suppose that the greatest feats would have been accomplished by those to whom luck seems to favor: the well-prepared and seasoned warrior. But it was not the sword of Aragorn that wounded the terrifying Shelob, but the dagger of Sam. It was not the convincing words of

⁶⁴ Markos and Kreeft, *On the Shoulders of Hobbits*, 37.

⁶⁵ Brown, *The Christian World of The Hobbit*, 42.

wisdom spoken by Gandalf that persuaded the Ents to destroy Isengard, but the gentle pleas of Merry and Pippin. While it was the arrow of Bard the Bowman that eventually fell the mighty dragon Smaug, the killing blow was only possible because of the courage of Bilbo. And it was the humble Frodo who was able to ensure the destruction of the ring of power. Nearly all of the greatest deeds throughout the series were achieved by unassuming Hobbits. Luck cannot explain the impressive feats accomplished by Hobbits; only providence can explain their success.

The Heroic Tao of Frodo is based on something of an amalgamation of theistic based deontology and virtue ethics. Deontology is similar to virtue ethics because both focus on the action itself as opposed to the outcomes. They are different because deontology is concerned with some imperative or law, whereas virtue ethics are motivated by virtue: excellence of character.⁶⁶ Deontology is insufficient because it lacks the functional aspect of human nature incumbent to virtue ethics.⁶⁷ Virtue ethics is insufficient because it lacks the requirement of divine assistance that Kant thought to be indispensable. Both virtue ethics and deontology are insufficient if the formulation of the ethical system is not based on the infinite prescriptive good. The heroic Tao of Frodo is perhaps typified by his acceptance of the call and then the asking for help. Frodo had a willingness to do what is good, but he required help to achieve the good end. The willingness to do what is good is based on virtue ethics, and the call for help is based on Kantian deontology. Therefore, the Heroic Tao of Frodo essentially entails, “I will do what is good, but I need help to achieve that goodness.”

⁶⁶ Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart*, 26.

⁶⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 58.

What is interesting about a Heroic Tao that is based on the infinite prescriptive good is that the Tao can be evaluated even before the adventure begins. In fact, it must be evaluated before the adventure begins because it is through the examination of the infinite prescriptive good and the ethical system derived from it, that the hero fears the “archangel” and attempts to act and live with humility. Any heroic Tao derived from infinite prescription will relate to moral faith and humility. Achilles failed as a hero because he lacked humility and lacked a good code. Samson failed as a hero not because he did not have access to a good code, but because he lacked the humility to trust in that code. Humility must come first. The humble hero must know that his code is good and worthy before an adventure can begin, therefore the question of (1) Does the hero think the code is good? Must be answered with a resounding “yes.” Frodo must think it is good or he will not be able to either act on moral faith, nor achieve the end result of worship via providence.

(2) Does the hero’s response to the code reflect the ultimate good that the hero is attempting to achieve? The affirmative answer to the first question assures an affirmative answer to the second question. With the heroic Tao of Frodo, it is impossible to differentiate between the good of the hero and the good of the code because they are irrevocably connected. The hero is only attempting the adventure because of the ineffable desire and the moral faith that is based on the infinite prescriptive good. Therefore, the hero’s response to the code must reflect the ultimate good that the hero is attempting to achieve. It is only through the external aid of the code that a good and worthy end can be attained at all.

Finally, (3) who is at fault if the hero commits a compromise, the hero or the

code? Temptation and the inclination for compromise are not absent from Middle-earth. In fact, every evil character within the anthology was at one point good,⁶⁸ but it was the allure of temptation and the song of the disharmonious compromise that corrupted characters. Similar to the real world, making the right choice in *The Lord of the Rings* sometimes comes with a softening of the heart and the sting of sacrifice.⁶⁹ If any hero is not willing to sacrifice, then he cannot fulfill the calling of the infinite prescriptive good. While martyrdom is a form of sacrifice, this is not the type of sacrifice that is required of the hero. Similar to the command of Jesus, “Anyone who desires to come after me must deny himself daily, take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24) The sacrifice required of the true hero is the willingness to leave behind all that he had previously cherished in order to fulfill the task.⁷⁰

Frodo thought his code was good, his ultimate goal reflected the intent of the code, and he was willing to sacrifice; but he failed. What follows is a lengthy description of the “failure” of Frodo by Tolkien:

Very few (indeed so far as letters go only you and the other) have observed or commented on Frodo’s “failure.” It is very important point. From the point of view of the storyteller the events on Mt Doom proceed simply from the logic of the tale up to that time. They were not deliberately worked up to nor foreseen until they occurred. But, for one thing, it became at last quite clear that Frodo after all that had happened would be incapable of voluntarily destroying the Ring. Reflecting on the solution after it was arrived at (as mere event) I feel that it is central to the whole “theory” of true nobility and heroism that is presented.

Frodo indeed “failed” as a hero, as conceived by simple minds: he did not endure to the end; he gave in, ratted. I do not say ‘simple minds’ with contempt: they often see with clarity the simple truth and the absolute ideal to which effort must be directed, even if it is unattainable. Their weakness, however, is twofold. They

⁶⁸ Markos and Kreeft, *On the Shoulders of Hobbits*, 157.

⁶⁹ Brown, *The Christian World of The Hobbit*, 132.

⁷⁰ Smith, *Tolkien’s Ordinary Virtues*, 47.

do not perceive the complexity of any given situation in Time, in which an absolute ideal is enmeshed. They tend to forget that strange element in the World that we call Pity or Mercy, which is also an absolute requirement in moral judgement (since it is present in the Divine nature). In its highest exercise it belongs to God. For finite judges of imperfect knowledge it must lead to the use of two different scales of "morality". To ourselves we must present the absolute ideal without compromise, for we do not know our own limits of natural strength (+grace), and if we do not aim at the highest we shall certainly fall short of the utmost that we could achieve. To others, in any case of which we know enough to make a judgement, we must apply a scale tempered by 'mercy': that is, since we can with good will do this without the bias inevitable in judgements of ourselves, we must estimate the limits of another's strength and weigh this against the force of particular circumstances.

I do not think that Frodo's was a moral failure. At the last moment the pressure of the Ring would reach its maximum - impossible, I should have said, for any one to resist, certainly after long possession, months of increasing torment, and when starved and exhausted. Frodo had done what he could and spent himself completely (as an instrument of Providence) and had produced a situation in which the object of his quest could be achieved. His humility (with which he began) and his sufferings were justly rewarded by the highest honour; and his exercise of patience and mercy towards Gollum gained him Mercy: his failure was redressed.

We are finite creatures with absolute limitations upon the powers of our soul-body structure in either action or endurance. Moral failure can only be asserted, I think, when a man's effort or endurance falls short of his limits, and the blame decreases as that limit is closer approached. Nonetheless, I think it can be observed in history and experience that some individuals seem to be placed in 'sacrificial' positions: situations or tasks that for perfection of solution demand powers beyond their utmost limits, even beyond all possible limits for an incarnate creature in a physical world-in which a body may be destroyed, or so maimed that it affects the mind and will. Judgement upon any such case should then depend on the motives and disposition with which he started out, and should weigh his actions against the utmost possibility of his powers, all along the road to whatever proved the breaking-point.

Frodo undertook his quest out of love - to save the world he knew from disaster at his own expense, if he could; and also in complete humility, acknowledging that he was wholly inadequate to the task. His real contract was only to do what he could, to try to find a way, and to go as far on the road as his strength of mind and body allowed. He did that. I do not myself see that the breaking of his mind and will under demonic pressure after torment was any more a moral failure than the

breaking of his body would have been - say, by being strangled by Gollum, or crushed by a falling rock.⁷¹

Ostensibly, Frodo failed because he did not willfully complete his task. But as Tolkien explained, the failing was not a moral failure similar to the compromises of Achilles or Odysseus, but rather it was a failure because Frodo simply lacked the physical and spiritual constitution to resist the ring when it was at the zenith of power—Tolkien explained that no mortal could resist the power in that environment. But, a fortunate moment of “luck” allowed Gollum to be present at such a moment and the corrupting power of the ring ultimately proved to bring about both the destruction of the Ring and the death of Gollum at the same time. Of course, one can hardly attribute the situation to “luck” because once again, the providence of God allowed for the success.

The providence of God ensures that even evil and corruption can be used to achieve an ultimate or greater good. The biblical character Joseph’s response to his brothers after being sold into slavery is an example of such providence, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”(Genesis 50:20) A similar understanding should be present with the destruction of the ring. Gollum was given opportunities to deny his corruption and to choose to live for the good, and while he did convert for a short period of time, he eventually and freely chose the path of corruption. God used the free and nefarious choices of Gollum to complete the task that Frodo lacked the capacity to achieve otherwise. In the belly of Mount Doom, no person could resist the power of the Ring, and in this scenario, when not even a hundred righteous men could aid Frodo, God allowed the morally corrupted Gollum to be present in that moment so that his debased

⁷¹ Tolkien, Tolkien, and Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 326.

mind could be used for something good. When Gollum bit the finger off of Frodo and snatched away the ring, he acted out of evil, but God allowed the evil to bring about a greater good. The kerfuffle caused the Ring to fall into the only substance that could destroy it, while simultaneously being in an environment wherein no mortal could willingly destroy it—goodness came about through evil intent. Frodo did not fail, but rather he did what he needed to do, relied on his moral faith and his heroic Tao, and eventually both were vindicated through providence.

Conclusion

The infinite prescriptive good is the natural moral law. The infinite prescriptive good is not a reduction of the law, but rather it is the law itself. One of the purposes of the infinite prescriptive good is a general command to be rational, moral, and heroic—this is achieved through moral philosophy and moral faith. The proper response to the existence of an infinite prescriber is the willingness to act out on moral faith in the hopes of fulfilling the inexorable longing of man. Frodo is a good example of what God can accomplish through a humble and willing hero.

CHAPTER 4: THE RIGHT KIND OF HERO

Heroism, like the good, is an intentional act. The most rudimentary definition of a hero is a moral agent who is committed to a noble purpose, which is usually aimed at furthering the welfare of others, including the willingness to accept, no matter how severe, the consequences of achieving that purpose. The levels of gradation inherent to the various components of this definition, as well as other implicit concepts, are what determine the various types of heroes. The most important implicit and explicit concept of heroism is moral realism. The type of moral realism inherent to myth entails that all literary myths can be properly and morally evaluated. The heroic good cannot be identified, let alone achieved, unless there is a real and actual means of universally measuring it. Within myth, heroism is measured in part through the moral assessment of the hero, which can only occur through moral realism. The first purpose of this chapter is to argue that moral realism—a clear and obvious delineation between vice and virtue, goodness and evil—necessarily exists within hero myth and story in general. There are five principal arguments for the necessity and existence of moral realism within myth: an argument from influence, an argument from implicit classical thought, an argument from believability, the three levels of moral evaluation, and the dissolution of the is/ought distinction. After the case for moral realism is presented, various hero types will be examined in order to determine which character type typifies the best possible hero.

The Argument from Influence

The argument from influence begins with comparison. Moral realism is important to myth because it is only through a real moral metric that heroism can be evaluated and assigned either subjective or objective value. The subjective power of hero myth is one of

the more crucial features of myth. The subjective value begins with the reader comparing himself to the hero, and the objective value begins when one compares that hero to other heroes via a logically consistent moral philosophy.

The subjective power of Myth begins when a person engages a hero and notices some type of similarity between the hero and himself, “Each person hearing a tale or watching a play or movie is invited, in the early stages of a story, to identify with the Hero, to merge with him and see the world of the story through his eyes.”¹ Affection for the hero is born through the invitation to identify or to compare oneself with him.² What is common amongst all heroes is that they all have universal qualities, emotions, and motivations that any reader can relate to: love, anger, fear, doubt, desire, or despair.³ These qualities are inherent to all moral agents because only a moral agent is able to truly experience fear or love. Animals have a sense of fear that has developed as an evolutionary mechanism, but the ends of such a feature is in adherence to the high law, and it is not concerned with anything outside of survival. True moral agency is more than a survival instinct; moral agents can, unlike animals, universalize the context of the emotions and employ them in scenarios that are unrelated to survival—animals are unable to do this.

The next type of comparison is found within similarities that the reader shares with the hero. The similarities can be a multitude of smaller ones or a single overarching traumatic event. The greatest connection between a reader and a hero is found within the

¹ Christopher Vogler, *The Writers Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, 3rd ed. (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007). 30.

² The “him” employed here has nothing to do with gender but is merely a reference to a generic hero.

³ Vogler, *The Writers Journey*, 30.

sharing of a single significant life event. How many orphans read the Harry Potter series and identified with the maligned and seemingly normal Harry? And then when the reader discovered that Harry was no mere boy, but a child of legacy and legend, how much more significant did that identification become? Identification befits hope; the orphan has hope that he is not a lost cause, “One thing that comes out in myths is that at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation.”⁴

The third type of identification is found with the decisions that the hero chooses to make—what is his heroic Tao and how does he employ it? Is the hero dark and brooding like The Punisher or is he goofy and happy-go-lucky like Spider-Man? Is he hot-headed like Achilles or calm and slow to anger like Yoda? Does the hero prefer to work alone like Batman or does the hero prefer to work within a group like the X-Men? Each of these aspects, and many more, act as various possible identification factors. This type of identification can even lead to the emulation of character traits.

Comparison entails moral realism because the hero evokes real emotions, desires, and dispositions within the reader. It may be difficult to suppose that something fictional can have an effect on something real, but Joseph Campbell has actually argued that myths have shaped every modern society: “All cultures...have grown out of myths. They are founded on myths. What these myths have given has been inspiration for aspiration. The economic interpretation of history is for the birds. Economics is itself a function of aspiration. It’s what people aspire to that creates the field in which economics works.”⁵ Economics may be a tool that practically grounds a culture for growth, but the desire

⁴ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 28.

⁵ Joseph Campbell, “Mythology and the Individual,” (lecture, The Joseph Campbell Foundation, December 17, 1999).

behind creating a good and worthy economics system or society is based on the motivation of myth:

Hero myths, when properly employed, effect change by instilling within a person or culture emulatable virtues. The emulation of virtues towards the ends of living for the good, the true, and the beautiful or creating a society and culture that shares in similar ends is an example of how the example of heroes and myth can cause real and good change. These legends give not only the hero as he seemed to his age; they also show the social life, the virtues and vices, the superstitions and beliefs, of earlier ages embedded in the tradition, as fossils are found in the uplifted strata of some ancient ocean-bed.⁶

Therefore, since myth has the power to influence human behavior on every level of human existence, personal, cultural, and societal, it has a real and measurable aspect to it.

Such a definition of “moral realism” definitely strays from the normative understanding; this sense of moral realism pertains specifically and solely toward myth effecting change in people. This is *not* an argument that moral realism in myth entails that the influencing myth is morally good or that the influenced person’s reaction will likewise result in him being morally good; the argument is just that mythology morally motivates. There is moral realism within myth simply because it prompts real men to act in ways that can be judged morally.

The Argument from Implicit Classical Thought

This argument is both a standalone argument and a precursor for the argument from believability. No matter how fantastical a universe or world is within myth, there are characteristics that must be true and present in every type of story. The aspects of story that must be true, or that at least must be implied to be true, are aspects that are only possible through a classical mindset. C.S Lewis and Tolkien specifically set out to write

⁶ M. I. Ebbutt, *Hero-Myths & Legends of the British Race* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library, 1910), xix.

myth that was backed by classical thinking: truth is readily available and knowable, all people have the capacity to be either heroes or villains, true senses of the vicious and the virtuous, etc. Lewis and Tolkien's classical thought infused works resulted in two of the most esteemed and easily identifiable—identifiable in the sense that these myths often elicit a desire for inclusion or co-adventure—myths in the modern era. Unless the author or creator of a work presents an explicit retraction, there is always an implied classical backing to story and myth. Even if there is an explicit retraction, such as the denial of absolute or universal truth, the result is a contradiction because one cannot universally condemn universal truth without adhering to the tenets of universal truth. The denial of universal truth is only possible if universal truth were possible; therefore, if one denies the existence universal truth, he is ignorantly backed by implied classical thought.

The ancient myths were not based on the universe having a rational cause to the same degree as Lewis and Tolkien presented with their meta-melodies, but there was an aspect of transcendent rationality. It is obvious that rationality is implied because the stories contain regulated natural processes: the changing of the seasons, balanced ecosystems, natural laws, and communication amongst characters—these all imply a rational universe. All hypothetical worlds share in certain essential aspects because any possible world must be based on the necessarily true: the laws of logic. The laws of logic are necessarily true, so they must exist and be present in every possible world—logic is one aspect that sews all hypothetical worlds together.

The basics of logical possibilities are quite firmly established even when considering hypothetical worlds; they are established within the laws of logic themselves. Think of the most bizarre and magnificent planet possible, such as Pandora from the

movie *Avatar*: brightly colored fluorescent flora, exotic and frightening fauna, daunting waterfalls, and a multitude of various splendors. The majestic world of Pandora represents an improbable world because it has not been discovered, but it is not an impossible one because even hypothetical worlds must rely, implicitly or explicitly, on the laws of logic—the only impossible worlds are those that are not governed by the laws of logic. Pandora is improbable because humans know of no other planet that can sustain complex life. However, if Pandora were discovered, one would find that it, like Earth, can only properly function because of the laws of logic.

If Pandora were to exist, while it may be bizarre and, in many aspects, dissimilar to Earth, there are aspects that nonetheless must also be identical to Earth. The same laws of logic which regulate Earth, humans, and all of existence, must also govern Pandora—existence or reality can only be found within the logically consistent. Everything that humans know and everything that is within reality is based either directly or indirectly on these very laws. If these laws were not actively and necessarily in place, communication with other individuals would not be possible, nor would it be possible for one to know her name, or that these computer keystrokes accurately and meaningfully transfer information to digitally or physically printed words.

There are also aspects of accidental necessity within hypothetical worlds too. The laws of logic are true in every possible world, but not every possible world must contain moral agents; however, any possible world that does contain moral agents must have a means of measuring and grading that morality. Morality does not need to exist in the same sense as it does in the works of Lewis and Tolkien, but there must exist some means of measuring the moral actions of moral agents if they do exist. The worlds of Tolkien

and Lewis, however, do represent the most logically consistent examples of moral and heroic goodness. Since heroism, as it will continue to be argued, is measured by morality, then even the most bizarre and mysterious world must have some means of quantifying and qualifying morality. Thus, it is not necessarily necessary for moral agents to exist, but if they do exist, morality must have a means of being measured.

What is interesting about morality, moral agents, and hypothetical worlds is that there is no possible world that can be putatively conceived wherein the possibilities of measuring morality are not readily evident. No hypothetical world can be so bizarre that it does not employ the laws of logic or a balanced eco-system, and no moral agent can appeal to any sort of moral values that are not based on one of the reductions to the natural moral law: nihilism, subjectivism, the arbitrary, nominalism, finite prescription, or infinite prescription. It does not matter the moral agent, or the world, morality can only be understood, at least in a prescriptive sense, by one of these reductions; therefore, one reduction must be employed in any hypothetical world that contains moral agents acting as heroes.

Morality is similar to time and distance with respect to the necessity of its existing within story. No matter how marvelous and bizarre a generated world or universe is created to be, if that universe contains moral agents acting and reacting, then time, distance, and moral gradation must be quantified. For example, suppose a story narrated: “Tesickara (a young girl) set out to find the cure for the plague. First, she needed to see the Oracle so she rode her Morgus (horse) through treacherous terrain for 25 quintons (about 40 miles). The journey took about 45 sintuns (about 60 days).” The author would either need to explain how long a quinton measures and the duration of a sintun within

that world, or he would need to explain those aspects in terms of miles or kilometers and hours or days so that the reader can understand the magnitude of the hero's journey. What is intriguing is that while time and distance need to be quantified if they are to be functionally understood by the reader, a rudimentary notion of morality is always readily apparent even before it is more specifically quantified and attached to one of the reductions of the natural moral law. Even if the specific aspects of Tesickara's heroic Tao and the corresponding reduction have yet to be made evident by the author, it is still nonetheless unmistakable that moral issues exist: Tesickara is acting upon a moral issue by embarking on a dangerous quest in order to cure the deadly plague.

The initial and obvious instances of moral problems though are insufficient for the character to develop; therefore, the author must explain in greater detail the moral inclination and philosophy of her. Without the moral inclination or the heroic Tao, then the reader cannot determine if the hero is compromising or progressing towards a morally good and heroic end. Since it is a requirement of the reader to know when the hero commits compromises or not, the author must clearly explain how morality is measured in the universe as well as her response to that measuring rod. When an author explains how morality is measured, it does not matter the measuring rod employed; the result is a true notion of moral realism even if the measuring rod does not result in actual or true moral realism.

Further, if the author explicitly revokes the implied classical thought by appealing to subjectivism or nominalism as a means of moral measurement, then the result is a diminished view of heroism. For example, as the section concerning nominalism and the heroic Tao of the Star Wars universe was being researched, formulated, and written, it

became evident that if the moral criticism were limited solely to the original trilogy, then one would have no reason to doubt or question the realness of Luke Skywalker's heroism or moral goodness. The criticisms presented earlier were so devastating because the prequels and the explicit motivation of Lucas were included in the evaluation. However, when Lucas decided to overtly dismiss the classical understanding of morality and truth and posit in their place subjectivism and the notion that moral goodness occurs with balance, he lost moral realism. When he decided to instill Yoda with the absurd Buddhist notions of desiring not to desire or that everyone becomes one with the Force, the moral status of hero in the series was reduced to the same moral status as every villain—diminishing classical thought diminishes heroism.⁷

The original and powerful imagery of Luke's moral dilemma becomes drama-less without implied classical backing. Luke had finally become confident enough in his powers and abilities to confront his father Darth Vader again. During the previous meeting between the two, Vader toyed and teased Luke until he sliced his arm off with a swift effortless stroke. The second meeting went differently. Luke began to give in to the Dark Side, and after Luke was pushed to the edge because Vader threatened his sister, he became untethered. He unleashed a fury akin to Achilles after the death of Patroclus. From the shadows, Luke sprung on Vader with a cyclone of unbridled lightsaber swings—Vader was staggered. Luke continued to advance with a series of violent slashes

⁷⁷ In discussing the failure of the nominal good incumbent to the Star Wars universe, eminent metaphysician and philosopher Andrew M. Bailey (Associate Professor of Humanities/Philosophy and residential faculty fellow at Yale-NUS College) pointed out that the criticisms only work by appealing to the prequels and the philosophy of George Lucas. This led to the realization that the original Star Wars trilogy was inundated with implied classical thought, which allowed for a true distinction between vice and virtue and real acts of heroism. When Lucas and the prequels overtly contradicted the implied classical thought, then heroism, moral realism, and goodness became undistinguishable from villainy, relative morality, and evil.

and strikes as Vader continued to retreat. Eventually Vader fell to the ground nearly defenseless; he was barely able to hold his lightsaber up for protection. Luke released a series of devastating blows as Vader struggled to even clutch his weapon. With a furious and final blow, Luke violently severed Vader's hand. The mechanical man collapsed as his robotic suit began to display its limitations. Luke stood over Vader with malicious intent and rage. The emperor had put Luke in the same position that he had once placed Anakin, standing over a defeated and vulnerable opponent, as he encouraged Skywalker to strike down his opponent; Anakin acquiesced, but Luke wavered. The sinister Palpatine encouraged Luke, "Good! Your hate has made you powerful. Now, fulfill your destiny and take your father's place at my side."⁸ At those words, Luke eyes drifted to the missing hand of Vader and compared it to his own mechanical hand—Luke realized he was becoming Vader. Luke knew in that moment that if he were to strike Vader down, he would become completely given over to the dark side—his struggle was potent but passing. With a calm and focused demeanor, he cast his lightsaber aside, "Never. I'll never turn to the Dark Side. You have failed, your Highness. I am a Jedi, like my father before me."⁹

The delightful expectation of Palpatine quickly fell into grimaced disdain and disappointment, "So be it...Jedi."¹⁰ Palpatine shadily raised his hands, "If you will not be turned, you will be destroyed."¹¹ Bolts of devastating lightning blasts ferociously flung

⁸ Richard Marquand, dir., *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 1983).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

from his fingertips; Luke had no defense as he writhed in pain. Vader slowly rose and reclaimed his spot at the side of his master Palpatine. Palpatine began to mock his defenseless opponent, “Young fool. Only now, at the end, do you understand.”¹² He unleashed another volley of lightning, “Your feeble skills are no match for the power of the Dark Side! You have paid the price for your lack of vision.”¹³ Luke in torment, desperately cried out, “Father, please! Help me!”¹⁴ Palpatine, not even considering that such a plea would have any effect on Vader, ignored him and continued, “Now, young Skywalker... you will die.”¹⁵ The lightning shot from his hands with a greater intensity than before—Luke was near death. Vader looked at his son thrashing on the floor and glanced back and forth between Palpatine and Luke as if he were in conflict: should he serve his master or save his son? In that moment Anakin Skywalker was resurrected. The once failed Jedi that had become a master of evil had regained something of his former self. Anakin knew that he, like his son, would rather die as a good Jedi than to live as an evil Sith. With every bit of effort that he could muster, Anakin grabbed Palpatine from behind and threw him down the reactor shaft. Anakin had been redeemed by the moral faith of his son.

It is a beautiful story of redemption and goodness triumphing over evil; unless, that is, one were to employ the moral philosophy espoused by Lucas. When Lucas’ philosophy is enacted, goodness does not triumph over evil, but one side of an opposing force overcomes another side of the opposing force, and the result is not a moral or heroic

¹² Marquand, *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

victory, but rather a mere instance of unbalance. It does not matter to the Force, which side is unbalanced or even why it is unbalanced; it merely desires to reclaim balance itself—the Force is not concerned if good triumphs over evil or if evil triumphs over good. Since the Force itself is concerned with balance, then one knows that, in light of the (nominally) good victory of the Jedi, the Force must reset the balance by creating or rising up a (nominally) evil Sith. The death of Palpatine does nothing to detract from the amount of evil in the universe.

However, suppose that Palpatine decided to break the rule of two—the Sith notion that there can only be two Sith Lords at any time: a master to embody the power of the Dark Side of the Force and an apprentice to crave that power—and keep both Luke and Vader on as students; and further suppose that both men agreed to serve Palpatine. If this were to occur, the Force would be compelled by moral goodness to rise up three “good” Jedi to balance out the three “evil” Sith. Conversely, if Palpatine were moved by the plight of Luke, and both he and Vader decided that they no longer wanted to serve the Dark Side, the victory would be short-lived because the Force would be compelled by moral goodness to raise up three “evil” Sith to balance out the three “good” Jedi. Finally, since all of the Jedi and the Sith will eventually become one with the Force, the triumph of Luke or his corruption is ultimately inconsequential.

Therefore, there are logically necessary aspects of story and myth, the laws of logic, and accidentally necessary aspects to story and myth, moral realism. It is only through classical notions or implied classical notions of moral realism and a true distinction between vice and virtue that true heroism can actually occur and be readily

knowable. If the author or creator of a myth explicitly deviates from such thought patterns, the heroism becomes diminished to the point of non-existence.

The Argument from Believability

The argument from believability is focused on what are acceptable levels of fantasy within myth. Myth in general is concerned with the fantastical, but the fantastical is not without limits. What are the limits of believability when it comes to myth? Odysseus traveled into the underworld looking for the blind prophet Tiresias to determine how to make it back home to Ithaca. In order to find Tiresias, Odysseus commits a sacrifice in order to draw shades (ghosts) to the blood. The shades line up to drink the blood and to talk to Odysseus. Odysseus is surprised to find that his mother Anticlea had died while he was on his adventure and is now a shade. She drinks the blood and talks with Odysseus. He tries to hug his mother three times but is unable to because she is ethereal. More and more shades were drawn to the blood and Odysseus foolishly draws his swords in order to keep the shades at bay—threatening shades with a sword is as effective as hugging them.

The Legend of Zelda is known for having a multitude of mysterious, bizarre, and ferocious creatures that impede the progress of Link. These creatures range from humanoids, river monsters (River Zoras), living skeletons (Stalfos), and even living statues (Armos). But one creature that has become a common feature of the series is the seemingly mild chicken (Cucco). Cuccos are normally docile in nature and are only found as domesticated farm animals. If left alone, Cuccos merely hop about and peck at the ground. If Link were to accidentally attack a Cucco nothing significant would happen, but if he continues to attack the Cucco, it will eventually reach a breaking point. The

Cucco will freeze in its place and like a howling wolf raise its beak to the sky and to let out a shrieking, "BUCUUUCK!!" Suddenly, Cuccos begin flying in from every direction and begin to attack Link. These Cuccos are immortal and cannot be damaged. Luke's only recourse is to flee in fear.

Superman is known for having some absurd feats and powers. Silver age superman was so powerful that he had to fly to another solar system because he needed to sneeze. The results of his sneeze, and the reason he had to fly to a different solar system, was because he ended up destroying every planet that was within his proximity.

Superman even bench-pressed the entire planet earth repeatedly for five days straight. Setting aside the fact that Superman did not stop for rest, food, or sleep the estimated weight of the world is about 13 septillion pounds or 13,170,000,000,000,000,000,000 pounds. Supposing that a single rep for a bench press takes about three seconds that means that over five days Superman would have benched the weight of the earth (including all animals, people, and man-made structures) 144,000 times. As impressive as this feat of strength is, it is not his most extraordinary: Superman was able to lift a book that had an infinite number of pages.

"Fanboys" have argued about the logical possibility of even a character like Superman being able to perform such an absurd feat. Laying aside the philosophical issues of having any physical object that has an infinite amount of any physical attribute, the possibility of Superman being able to perform such a feat does not fall outside of the realm of believability. While investigating this debate, many commentators wrote something like, "But remember, this is all fiction." It was the call to remember that Superman was a work of fiction that was the catalyst for this section.

The argument from believability is not based on what is logically or rationally conceivable for a hero to partake in nor how stretched the laws of physics can become before the reader drops his level of believability to “impossible.” The argument from believability is not concerned with things like the logic of the flight path of lasers, how it is possible for sound to occur in space, that immortal chickens exist, or if artificial intelligence is possible. Fans of myth have learned to accept various levels of the fantastical; however, there is one aspect of myth, sci-fi, and fantasy that remains fixed: moral realism. The level of the fantastical does not extend to the realm of moral disregard by the hero. One can readily read a story about a perpetual motion engine or about a DeLorean that can travel through time, and yet not discard the work as “unbelievable.” However, while one can readily believe that Superman is able to lift a book that contains an infinite number of pages, one simply cannot believe, no matter the level of imagination and contemplation, that a hero who claims to be a hero could willingly and actively act in a morally debased manner. There are limits to imagination within myth, but the limits of imagination are not apparent with the physically and logically possible, but rather with the morally consistent.

There are universes wherein Superman is a villain. There have been instances wherein Superman has been turned evil by some exterior force. He has been hypnotized by Poison Ivy and has been corrupted by the power of Red Kryptonite, both of which turned him evil. In the *Injustice* series, the Joker tricked Superman into killing his wife Lois and his unborn baby. The tragedy was too much for Superman to endure, and he transformed himself into a god of wrath. He became disillusioned with the goodness of man and the worth of fighting villains and politicians alike, and he decided, for the sake

of the earth, that it needed to be ruled with his iron fist.

A universe that contains an evil Superman is believable. Instances of Superman being corrupted by an external force, similar to Frodo being enraptured by the ring inside of Mount Doom, is believable. It is even believable that Superman, at seeing the death of his wife and child by his own hands, has something of a complete mental breakdown and forsakes his previous moral disposition and puts on a new and darker persona. But, what is simply unbelievable is that a hero like Superman, who's heroic Tao is based on fighting for truth and justice while also desiring heroic and moral goodness, could also deem it acceptable to torture babies for fun during his free time. Such a revelation is simply too unbelievable for the reader to accept as "logical." The reader accepts with little incredulity that Superman can jump over a building or freeze a lake with a puff of his breath, but she will not accept that a good hero can remain a good hero while willingly embracing the demonstrably evil.

If it were ever revealed that Superman was involved with something as morally grotesque as torturing babies for fun, the reader would either simply find the notion too absurd and disregard the entire work, or she would be forced to reconsider the moral goodness and heroism of Superman in general. Even if the number of affected babies was limited to just a few, there is no level of utility that would allow those actions to be acceptable. It would not matter how many times Superman saved the world, or how many babies had survived because of him, the characters within the story and the readers of the story simply would not accept that such an esteemed hero is capable of such a disgusting act. The characters within the story and the reader would be vindicated in admitting, that

while Superman had saved the world, he is a diminished hero if he chooses to torture babies for fun.

Moral realism is true within myth simply because there are acceptable and unacceptable levels of believability within myth, and while the supremely absurd (sounds in space, immortal chickens, or perpetual motion machines) are given a pass without much of a second thought, heroes, especially heroes that have a solid moral background and expectation, are held to higher standards than the laws of physics and the laws of logic. When a morally good hero commits the unspeakable, there are two primary responses: disregard the work as too absurd or diminish the status of the hero.

Three Levels of Moral Evaluation

The first level of moral evaluation is the purely literary level. The goal of this level is not to determine the goodness of the hero's Heroic Tao in light of its philosophical consistency, but to merely judge the hero by his own merits, actions, and desires. One should focus on the types of compromises he makes and how he treats other people while progressing toward an end. The end too should likewise be given moral deliberation to determine its relative goodness. An example of the literary level of evaluation must conclude that Luke Skywalker is a true and real hero. He is a true hero because he had a desire to solve a worthy problem (the destruction of the Empire and the redemption of his father), he committed no major compromises while attempting to solve that problem, and he employed soft virtues which entailed that he had a sufficient amount of humility that allowed for moral faith, proper doubts, and to accept aid and instruction. Because Luke acted with consistency and humility, and he did not compromise his heroic Tao, then he is a hero in every sense. From a purely literary standpoint, since Luke's

actions can be judged morally, then there is a real sense of morality on the first level of evaluation.

In the second level of evaluation, the reader takes on the role of Archangel, and he is concerned with objective moral and heroic goodness. Playing the role of Archangel or privileged viewer allows the reader to take on a more critical approach to evaluating the hero. On the second level, the reader not only judges the hero by his heroic Tao in the immediate context of the story, but similar to the refutation of the nominal good within Star Wars, the reader evaluates the philosophical commitments of the hero and his beliefs. While it is evident that Luke is a genuine hero on the purely literary level, due to the deficiency of his heroic Tao and the corresponding reduction, the Archangel level must conclude that the heroism of Luke is diminished.

Another aspect of the Archangel level is that a reader can employ characteristics or tendencies of heroes. When Joseph Campbell explained that every modern-day society is based on myth, he was arguing that humans, as Archangels of stories, glean notions of heroism and virtue that can be employed both within one's daily life, but also within in the formulation something like complex societal laws and standards. Because the Archangel allows for a further and deeper degree of moral critique of myth and the implementation of various virtues derived from it, this is another example of moral realism.

On the third level of moral evaluation, the reader, by moral faith, is commanded to capitulate the authority of his own Archangel status and place himself under the moral authority of his own hypothetical transcendent Archangel. As much as the reader has a privileged perspective concerning the motivations and dispositions of characters and the

author of those characters alike, she must also have the moral faith to believe that she too has moral blind spots. This is another aspect of objective evaluation, not just that the reader can judge the moral actions of a character, but through comparison, the reader can be given insight into his own struggles with employing the soft virtues and progressing toward a good and worthy end while employing good and worthy means. The reader should conclude, like the characters with myth, that he too might have moral failings that he is unaware of. This level of moral evaluation is another example of moral realism.

The Is/Ought Distinction

The fact/value problem concerns a distinction between what one can know as objectively true and the things that are subjectively true. David Hume agreed with the fact/value problem and conceded that there is a real distinction between statements of obligation and statements of facts.¹⁶ The lack of distinction between facts and values is directly related to the is/ought problem, which was first brought to light by Hume: “Nothing about what ought (or ought not) to be the case can be deduced from what is (or is not) the case.”¹⁷ Hume was not a moral skeptic and believed that there were universal moral concepts, but he did not think that these concepts came from God.¹⁸ Further, when he explained his trepidation for converting an “is” to an “ought,” he argued that it was not because he thought it to be logically impossible, but that, at the time of his writing, no one had adequately explained how such a deduction were possible.¹⁹

¹⁶ Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge*. 121.

¹⁷ Gerhard Schurz, “How Far Can Hume’s Is-Ought Thesis Be Generalized?,” *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 20, no. 1 (1991): 37.

¹⁸ Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason*, 82.

The problem for Hume was that he differentiated between moral judgments and moral sentiment: the former is a fact; the latter a value. Hume thought that one's response to ideas, imagination, or customs were only explicable in terms of a consensus of interest: that people accept that they ought to do something merely because of some rule that was derived by consensus.²⁰ What Hume wanted to discover was the principle that objectively explained why people approved of one thing and disapproved of another.²¹

One of the reasons that Hume's is/ought problem was so difficult to overcome was due to his view on human nature. Hume and the philosophers of the enlightenment held to a skewed notion of human nature, which resulted in a skewed notion of moral goodness. Hume thought that moral values were universal, but only to the degree that moral sentiment was derived from a common human nature: customs, habits, and feelings that guided conduct.²² Hume's idea of human nature was descriptive and not prescriptive. If human nature is thought of in terms of description, then it ceases to actually be human nature and defaults into "human condition."²³ The human condition, derived from habit, cannot (and should not) produce an "is" from an "ought."

Alasdair MacIntyre explains that the teleological scheme incumbent to classical thought differentiates between "man-as-he-happens-to-be" and "man-as-he-could-be-if-

¹⁹ W. D. Hudson, "Hume on Is and Ought," *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-) 14, no. 56 (1964): 246.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 249.

²¹ Nicholas Capaldi, "Some Misconceptions About Hume's Moral Theory," *Ethics* 76, no. 3 (1966): 208.

²² Heather Widdows, *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2017). 145.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

he-realized-his-essential-nature.”²⁴ Hume considered human nature to be as it is (man-as-he-happens-to-be) and did not think it possible for one to know man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature, let alone how to achieve it. MacIntyre thought that it could be achieved through ethics: “Ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former (man as he is) to the latter (man’s realized nature).”²⁵

If the realized nature of something can be determined, then it seems quite easy to derive an “is” from an “ought” since “There is no difference between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ in the animal kingdom.”²⁶ This entails that there is no difference between an animal-as-it-happens-to-be and an animal-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-essential-nature, and because there is no distinction between the two, it would then follow that the animal acts as if it is adhering to its realized nature. Therefore, it is possible to overcome the is/ought distinction by first appealing to these obvious cases within nature. Then, if obvious cases of overcoming the distinction can be determined, then perhaps the principles employed could be applied to humans so that they too can overcome the distinction.

Scientific inquiry is based on normative functions and laws, which allow for hypotheses that are not based on consensus but on observations concerning repeatable phenomena. Other individuals can likewise confirm the observations independently. Thus, the nature of scientific discovery is based on a rational universe establishing various “is-es” that may justify one in believing that an “ought” may reasonably follow. For example, if one were to study a hummingbird, it would not be contestable that the

²⁴ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 52.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist*, 239.

“is” is that a humming bird has a long needle-like beak, has wings, and uses her natural faculties to engage in the high law. The ensuing ought would be, “the hummingbird ought to use its beak to probe deep into a flower, so that once the beak is inside, she can press her tongue through the protective sheath and extract nectar from a flower.”

In nature, there is both a “common ought” amongst species and a “unique ought” amongst the species. The common ought amongst all the species is the adherence to the high law. If an animal, for whatever reason, suddenly decides it does not wish to eat, reproduce, or act in any way that would lead to its own preservation, it is reasonable to conclude that “she ought not do that.” The animal should not act in out in destruction because all life, based on observations and excluding the anomalous, should desire to keep on living.

The unique ought amongst the classes is found in the physical attributes that differentiate the members of those classes from the rest of the animal kingdom and from each other. For example, a robin and a hummingbird would share in the common ought of using their wings and beaks to collect food, bear and raise young, and avoid precarious situations. What is unique to each species is how those universal functions occur within the classes due to relative faculties. How the hummingbird and an octopus employ different means of fulfilling the high law is what separates and differentiates the unique ought amongst those species.

The is/ought distinction becomes a bit more muddled if it is applied to humans. Obviously, it would follow that humans ought to employ their cognitive and physical faculties to allow for the flourishing of life, but what Hume and others would contest is what the unique ought of humanity actually is and how it is achievable. It is reasonable to

argue that unique human “oughtness” is found in moral goodness, but the ought of human moral goodness as a unique function of his nature cannot be derived from deduction, which was Hume’s original contention. If the nature and composition of something is the key to determining that thing’s unique oughtness, then another argument for moral realism within myth is achieved. It is achieved because it is quite simple to know the nature of a hero and how a hero ought to act: a hero ought to act heroically. The nature of a hero entails that she be and act heroically—the requirement of a hero acting heroically is not a simple tautology, but rather it is something that is true by definition. If the nature a hero is true by definition, then there must be a means of measuring or understanding if a hero is acting according to that nature: moral realism. The problem of one being unable to determine real instances of heroism or to know what a true, by definition hero resembles will be discussed throughout the rest of the dissertation.

In classical thought there was no distinction between is and ought because moral arguments were based on (at least) one overarching functional concept: “The concept of man understood as having an essential nature and an essential purpose or function; and it is when and only when the classical tradition in its integrity has been substantially rejected that moral arguments change their character so that they fall within the scope of some version of the ‘No ‘ought’ conclusion from ‘is’ premises’ principle.”²⁷ Such thinking allows for man to be considered “good” in the same Aristotelian sense as a watch or a farmer may likewise be considered good;²⁸ anything can be considered good if it functionally achieves its essential purpose. In order to determine the functional purpose

²⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 58.

²⁸ Ibid.

of man, one would have to argue for a number of highly contested propositions; however, if one were to argue for the functional purpose of a hero, one would merely need to define a few key terms and aspects of heroism.

There are six different types of heroes, and those various heroes can serve a multitude of functions. The title of hero seems to be somewhat equivocal as it is applied to an eclectic gamut of characters and people. Only the villainous or the delusional would maintain that Superman is not a hero. But is The Punisher a hero? The Punisher will only hurt criminals that deserve it, but he is ruthless in his tactics and shows no mercy. What about Ozymandias from *Watchman*? He killed half of the population of New York City by staging an alien invasion; however, the fear of a new, powerful, and global enemy caused the immediate end to all global conflict and the cold war. Is Ozymandias a hero? His actions would ultimately save more people than he killed. Defining a hero as being true by definition is fruitless if a multitude of different heroes exist and if those heroes' dispositions or actions diverge from one another. To determine the nature of heroism and what true-by-nature heroism resembles, the main alignments of characters must first be distinguished.

Character Types

The first distinction should focus on the difference between a hero and a protagonist. In hero myth, every primary hero is the protagonist, but not all protagonists are heroes. A protagonist is merely the character to whom the story focuses. Since a protagonist is simply the character of focus, then the protagonist can be a villain, a hero, or an anti-hero. A protagonist is not limited by the burdens of heroism—she is not limited by anything. The protagonist is an open-slate character that can be used to achieve

whatever purpose the author desires without worrying about breaking any rules incumbent to a specific character type. However, if a character is not presented as having a clear character alignment, then it is impossible for the reader to know when a compromise has occurred. Compromise is a crucial factor in determining heroic, anti-heroic, or the villainous good. This entails, that while all primary heroes are protagonists, all protagonists, if they are to develop as a character, must have an established alignment.

Alignments

Character alignment has always had an implicit role within literature and myth. Alignments define and limit a character's disposition, motivation, and what he considers to be the good. A character must act in accordance with his alignment. If a character does not act within that scope, then the initial assessment of the alignment was either incorrect, or the alignment of the character has evolved into a different one. The modern classifications of alignment were originally designed and fully developed to aid in character creation for role-playing games: games in which players assume the roles of characters in a fictional setting. A character's alignment is determined by a combination of factors: what she considers to be the ultimate purpose of life, her religion, her view on humanity, or even the role that a hero is meant to play. When a player in a role-playing game creates a character, the player decides the type of actions that he wants his character to partake in, and his alignment becomes established based on those desired actions. The alignment becomes fixed, but not unmovable, and the player plays the character in accordance with the chosen alignment.²⁹ The alignment is fixed until the character consistently acts in

²⁹ Richard A. Bartle, *Designing Virtual Worlds* (San Francisco: New Riders, 2004), 257-260.

ways that correspond to a different alignment.

There are essentially three sets of factors that determine a character alignment: goodness versus evil, lawfulness versus chaos, and neutrality.

Good implies altruism, respect for life, and a concern for the dignity of sentient beings. Good characters make personal sacrifices to help others.

Evil implies harming, oppressing, and killing others. Some evil creatures simply have no compassion for others and kill without qualms if doing so is convenient or if it can be set up. Others actively pursue evil, killing for sport or out of duty to some malevolent deity or master.

People who are **neutral** with respect to good and evil have compunctions against killing the innocent but lack the commitment to make sacrifices to protect or help others. Neutral people are committed to others by personal relationships.³⁰

Role-playing games employed normative definitions of goodness, evil, and neutrality.

Without the standard then goodness, evil, and neutrality cannot properly be determined.

Law implies honor, trustworthiness, obedience to authority, and reliability. On the downside, lawfulness can include closed-mindedness, reactionary adherence to tradition, judgmentalness, and a lack of adaptability. Those who consciously promote lawfulness say that only lawful behavior creates a society in which people can depend on each other and make the right decisions in full confidence that others will act as they should.

Chaos implies freedom, adaptability, and flexibility. On the downside, chaos can include recklessness, resentment toward legitimate authority, arbitrary actions, and irresponsibility. Those who promote chaotic behavior say that only unfettered personal freedom allows people to express themselves fully and lets society benefit from the potential that its individuals have within them.

Someone who is **neutral** with respect to law and chaos has a normal respect for authority and feels neither a compulsion to follow rules nor a compulsion to rebel. They are honest but can be tempted into lying or deceiving others if it suits him/her.³¹

³⁰ Wizards Team, *Special Edition Player's Handbook*, Special ed. (Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 2004), Np.

³¹ Ibid.

Originally the lawful and chaotic dichotomy was based on the distinction between, "The belief that everything should follow an order, and that obeying rules is the natural way of life," which is the opposite of, "the belief that life is random, and that chance and luck rule the world."³²

The distinction between good, evil, lawful, and chaotic defines all characters. All heroes fall under the good category, all anti-heroes fall under the neutral category, and all villains fall into the evil category. Once a character is given a category, she is assessed to a further degree by lawful, neutral, or chaotic. This means there are essentially nine character types, six different kinds of heroes, and three villain types.

Lawful Good

Lawfully good characters typified one's initial thoughts of heroism. The lawful good hero epitomizes heroism: brave, compassionate, honorable, virtuous, and dutiful. These heroes are willing to sacrifice for the greater good. The lawfully good will never stop fighting. They endure; despite hardships of a galactic magnitude, they press on. To them, heroism is a mantle that requires all effort and focuses—it is a relentless pursuit that never ends.

The lawfully good respect life. These heroes have unwavering hope in all areas, and this hope especially applies to people. They believe that everyone can be saved and that no one has to die. They believe that everyone deserves a second chance. These heroes think that even the vilest villain can be redeemed. They are reluctant to kill, but will do so in combat, but they would never kill a defenseless opponent.

This hero cannot be bought. He will not attempt to buy others. His primary virtue

³² Frank Mentzer, ed., *Dungeons & Dragons Basic Rules, Set 1* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Hobbies, 1983), 1.

is humility; it is the lens to which he sees all things. He is never looking for a fight. He is never happy about lying—and technically he is not meant to lie at all—but would do so if it saved the life of someone else. He is not given over to the common vices of man. He is monogamous in his relationships and thinks of institutions such as marriage are as sacred as his code of heroism.

What is very important to this hero is that his heroism is based on some law or standard that is higher than himself. This hero respects authority. His respect for authority is evident in his praise for common heroes such as firefighters or police officers. In his mind, everyone is meant to follow a law or standard that transcends any person or society, and people like police officers are servants to a kind of transcendent law. The law is crucial. The law establishes the good. Through a clear and good law, one can easily determine the goodness or evilness of an action. The law limits the hero by informing the hero what is considered morally good. But the hero is happy to be limited by the law because the hero has such a lofty view of it.

Most of the heroes that fall under this alignment are thought of as true examples of heroism: Superman, Vash the Stampede (*Trigun*), Luke Skywalker, and Frodo.

Neutral Good

Since all of the good character alignments have a lofty view of humanity and life in general, obviously the main difference between the three types is their response to law. A neutrally good hero desires the good at all costs, and while he will attempt to follow the law, he has no problem breaking the law if it will result in goodness. One of the flaws inherent to the lawfully good hero is that it is possible for a lawfully good character to follow a less than good law. Neutrally good characters do not share in this hypothetical

problem. They are always willing to break the law if it can bring about a greater good. Their respect for authority is limited by the goodness of that authority, but their respect for life remains constant. Neutrally good characters often get along well with lawfully good characters because both employ the soft virtues while also willing to protect life with force. The only source of contention between the lawfully good and the neutrally good is always centered on the goodness of working within the bounds of law.

Qui-Gon Jinn, a character from the Star Wars universe, typifies a neutrally good hero. Qui-Gon is humble, peaceful, has a lofty view of life, and employs many of the soft virtues. Qui-Gon respects authority and always attempts to work in coalition with governing authorities, but he does not feel compelled to always comply with those authorities. Qui-Gon got into an argument with his Padawan (pupil) about the goodness of following the Jedi Council's decision that Anakin Skywalker would not be trained as a Jedi:

Obi-Wan: The boy will not pass the Council's tests, Master, and you know it. He is far too old.

Qui-Gon: Anakin will become A Jedi...I promise you.

Obi-Wan: Don't defy the Council, Master...not again.

Qui-Gon: I will do what I must.

Obi-Wan: Master, you could be sitting on the Council by now if you would just follow the code. They will not go along with you this time.

Qui-Gon: You still have much to learn, my young apprentice.³³

Examples of neutrally good characters: Spiderman, Goku (*Dragon Ball*), and Qui-

³³ George Lucas, dir., *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 1999).

Gon Jinn.

Chaotic Good

Chaotically good characters hate—even more than neutrally good characters—the limits imposed by politicians and bureaucrats. All that the chaotically good is concerned with is a good end. While chaotically good heroes cannot employ any means necessary to achieve a good end, they will also push the bounds of what is reasonably considered acceptable actions of a hero. They are the type of characters who continually carry the notion of, “Just get out of my way and goodness will be the result.” Such brashness often makes the hero seem aloof or indifferent. The hero is not indifferent to a good end, but he *is* indifferent to less-than-good means—he will flirt with evil to bring about goodness.

The chaotically good find the sentiments inherent to the soft virtues as profitable, but he will never be limited by those virtues. While this hero is not free to kill indiscriminately, he is willing to lie, deceive, and swindle if the end result is goodness. The chaotically good hero is similar to the other good heroes because he too has a lofty view of humanity and life. These heroes tend to work alone. If he does work with someone else, it is only a limited group of supremely trusted comrades. These heroes are often hot-headed loners who endure by their strong will.

The Doctor from *Doctor Who* is perhaps the best example of a chaotically good character. The Doctor places an incurably high value on all life. He refuses to kill. He believes that everyone can be reformed. He is not above deception and destruction, but his value on life does not waver. The Doctor usually works with only one companion, but he is for the most part, a loner. What typifies the Doctor’s status as a chaotically good hero is how he responded to “the Family of Blood.” The Family was a group of

malevolent creatures that wanted to siphon the life from the Doctor so that they could become immortal. When the Family attacked the Doctor, he chose to run and hide instead of fighting. Eventually the Family hunted him down. What the Family did not realize was that the Doctor did not run because he was afraid, but because he knew that if the Family attacked him, he would be forced to respond—his response was paramount. One of the members of the Family narrates:

He [the Doctor] never raised his voice. That was the worst thing—the fury of the Time Lord [the Doctor’s species]. And then we discovered why—why this Doctor, who had fought with gods and demons, why he had run away from us and hidden: he was being *kind*. He wrapped my father in unbreakable chains forged in the heart of a dwarf star. He tricked my mother into the event horizon of a collapsing galaxy to be imprisoned there, forever. He still visits my sister once a year, every year. I wonder if one day he might forgive her, but there she is. Can you see? He trapped her inside a mirror. *Every* mirror. If ever you look at your reflection and see something move behind you just for a second, that's her. That's *always* her. As for me, I was suspended in time and the Doctor put me to work standing over the fields of England, as their protector [Scare Crow]. We wanted to live forever. So, the Doctor made sure we did.³⁴

The Doctor even valued the life of the people who were trying to kill him. However, when he was given no alternative, and he was forced to respond, his response was severe.

Examples of chaotically good characters: Anakin Skywalker, Piccolo (*Dragon Ball*), and the Doctor (*Doctor Who*).

Lawful Neutral

Neutral characters are anti-heroes. Neutral characters are anti-heroes because both groups share identical characteristics: most notably the willingness to flirt with evil. An anti-hero is not the opposite of a hero, but rather a different kind of hero.³⁵ The modern sense of the anti-hero was a response to a changing culture that began to question the

³⁴ Charlie Palmer, dir., *Doctor Who: The Family of Blood* (BBC, 2007). S3 E9.

³⁵ Vogler, *The Writers Journey*, 35.

existence or the efficacy of moral facts and values.³⁶ The first thing that differentiates good heroes (heroes) from neutral heroes (anti-heroes) is the frequency to which the hero types succumb to their baser and more primal urges. Anti-heroes are not only much more willing and likely to employ nefarious tactics and methods, but to employ those tactics and methods to a much more severe degree. Anti-heroes are less likely to employ the soft virtues, especially humility.

In general, all heroes value all life, even the life of their enemies. Anti-heroes are generally not concerned with the wellbeing of their enemies. They do not merely flirt with evil, but rather regularly employ it to accomplish their tasks. Neutral characters are meant to represent a balance between goodness and evil. Many anti-heroes often desire to bring about a good end, but they will use nefarious and, at times, vile acts to achieve that end. The balance is based on the goodness of the ends compared to the evilness of the means. If the means and the ends are too consistently debased, however, then he is actually a villain. What primarily differentiates anti-heroes from villains is that anti-heroes are more willing to commit self-sacrificial acts.

Lawfully neutral characters are anti-heroes that—similar to the lawfully good and lawfully evil—have a strong Heroic Tao. Lawfully neutral characters have a strong sense of order and believe that clearly defined laws and rules preserve peace. The biggest weakness with this type of character is that this strong sense of law is often blindly followed, even if the law does not produce a heroic or moral end. The lawfully neutral character is not concerned with his code being good, but rather he follows it because following it *is* itself the good.

³⁶ Shadi Neimneh, “The Anti-Hero in Modernist Fiction: From Irony to Cultural Renewal,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 46, no. 4 (2013): 75–90.

A good example of this hero and the weakness of this alignment is Judge Dredd. Dredd followed and enforced the law with unwavering resolve with no room for mercy. In the first movie, Judge Dred arrests Fergie for a relatively minor crime, and his minor infraction was actually justified because it allowed Fergie to escape from a lethal situation. Dredd quickly and harshly sentences Fergie to five years in prison. Later, Dredd is falsely accused of a crime and when it seems irrefutable that he had committed the crime, he bursts out, "I never broke the law...I am the law."³⁷ As each were being transported to a detention facility, there were serendipitously seated next to each other.

Fergie: Dredd? Don't hit me. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Don't hurt me. What are you doing here?

Dredd: I was convicted of a crime. Wrongly convicted.

Fergie: Really? That's kinda weird. What are the odds? Two wrongly convicted guys sittin' right next to each other.

Dredd: You received the sentence the Law required.

Fergie: Five years... just for saving my own ass? That was a mistake!

Dredd: The Law doesn't make mistakes.

Fergie: Really? Then how do you explain what happened to you? You can't... can you? Great! Mr. "I am the law" can't. So, maybe, this is some kind of typo. Maybe it's a glitch. Or maybe it's poetic justice!³⁸

Dispassion towards justice is good, but careful attention must be given to the goodness on which that justice is based. The lawfully neutral do not usually consider the

³⁷ Danny Cannon, dir., *Judge Dredd* (Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 1998).

³⁸ Ibid.

goodness of the law; he usually presumes its goodness. The two primary differences between the neutrally lawful and the lawfully good are (1) the means employed by the hero and (2) the careful consideration of the law. The lawfully neutral tend to be “good guys” who employ less than good tactics but also progress towards a good end. The lawfully good hero fully believes in the goodness of his heroic Tao before he sets off on any missions or adventures. The lawfully neutral does not pause for such a consideration; for this reason, and because of his nefarious tactics, this hero is often thought of as cold or heartless. Examples of lawful neutral characters: Judge Dredd, The Punisher (Marvel), Odysseus, and Dexter (*Dexter*).

True Neutral

No moral agent can be perfectly neutral. True neutrality in the literal sense cannot be maintained indefinitely. Truly neutral characters will always be enveloped by a shade of nihilism because their indifference toward evil or goodness obliges a kind of “What does it matter?” attitude. They willingly and happily break the law, employ nefarious and deceitful tactics, and proceed toward whatever end that they see fit. This kind of anti-hero does not usually care about any other characters except for the character with whom he can benefit. These heroes are always reluctant heroes; they need a good reason to adventure.

Drifters are the most common type of truly neutral characters—it is a common heroic trope. Westerns are the genre of story that really developed and made popular the neutral character type. They travel light, do not like to draw attention to themselves, and they are withdrawn and detached from most plights for aid. The drifter is not initially inclined toward either the protagonist or the antagonist. The protagonist needs to both

convince and entice the anti-hero to join the quest. The drifter requires either a monetary enticement or a good reason why he should help. The most well-known drifter of all time is Han Solo.

After Luke Skywalker fails to convince Han to help save the princess for purely altruistic reasons, he relents:

Luke: *[Pauses for a moment, then leans in close to Han]* She's rich.

Han: Rich?

Luke: Rich. Powerful. Listen, if you were to rescue her, the reward would be...

Han: What?

Luke: Well, more wealth than *you* can imagine!

Han: I don't know, I can imagine quite a bit!

Luke: You'll get it.

Han: I better.

Luke: You will.

Han: All right, kid. But you'd better be right about this.³⁹

Han is also an example of a character that eventually changed his alignment due to his decisions—he eventually became a full hero. Before his transition into full heroism, Han was neutral because he was only concerned with himself and he was willing to employ vices and immoral tactics while attempting to achieve whatever end he desired.

Emotionless characters, such as robots, are a different kind of neutral. Any character that is devoid of humanity and can act with absolute moral detachment is a truly neutral character. Robots are perhaps the best example of the truly neutral because they

³⁹ Lucas, *Star Wars: A New Hope*.

can be programmed to fight either for good or evil. Any sort of collection of single minded and morally devoid entities (drones and robots) are examples of true neutrality.

A truly neutral character that remains static in his alignment is Dr. Manhattan from *The Watchmen* comic book. He is able to remain purely neutral because of his near omniscience. It is easy to remain indifferent when one is like Manhattan and knows that the order of events is fixed and unmovable. When a friend attempts to persuade Dr. Manhattan to join with the heroes, he claims, “We're all puppets, Laurie. I'm just a puppet who can see the strings.”⁴⁰ He further explains such reasoning, “There is no future. There is no past. Do you see? Time is simultaneous, an intricately structured jewel that humans insist on viewing one edge at a time, when the whole design is visible in every facet.”⁴¹

Examples of truly neutral characters: Han Solo, Achilles, Dr. Manhattan, and Morla the Ancient One (*The NeverEnding Story*).

Chaotic Neutral

Chaotically neutral characters are very entertaining, unpredictable, and notoriously reluctant to affiliate themselves to any side or cause. They do not enjoy playing by the rules, they have a unique code, and the person they are concerned most about is themselves. These heroes do bring about goodness, but the goodness seems to be solely due to the company they choose to (reluctantly) affiliate themselves with.

Dr. Gregory House and Captain Jack Sparrow are perhaps the best examples of chaotically neutral heroes. House is a brilliant medical diagnostician who abhors rules and bureaucracies, is very misanthropic, and yet is still willing to fight against his baser

⁴⁰ Alan Moore, *Watchmen* (repr., New York, NY: DC Comics, 2014), Chapter IX, 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter IX, 6.

urges of indifference so that he can help someone else. House always teeters on the edge of self-destruction but has fully given himself over to self-deprecation. Everything outside of himself is initially given the label of “boring,” and he must be constantly encouraged by his colleges to reign in his destructive tendencies. What differentiates chaotically neutral characters is motivation. Though House often decries the acolytes and praise, he is driven by pride and ego— House is similar in many respects to Odysseus.

Captain Jack usually ends up on the “good” side of things, but this has not much to do with his actions or disposition. Like House, Jack’s top priority is himself. Jack is able to help achieve a good end, but it is mostly through his supporting allies. His comrades have to constantly reel in his drunken behavior to keep him focused on the task at hand. Jack, like most chaotically neutral characters, is a wild card with often shifting allegiances. For example, Jack was willing to risk his own life by jumping from a precarious cliff to save a woman who had accidentally fallen into the treacherous waters below. After saving her and being confronted with incarceration, he took the very woman he had just saved as a hostage. The dialogue of two of Jack’s companions typifies the unpredictable nature of this character:

Elizabeth: Whose side is Jack on?

Will Turner: At the moment?⁴²

Examples of chaotically neutral characters: House, Jack Sparrow, and Catwoman.

Lawful Evil

Darth Vader is an unequivocal example of a lawfully evil character. Lawfully evil characters usually have morally upright and good goals; it is the means that they employ

⁴² Gore Verbinski, dir., *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2011).

to achieve those ends that cements the characters as evil. Darth Vader would be considered a hero if heroism were based on the ends alone. His plea to Luke Skywalker typifies the dichotomy inherent to lawfully evil characters, “Join me, and I will complete your training! With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict, and bring order to the galaxy.” Darth Vader wanted to solve a worthy problem because bringing order to a world of chaos is a worthy goal. A precursor for his reign of terror, as well as the mindset shared by the lawfully evil, is found in a conversation that Anakin had many years before becoming Darth Vader.

Anakin: We need a system where the politicians sit down and discuss the problems, agree what's in the best interests of all the people, and then do it.

Padme: That is exactly what we do. The trouble is that people don't always agree. In fact, they hardly ever do.

Anakin: Then they should be made to.

Padme: By whom? Who's going to make them?

Anakin: I don't know. Someone.

Padme: You?

Anakin: Of course not me.

Padme: But someone.

Anakin: Someone wise.

Padme: That sounds an awful lot like a dictatorship to me.

Anakin: Well, if it works...⁴³

⁴³ Lucas, *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones*.

Anakin eventually plays off the comments as tongue-in-cheek, and the two laugh it off, but this seems to be a clear ominous forewarning of the eventual reign of Darth Vader. Examples of Lawfully Neutral characters: Darth Vader, Tywin Lanister (*A Song of Ice and Fire*), and Ozymandias (*The Watchmen*).

Neutral Evil

Neutrally evil characters are the most selfish of all of the alignments. While anti-heroes tend to be selfish from time to time, the neutrally evil character is only concerned with himself. If virtuous tactics benefit him, he will use them. If vicious tactics benefit him, he will use them. The moral compass of this character is based on himself: things that are morally good are the things that benefit him and things that are morally evil are the things that hurt him. Because of his wayward moral compass, this character, like the lawfully evil, often does not think of himself as evil. This character would do all that he could to save the world from doom, but he would also sacrifice a thousand people so that he could live.

There is another type of neutrally evil character: destructive mindless drones. The drone is not evil because of intent, but rather is evil because of the result. Drones are not moral agents, but they hurt and kill moral agents: Xenomorphs (*Alien* franchise), the Borg (*Star Trek*), and zombies. These characters are evil because of the result of their proliferation and expansion, not because of a desire to bring about evil—the evil comes about based on how these groups act towards humans and humanity as a collective whole. These characters are focused on the high law. Xenomorphs attack humans so they can be impregnated by the viral-like Xenomorph egg, which will eventually eat its way out of the host. The Borg transform sentient individuals into mechanical/biological

drones whose sole purpose is to assimilate and expand. Zombies do not have a desire to hurt people; they simply have an innate desire to feed; however, it is this desire to feed which brings about destruction. Other examples of neutrally evil characters: The Flood (Halo series), Petyr “LittleFinger” Baelish (*A Song of Ice and Fire*), and Loki (Marvel Comics).

Chaotic Evil

The Joker is the prime example of chaotic evil:

"Oh, yes! Fill the churches with dirty thoughts! Introduce honesty to the White House! Write letters in dead languages to people you've never met! Paint filthy words on the foreheads of children! Burn your credit cards and wear high heels! Asylum doors stand open! Fill the suburbs with murder and rape! Divine madness! Let there be ecstasy, ecstasy in the streets! Laugh and the world laughs with you!"⁴⁴

No other character examples are required because the Joker typifies this character type so well. These characters just want to watch the world burn. They have no real allegiances and no real friends. They never display regret, remorse, or indecisiveness, which seem to be universally present in all other character types. These characters employ evil means to reach evil ends, they are impossible to be reasoned with, and are completely unpredictable.

The Dissolution of the Is/Ought Distinction

Within classic RPGs, the game master monitors the choices made by the players. If a player makes too many decisions that do not correspond with his chosen alignment, the game master will change his alignment. If a truly neutral character involves himself too much in the affairs of others—either for good or nefarious purposes—he will be

⁴⁴ Grant Morrison, *Batman: Arkham Asylum - A Serious House on Serious Earth*, 15th anniversary ed. (New York: DC Comics, 2004), Np.

forced to ascribe to a new alignment. The alignment is static as long as a character continues to act within his ascribed alignment. The alignment is the nature of the character.

It is actually through video games that the biggest need for distinction amongst different protagonists first became apparent and necessary. Initially, video games had no real story or plot to them. The first games were simple, and no story was needed, which meant there was no need to develop characters or plot. However, as technology progressed, characters and plot became a vital aspect of gaming.

Even when video games transitioned from nameless avatars to characters like Mario, the plot of video games was relatively linear with few possible variations, which resulted in a relatively uniform gaming experience. The original *Super Mario Brothers*, which was released on the Nintendo Entertainment System, presented a relatively scripted and directed play through. Players could skip portions of the game through portals, and there were a few secret chambers, but the game always had the same ending.

The majority of 32-bit games were side-scrollers: the character could only progress in the game by moving from the left to the right. *The Legend of Zelda* was the first popular video game that employed an “open world” concept: the avatar was not limited to move only from the left to the right, but he could travel in any direction—he could explore. The open world concept in video games allowed for non-linear storylines and unique gameplay experience. The addition of an open world concept eventually led to the usage of different character types and different game endings.

Not long after video games began to increase in popularity, the notion of multiple endings to the games started to become more popular. The first major video game that

introduced multiple endings was *Metroid*, which was released on the Nintendo Entertainment System. If a player were to beat the game in over five hours, he was given a fairly basic ending. If he beat the game somewhere between three and five hours, he was given a better ending, and if he were to beat the game in under three hours, he was given the best ending. The better and best endings also revealed one of the earliest and most memorable twists in video game history: the avatar was a woman.

Deciding that a game should have multiple endings based on how quickly a gamer could complete a game was a welcomed treat for the gamers, but it did not lead to a compelling story. When the technology was fully developed which allowed for true non-linear gameplay, the result was that players were also given the capacity to respond to different situations, and the responses to those situations determined (1) the type of companions who would travel with the avatar, (2) how NPCs (non-playable characters) responded to the avatar, (3) different rewards (making a morally good choice did not always entail that the player would be rewarded in the best way), and (4) different endings. Each of these consequences made sense because given a highly detailed plot and story, a gamer who has a lawfully good alignment should not have the same gaming experience as someone playing a chaotically evil character.

The game *Bioshock* is a brilliant video game that advanced the genre of first person shooters and storytelling in a multitude of respects. This game was not as much of an open concept or a true RPG like the *Fallout* or *The Elder Scrolls* series, but it is for this dissimilarity how evident the consequences of choices could and should affect the ending of a game. In both *Fallout* and *The Elder Scrolls*, every single choice affected the moral status of a character, which consequently affected the entire gaming experience.

Further, since the game is an open world concept, it entailed that a lawfully good character could interact or journey with a NPC that a chaotically evil character was unable to, but the opposite was also true and some NPCs would only travel with an avatar if he was of low moral standing. *Bioshock*, though not necessarily linear, had a single plot line and one's interactions with NPCs were nearly identical in every play through, but not all endings were the same.

There is only one moral dilemma type found within *Bioshock*, though there are many tokens of this same dilemma throughout the game. If the player is going to survive in Rapture (the underwater city wherein the game takes place), he is forced to rewrite his genetic code so that he can employ a type of technologically based magic: Plasmids. Plasmids can cause fire to shoot from one's hands, allow one to hypnotize enemies, or even to become a living beehive. Plasmids are powered by Atom, and Atom is more precious than gold. In order to acquire Atom, the player needs to kill the bodyguard of a Little Sister. Little Sisters are zombie-like little girls, and they are the only NPCs who can harvest prized Atom. Little Sisters are protected by Big Daddies: large robotic creatures that are very difficult to kill. Once the Big Daddy has been killed, the player is given a choice: he could harvest the Atom from the little Sister or he could break her zombie-like trance and save her. If the player chooses to harvest her, he is able to extract the maximum amount of Atom, which makes his journey through the dangerous city of Rapture much easier. If he chooses to save the Little Sister, he receives less Atom, but the Little Sister becomes a little girl once again.

There are essentially two endings to Bioshock:⁴⁵ one good ending and one bad ending. The good ending shows the player escaping the dystopian city with some of the young girls that he had freed. It shows how the player adopted and raised the little girls. Under his care and protection, the girls all grew into adults, and it is implied that they lived full and happy lives. The sequence cuts to the Jack (the protagonist) on his deathbed as he is comforted and held by the women he had saved—it is a moving and beautiful scene.

If the player harvests more than one Little Sister, he is given the moderately bad ending, and if he harvests all of them, he is given the worst ending. Jack kills the ruling dictator of Rapture and sets himself up as the new leader. He monopolizes the Atom and uses it to influence the genetically modified people of Rapture to capture a submarine, which contains a nuclear armament—it is implied that Jack attempts to take over or destroy the world.

It is interesting that a game wherein so much of the dialogue, plot, and story are heavily scripted would result in two completely dissimilar endings. But the justification for the different endings is that it is not right that a character who harvests little children and a character that saves them and sets them free should be given the exact same ending.

Therefore, since different character types make different decisions, it should result in different consequences and different outcomes. Since polarizing moral choices should result in polarizing consequences, then any video game that has a detailed story containing moral choices, then it follows that there is absolutely no is/ought distinction found within story-based video games—the same concept applies to myth as well. If a

⁴⁵ There are actually two different bad endings, but the bad endings are nearly identical except for the harshness of condemnation presented by the narrator.

hero *is* lawfully good and desires to remain within that alignment, then he *ought* to act in the ways that typify that alignment. The same is true for all other alignments: if a character *is* “x alignment” and desires to remain within that alignment, then he *ought* to act in the ways that typify that alignment. If there is no is/ought distinction found within hero myth and there is a clear and unwavering distinction between heroes and villains, which aides in determining the best possible here. The dissolution of the is/ought distinction is also more evidence for moral realism.

Evaluating Heroes and Hero Types

Since heroism is an intentional act and moral realism is true within myth, then the most important questions to determine the goodness of a hero are: what problem is the hero attempting to solve? And, how is he attempting to solve it? Both areas of evaluation are inherently connected to morality. A hero is meant to solve or attempt to solve a worthy problem. The level of commitment the hero has towards solving the problem, the means the hero employs while solving the problem: what the practical application of the heroic Tao looks like, the resources the hero gathers while solving the problem, and the level of success that is had while attempting to solve the problem all determine the goodness of the hero.

The solving of a worthy problem can be reduced to two types: death and a quality of life. A hero cannot solve the problem of death; he can only delay it. For example, suppose that Superman sees a man falling from an airplane and flies over saves him. Even though Superman saved that man from death at that moment, since that man will still one day die, then heroes at best, can only put off the inevitability of death. It is still a good thing to prevent a death, but prevention is merely a delay—death still looms.

Likewise, Superman could see a man about to fall from the top of a two-story house, and while it would be unlikely that such a fall would kill the man, Superman should still save him because the broken bones and financial burdens of such an injury would likely detract from quality of life.

There is always a connection between the abilities and giftedness of the hero and the problems he solves. Aquaman can swim at incredible speeds, breathe underwater, and can control aquatic life; therefore, he solves problems that are related to those abilities: drowning people, shipwrecks, or tempests. Spider-Man's agility, strength, speed, "Spider Sense," and the capability of shooting webs entails that he solves problems that coincide with those abilities: preventing robberies or muggings, saving someone from falling, or fighting crime lords.

There are also different tiers or levels that aid one in determining the type of problems that a hero can solve. The tiers range from street-level to multiverse-level. A street-level hero has sufficient abilities to protect only a small portion of a city from danger. As the tiers increase, the power and abilities required to act heroically within that tier must likewise also increase. When a hero reaches the limit to which he can protect those within that tier, then he has reached his maximum level of heroism. If a hero were to protect people on the highest level, the multiverse-tier, he would need a series of very rare abilities in order to do so: trans-dimensional travel, reality manipulation, invulnerability, supreme intelligence, supreme knowledge, and supreme resolve (to name a few). Even though there is a vast difference between the various tiers and the heroes that govern them, one aspect that is true amongst all heroes is that no matter the tier, and no matter the power of the hero, the best possible outcome that the hero can hope for is

always the same: delay death or improve quality of life until one dies.

Superman is known for having absurdly powerful abilities. But what happened in the first Superman movie when Lois Lane died? Superman flew into space and began flying counter-rotationally around the earth. His speed increased past the speed of light, which, somehow resulted in the reversal of time. The mechanics and physics of such a feat do not in any way correspond to reality, but the imagery is quite powerful. After Superman had finished flying, he returned to earth to meet up with a now-living Lois Lane. What is interesting about this scene is that Superman is a hero that is so powerful that in one comic he had to fly to another galaxy just so that he could sneeze without destroying earth and the Milky Way galaxy, but, when he was confronted with the problem of death, all he could do was reverse time so that death could be delayed. There are heroes that are much stronger than Superman, but unless a hero can prove himself superior to death, then at best he can only delay death or improve quality of life.

There are two primary problems with defining heroism as the solving of a worthy problem. The first issue is, every single character alignment attempts—at least at some point—to solve a worthy problem. Obviously, all of the heroes that were mentioned sought to solve worthy problems: Superman fought for truth and justice, Spider-Man took his vow of responsibility with the utmost of seriousness, and Anakin wanted to put an end to the Sith. The anti-heroes mentioned also attempted to solve worthy problems: Han Solo helped Luke Skywalker destroy the Death Star, and Dr. House saved hundreds of patients that initially seemed incurable. Both heroes and anti-heroes solve worthy problems; heroes merely solve the worthy problems at a higher frequency than anti-heroes.

Evil characters solve worthy problems, but not as frequently as anti-heroes. It is strange to think about, but even the Borg that strip men of individuality and personhood still solve many crucial problems that plague men: disease, war, hunger, and disdain for one another. Obviously, a galaxy devoid of famine and free from destruction is desirable by any reasonable person, but what any reasonable person would also admit is that individuality, freedom, and moral agency are more important—despite the negative consequences—than a universe filled with mindless drones. Therefore, while one may argue that the Borg may solve serious problems caused by moral agents, it is difficult to argue that the Borg are heroic

Even the chaotic, at times, can have a bit of rationality behind it. The Joker is often foolish and uncontrollable, but he cannot be uniformly dismissed as having no desire to solve worthy problems: “Introduce a little anarchy, upset the established order, and everything becomes chaos, I’m an agent of chaos, and you know the thing about chaos? It’s fair.”⁴⁶ Chaos, in the mind of the Joker, levels the playing field, which solves various issues of inequality. While inequality is indeed a worthy problem that warrants attentions, it does not seem that the Joker can be considered a true hero for wanting to bring about a state of chaos in order to solve such a problem.

Therefore, the solving of a worthy problem is insufficient criterion for one to be considered a hero. Solving a problem inclines someone towards heroism, but that inclination is insufficient to produce full-on heroism. No one would argue that Darth Vader, a man who was known for “force-choking” people who failed him, is a hero because he was also attempting to bring order to the galaxy.

⁴⁶ Christopher Nolan, dir., *The Dark Knight* (Warner Brothers, 2008).

The second problem with defining heroism as the solving of a worthy problem is a paradox between ability and humility. The greater the problem, the greater the ability of the hero needs to be in order to solve that problem. As issues increase in severity, the hero needs to correspondingly increase in ability. However, as a hero increases in ability, the less likely a hero is willing to employ the soft virtues, especially the virtue of humility. Achilles was feared even by the gods, but he had no humility and was a loose cannon. Anakin's arrogance increased alongside his skillsets and powers—the two were fused. Achilles and Anakin ultimately failed as heroes due to pride. Humility is not a prerequisite of solving a worthy problem, but it is a prerequisite of being a hero.

The two primary problems with heroism being defined as the solving of a worthy problem entail that how a hero solves a problem is just as important as the problem he solves. A true hero solves a worthy problem by worthy means. Therefore, since all heroes, many anti-heroes, and some villains solve the same kinds of worthy problems, delaying death or improving life before death, then all heroes and all characters cannot be fully judged by outcome alone. Instead, they should be judged by motivation and means: the heroic Tao and the employment of the soft virtues.

There is a connection between the heroic Tao and the soft virtues. The heroic Tao is directly related to the natural moral law because the law acts as a more comprehensive and complete model for prescriptive conduct than can be possibly discerned from a code alone. One of the crucial features of the infinite prescriptive good, in the context of heroism, is that it, more than any other reduction, places a high value on humans. Human value seems to be one of the more crucial metrics for measuring morality and heroism,

“If humans do not have value then there cannot be real morality.”⁴⁷ In order to disentangle the ability/humility paradox, a hero requires both the aptitude to solve worthy problems as well as the temperance required to reel-in and limit his exploits and negative capacities. Those self-imposed limitations are based on the soft virtues, and the soft virtues are based on one’s reduction to the natural moral law. Those that employ the soft virtues often place a high value on humanity. While a multitude of soft virtues are crucial for the hero, the most important is humility.⁴⁸

The three most important reasons that a hero must be humble are the willingness to sacrifice, the limiting of conflict, and proper doubt. Humility allows for selflessness and a willingness to sacrifice. If a hero thinks too highly of himself, then he would likely not endanger himself to save a stranger. Heroes are expected to make sacrifices. The word sacrifice is derived from Latin words which mean “making holy.”⁴⁹ Holiness means to be “set apart” or unique. A hero is not an average person. A hero must be willing to do what few others are willing to. A hero must be willing to sacrifice. Odysseus failed horribly in terms of compromise because he was entirely selfish and unwilling to make personal sacrifices. A hero must be willing to put his own desires and wants ahead of the people that he is attempting to save. Anti-heroes are reluctant to make self-sacrifices and villains are quite opposed to making them—sacrifices are expected of real heroes.

Humility also limits conflict; the proud fight over everything. If heroism is the solving of a worthy problem via worthy means (the soft virtues), and if the soft virtues—

⁴⁷ C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16.

⁴⁸ It was Dr. Phil Fernandes (President of the Institute of Biblical Defense) who contributed to this dissertation by explaining the need for humility within heroism.

⁴⁹ Vogler, *The Writers Journey*, 209.

specifically humility—limit conflict, then a perfect illustration for such a need is found within the Jackie Robinson biopic: 42. Jackie Robinson broke the race barrier in baseball. In a crucial scene, the owner that signed Robinson asked him to not fight back when other players and fans mocked and threatened him:

Jackie Robinson: You want a player who doesn't have the guts to fight back?

Branch Rickey: No. No. I want a player who's got the guts not to fight back.

People aren't gonna like this. They're gonna do anything to get you to react. Echo a curse with a curse and, uh, they'll hear only yours. Follow a blow with a blow and they'll say, "The Negro lost his temper." That "The Negro does not belong." Your enemy will be out in force... and you cannot meet him on his own low ground. We win with hitting, running, fielding. Only that. We win if the world is convinced of two things: That you are a fine gentleman and a great baseball player. Like our Savior... you gotta have the guts... to turn the other cheek. Can you do it?

Jackie Robinson: You give me a uniform... you give me a, heh, number on my back... and I'll give you the guts.⁵⁰

Rickey knew that Jackie could never solve the segregation problem if Jackie fought any other battle than the battle that occurred on the field. Humility limited his conflict, so that a greater problem (conflict) could be solved.

If a hero felt compelled to respond to every threat, or that mockers and bullies required anything more than a glancing thought, if he allowed his pride to direct him, or if a more glorious reward could diverge his course, then the hero is not governed by

⁵⁰ Brian Helgeland, dir., 42: *The Jackie Robinson Story* (Warner Brothers, 2013).

humility. A hero who lacks humility is Odysseus. His journey was hampered primarily due to his pride. Odysseus took many unnecessary risks. If he were humble, he would have focused solely on returning home. Had he fixated his superior intellect on returning to Ithaca, not only is it likely that most of his crew would have survived the voyage (they all died), but the journey would have perhaps only lasted a few months, as opposed to the decade it actually took. A hero needs humility to limit conflict. If conflict is not limited, heroism is diminished.

Humility causes doubt: good doubts and bad doubts. Prideful men experience neither good nor bad doubts. A hero needs to doubt, he needs to question his motives in order to determine if he is moving toward a good and worthy goal while applying good and worthy means. If a hero does not doubt, then he is not considering the fullness of his actions. If he does not doubt, he cannot maintain moral faith and a moral life. The only doubt Achilles ever had was to question if the adventure was worth his efforts. He never doubted if he should go, but rather only doubted if the prizes were grand enough. The doubt of the Achilles was not based on humility.

The heroic good is achieved when a hero solves a worthy problem via worthy means. The fundamental understanding of heroism requires selflessness and sacrifice. Villains sometimes solve worthy problems, but if they do, they do not employ worthy means. Villains do not selflessly sacrifice. Anti-heroes often solve worthy problems, but when they do they sometimes do not employ worthy means. Anti-heroes are reluctant to selflessly sacrifice. Heroes (the lawfully good, the neutrally good, and the chaotically good) always solve worthy problems, and when they do, they almost always employ worthy means. Heroes are willing to selflessly sacrifice.

Classically, there are many different types of heroes. Christopher Vogler argues that the varieties of heroes include “willing and unwilling heroes, group-oriented and loner Heroes, Anti-heroes, tragic Heroes, and catalyst Heroes...Trickster hero.”⁵¹ The problem with these varieties of heroes is that they are based on function or role, rather than on intent and being. For example, Vogler explains that catalyst heroes, who he claims do not need to act heroically,⁵² “do not change much themselves because their main function is to bring about transformation in others.”⁵³ First of all, a catalyst hero cannot be a hero unless he acts heroically. Second, the arbitrary function of a hero only determines his role, it does not determine if he is an actual hero because that is based on intent.

Carol S. Pearson, in her book *The Hero Within*, explains that there are six different hero types, and that each has a unique back story and giftedness: Orphan, (“How I suffered or how I survive,” Resilience); Wanderer, (“How I escaped or found my own way,” Independence); Warrior, (“How I achieved my goals or defeated my enemies,” Courage); Altruist, (“How I gave to others or how I sacrificed,” Compassion); Innocent, (“How I found happiness or the promised land,” Faith); and Magician, (“How I changed the world,” Power).⁵⁴ However, similar to the varieties of heroes presented by Vogler, these are merely functions or roles that different heroes play. Orphan-hood is a common heroic trope and several of the heroes already mentioned were orphans: Superman, Luke

⁵¹ Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, 3rd ed. (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007), 34.

⁵² Ibid., 36.

⁵³ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁴ Carol S. Pearson, *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By*: (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2015), 18.

Skywalker, Link, and Frodo Baggins. Anti-heroes are also orphans: Jessica Jones (Marvel Comics), Catwoman (DC Comics), and James Bond. Further, villains are also orphans: Orochimaru (Naruto), Magneto (Marvel Comics), and Freddy Kreuger were also orphans. Being an orphan is simply a circumstance that a character was placed in, and while such a circumstance will play an influential role on that character's life, there is nothing inherent to being an orphan that determines one's heroic status.

Conclusion

Moral realism is an integral aspect of myth. Through moral realism, true heroism can be determined. While the solving of a worthy problem can make someone seem like a hero, the solving of a worthy problem alone is insufficient for true heroism to occur. While a hero can play a variety of roles, the roles that a character plays does not determine the heroic good.

The requirement of a hero to act heroically is self-attesting: by definition a hero acts heroically. The content of that heroism becomes evident when an intentional agent, combines rationality (the arguments for the infinite prescriptive good) with moral faith (that one's future wellbeing is assured through a morally good life), determines a code of conduct (heroic Tao) based on the highest law (the infinite prescriptive good), is humble enough to receive instruction and empowerment, attempts to solve a worthy problem, employs the soft virtues while solving that problem, and is also willing to sacrifice himself for others. If this is true, then the highest or truest form of heroism is found within the lawfully good alignment.

The purest state of a thing cannot increase in purity; it can only incur degradation—a pure substance cannot become more pure, only more degraded. The

lawful good is the purest version of heroism. All other alignments are degradations from the lawfully good. Concerning law, neutrality is the corruption of order, and chaos is the corruption of neutrality. Concerning goodness, the apathy of neutrality is the corruption of virtue, and the viciousness of evil is the corruption of neutrality. The lawfully good hero sets the standards for heroism. All other character types are diminished versions of the lawfully good. All other character types are diminished versions because the frequency of heroic ends and means is less valued in all other character types.

Therefore, there is only one character type: the prototypical or best possible hero. The best possible hero is both the standard for heroism as well as the goal or aim for all heroes—a hero is meant to act in accordance with the best possible hero.

CHAPTER 5: THE RIGHT KIND OF STORY

The infinite prescriptive good is natural revelation. A criticism of natural revelation is that the content of it is unknowable. However, it has already been argued that a prototypical hero can be determined from studying various attempts to emulate or distort the image of the best possible hero. The various attempts to emulate or distort the image of the best possible hero are universal in scope (they occur throughout the world), and universal in medium (myth, movie, comic book, video game, music, and story). Since these attempts are universal, and they can be fully and really evaluated via moral philosophy and literary criticism, heroism too is an aspect of natural revelation, which *is* knowable. All heroes of myth and story are a degraded version of the best possible hero—this is the content of the infinite prescriptive good. However, the argumentation so far has only focused on the hero and not on the story. The story itself must be examined. It will be argued in this chapter that the best possible hero must come from the best possible story, and the best possible story is a myth. It will be argued in the final chapter that the monomyth is also a form of natural revelation that is meant to explain other integral aspects of the best possible hero. The importance and proper understanding of myth must be established before the monomyth can be examined.

Narrowing the Definition and Understanding

The etymology of the word *myth* is humble enough; it comes from the Greek word *mythos*, which simply translates to “speech” or “discourse.” The term evolved to later entail “legend” or “fable.” The most fundamental definition of myth is merely communication, but later it began to be associated with bizarre creatures, historically questionable exploits of people or events, and eventually just pure fantasy. Even in

common understanding and usage, myth is employed in a variety of means and contexts. Myth may refer to something real or something fake and either usage may rightly be referred to as a “myth.” Myth may refer to something elusive but known to exist (an albino Sperm whale), or myth may also refer to something elusive but not known to exist (Bigfoot). Myth may refer to an “old-wives tale” that is demonstrably false (“Don’t swallow your gum or else it will remain in your stomach for seven years”), or myth may refer to an old-wives tale that is demonstrably true (“Have some tea with honey because honey helps soothe a sore throat and acts as a cough suppressant”).

Should a father recount to his son a troubling tale from his youth about the consequences of lying, this would be an example of a myth: an *actual* myth. A father could likewise read his son the story “The Boy who Cried Wolf,” and the cautionary tale would act as a *hypothetical* myth that serves the same function as the father’s story. In the story, a boy continually lies about being in danger from a ferocious wolf. The threat of danger causes the townspeople to rush to his aid. Since the boy was lying, the townspeople would leave annoyed. Eventually, a time came when a wolf actually drew near and threatened the boy, and his cries for help went unheeded by the townspeople who were tired of being made fools. Both the father recalling a story from his childhood and “The Boy who Cried Wolf” are examples of myth.

A man with a series of fantastic deeds attributed to him that have been properly witnessed and recorded may be likened to a myth: “the man, the myth, the legend.” In current usage, the title of “man, myth, and legend” is reserved for people that everyone agrees existed at one time, but the acolytes and exploits of those people place them so far above their peers, that they are given the title of myth. The superior skills of such a figure

is what makes him a myth and does not necessarily mean that the person never existed. Often various celebrities are referred to in such a way: Babe Ruth, Frank Sinatra, and Cassius Clay.

A man with a series of fantastical deeds attributed to him that have not been properly witnessed and recorded may also be referred to as a myth. In this understanding, the myth can either be a reference to a historical person as the myth, the actions of that person as the myth, or both the person and the actions as the myth. For example, there is little doubt that Buddha existed, though he is often described in mythological terms. Buddha is a myth in several different senses. Buddha is a myth because he had a level of knowledge and understanding that set him apart from his contemporaries. He is myth because that he was the founder of a major religion. Buddha is also a myth because he had miracles attributed to him. He is a myth because various aspects of his life are portrayed in themes common to myth: his mother had supernatural or otherworldly attributes, he was a child of prophecy, nature itself overtly responded to his coming and birth, he had a supernatural birth, and he is associated with a rebirth or resurrection. However, Buddha is also a myth because various aspects of his life—namely his miraculous birth and deeds—were not properly witnessed or historically recorded.

To avoid a problem of conflation between the historical and the mythical, often they are regulated to different areas of study: there is a Buddha of history and there is a Buddha of mythology. The Buddha of history is a historical figure, but the “Christ Buddha” is just another myth.¹ The differences between Buddha and Christ Buddha are that the former is what one can know about Buddha through historical inquiry, and the

¹ T. W. Doane, *Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions: Being a Comparison of the Old and New Testament Myths and Miracles with Those of Heathen* (Forgotten Books, 2012), 506.

latter is the untrustworthy remains after centuries of dissemination and speculation—“the belief in their historicity is due partly to the false theories of tradition and history.”² How one can differentiate between the historical figure and the mythical figure will be discussed in the section evaluating myth.

To muddy the waters to a further degree, myths may also exist within myths or stories themselves. The “mythical” status of a character within a story is determined by the same criteria for the mythical status of a person outside of a story: someone who has a set of skills, characteristics, or abilities, which sets his character apart from others. Further, within that work of fiction, there may also be true and false myths as well. For example, a comic book could be centered on a retired hero whose abilities, skills, and exploits were properly attributed to him, and therefore the retired hero is a myth because those properly attributed abilities, skills, and exploits proved him superior to his peers. The hero is a myth because he is a character of a comic book, but since he had also proven himself superior to his peers, he is a myth of a different kind—he is two different myths for two different reasons.

Further, the hero whose fantastical deeds that are *improperly* attributed to him within a comic book makes the “hero” a different kind of myth. The fictional character is a myth like the previous example because both characters are written about within a comic book. However, the second “hero” is also a myth within the comic book, but not in the same sense that the previously examined hero was a myth, but is instead a myth because his heroic exploits were fabrication, exaggeration, or pure intentional falsehood. Thus, a character within a myth can be given a secondary title of myth and for either the

² Lord Raglan, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2011), 46.

reasons of being a fantastical hero with epic exploits or by being a fraud and a charlatan.

A single incredible feat that was properly witnessed and accurately recorded could be considered a myth: “Bob won the pie eating contest by eating 30 pies.” A myth could also be an exaggeration of an already attested and accurately recorded mythical feat: “Bob won the pie contest by eating 35 pies.” Or a myth could be a single incredible feat that was either improperly witnessed or improperly recorded: “Bob won the pie eating contest by eating 70 pies.” The level of truthfulness does nothing to change the status of this kind of myth—myths are not inherently true or false.³

In a general sense, myths are associated with rare and unique people or events, which may or may not have been accurately observed or accurately preserved. One notion that must be absent from any definition of myth is that they are merely poorly kept historical records, or primitive man simply asserted supernatural causes to natural effects: “It is easy to refute the old-fashioned theories of myth, such as that it is garbled history, or is the product of savage speculation.”⁴ Lord Raglan does agree that time can warp the veracity of events which can result in the marring of truth,⁵ but he also explains there is reason to doubt that any sort of “savage” speculation could have been the reason for myth due to the accompanying ritual.

While there is no universal definition of myth,⁶ it is the introduction of the ritual that separates the operative definition of myth from the colloquial understanding. A myth

³ James W. Menzies, *True Myth* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 25.

⁴ Lord Raglan, “Myth and Ritual,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (1955): 454–61, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/536770>.

⁵ Raglan, *The Hero*, 126.

⁶ William G. Doty, “Mythophiles’ Dyscrasia: A Comprehensive Definition of Myth,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48, no. 4 (1980): 531–62.

must be associated with a ritual (or disposition). The entire idea that the primitive savage created myth as a means of explaining his natural phenomena has been proven false because of the intricacy of the rituals involved. Even the primitive minds of savages had very high standards for its implementation: the ritual had to be completed perfectly, those participating in the ritual had expectations, and only a person of significant authority could perform the ritual.⁷ Primitive ritual was as strict as a military ceremony: the participants, the officiant, and the audience all had explicit expectations that they were required to follow. A.M Hocart explains that even “primitive” rituals are not primitive at all:

Such also are those ceremonies of the Australian aborigines which cause a particular species to multiply. These can be very highly specialized, for instance among the Aranda who have ceremonies directed not to food, or animal food, or even to kangaroos, but to brown kangaroos, grey kangaroos, and so on. Now the biologist regards specialization as a sure sign that a type is not primitive. By his standards then these specific ceremonies of the Arandas are anything but primitive, for they are as highly specialized as they could be.⁸

Myth, like religion and morality are inherently complex. While myth, religion, and morality are all separate entities, they cross paths in a number of ways. Religion can determine morality, morality can determine religion, myth can determine religion,⁹ and myth expresses religious thought.¹⁰ Sometimes it is impossible to differentiate myth and religion,¹¹ and myths can outlive the religion on which it is based.¹² All religions employ

⁷ Raglan, “Myth and Ritual,” 454-61.

⁸ A. M. Hocart, “The Purpose of Ritual,” *Folklore* 46, no. 4 (1935): 343–49.

⁹ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 228.

¹⁰ Menzies, *True Myth*, 27.

¹¹ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 28.

myths to bring about prescribed rituals and dispositions, some regard religion as a primitive form of science,¹³ and religions can be based on either true myths or false myths. But, the most striking similarity is there is no evidence that any of these entities have ever evolved. Morality has been expressed in a variety of different ways, and one can purport various sources wherein morality is derived, but there is no evidence that moral thought began as naturalistic sentiments of sharing or cooperation and progressed from there. The same seems to be true of myth and religion: they both have various means of expression, but there is no evidence that either began as devolved shells of what they are now, but rather have always existed in the complex forms.

G.K. Chesterton argued that it is contradictory and incorrect that things like morality or religion have ever evolved. The idea of “caveman” is often employed in a contradictory sense in that it is used to both refer to man as a savage, but it is also used to explain the origin of man’s moral, religious, and mythical inclinations.¹⁴ How can the caveman be a (nearly) mindless savage and yet also have moral inclination? The earliest man must have had moral capacities if he were to have moral outcomes. The birth of morality cannot be based on sentiments of cooperation: early man banding together for survival because if the earliest man thought it good to band together, then the caveman had pre-existing rational and moral inclinations.

The birth of religion is often associated with man’s moral inclination. If primitive man had sufficient cognitive faculties to create a system of worship that included myths

¹² Raglan, “Myth and Ritual,” 458.

¹³ Robert A. Segal, “The Myth-Ritualist Theory of Religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19, no. 2 (1980): 173–85.

¹⁴ Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*.

and rituals, then one is hardly justified in believing that such a man was actually “primitive.”

Chesterton argued that many naturalists claim that religion (and myth) is derived from one of three things: (1) Fear of the chief, (2) Exotic dreams (Joseph Campbell considered dreams as a source for mythology) or unexplained phenomena, and (3) the desire for a plentiful harvest.¹⁵ But Chesterton argued that such reductions are a ploy to dehumanize the ancient man and make him seem distant, and that those who attempt to explain the origin of religion, myth, and morality by such means are really trying to explain away the apparent phenomena, as opposed to actually explaining it.¹⁶ He reasoned that when people argue that something takes a long time to evolve to reach a certain level of sophistication, it is because he does not wish to deal with the consequences that some things basically exist¹⁷ (religion, myth, and morality), yet also exist with sophistication (monotheism, complex myths and rituals, and the infinite prescriptive good). Complex religions cannot be derived from natural processes or the evolution of man because animism would always have to be the perpetual precursor for the more sophisticated polytheism, but this is demonstrably false. While myths can change through time, the earliest myths were nonetheless complex.

It is evident that religious mythology, in whatever form it takes, is not a product of evolution. If myth came about via evolution, then a large body of work would be required to display that simple myths and rituals arose initially and then were followed by the more complex, but no comprehensive body of work has been able to prove that all

¹⁵ Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 28.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

incidences of complex myths and religions were caused by earlier embryonic forms—the evidence points to the opposite. If evolution occurred within myth and religion, then a single incidence of native monotheism would disprove the evolutionary theory because monotheism is considered a highly evolved form of religion. The theory requires that some form of animism or an even more primeval religion must exist first in the earliest stages of all types and varieties of myth and religion, but the futility of such an endeavor has been firmly established. Even if one were to posit numerous examples of myths or religions evolving from one form to a completely different form; a single incidence of native monotheism proves that myth and religion do not evolve from simpler forms, but rather there are merely different instantiations of myth and religion. Not only has such an incidence of native monotheism been discovered, but thousands and thousands of examples have been discovered—even the most obscure, isolated, and primitive polytheistic and pagan religions and people-groups had notions of native monotheism. G.K. Chesterton gives examples of a polytheistic aboriginal group and a Native American tribe that had knowledge of, and a name for a great monotheistic God.¹⁸ He also argued that the Greek pagans considered there to be something higher and loftier than Olympus.¹⁹ Ronald Nash argues even that Plato was open to the idea of a supreme God.²⁰

In his groundbreaking work *Ursprung Der Gottesidee* (*The Origin of the Idea of God*), Wilhelm Schmidt compiled thousands of incidences of native monotheism throughout the world. He argued that missionaries had not visited these people-groups,

¹⁸ Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 55.

¹⁹ Ibid., 57.

²⁰ Ronald H. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought?*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003).

and despite being “savages,” they still nonetheless had knowledge of monotheism, which is considered a highly evolved form of religion. His work was extensive and eventually filled 12 volumes and more than 4,000 pages of examples of native monotheism.²¹ What has been universally confirmed is that complex religious thought (including, but not limited to monotheism) is found in cultures so early in their communal development that there was no time for the belief to have evolved from the simpler forms—primitive people does not necessitate either primitive gods or a non-High (monotheistic) God.²²

What was primitive about the earliest myths and rituals was the expectations. Today’s myths, specifically religious myths, are meant to answer the biggest questions that man has: Who am I? What is my purpose? What is the ultimate good? But the ancient man did not have the same types of needs as man does today. Primitive man was concerned about practical problems associated with daily life,²³ not existential dilemmas. Because the expectations of ancient man were more fundamental, the myths and rituals are considered more basic, but they are only basic in the sense that they fulfilled basic needs. Since the modern man is concerned with more complex questions, then by comparison, the earlier myths and rituals seem primitive paralleled to modern myths and rituals. However, this is an issue of accident, not intention. It would seem to follow that a myth about how to plant corn would by proxy appear simple compared to a myth associated with the ultimate purpose of man. However, while myths can vary in style,

²¹ Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2006), 12.

²² Winfried Corduan, *In the Beginning God: A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monotheism* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 305.

²³ A. M. Hocart, "Review of *Review of Myth and Ritual. Essays on the Myth and Ritual of the Hebrews in Relation to the Culture Pattern of the Ancient East*, by S. H. Hooke," *Folklore* 44, no. 3 (1933): 318.

format, and complexity, the ensuing rituals of simple myths and complex myths to not necessitate that simple myths have simple rituals or that complex myths have complex rituals—the myth of baptism is relatively simple, but the explanation of the rite and ritual in the full historical and soteriological sense is a massive undertaking.

The common understanding of myth is different than the technical sense. The common understanding entails that myth is a grand tale of fiction, a person with marvelous exploits, oldwife's tales, or stories of warning. The common understanding is not the true or full understanding of myth. The technical sense of myth, that it is associated with a ritual, is the proper and useful definition. Myth is inherently connected to morality and religion, which is evidence that the earliest myths were complex.

Myth and Art

On the most basic level a myth is story (a work of art) that is meant to motivate one towards an intentional end: "mythology is an interior road map of experience, drawn by people who have traveled it."²⁴ A myth is a story that directs a person, but myths are not just stories, they are much bigger than stories, "Myths are universal and timeless stories that reflect and shape our lives—they explore our desires, our fears, our longings, and provide narratives that remind us what it means to be human."²⁵ A myth is art that attempts to answer the bigger questions of life. But, myth is not merely art because myth transcends it, "Mythology teaches you what's behind literature and the arts, it teaches you about your own life."²⁶ Iris Murdoch explains the nature of art enforces the idea that

²⁴ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, XVI.

²⁵ Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Edinburgh: Cannongate, 2005), 63, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/KarenArmstrongAShortHistoryOfMyth>.

Myth transcends art:

A work of art is of course not a material object, though some works of art are bodied forth by material objects so as to seem to inhere in them. In the case of statue the relation between the material object and the art object seems close, in the case of picture less so. Poems and symphonies are clearly not material objects... Works of art require material objects to keep them continuously available (our memories fade) and some require performance by secondary artists. All art objects are 'performed' or imagined first by the artist and then by his clients, and these imaginative and intellectual activities or experiences may be said to be the point or essence of art.²⁷

Mythology is not art; it is the essence of art. Mythology is expressed by art, but it is also the cause for art.

Plato had a complicated relationship with art. Plato's dialogues of rhetoric and poetry are both persuasive and pervasive, but he never created a systematic approach to defining key concepts: "The differences between kinds of poetry (epic, tragic, lyric, comic, and so forth); and the senses in which poetry is and is not bound to representation, imitation, expression... and fiction."²⁸ Plato understood the power of poetry and rhetoric (simplified as "art") and thought that they were at odds with philosophy. Plato considered art to be simple, powerful, and easily manipulating: "Language has an inherently seductive power which interferes with both philosophical activity and true poetic response."²⁹ He also thought that aesthetic harmony was *felt*, but not reasoned,³⁰ which is another reason he avoided art.

²⁶ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 14.

²⁷ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 2.

²⁸ Charles L. Griswold, "Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016), accessed February 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/plato-rhetoric/>.

²⁹ Morris Henry Partee, "Plato on the Rhetoric of Poetry," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33, no. 2 (1974): 203–12, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/429088>.

Plato thought that art was often employed as unreasoned sensationalism, which appealed to emotion and did not rest on solid reasoning or critical thinking skills: “The ability to influence an audience through emotional appeals that lack any basis in knowledge.”³¹ The fear of such influence was concerned with the loss of real values and real morality.

The trepidation was typified in Thrasyarchus’ dialogue with Socrates. Thrasyarchus argued that objective and non-arbitrary justice was an act of pure fiction; however, he was unable to express his views concerning justice without using the language of justice.³² For Plato, if one is to employ a concept that he disavows, the result is complete nonsense and a broken philosophy. Plato thought that art acted similar to Thrasyarchus because it, specifically the works of Homer, used language of justice and goodness without properly arguing for it. His critique was practical as well: “Praisers of Homer who say that this poet educated Greece, and that in the management and education of human affairs it is worthwhile to take him up for study and for living, by arranging one’s whole life according to this poet.”³³ He knew that the works of Homer could not create a kind of categorical imperative; therefore, they could not aid one in obtaining happiness—the writings of Homer could neither inform one of the good nor compel one to seek it.

Ironically, Plato did employ poetry to a degree within his dialogues and his most

³⁰ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 9.

³¹ Michelle Brady, “A Platonic Defense of Rhetoric,” *Mediterranean Studies* 11 (2002): 1–18.

³² Rist, *Real Ethics*, 17.

³³ Griswold, “Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry.”

well-known philosophical accomplishment was in fact a hero myth: *The Allegory of the Cave*. The reluctance of Plato to employ myths or art as a literary device was rooted in his view of the immaterial forms. His view on universals resulted in a kind of iconoclasm³⁴ that made him uncomfortable with presenting simple yet easily misconstrued imagery, and instead thought that unambiguous argumentation was preferable.

Plato's understanding of myth was misguided. The nature for myth is not deception.

Mythology is not a lie, mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical. It has been well said that mythology is the penultimate truth—penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words. It is beyond words. Beyond images, beyond that bounding rim of the Buddhist Wheel of Becoming. Mythology pitches the mind beyond that rim, to what can be known but not told.³⁵

Myth is art, but it is more than art because it also causes artwork to be created. Myth is bigger than art.

Myth and Ritual and Disposition

Myth is an intentional work of art (story) that engages a person in a ritual or brings about a disposition—the effect of a corresponding ritual or disposition is true of all myths. The most common definition of mythology within academia is that it is primarily concerned with ritual. Joseph Campbell and Lord Raglan both claim that ritual is a crucial component of myth, “A ritual is the enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth.”³⁶ “Myth has no existence apart from the ritual.”³⁷

³⁴ Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 7.

³⁵ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 206.

³⁶ Ibid., 103.

The co-existence of myth and ritual, especially to the degree that Raglan argues, is directly related to man's desire for meaning.

"Myth is as real as human concerns are real."³⁸ The primary human concern—once all of his basic needs are met—is the desire for meaning and to obtain some form of transcendence. Joseph Campbell argued that the primordial myths (the oldest myths) were practical in nature.³⁹ The primary concern for early man was survival; therefore, the earliest myths were pragmatic and useful for survival. However, once the basic needs within a people-group or society are met, myths take a different and less practical, but more meaningful, role. Myths create rituals that act as various milestones⁴⁰ of life, and these milestones give meaning and hope—myths and rituals oblige sentiments of transcendence. The fundamental truth of the myth lies in the fact that it personifies a situation of deep emotional substance: a ritual.

Rituals represent the most significant aspects of one's life. Rituals are recurrent in nature, and in fact they demand repetition. Since repetition is a crucial aspect of ritual, then the significance of milestones is not limited to the person directly involved with the rite, but rather it is significant to the community as a whole. Suppose a "primitive" tribe has a complicated and rigorous ritual that signifies a boy's transition into manhood—it requires years of preparation. If a boy were to successfully endure the ritual, it would be a moment of a great personal significance. However, it is even more significant because the

³⁷ Lord Raglan, "Myth and Ritual," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (1955): 457.

³⁸ David Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1937), 5.

³⁹ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 61.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

ritual is recurrent. To the father who raised the boy and guided him in preparing for the ritual, just as his father had done with him, there is a greater sentiment of significance and pride. Rituals must be recurrent to fully elicit sentiments of meaning and transcendence.⁴¹

Initially, it does not seem plausible the myth and ritual play such a massive and universal role; however, it is demonstrably true that every aspect of man's existence is influenced by myth. Rituals are closely related to rites. Rites, specifically rites of passage, are formal ceremonies. The ritual is the proper implementation of actions or deeds that signify the completion and accomplishment of that rite: the type of people involved, the instruments or symbols used (if any), the officiant, and a new status declaration. Rites, rituals, and myths all function together and affect man at every stage of his life: "All of those rituals are mythological rites. They have to do with your recognition of the new role that you're in, the process of throwing off the old one and coming out in the new, and entering into a responsible profession."⁴²

In a general sense, rites are about transition: a person obtaining a new title, a great accomplishment because of skill, a great accomplishment because of duty, a great accomplishment because of commitment, people getting married, a person being born, or a person dying. Since rites are concerned with transition, then all rites are rites of passage. If a ritual does not bring about a transition—or confirm with each subsequent ritual reenactment the status of the previously obtained rite via ritual—then it is neither a rite nor a ritual in the truest sense. While exact rituals vary from culture to culture, the implementation of rituals are universal to man. The main categories and types of rituals

⁴¹ Raglan, "Myth and Ritual," 454.

⁴² Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 14.

are birth, death, marriage, puberty, cultural (greetings, social behavior, or the taboo), religious ceremonies (circumcision, baptism, or the Eucharist), academic (graduation ceremonies), military (graduations, promotions, decommissions, or retirement ceremonies), vocation and professional (firefighters, police officers, and even airline stewards all have specific rites associated with their professions), political (coronation, the passing of legislation, or retirement), and sports (the seventh inning stretch, championship celebrations, and rituals for rookies and those retiring).

Marriage is a rite. Marriage marks a significant transition in one's life. It does not matter the culture; there is always a prescribed ritual for the proper fulfillment of that rite, and that rite is always based on a myth. Many marriages in the United States appeal to the Bible as the corresponding myth. The Bible provides the myth of Adam and Eve as the basis for the ritual. Various aspects of the ramifications of the rite are also found within the Bible as well: the role of the husband and wife, the expectations of the family, and so forth.

Myths are stories that meet the common and significant needs of man. The common aspects of one's worldview are often associated with the culture that a person resides in.⁴³ For example, in the United States the most common and culturally accepted form of greeting is based on a myth and has a corresponding ritual and disposition. When two people meet for the first time, they shake of hands. The—true or false—myth associated with this greeting dates back to the practice of strangers meeting and showing an empty hand as proof that he was unarmed and likewise did not intend to cause harm on the other person. The mutual agreement to cause no harm—which dates all the way

⁴³ Campbell and Moyers, 28.

back to the myths associated with Xenia—is cemented with an embrace of empty hands. The myth is the reasoning behind shaking hands and the act of shaking hands is the ritual. The disposition is a promise to not harm the other person.

As more examples are examined, it will become evident that *most* myths do not need to be true in order for them to be effective. A myth may be incoherent or absurd, but if the corresponding ritual proves effective, then while the myth is false, the ritual is true. It is true in a subjective sense if it elicits sentiments of transcendence; it is true in an objective sense if it meets a practical need. The efficacy and the veracity of the ritual is based on satisfying a need, which it accomplishes by prescribing the proper, good, traditional, cultural, or religious means of conduct, action, or purpose of the given phenomena. If a ritual meets a need, then it is effective despite the veracity of the associated myth.

Suppose that a Native American tribe has a myth about a great horse that had tremendous power. If she stomped her feet the earth would quake, if she whipped her tail trees would come crashing down, and when she reared she would block the sun. She was also great in virtue. She respected and loved all life. She wanted a family. For thousands of years she should roamed the countryside looking for a suitable mate, but no stud could match her physically or virtuously. She prayed to the gods for a foal. Her prayers were answered, but she was warned, “There is no horse that is strong like you. Your power is great, but your foal’s power will be limited. And despite your great power, you cannot protect her from all danger and pain.” The great horse understood and agreed. She gave birth to a foal. The two played and raced together for years. The foal one day grew sick and died. The horse mourned for years. The god that answered her prayer came to the

horse and reminded her, “No power is so great and no love is so pure that can prevent the suffering of others.”

The purpose of the myth is to produce a disposition (ritual) of comfort. It is meant to help ease the grief of mothers who had recently lost a young child. The goal of the myth is to bring comfort to mothers. If a mother feels comforted from the myth, then the ritual is true in a subjective sense, but if a mother does not feel comforted from the myth, then the ritual is false in a subjective sense. This is an example concerning how a false myth can bring about subjective senses of truth and falsehood.

An example of a false myth that produces an objectively true rite is found in a story from the Native American Suquamish tribe of the Pacific Northwest about how to properly build a canoe. In the myth, several animals are presented as possible models for the canoe. The animals were manipulated to try to accommodate people, but the manipulations and attempts only resulted in the death, and subsequent resuscitation, of the people. For example, a fish’s back was cut open and people were placed inside of the fish; however, as the fish began to swim, he, as usual, flaps his tail from side to side, which caused the passengers to be flung into the water and drowned. None of the animals provided a sufficient model because the physiology of the animals did not translate well into a safe and functional canoe. Likewise, the salmon did not work. Eventually, a deer is proposed as the best model for a canoe. Deer swim with their necks high out of the water, which results in their back being relatively dry and stable. The dry and stable back of a swimming deer provides a good example for how a canoe should look. The myth about the deer is the reason why the tribe carves a deer head into the bow of their canoes, so that it resembles the deer of which the canoe is designed after. The truthfulness of the

deer myth does not matter because the corresponding ritual is effective, and a reliable means of creating a canoe is achieved.

Myths and rituals are not usually judged by their veracity or the causal connection between the myth and ritual, but instead are solely judged on the effectiveness of the ritual. If the Suquamish myth is able to produce capable canoes, then the myth and ritual are effective. However, even in the light of more effective methods (such as a shipwright teaching the Suquamish tribe a more proficient means of carving canoes), the cultural or traditional method associated with the original myth, method, and ritual will still prevail because not all myths are concerned with the absolute best or perfect function of something, but rather on something functioning sufficiently while paying homage to tradition—the nature of myth obliges a devotion to the traditional. Myths, in general, act as a form of transcendence. This transcendence allows not only significant events to have greater meaning, but also common events. The goal of the Suquamish myth is neither perfect transcendence, nor perfect function, but rather a sufficient function that also unifies the whole tribe under a communal myth. The sharing of a communal myth and ritual is more important than a perfected and new ritual capable of producing a more proficient canoe.

A myth is a narrative that produces varying degrees of transcendence through a ritual or disposition. Most of the different kinds of myths are not concerned with ultimate transcendence or unwavering veracity but are instead concerned with one's practical daily life and affairs. Myths must meet needs. If a myth does not meet a need, then a myth is created. When asked where kids today got their myths, Campbell responded,

They make them up themselves. This is why we have graffiti all over the city. These kids have their own gangs and their own initiations and their own morality,

and they're doing the best they can. But they're dangerous because their own laws are not those of the city. They have not been initiated into our society.⁴⁴

Myths are comprised of subjective and objective components. Objectively, a myth must correspond to a ritual. Depending on the myth and ritual, if they are to be effective, the myth and ritual must correspondingly also both be true. However, the subjective power of myth entails that a ritual merely be effective if it is to be subjectively true. Subjectively, true myths are the most common. The following examples display subjective nature of myth as well as the necessary correspondence of ritual and disposition.

It is Sunday morning during the regular season of the NFL, and the season ticketholders have been up for a while preparing for the ritual that is an NFL game. Much like many “primitive” rituals, the most “diehard” fans often have a set and fixed means of preparing for the game: getting dressed in the uniform of their “hero,” face painting, preparing or ordering the same food, or sitting in the same spot to watch the game. There are of course also universal rituals to football: tailgating, the playing of the National Anthem, the halftime show, cheerleaders, the uniforms of players and officials, the coin toss, the signal for a touchdown, and even the post-game media conference.

The mythos of football is identical for players, coaches, and fans alike: a return to previous glory or the future hope of glory—everyone wants to win the Super Bowl. A fan, coach, or player of a team that has never won the Super Bowl and seen the Lombardi trophy hoisted by the team captain look to other teams that have achieved such splendor, and they pine for a similar experience. The myth is the hope of glory; the rituals (for coaches and players) is practice, weightlifting, conditioning, film study, and strategy.

Movies obviously can act as myths, but there is a deeper level than the mere

⁴⁴ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 9.

content of a film. Since myths and rituals meet needs, then a non-mythic movie can act as a myth due to one's response or interaction with it. For example, many friendships are born out of a shared experience of watching a movie. Often, especially with humorous movies, friends become fixated on a humorous or memorable moment and an "inside joke" is formulated. The inside joke acts as a transcendent connection between friends. The myth is the movie or scene that caused the connection; the ritual is the replaying of that movie or the retelling of the inside joke in various contexts.

Musicians, bands, celebrities, athletes, and politicians can all represent ideal functional hero myths, and each correspond to the same model: an ideal function is conveyed, the follower agrees with the ideal function or thinks that it is good to the point of transcendence, and then the ideal function is implemented, praised, and defended by the follower. Music in general tends to captivate people, but when a musician or band's lyrics or lifestyle enraptures a person, and she considers the philosophy or conduct espoused by the lyrics as ideal or good, it becomes a myth. The myth is based on the image of the musician or band and what is championed as the good through the lyrics. The ritual is the habitual listening of the lyrics, the buying of memorabilia, living in accordance with the disposition, and praising the lyrics or disposition to others.

Classically, most mythicists have argued that the only means that a person had to truly interact with a myth is through dreams. However, now with the advent of virtual reality, and video gaming in general, one is able to engage in myth to a degree that was once impossible. The myths associated with video games allow a unique opportunity for one to act virtuously as a hero or to act viciously as a villain, without dealing with the inherent consequences of either. The gaming myth-maker (player) is more influenced by

the motivation behind the myth than the actual mythos experience. The motivation for the myth is based on one being unable to achieve either true virtue or true vice in the real world, and a desire for the opportunity to experience such moral polarities free from consequence. With technology, one is able to engage with the ensuing heroism or villainy incumbent to the gaming universe without real life commitments or penalties.

If a person receives a tattoo to either remember a loved one or to connect with one's spouse, it is an example of myth and ritual. A person who has obsessive-compulsive disorder and thinks that she must knock on every door she passes (ritual) so that her father will not die (myth) is another example. When a country produces propaganda, the venerated or degenerated citizen is the myth, and how the citizen is meant to respond is the desired and elicited disposition. Examples of myths, rituals, and dispositions are vast and an inescapable aspect of human life.

Different Kinds of Myth

After presenting a working definition for myth, the various types of myths will be explained in light of the need for relative veracity.

The most comprehensive definition of Myth is as follows:

A mythological corpus consists of (1) a usually complex network of myths, which are (2) culturally important (3) imaginal (4) stories, conveying by means of (5) metaphoric and symbolic diction, (6) graphic imagery, and (7) emotional conviction and participation, (8) the primal, foundational accounts (9) of the real, experienced world, and (10) humankind's roles and relative statuses within it. Mythologies may (11) convey the political and moral values of a culture, and (12) provide systems of interpreting (13) individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include (14) the intervention of suprahuman entities, as well as (15) aspects of the natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in (16) rituals, ceremonies, and dramas, and (17) they provide materials for secondary elaborations, the constituent mythemes having become merely images or reference for a subsequent story, such as a folktale, historical legend,

novella, or prophecy.⁴⁵

Doty's definition is both impressive and daunting. A definition that is much simpler and yet still contains the same essential aspects is that mythology is a system of narratives that confirms or informs, via ritual or disposition, basic and integral aspects of one's worldview, to the end of achieving various levels and kinds of transcendence. The basic aspects of one's worldview are things like culture, etiquette, and the proper disposition towards one's fellow man. These provide the most rudimentary form of transcendence: sentiments of belonging and increased significance. The integral aspect of one's worldview is his religion, which is meant to bring about the highest level of transcendence.

All myths can be reduced to two types: myths of being and myths of function. There are a few subcategories to these types, but in essence, all myth will come down to one of these two. There is also a third category that will be referred to as "myth-like stories." The third category of myths are reserved either for stories that seem like myths, but lack necessary components, or another kind of myth that will be referred to as "colloquial myths." Myth-like stories contain aspects that are classically associated with myth: fantastical beasts, enchanted items, magical weapons, gods or demigods, and marvelous worlds; however, if the myth was not intended to correspond to a ritual or disposition, and no one considers the content to be "myth worthy," then it is merely a myth-like story.

Colloquial myths can be reduced to two different kinds: Oldwives tales and the adjectival. The former deals with things like urban legends, email forwards, "creepy

⁴⁵ Doty, "Mythophiles' Dyscrasia," 543.

pasta,” fake virus or malware warnings, or supposed cures and causes for various maladies. The adjectival colloquial myth is when a person tells a “larger than life” story or when one recounts the marvelous exploits of some athlete or celebrity. The adjective usually is in reference to something being epic, rare, or obscure. Either kind of colloquial myth can be true or false.

There are two types of myths of being: myths of being and myths of Being. Myths of being in general are creation myths, but any myth that explains the status of man or the human condition is also a myth of being. They are also attempts at positing the good. Myths of being are contingent attempts to achieve transcendence: contingent religion. These myths may also explain the status of the world that one lives in—“being” applies to both the condition of man and the condition of reality itself. A common example of a myth of being is “Pandora’s Box.” The “Pandora’s Box” myth explains both the inquisitive nature of man and the tumultuous nature of reality, which are both meant to elicit specific dispositions. “Pandora’s Box” warns of the dangers of unmitigated curiosity as well as the negative consequences of such curiosity.

The difference between myths of being and myths of Being is that only myths of Being can actually bring about true transcendence. Myths of Being are any myths given by or derived from the infinitely good prescriber: the God of Judeo-Christianity. A myth about how to plant corn is practical, but it does not grant a person meaning. A myth about how a boy becomes a man can grant meaning, and that meaning can grant hope, but finite meaning and finite hope only produce finite transcendence: sentiments of transcendence. Even an incredibly moving myth that resulted in the establishment and flourishing of an entire society, if it were not based on something transcendent—and, as will be made

evident soon, “true”—then the result will only be sentimental, not actual transcendence. Ultimate transcendence is achieved when the inexorable longing of man has been satisfied; when one ritualistically joins the hero that put an end to death.

A myth of Being is a myth that is unlike any other myth because myths of Being, and myths of being that progress towards myths of Being, are absolutely concerned with veracity. If these myths are not true, then they are not actual myths of Being. Most myths are concerned with practical outcomes: ritual or disposition leading to sentiments of transcendence. Myths of Being are concerned with veracity because without veracity, it is impossible to actually achieve true, real, and full transcendence.

The best examples of myths of Being are Gordon Clark’s Dogmatic Presuppositionalism and Cornelius Van Til’s Transcendental Presuppositionalism. Cornelius Van Til argued that all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, circular reasoning.⁴⁶ By this he meant, “The starting-point, the method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another.”⁴⁷ When attempting to prove something, a person must first assume the conclusion to be true before proving it to be true. Van Til claimed that every argument contains its conclusion in its initial premise. However, there is another premise, which undergirds or transcends all others: being and rationality. If God does not exist, the presuppositionist argues that man would know nothing because there is no other means of establishing being or rationality. Even man's capacity for conscious thought of his own existence presupposes a consciousness for God’s existence because being cannot come about from non-being. Therefore, if someone denies the existence of God, he is

⁴⁶ Phil Fernandes, *No Other Gods: A Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Bremerton, WA: IBD Press, 1998), 185.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

subconsciously maintaining that God exists because rationality can only rightly exist if God exists. Van Til concludes that only the God of the Bible can grant rationality, and therefore He should be presupposed. Despite the veracity of the argument, since it is a direct argument for the Judeo-Christian notion of God, it is a myth of Being.

There is a second kind of myth of Being, and these are myths of being that progress towards a myth of Being: progressive myths of being. A regular myth of being is a creation myth or any argument for the existence of a finite god. A progressive myth of being is an argument that can be employed in a cumulative case for the existence of God. The classical arguments for the existence of God (ontological, teleological, cosmological, and axiological) are examples of rituals that actually inform on the myth itself—they are derived myths of Being. The process of studying necessity and the nature of God is a ritual that informs one of ontological myths of being. The process of studying aspects of design and “fine-tuning” is a ritual that informs one of teleological myths of being. The process of studying causality and the beginning of the universe is a ritual that informs one of cosmological myths of being. The process of studying meta-ethics and the natural moral law is a ritual that informs one of axiological myths of being. Independently, these are myths of being; as a cumulative case, they are a myth of Being.

The classical arguments are generally myths of being, but it is possible for them to be considered myths of Being. A single myth of being is not initially a myth of Being. For example, a teleological argument could also be used as evidence for a contingent designer god. Since the teleological argument alone does not entail the existence of a necessary being (God), then it is a myth of being, and it is general evidence for any contingent god that is capable of grand design. The teleological argument does not entail

that a necessary or infinite God exists. However, if an argument from design were employed in a cumulative case for the existence of an infinitely prescribing God, then it is a myth of Being. Likewise, many cosmological arguments are myths of being, however, if while defending a cosmological argument, one argues that God is ultimately the uncased caused or unmoved mover, the result is a myth of Being—myths of being are concerned with contingent gods; myths of Being are concerned with the necessary God.

Myths of function are the most common of all myths. Each of the myths of function are concerned with the proper function of something: social protocols, marriages, planting crops, or religious worship. Myths of function are primarily concerned with sentiments of transcendence—most of the examples presented earlier were of this variety. Hero myth is also an example of a myth of function.

Classically hero myth was thought of as, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”⁴⁸ However, based on the definition presented, myth in general, especially hero myth, is more than a series of common attributes and trials shared by heroes in stories. If hero myth is to be more than a myth-like story, then it must display the proper or ideal function of a hero. True hero myth prescribes the actions, attitudes, and exploits of what the author thinks is the best possible hero. If the protagonist of a story does not represent the author’s ideal hero, then it is not a pure hero myth, but rather a myth-like story.

⁴⁸ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 23.

The Veracity of Myth and Science

Most myths do not need to be true in order for the corresponding ritual or disposition to be effective. No ancient man thought Zeus actually reigned over Olympus and literally championed Xenia, but people did not need to think that it was true in order to benefit from the ritual: the implementation of Xenia. The rituals associated with ancient myths were very practical. Many myths were centered around farming and hunting and provided the community a unifying encouragement of the ideal hunter or farmer, as well as practical hunting and farming techniques.

Some myths must be true in order for a ritual to be effective. There is a (colloquial) myth that claims that if one's comrade is bitten by a venomous snake, then he should suck the poison out of the wound with his mouth. The corresponding ritual—the sucking venom out of a wound—has proven to be dangerous. Most snakebites occur on the foot or hands, which allows one a sufficient amount of time to reach a hospital for treatment. If one were to attempt to suck out the poison and he had an open sore in his mouth, then the poison would seep into the wound and cause it to swell resulting in the possibility of suffocation—if someone is bit by a snake, take him to the hospital. The false myth leads to a false ritual.

All rituals must either be true or effective. If a woman follows the prescribed rituals of mourning due to the sudden loss of her daughter and feels a respite from her grief, then the ritual is effective. True rituals are of a completely different variety. True rituals do not necessarily need to be based on true myths. Friedrich Kekulé was a chemist who was famous for discovering the structure of benzene and therefore also all aromatic compounds.

What is interesting is that he initially got the idea of the structure via a reverie or daydream:

I was sitting, writing at my text-book; but the work did not progress; my thoughts were elsewhere. I turned my chair to the fire and dozed. Again the atoms were gamboling before my eyes. This time the smaller groups kept modestly in the background. My mental eye, rendered more acute by the repeated visions of the kind, could now distinguish larger structures of manifold conformation: long rows, sometimes more closely fitted together; all twining and twisting in snake-like motion. But look! What was that? One of the snakes had seized hold of its own tail, and the form whirled mockingly before my eyes. As if by a flash of lightning I awoke; and this time also I spent the rest of the night in working out the consequences of the hypothesis.⁴⁹

He was describing the myth of Ouroboros. “And so this vision of the Ouroboros Serpent, the ‘tail-eater’ of Greece and ancient Egypt, a symbol ‘half as old as time,’ brought across the wide ocean of time to Kekulé the solution of one of the most baffling and most important problems of organic history.”⁵⁰ A false myth was able to aid one in a true disposition.

There are a number of other readily available examples of false myths that are employed in rituals that must be true. Two examples are associated with the medical professions: The Rod of Asclepius and the Hippocratic oath. Asclepius was the Greek god of healing and medicine who carried a rod entwined by a snake. Even to this day, many medical institutions employ the Rod of Asclepius as their emblem. The Hippocratic oath is inundated with mythology: “I swear by Apollo the Healer, by Asclepius, by Hygieia, by Panacea, and by all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will carry out, according to my ability and judgment, this oath and this indenture...” Obviously the medical field is highly concerned with proper procedure, conduct, and

⁴⁹ John Read, *From Alchemy to Chemistry* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2011), 179.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

veracity, yet those rituals are at least to a small degree shaped by mythology.

For a scientist, his ideal functional hero is the scientist that either best represents how a scientist is meant to function or one he can relate to in some significant way. For example, a scientist might appeal to Gottfried Leibniz as an ideal functional hero because he represents the disposition and attributes had by the ideal scientist. Because Leibniz is a demonstrably proficient scientist, then the appeal to him represents a true myth. If the true myth results in the scientists acting more in accordance with Leibniz, then the ritual is likewise true, but if it does not, then the ritual is false. True myths should entail true rituals.

If one appeals to an ideal functional myth based on false premises, the ritual may or may not be effective. For example, many modern scientists errantly appeal to Galileo as an ideal functional hero myth because of his supposed continual quarrels with the church. The scientist of today is likewise frustrated by the incurably religious: they deny science, cling to superstition, and lack intellectual justification. The incidences surrounding the incarceration of Galileo do not warrant the common scientific appeal to an example of “science vs. religion,” but if the myth spurred on in the scientists a zeal for knowledge and to become better scientists, then the ritual is real despite the myth being false. As long as the rituals that are produced from the myth are true, then the appeal to a false myth is inconsequential. The rituals need to be true because the hard sciences must have tangible results that are confirmed with internal experimentation and likewise confirmed with external experimentation.

Hero Myth and Religion

Religious mythology, depending on the intent, may or may not be concerned with

veracity. The problem with defining things like science or myth is that the definition is either so strict that obvious examples are excluded, or the definition is so broad that everything is included. Norm Geisler and Win Cordun's warning in *Philosophy of Religion* concerning the dangers of defining religion and their subsequent breakdown and defense of varieties of religious experience is helpful for understanding the full nature of myth. The authors wrote that humans are "incurably religious," and it seems that it could likewise be argued that humans are "incurably mythical" as well. One of the types of religious experience they wrote about was religious impulse, which is a universal component in humans that compels them to seek transcendence:⁵¹ it makes them look beyond their finite circumstance and conditions.⁵² The goal for religious impulse is to fulfill the inexorable longing had by all people; it is had by all heroes too.

It is nearly impossible to differentiate some aspects of myth and religion. Religious experience can be expressed in a variety of ways, but the most common means of expression are ritual, symbol, dogma, and myth. Ritual, symbol, and dogma are crucial for myth. A ritual is an expression of worship in religion. The actual telling and retelling of a hero myth is a ritual that is a literal kind of "hero worship." Ritual in religion is common, and it is usually the specific instructions for proper worship. Ritual within hero myth is found in emulating the hero in some manner.

Symbols are non-literal figures that point beyond themselves.⁵³ Symbols are

⁵¹ Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr, *Faith has its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 86.

⁵² Norman Geisler and Winfried Corduan, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2003), 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 212.

common in religion; perhaps the most common religious symbol is the Christian cross. Within hero myth, the symbol can be anything, such as the hero's empowerment or equipment. For example, in a King Arthur myth, the Lady of Lake presented Arthur with Excalibur well into his kingly reign. To receive a sword that can cut steel is very practical, but the symbolism of "divine encouragement" is also significant. By giving Arthur the sword, she was symbolically supporting him and his reign.

Symbolism is often conflated with allegory. C.S Lewis and Tolkien were not fans of allegory. Lewis does concede that aspects of symbolism and allegory are ultimately inseparable,⁵⁴ but he explained that in a general sense allegory is concerned with each symbol in isolation and the total meaning is the sum of things of significance: thing significance plus thing significance equals allegorical significance.⁵⁵ Allegory is a number of independent symbols that is meant to convey an allegorical conclusion. Conversely, Lewis claimed that symbolical narrative or myth is the meaning of the entire story.⁵⁶ Symbol, in this sense, should represent the thesis or intent of the myth.

Campbell's understanding of symbolism is contradictory to Christianity, "There's no danger in interpreting the symbols of a religious system and calling them metaphors instead of facts."⁵⁷ If the rituals and dispositions derived from Christianity are to be true, then Christianity must be comprised of facts. It is also compromised of symbols. Jesus is a symbol, but he is not an allegory or metaphor. He is a symbol in the sense that he

⁵⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 2:439.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 2:438.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 274.

represents the greatest “story” ever told (God became flesh to die for the sins of mankind), but his is not an allegory for something like sacrifice or humility. While sacrifice and humility are important aspects of heroism, detached or independent from the grand story or intent of Christianity, they become ineffectual.

Dogma is an aspect of myth and religion as well. Dogma is the explanation. It is the reason behind a given ritual: “It is often not easy to draw a clear line of distinction between the mythological and the linguistic or doctrinal dimensions of religion, but the former is typically more colorful, symbolic, picturesque, and storylike.”⁵⁸ The dogma of religion is concerned with explicit delineation of the good and the dogma of myth is concerned with the implicit delineation of the good. Religious dogma is meant to provide specific and analytic reasoning; whereas, the dogma of myth is concerned with symbolism.

All religions employ myths, but not all myths are inherently religious. However, stories can become myths, and myths can become religions. C.S Lewis argued that there is a subjective aspect to myth, “I define myths by their effect on us, it is plain that for me the same story may be a myth to one man and not to another.”⁵⁹ A story becomes a myth when it has a profound effect on someone leading to sentiments of transcendence. A myth becomes a religion when the sentiments of transcendence are considered either the ultimate form of transcendence or the most significant aspect of one’s life. When a myth becomes a religion, the myth transforms into a different kind of myth.

A myth becomes a religion when a myth of function attempts to become a myth

⁵⁸ Geisler and Corduan, *Philosophy of Religion*, 215.

⁵⁹ C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45.

of being. A myth becomes a religion when one posits what man's nature and purpose is in light of some function, usually the proper function of man. The proper functioning of a thing is a myth of being because it attempts to establish Aristotelian goodness. For example, science is not a religion, but scientism is a religion. Because of the nature of scientific thought, the corresponding ritual, scientific experimentation leading to practical outcome, has prompted some to think that the practical outcome and life improvement derived from scientific thought and implementation is due to the superiority of it over anything else. Because it is superior, it should be the basis for human conduct: the good. If something is an example of ideal or ultimate being derived from function, then it is also a contingent religion. It is a religion because one is arguing that true purpose, meaning, or transcendence is found within scientific thought. It is a contingent religion because it is based on a contingent myth of being. Myths of being can only produce sentiments of transcendence.

Scientism has heroes. The hero is the ideal functioning person. Religions have heroes. These heroes set the standard for human function and being. The hero is the founder of the religion.

Evaluating Myth and Religion

Myth is art that attempts to achieve transcendence. Even though the veracity of myth may vary, myths can always be judged. Hero myths, by their nature because they attempt to posit the proper function of man, must provide a clear moral standard: heroic Tao and the corresponding reduction. If a myth does not provide sufficient knowledge of a moral standard, then it is not really a myth. Myths in the fullest sense cannot be detached from moral agents; moral agents require a moral standard. Myth and moral

realism cannot be separated.

Myths can be evaluated by the means already presented: What is the code of the hero? Is the code good? Is the hero good? Does the hero solve worthy problems via worthy means? Does the hero commit any compromises? These are all examples of internal evaluation, but internal evaluation is not as crucial as external evaluation.

The critique of the Star Wars universe was much easier to achieve due to the knowledge of George Lucas' intent. Lucas was attempting to tell a story about good and evil. He presented Luke Skywalker as the ideal functioning person, the one that achieves the heroic good. While the imagery of Luke's heroism cannot rightly be questioned, Lucas' attempt to have Luke achieve the heroic good is diminished due to his intent. Lucas' moral philosophy did not allow for true heroic goodness. If the intent of the myth is known, then the purpose of the myth is known. If the purpose is known, then a specific critique of the myth can be presented.

Is the Bible a myth? That depends on one's definition of Myth. If one argues that the New Testament is a myth because it is pure fantasy, then the New Testament is not a myth. If one argues that the New Testament (and the Bible) is a complex myth of Being that is concerned with veracity, and it sufficiently explains the true and proper function of man, then it is a myth. The first aspect that one should evaluate is the intent of the New Testament writers. The intent of the Apostles seems readily fixed and unmoved. Peter argued "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Peter 1:16). The author of the Gospel of Luke claims the intent of his writing is to specifically to provide an accurate account of Christ the myth:

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed. (Luke 1:1-4).

Because the intent of Star Wars is different from the intent of the New Testament, the evaluation is much different. Both Star Wars and the New Testament can be evaluated historically. If a major historical discrepancy were discovered within the Star Wars universe, the result would be mere continuity issues. If major historical issues were discovered within the New Testament, it could question the myth's ability to achieve Aristotelian goodness. The Star Wars myth only had to prove its moral and heroic goodness hypothetically, which it was unable to achieve; whereas, Christianity has to prove moral and heroic goodness actually. "Actually" entails that the New Testament must not only be internally consistent, but also externally.

The New Testament and Christianity demand that its truth claims be tested. The goal of Christianity is transcendence. If Christianity is proven false, then it devolves from something that produces transcendence to something that merely produces sentiments of transcendence. The Apostle Paul argued that the veracity of the resurrection of Christ was indistinguishable from the veracity of Christianity:

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable...If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what

advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” (1 Corinthians 15:12-19; 32).

Lucas could accomplish the intent of his myths through fictional story, but the writers of the New Testament could not accomplish their task through mere fiction. The Gospels are myths. But, the intent of the myth is of the type of variety that if the events that occurred within the Gospels were not accurately portrayed, then the accompanying disposition and rituals cannot produce transcendence.

The New Testament is both inherently religious and inherently mythical, but it is fully neither of these things, however before it can be thought of as religious or mythical, it should first be considered historical. The myth of Christ is the variety that unless it is true, then the rituals or dispositions that are meant to follow will become inert or meaningless. Christ did not preach sentiments of hope, sentiments of salvation, or sentiments of how man was meant to live and be, but he preached a hope that would not disappoint and a salvation that could change man at his very core, and he granted one a new way to be human. If the myth of Christ is false, no amount of sentiments derived from rituals or dispositions can save it from futility.

There are other myths that should be evaluated similar to the New Testament. Any religion that bases the veracity of their religion on the existence of an actual ideal functional hero must be evaluated not only in terms of its internal consistency but also external consistency. Other historical myths that should be held to the same standard as the New Testament are The Quran and The Book of Mormon. Historical myths require historical inquiry. It is beyond the scope of this work argue for the historical reliability of the New Testament, but this is a crucial aspect in proving that Jesus Christ is the real

myth. While the New Testament can be historically defended,⁶⁰ the issue can be pacified with Gary Habermas' minimal facts argument. The minimal facts argument is based on what the most critical scholars believe to be true about Christ and his resurrection. The minimal facts argument allows for sufficient knowledge of Christ to conclude the thesis of this dissertation.

Conclusion

In a common sense, myths are merely the sensational, the fantastical, and the marvelous. Myth is often thought of as speculation or lies. But myth in the technical sense is intentional. It is artwork that attempts to elicit sentiments of transcendence. Myths represent the most important aspects of one's life. The area of prime or ultimate importance is one's religion. Christianity is both a myth and a religion.

⁶⁰ Phil Fernandes has written and lectured extensively on New Testament reliability.

CHAPTER 6: THE MONOMYTH

The Monomyth is to myth what myth is to the arts. Mythology explains what is behind or motivates the arts,¹ various kinds and types of transcendence, while the monomyth explains what is behind or motivates myth itself. The monomyth is a portion of the content of the natural moral law or the infinite prescriptive good. Therefore, the monomyth is also an aspect of natural revelation. The purpose of the natural moral law is to impress on man the importance of moral accountability and moral faith. The intuitive moral inclination of man cannot be denied, and it is a universal attribute. Another universal attribute, or rather tendency, is to create hero myths. Heroes are created in the image of the author or the author's ideal person. The universal tendency for man to desire moral and heroic goodness is due to his moral and heroic inclination, which is directly caused by God naturally revealing Himself.

The intent of any moral philosopher is to produce a robust, logically consistent, comprehensive, and practical system of ethics based on one of the reductions of the natural moral law—it is an attempt to achieve moral goodness. While any ethical system can produce morally good aspects, the infinite prescriptive good allows for true moral realism and true moral goodness. The standard for all ethical theories is the natural moral law. The standard for all hero myths is both the natural moral law and the monomyth. Jesus is to the monomyth what God is to the infinite prescriptive good. Jesus is both the cause of the monomyth and the content of it. He allows for the relentless longing in man, but also presents himself as the solution to that longing. Some have errantly argued that the life of Jesus was nothing more than a Jewish copy of common heroic tropes, but the

¹ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 14.

opposite is the case. All myths are based on Jesus because all myths are based on and due to the monomyth. Just as man has a tendency to mar what he knows to be moral goodness, the same is true with heroic goodness. C.S Lewis explained that the source for myth is beyond myth, and that man has the tendency for allegorizing something (true myth) only because he innately already knows it to be true:

Similarly, when I talk of myths I mean myths as we experience them: that is, myths contemplated but not believed, dissociated from ritual, help up before the fully waking imagination of a logical mind. I deal only with that part of the iceberg which shows above the surface; it alone has beauty, it alone exists as an object of contemplation. No doubt there is plenty down below. The desire to investigate the parts below has genuinely scientific justification. But the peculiar attraction of the study, I suspect, springs in part from the same impulse which makes men allegorise the myths. It is on more effort to seize, to conceptualize, the important something which the myth seems to suggest.²

C.S Lewis is describing the monomyth. To allegorize myth is to deny that Christ is the true myth.

Many readers throughout the world enjoy *The Lord of the Rings*. It does not seem to matter one's moral or heroic philosophy, his religion and worldview nor does it matter one's age or culture; the myth has an uncanny universal appeal. The reason that its universal appeal transcends calculated philology or comprehensive mythology is because it is an accurate attempt at describing the content of natural revelation: the infinite prescriptive good and the monomyth. Campbell argued that man thinks of himself as a hero and the monomyth is compelling "because it symbolizes everyone's continuous rediscovery of the self as each of us evolves from one stage of life to the next, as each of us transcends continuously what-we-are to become what-we-are-becoming."³ When one

² Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 45.

³ Donald E. Palumbo, *The Monomyth in American Science Fiction Films: 28 Visions of the Hero's Journey* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 3.

engages with *The Lord of the Rings*, he interacts with a beautifully created monomyth, which is laid out before him. He appreciates the moral faith of Frodo and intuitively knows that he should act likewise. The monomyth—in the classical sense—is more than slight variations of the same story, but rather they are various recounting of stories of redemption—all hero myths, to some degree, are inherently redemptive stories.⁴ Frodo is a Christ-like figure because *The Lord of the Rings* is, on many different levels, a story of redemption. If Christ is the source for the monomyth, then the reason that this myth causes universal appeal is because it clearly portrays moral realism, heroic realism, a worthy hero solving a worthy problem, and key aspects of the monomyth. Just as man innately knows that moral facts and values exist, he also innately knows when true incidences of true heroism have occurred. There are many incidences of true heroism found within *The Lord of the Rings*. Knowledge of a true and logically consistent hero archetype will always intrigue man because it reveals something of his intended nature.

The monomyth as revelation has two key components. The first is to create a restless desire that causes man to seek transcendence. The first component also imbeds man with intuitive notions of moral and heroic goodness. The second component is the hero's journey. Most consider the monomyth to be identical to the hero's journey. The hero's journey is the natural progression of the story: "The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation--initiation--return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth."⁵ The monomyth, though it can differ from culture to culture, ultimately

⁴ C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 74.

⁵ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 23.

remains static, “The pattern of the Hero’s Journey is universal, occurring in every culture, in every time. It is as infinitely varied as the human race itself and yet its basic form remains constant.”⁶

Jesus properly and fully completed the hero’s journey. This chapter will first posit the most plausible source for the monomyth. Then a new hero’s journey will be presented. The modified journey, with Christ as the hero and backed by a consistent moral and heroic philosophy, justifies the conclusion that Jesus Christ is the best possible hero.

Possible Sources for the Monomyth

There is near universal consensus that the source for the monomyth is singular, but there are a multitude of different theories that attempt to posit a source. The multitude of parallels amongst myths is undeniable. The initial problem concerning the monomyth is the difficulty in determining how such similarities are universal.

Oral Tradition

The notion of oral tradition is often posited as a plausible explanation for the similarities amongst myth. This theory argues that nomads received a story or myth and spread it to various people-groups and locations. The nomads would tell the story in a dozen different tongues to a dozen different strangers and in a dozen different cities, and eventually the same story or something quite similar is told everywhere. The problem with this view is that there are various details or aspects of myths that are nearly identical

⁶ Vogler, *The Writers Journey*, 4.

and yet occur in groups that are separated by vast distances.⁷ Since the stories of nomads and travelers tend to degrade and bifurcate, mere oral tradition alone cannot provide a very efficient means of accounting for such widespread and yet specific themes. While oral transmission can account for a large number of circulated myths amongst a region, but certain complex themes (virgin births, “the one forbidden thing,”⁸ and the feigning of death or resuscitation) are near universal and yet are also highly complex. Oral tradition can account for general ideas, but not the more complex themes.

Oral tradition, even if it is a plausible explanation for the dissemination of a localized myth, still only subverts the true problem concerning both the source of the monomyth as well as the origin of the primordial myth itself. Where these things come from is the true problem.⁹ All of the naturalistic theories “only explain the variability and distribution, but not the origin of the myths.” Limited distribution can be accounted for with oral transmission but not the origin of myths themselves.

Programming or Adaptation

There are two basic means of understanding how man has knowledge of the monomyth: programming or adaptation. Programming is based on the supernatural and adaptation is based on naturalism. There are a number of psychological views, but all of them can be refuted with a few simple critiques. The specific type of psychological view that will be evaluated in this work is that of Carl Jung. Psychology in general tends to ground myth on elementary ideas and archetypes. The human mind has universal

⁷ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 60.

⁸ Ibid., 273.

⁹ Otto, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, 9.

characteristics that under the right conditions manifest consistently and in a nearly identical fashion throughout the globe.¹⁰ This view achieves universality in the same sense that Hume was able to achieve objective morality. Hume argued that because humans are the same everywhere and all adhere to certain universal notions of morality, then morality itself, because it co-exists with humans and their universally moral notions, is also universal, and therefore morality is objective. The same follows with elementary ideas: “human psyche is essentially the same all over the world. The psyche is the inward experience of the human body, which is essentially the same in all human beings, with the same organs, the same instincts, and the same impulses, the same conflicts, the same fears.”¹¹

Myths contain many reoccurring themes, characters, symbols, and tropes:

In describing these common character types, symbols, and relationships the Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung employed the term archetypes, meaning ancient patterns of personality that are the shared heritage of the human race. Jung suggested there may be a collective unconscious, similar to the personal unconscious. Fairy tales and myths are like the dreams of an entire culture, springing from the collective unconscious. The same character types seem to occur on both the personal and the collective scale. The archetypes are amazingly constant throughout all times and cultures, in the dreams and the personalities of individuals as well as in the mythic imagination of the entire world.¹²

Jung argued that a collective unconsciousness was the source for the archetypes. The collective unconsciousness is the deepest level of shared experiences had by all people. Jung argued that all myth came from this collective unconsciousness.¹³ The archetypes

¹⁰ Otto, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, 8.

¹¹ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 60.

¹² Vogler, *The Writers Journey*, 23.

¹³ Robert Segal, ed., *Jung on Mythology* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1998), 23.

represent models or roles (the shadow, the trickster, or the mentor), and these represent models of relation and/or emulation. Archetypes are both objective and subjective. They are objective because there is only a limited number of basic archetypes. Jung argued that they are subjective because any environment can produce a new archetype since archetypes exist in any situation that corresponds to a human need.¹⁴

Jung did not believe that the human mind was a blank slate or a *tabula rasa*, but he believed that the archetype system was hardwired into the structure of the human brain.¹⁵ He also argued that archetypes were translated through both heredity, and due to the collective unconsciousness, each person is able to partake in the whole gamut of human experience.¹⁶ The collective unconscious also contains mythological motifs or primordial images¹⁷—primordial image was an early word for “archetype.” The primordial image is the inherited capacities of human imagination.¹⁸ The primordial image is an imprint derived from innumerable repetitions of a similar process.¹⁹

There are a number of problems with Jung’s argumentation, but only four brief critiques will be presented. The first problem is that it is contradictory to suppose that the collective unconsciousness is both hardwired in humans and also exists due to the repetitive actions of one’s ancestors. If it is hardwired or programmed, then who or what

¹⁴ Richard P. Sugg, *Jungian Literary Criticism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 184.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁶ Neil B. Yetwin, “Thoreau, Jung, and the Collective Unconscious,” *The Thoreau Society Bulletin*, no. 265 (2009): 4–7.

¹⁷ Sugg, *Jungian Literary Criticism*, 201.

¹⁸ Jung, *Jung on Mythology*, 62.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

did the hardwiring or programing? If a god imprinted the hardwiring, then the mythical motifs would be intentional imprints and not one of a potentially infinite number of archetypes or experiences. Hardwiring cannot be true unless programming is also true. If archetypes are hardwired into the human brain, then they cannot be based on adaptation or repetitive actions. If since the beginning of humanity man has had these notions built into his brain, then how did the archetypes arise out of a shared human experience? It is either programing or adaptation.

Secondly, one could argue that adaptation led to the brain being hardwired, but this view holds little plausibility. One of the problems with maintaining a psychological view is that one must also factor biological components. The human body, its nature and tendencies, must be measured into any psychological view. How the human mind came to have these “primal images” is of crucial importance. It cannot be from programing alone because then aspects of Jung’s theories would be based on false premises. It cannot be a hybrid of adaption and hardwiring because the ends achieved by naturalistic adaptation would not result in archetypes, and if it did result in archetypes, then the heroic ones would not be heroic in an objective or universal sense.

Unless one holds to a creationist view of humanity, then the only means for primordial humans to learn about things like morality and heroism would be through experience and adaptation. The naturalist means of adaptation is Darwinian evolution. Some have attempted to argue that moral inclination was achieved by adaptation, but this notion is dated. Darwin seemed to argue for something similar by quoting Herbert Spencer,

I believe that the experiences of utility organized and consolidated through all past generations of human race, have been producing corresponding

modifications, which, by continued transmission and accumulation, have become in us certain faculties of moral intuition certain emotions responding to right and wrong conduct, which have no apparent basis in the individual experiences of utility.²⁰

Darwin argued that moral faculties came about through moral-like repetition of actions. This view has been abandoned. Sam Harris, who argues the objective morality is found independently from God via “human wellbeing,” does not base his ethical model on one of the key governing features of his worldview: Darwinian evolution.

Harris does not base human wellbeing on Darwinian evolution because he argues that if human well-being were central to the proliferation of the species (the high law demanded by Darwinian evolution), then the highest calling and purpose of man would be found in contributing as much genetic information as possible.²¹ Harris however relents and maintains that, “but our minds do not merely conform to the logic of natural selection.”²² Harris maintains that logically all that one should be concerned with is the high law and flourishing of life. However, he argues that such a way of thinking just seems incompatible with how humans think, desire, and live. “Consider it: every person you have ever met, every person you will pass in the street today, is going to die. Living long enough, each will suffer the loss of his friends and family. All are going to lose everything they love in this world. Why would one want to be anything but kind to them

²⁰ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 41.

²¹ Sam Harris, “Surviving the Cosmos,” *Sam Harris* (blog), August 21, 2016, <http://samharris.org/surviving-the-cosmos/>.

²² Sam Harris, *Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 13.

in the meantime?”²³

While Harris’ sentiment is welcomed, there is nothing incumbent to naturalism that rewards kindness. Since naturalism is the primary governing factor of a naturalist’s worldview, it is somewhat difficult to think that something like “kindness” could be considered of primary importance. Kindness plays no function in natural selection:

Natural selection follows from the struggle for existence; and this from a rapid rate of increase. It is impossible not bitterly to regret, but whether wisely is another question, the rate at which man tends to increase; for this leads in barbarous tribes to infanticide and many other evils, and in civilized nations to abject poverty, celibacy, and to the late marriages of the prudent. But as man suffers from the same physical evils with the lower animals, he has no right to expect an immunity from the evils consequent on the struggle for existence.²⁴

Natural selection is based on the survival of the fittest and the struggle for existence, and it does not reward kindness, but rather it rewards those species that remain around long enough to be rewarded. The common view held by the naturalist is that the natural world is wild, unforgiving, and only favors the strong.

Despite naturalism being a governing feature of his worldview, Harris and other naturalists are reluctant to use it as a model for determining morality. Richard Dawkins argues, “I am not advocating a morality based on evolution. I am saying how things have evolved. I am not saying how we humans morally ought to behave.”²⁵ Evolution itself is an insufficient guide for moral truth. Harris shares the sentiment,

It is important to emphasize that a scientific account of human values— i.e. one that places them squarely within the web of influences that link states of the world

²³ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 226.

²⁴ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 72.

²⁵ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene: 30th Anniversary Edition—with a New Introduction by the Author* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2-3.

and states of the human brain—is not the same as an evolutionary account. Most of what constitutes human well-being escapes my narrow Darwinian calculus. While the possibilities of human experience must be realized within the brains that evolution has *built for us*, our brains were *not designed* with a view to our ultimate fulfillment.²⁶

Harris does not think that objective notions of human value are capable of being derived from or based on naturalism. Archetypes, to the degree that Jung argued for, likewise cannot be based on evolution.

What kind of archetypes would be derived from a process that only values the genetically strong and those who are fit enough to pass on genetic information? It does not seem possible that millions of years of continual competition for life could instill in man real notions of heroism, let alone heroic archetypes. Even if a consistent view on heroism can be achieved by evolution, what attributes and dispositions does the best possible hero have if those attributes and dispositions are derived from a non-moral process that rewards only those who reproduce with good genes? Perhaps one of Nietzsche's Ubermen or maybe something worse?

The adaptation of the human body to learn and respond to various situations without thought or cognition is essentially unconscious instinct. It is reasonable that the human unconscious instinct evolved uniformly throughout the world. It is even reasonable that these instincts were able to elicit sentiments of the moral good through altruism. However, the unconscious instinct that is produced, no matter how it is naturally obtained, simply cannot explain the universal similarities of myth. It is impossible that humanity communally, and yet also separately, evolved to the degree that all mankind felt the need to tell stories of “virgin” births, that all people implicitly know the proper

²⁶ Harris, *Moral Landscape*, 13.

role of the mentor, or that heroes should be tested by threshold guardians.

The third problem is the only means that Jung has to ground true universal knowledge of archetypes, if it exists, is through the collective unconsciousness. But the collective unconsciousness cannot be the source for myth. If the collective unconsciousness is the source for the monomyth, then what is the source for the collective unconsciousness? The source for the collective unconsciousness is both man's hardwired knowledge of the archetypes and his shared universal knowledge obtained through repetitive processes. But if repetitive processes inform the collective unconsciousness, then how can the collective unconsciousness also inform man? If the collective unconsciousness is true, then throughout man's existence his unconscious mind had been receiving unconscious information from experience as well as unconscious information from the collective unconsciousness. Then, he synthesizes and ingests that information and employs archetypes as a means of explaining his conscious and subconscious inclinations and actions. Further, once synthesized, those experiences are essentially "uploaded" back into the collective unconsciousness so that those experiences can be had by other people; but the "other people" already have knowledge of that experience through universal repetition of actions—it all seems redundant and contradictory. It is unreasonable that the source for the collective unconsciousness is based on man's knowledge and experience, yet the collective unconsciousness can also inform him on knowledge and experience.

Adaptation and the Primordial myths

The final problem with the psychological view is that it cannot properly account for the primordial myths. Lord Ragland argued that the ancient man did not make myths.

Man is without a doubt a story telling animal—which makes him not an animal—but the ancient myths were much more than stories. It has already been established that the primordial myths, and myths in general, were not concerned with mindless speculation about the origins of natural phenomena,²⁷ nor were they stories that were meant to entertain,²⁸ but Myths have always been narratives associated with rituals. The origin of myth is difficult to account for naturalistically because while various aspects of myth are universal, historically the manifestations of these myths and rituals are quite specific to cultures and their relative needs. It is a virtual impossibility that every people-group would not only naturally and uniformly evolve to create universally themed myths, but also uniquely evolve to create pragmatic myths that genuinely aid a given people-group. Campbell attempts to explain this phenomenon with psychology:

The art of tilling the soil goes forth from the area in which it was first developed, and along with it goes a mythology that has to do with fertilizing the earth, with planting and bringing up the food plants—some such myth as that just described, of killing a deity, cutting it up, burying its members, and having the food plants grow. Such a myth will accompany an agricultural or planting tradition. But you won't find it in a hunting culture. So there are historical as well as psychological aspects of this problem of the similarity of myths.²⁹

What Campbell seems to be missing is the idea that pragmatic myths arising to meet specific needs of specific cultures and people-groups is neither a psychological nor a historical problem because neither history nor psychology can provide a sufficient answer to that problem.

As difficult as it is to determine how the pragmatic myths and rituals arose, such

²⁷ Raglan, *The Hero*, 126.

²⁸ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 63.

²⁹ Ibid., 61.

as myths that taught a previously unknown farming or hunting technique, there is a more fundamental problem: how did the primordial myths of ancient people-groups arise in the first place and yet also warrant the strict adherence and consideration they produced? Setting aside the issues inherent to pragmatic myths being generated naturally and yet being able to practically aid a specific people-group, there is a paradox of sorts if one supposes that the pragmatic myths were also primordial. In a sense, there is no difference between the theories of how religion, morality, or myths arose because in the naturalistic mindset, they all find their origin in one of three aspects: fear of the chief (authority), dreams (unexplained phenomenon), and the harvest (cooperation and/or practical survival). These three sources can explain either the pragmatic myths or the solemn attention given to myths and rituals, but not both. The problem with these suggested origins is that none of them can account for the first myths, and even if they could, it would be unreasonable to suppose that the myth was necessary, practical, and sacred—the primordial myth must have been all three.

Myths must meet needs. If the myths were man-derived and pragmatic, such as a hunting technique, then the myth was not necessary because if the proper means of doing something was already known and readily acted upon by a people-group, then there would be no need for a myth to be generated because the pragmatic need was already being met. If man's pragmatic needs were met, then he would not focus on pragmatic myths, but rather on myths that are existential in nature and that produce sentiments of transcendence.

The myths that arise quickly due to subjectivity and a desire for transcendence are much different from the primordial myths. Myths meet needs: the practical first and then

sentiments of transcendence. When kids on the street make up their own myths and form their own tribes (gangs), they do so not for a “plentiful harvest” or to necessarily fulfill practical needs, but because society has not provided them any rituals to join the main tribe (society)³⁰—they are fulfilling an existential need to belong. There was no room or reason for the existential myth to arise unless that practical was already being met. However, the primordial myths were all practical in nature, which is problematic.

If the ancient practical man already knew how to plow a field and survive, he would deem it unnecessary to employ a myth to explain a ritual of something that was already a daily and crucial aspect of his life—why would man need a myth to tell him what he already knew and engaged in frequently? If survival were the primary goal of the earliest man, then why would he need a myth to explain a task that was crucial requirement for survival? It is unlikely that the myths were generated merely for the purposes of a clever or endearing means of passing on the proper function of something because if survival were so fundamental, there would be no need for a metaphor—a metaphor for plowing a field lacks appeal to the man who plows for a living and must do it to survive.

Even if survival were not so strenuous that myth making would have been considered redundant or unnecessary, it still does not follow that man would make a practical myth. If all of man’s essential and practical needs were met, then he would create myths to achieve sentiments of transcendence. If the earliest of man desired to achieve transcendence, then the myths would not be practical in nature but would rather be myths that connected a community via rites of passage. Therefore, the primordial

³⁰ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 9.

myths must have been both necessary and practical.

The earliest myths were also sacred. The evidence seems to convey that even the most “savage” of ancient man held a reverence toward the myth and ritual.

The rustic or savage story-teller may seem to be improvising his stories, just as to one who visits a theatre for the first time the funny man may seem to be improvising his jokes. Investigation, however, shows that in illiterate communities not merely do the people as a whole not invent stories, but they do not even tell stories. The telling of stories may only be done by recognized story-tellers, and not only is it incumbent on these to tell the stories in the traditional manner and with the traditional words, but among many tribes they may tell only the particular stories that they have a recognized right to tell.

These being the facts, we are faced with two possible explanations. We must conclude either that savages once possessed a faculty of imagination and invention which has unaccountably disappeared, or that the attribution of imagination and inventiveness to savages is erroneous.³¹

One can maintain that ancient man was so savage that he confused the common with the sacred, and therefore he was willing to consider anything sacred or divine—especially if the sacred were the crops that provided life. However, if man was so savage that he could not distinguish between the common and the sacred, then he would have no basis for respecting the detailed specification and precise aspects of the primordial myth and ritual. If man worshiped the common as sacred, then he would have no means of differentiating the two, and he would not be willing to respect the ritual. If man conflated the common as sacred, then he could not differentiate between normal and not-normal occurrences. However, knowledge of normative processes that occur within nature is required for any “savage” to create a “supernatural” myth.

If the ancient man were rational enough to consider the notions of sacred and common, then the myth cannot have been based on a previously understood practical

³¹ Raglan, *The Hero*, 132.

process, such as a type of farming technique. No previously understood practical process would prompt a sufficiently rational ancient man to suddenly consider the pragmatic to be sacred. Jung even argued that, “Humans generally, not merely primitives, lack the creativity required to concoct consciously the notion of the sacred out of the profane. They can only transform the profane into a sacred that already exists for them.”³²

However, if one maintains that pre-existing notions of the sacred and the mundane were readily had by man, then it seems unlikely they he would swap one for the other without good reason.

The earliest myths and rituals were practiced as sacred even though they represented daily and common aspects to life, which means the earliest myths could not have been based on dreams or unexplained phenomena. The people had to be sufficiently rational to distinguish between the sacred and the non-sacred and yet still be willing to consider myths of the non-sacred as actually sacred. If the primordial myths met a need that was practical, and yet still warranted one to consider it sacred, then the source for the primordial myths must be something that is outside of both man and nature.

Neither “fear of the chief” nor “the harvest” can act as sufficient explanations for the source of the primordial myths. The harvest fails because it cannot explain the origin of the first myth nor explain why the rational man would consider the mundane to be sacred. Fear of the chief may explain why a rational man—through pain of punishment—might be compelled to worship the common as sacred. However, if true, one would have to claim that every single source for the sacred myth was a strong man or group that handed down and established moral and heroic goodness through force—this is difficult

³² Jung, *Jung on Mythology*, 4.

to defend. Even if all throughout the history of the world all the chiefs ensured their respective myth, this still does not explain the first myth and why there are so many similarities within myth throughout the world. No purely natural process can explain either the monomyth or the primordial myths.

Supernatural: Programing

This work is not meant to be a biblical exposition or a defense of New Testament reliability. The intent is to present the most reasonable understanding of what the monomyth is, how it is discerned, and how it is implemented. The Christian religion, the Bible, and basic Judeo-Christian theological concepts are essential aspects for this case.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. (Romans 1:19-23).

The Bible is clear that knowledge of God's statutes has been intentionally engraved on the hearts and minds of men. Classically, this engraving was limited to God's moral statutes, but if notions of moral knowledge can be received through natural revelation, it seems reasonable that notions of the heroic good can likewise be received through natural revelation. Heroism and morality are both universal concepts found in every people-group and culture.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven." A transcendent God—like Eru Ilúvatar—establishes Himself as the basis for beauty, truth, and goodness. He asks his

creation to join in harmonious song and warns of consequences of those who purposely and foolishly act disharmoniously: “Against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” No morally upright God indiscriminately pours out wrath unless moral statutes are readily discernable and knowable. Man has knowledge of moral statutes through the natural moral law. God is justified in punishing those who know the standards of God and then willingly “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” These verses establish God as the infinite prescriber and ultimate Archangel. The Apostle Paul acknowledges that man has awareness of God’s moral demand and that God desires harmonious seeking of the true, the good, and the beautiful, “because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.” Man has knowledge of God’s moral and heroic expectations, but man suppresses that knowledge.

These verses represent a myth of being because it establishes the nature or origin of a thing (man), but it is also a myth of Being because the theology of the Apostle Paul is based on the classical notion of God. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” Myths of progressive being—the classical arguments for the existence of God—are evidence for the God whose invisible attributes are evidently on display throughout the universe. Axiological arguments establish the moral component of God. But the moral component of God’s revelation is not limited to his (the Father’s) invisible attributes but extends also to the attributes of the Son. Even if one were to deny moral realism in reality, he cannot deny its existence in myth. The real moral metric incumbent to myth reveals the invisible attributes of the hero of the monomyth: Jesus Christ.

“Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Man suppresses philosophical knowledge of God’s existence, moral realism, and duty, and he denies true heroism and the best possible hero. The Greek word for “futility” entails to make vain or foolish. It does follow that Paul’s charge of “futility” is in reference to man’s general denial of God, but the verses that follow explain the immediate context of Paul’s intent, “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”

What follows Paul’s condemnation for the suppression of truth is not a condemnation of actions or conduct, but rather Paul argues that the suppression of truth leads to a willful and intentional marring of the image of God through false myths and religions. All pagan myths are concerned with “corruptible man.” A better understanding of “corruptible” is “perishing” or “mortal.” The wrath of God is upon man because he takes the image of the incorruptible God, corrupts them, and posits a new god in his place. The pagan god is made in the image of man and such a god is as contingent, morally corrupt, and lacking true heroism as the men who created it. To create a myth of being that is not progressive is a corruption of the invisible attributes of God. To create a hero myth that is not based on moral realism and the best possible hero is a corruption of the invisible attributes of Christ.

Campbell argued that some myths could grant one a clue as to what the spiritual life is meant to look like.³³ He also maintains that all religions are true to a degree,³⁴ but

³³ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*. 228.

when he was asked if some myths are more or less true than others he replied, "There are true in different sense. Every mythology has to do with the wisdom of life as related to a specific culture at a specific time."³⁵ He explained that myths should not be thought of in terms of true or false because they are metaphors: images that suggest something else. The absolute bedrock for judging mythology must be found in intent. Without intent it is impossible to know if the author achieved the end that he is striving for. If the intent of a myth is based on an intentional obscuring of the attributes of God through metaphor, then the work is doubly futile.

The best possible explanation for the monomyth is that functions as an aspect of natural revelation. No purely biological view can account for intuitive notion of moral and heroic goodness. Jung's archetype view seems to rely on an obscure notion of general revelation: the collective unconsciousness, but how the collective consciousness was created is dubious at best and it cannot account for the monomyth. Natural revelation explains moral and heroic realism; it explains why *The Lord of the Rings* has such a common appeal, and why good heroes are often referred to as "Christ-like" figures.

The Hero's Journey

This explanation for the monomyth presumes various integral aspects of the Christian worldview, such as essential doctrines and Scriptural integrity. Much of what will be presumed can be argued for independently, but it is beyond the scope of this work to include such a defense.

The thesis that Jesus Christ is the best possible hero and the source for the

³⁴ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 67.

³⁵ Ibid., 66.

monomyth is both a literary defense and an actual defense: Jesus is in theory and in practice the epitome of moral and heroic goodness. A modified monomyth will be presented. The modified monomyth is similar to the one's presented by Campbell and Vogler, but this one will also include implicit stages that are presumed, but absent, from most formulations. The stages presented do not necessarily represent all the stages that Jesus endured, but rather the focus will be on the most crucial stages of the journey. It is not the intent to explain each of the stages, but rather only to explain why the stage is important for Christ.

Stage 1: Myths of Being and Function

No hero is born into a world that does not need him. The pre-hero world must be established independently from the hero. Every hero myth in some way must ground the world prior to the hero's arrival. The pre-hero world is often filled with turmoil and evil that the average man cannot handle. The violent history of the world recounts the failed exploits of previous heroes, and it explains the magnitude of the despair as well as the type of hero required to fix that problem.

Just as the world of the hero must be established before the hero's journey can begin, there exists a deeper level to what also must be established: a myth of Being. The source and the product of the Myth of Being is Yahweh. The triune God is responsible for different aspects of the monomyth. The Father is the source for the monomyth; he secures the good and sets the standards. He is both the infinite prescriptive good and the infinite prescriber of that good. Jesus Christ is the object of the monomyth; he is the hero sent forth by the Father to solve the problem that humans were unable to solve. The Holy Spirit is the means by which the monomyth is known and implemented; he guides the

hero and writes the standards of the Father—innate moral knowledge, heroism, and the hero's journey—on the hearts of man.

Two myths are required for a true hero myth. The first myth is a Myth of Being or an implied myth of Being. Myths of Being are always required because they establish a rational universe and an objective means for judging morality. The Myth of Being sets the standard. God sets good standards because he is good and desires the good. It would be wrong for God to break his standards because the standards are good. God is indistinguishable from his being and His standards. For him to break his standards is for him to break his Being. But it is his very being that all of reality is based on, through, and because. If God were to break his standard, all of reality would falter. A myth of Being, based on the infinitely good prescriber entails that there are necessary moral truths, and these, to a degree, also limit God. These limitations are positive: God cannot lie or murder. If necessary moral truths exist, one of the necessary truths would be: "it is not good if God were to contradict himself or to act contrary to what is good." If God were to set a standard, then God is essentially proclaiming that the standard is the good. If the standard is good, then God is limited by the goodness of that standard, and he must act in accordance with it. Acting accordance with the good standard is the same as God acting in accordance to his nature.

It is good to create. It is good for man to exist. It is good for free will to exist. It is good for God to solve the main problem inherent to free will, which is death. However, it is also good for God to keep his standards. God cannot simply claim that the morally unjust are actually just because he would be contradicting his good moral standards. To satisfy the conflicting goods of solving the problems associated with sin and death while

not breaking his established goods of justice and moral uprightness, God created a vicarious system of atonement: a myth of proper function. Through the system, God is able to keep his standards while also fulfilling the good of solving man's biggest problem: death.

The vicarious system of atonement requires blood and death—it is a sacrificial system. Heroism is conjoined with sacrifice, “People commonly think of Heroes as strong or brave, but these qualities are secondary to sacrifice--the true mark of a Hero. Sacrifice is the Hero's willingness to give up something of value, perhaps even her own life, on behalf of an ideal or group.”³⁶ Since Jesus is God, then he has the value of God. God is of ultimate value. Therefore, Jesus is of ultimate value. Jesus sacrificed what was of ultimate value.

Jesus' sacrifice is also related to the soft virtues, “The most convincing evidence that a man can give of his faith in his doctrines or of a cause he champions is his willingness to sacrifice his life for them.”³⁷ The moral faith of Jesus was perfect. he wanted to fulfill the ultimate good, and he never doubted that God's good was ultimate or that he could help in that fulfillment.

Without Christ, the sacrifices detailed in Judaism and the sacrifices within Paganism do not make sense.³⁸ Lord Ragland mentions the notion of sacrifice,

Human sacrifice real or symbolical, has been a prominent feature of most religions. Nobody has succeeded in explaining it, and I shall make no attempt to do so but its evolution seems to have been in four main stages. In the first it was the divine king who was regularly sacrificed; in the second somebody else was

³⁶ Vogler, *The Writers Journey*, 31.

³⁷ Charles W. Super, “Vicarious Sacrifice,” *International Journal of Ethics* 15, no. 4 (1905): 444–56.

³⁸ Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 2: 35.

regularly sacrificed as a substitute for the divine king; with the progress of civilization came a third stage, in which a human victim was sacrificed in times of emergency, but at other times a pretense was made of killing him, but some other victim was substituted. In the fourth stage the victim was never human, but was usually treated in such a way as to indicate that it once had been.³⁹

Only Christ can really explain sacrifice. Jesus is synonymous with sacrifice; it is evidence that he is the object of the monomyth. More evidence is that all of the four stages of sacrifice found in myth can be applied to Christ. In the first stage, the king was sacrificed. Jesus is the King of kings. Jesus is also God. Jesus is the divine king. Jesus was also a sacrifice for the divine king: God the Father. Jesus sacrificed himself due to the will of the Father. Jesus was a substitute in another sense. Jesus was a substitutional sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Jesus died so that humans did not have to die. In the third stage, a human is sacrificed in times of emergency or pretense—all three apply to Jesus. Jesus was fully human. He came at a time of emergency because the problem of death is the ultimate emergency. And there was a pretense for his death: he was the perfect harmony for God's song of redemption. The fourth stage of sacrifice applied to Jesus because while he was *fully* human, he was not *solely* human. Most people, initially, did not think that Jesus was God, which means they treated him as human. The stages of myth in sacrifice all apply to Christ.

The sacrificial system of Judaism was concerned with the overlooking of sin, while the pagan sacrificial system was concerned with worldly desires or sentiments of transcendence. The Jewish system of sacrificing animals was a stopgap; the blood of animals only allowed God to "pass over" sin, but it did not forgive sin, and death continue to plague man. To solve the problem of sin and death required a perfect and

³⁹ Raglan, "Myth and Ritual," 458.

worthy sacrifice, but no man could offer such a worthy sacrifice. God alone is worthy to both set the standards for goodness and to act as the sacrifice to satisfy those standards. However, God cannot act as the vicarious sacrifice because he cannot die. To solve the problem, God sent Jesus to act as the vicarious sacrifice for the atonement of sins. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice because, being fully God Himself, he shares in God's unlimited worth, which makes his sacrifice equally worthy to satisfy the just wrath of God. Sacrifices require death. While Jesus was fully God, he also had to be fully man so that he could actually perform a proper sacrifice and die. Jesus is a divine king, but he also sacrificed Himself in obedience to another divine king: God the Father.

The second myth is a myth of proper function. It is Jesus acting as the perfect harmony to the melodious standards of God. Jesus is the hero that can do what no other mortal man could do and follow the statutes of God without compromise. Because Jesus did not compromise or sin, he proved Himself as the ultimately worthy sacrifice. It is through the vicarious system of atonement that Jesus is able to put an end to what had occurred through the fall:

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Hebrews 9:11-15).

Myths of being and function are required for all myth. The myth of being—specifically a creation myth—establishes and guards the ultimate good. In a sense, all

creation myths are imperfect natural revelation of God because every creation myth centers on a figure that has superior strength, ability, foresight, and government. This creator has a sovereign reign over his creation. The best possible creator establishes, through his own natural goodness, the standard for the true, the good, and the beautiful. He knows the standards and enforces them. It would be wrong for him to break the standards or contradict them. A world without a creation myth is also a world without evil, but then it is also a world without goodness too. There is no problem of evil because without a series of transcendent standards, nothing can truly be considered evil or good.

Hero myths implicitly rely on myths of being. Without a myth of being there is no moral or heroic standard. Hero myths also implicitly rely on myths of Being. Without a myth of Being, there is not a rational universe or absolute moral or heroic standards—myths of Being allow for the classical backing employed by Lewis and Tolkien in their myths. It is only through myths of being that moral faith can occur.

Stage 2: The Ordeal Begins: The Fall

The fallen nature of man is as universal as myth itself:

Observe the persistence, in mankind's mythologies, of the legend about a paradise that men had once possessed, the city of Atlantis or the Garden of Eden or some kingdom of perfection, always behind us. The root of that legend exists, not in the past of the race, but in the past of every man. You still retain a sense—not as firm as a memory, but diffused like the pain of hopeless longing—that somewhere in the starting years of your childhood, before you had learned to submit, to absorb the terror of unreason and to doubt the value of your mind, you had known a radiant state of existence, you had known the independence of a rational consciousness facing an open universe. *That* is the paradise which you have lost, which you seek—which is yours for the taking.⁴⁰

Conflict is a necessary aspect of story. It is only through conflict that a character can

⁴⁰ Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Signet, 1963). 137. This is a quotation from Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*.

progress, learn, and grow. The source of conflict is always associated, implicitly or explicitly, with an ineffable but lucid knowledge of some pre-historic cataclysmic event: a fall. It is this vague understanding and existential angst that compels men to create art, join religious groups, pray, make myths—it is to recapture what was lost in the fall. The fall was explicit in *The Lord of the Rings*: there was actually three falls in the history of Middle-earth. The fall was implicit in Star Wars. It was implicit in Star Wars because corruption, murder, and evil existed in the world. However, without a myth of being that establishes a fall, it is merely implied.

In the Judeo-Christian worldview, the prehistoric cataclysmic event that explains the sinful nature of man is the fall recorded in Genesis. The depraved nature of man as well as the significance of the fall must be addressed if Jesus is to rightly be considered the best possible hero. The fall contains several aspects that explain the nature of the problem as well as the solution: the introduction of sin, cursed environment, loss of fellowship with God, and a promise of future hope.

The introduction of sin is both the cause for the fall and an effect of the fall. The effect of the introduction of sin was a loss of man's righteousness and separation from God. It also caused death. Before Adam and Eve sinned, the two had unfettered access to God for fellowship and edification. But when Adam and Eve committed sin, the two hid in shame after being made aware of their sinful nature. God eventually expelled them from the Garden because he cannot be in fellowship with sin. The expelling of Adam and Eve from the Garden is early and significant evidence concerning the holiness of God and the real effects of sin.

Fallen man's ability to always choose the true, the good, and the beautiful become

marred and inaccessible—this is what Paul was condemning with the pagan myths. Truth, goodness, and beauty were meant to be the tools employed to worship God. After the fall, the tools meant for worship were applied, with futility, to false religions and myths to achieve sentiments of transcendence. While the fall did impact man’s cognitive faculties to a degree, the true problem of the fall was not the lack of intellect, but rather the lack of volition. Intellectually man knows what is morally good, but volitionally he wavers. Man is rational, but his volition will often, if not always, supersede his intellect.

The cursed environment was another effect. Man’s nature was not the only thing that become cursed due to the fall; the environment was cursed as well: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.” (Romans 8:20-22). Creation itself displays a similar angst as man, though it is expressed differently and without intention: hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis are nature’s equivalent of the vices that are evident in men. The fall of man led to the fall of nature. Man causes moral evil, and nature causes natural evil.

Just as no person is so evil that he is unable to display aspects of moral goodness, so also nature is not so fallen that it cannot display aspects of “goodness,” but this goodness is not moral. Moral goodness, like evil, requires intentionality. The goodness of nature lacks intentionality, but it is good in the sense that it displays normative processes. The normative laws of nature are good because they allow for animals to obtain Aristotelian goodness by performing their intended purpose to an excellent degree. It is

the laws of nature that provide a platform for animals to achieve goodness.

Man's greatest problem is not actually death. Death is a symptom of the ultimate problem: a lack of ultimate transcendence. A lack of transcendence means an inability to have proper fellowship with God. In the Garden after the Fall, Adam and Eve lost the transcendent link between God and man due to the introduction of sin. A lack of transcendence in man leads to a loss of Aristotelian goodness. Because of sin, man's ability to perform his intended function to an excellent degree (acting with moral and heroic goodness) became impossible to obtain without divine intervention.

The threat of a damaged creation and the introduction of death and toil were pacified by a promise and a prophecy: "And I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:15). This is a prophecy about the ultimate hero, the one who can put an end to sin and death. God claimed that the hero would, through the seed of woman, crush the head of the serpent that facilitated the fall of man and creation. The coming hero is one who can undo the effects of the fall. The best possible hero is the one that solves the problem of the fall—Jesus set out to solve the problem of the fall.

Stage 3: Virgin Birth in Ordinary World

The virgin birth in the New Testament is completely dissimilar to the supposed incidences of virgin births found in pagan mythology. There are no real incidences of true virgin births that predate Christianity, and the notions that do predate it are not true incidences of virgin birth. Campbell argued that the virgin birth is an integral aspect of the monomyth; however, it is a stretch to consider any of the ancient incidences as anything other than "miraculous births." Heroes often have miraculous origins or at least

unusual births—the only unusual birth of a significant hero *is* a normal birth. There are several different kinds of miraculous births, but the only one crucial for this work is the god-hybrid

God-hybrid miraculous births are common in the Ancient Near East and the West in general. There seems to be two primary reasons for the inclusion of god-hybrid births: to increase the magnitude of the myth or story or to increase the magnitude of the hero. Since all heroes attempt to solve a worthy problem, and the bigger the problem requires a more substantial hero in order solve it, a hero that is a god-hybrid is able to solve more extensive problems than what a mere man alone is able to solve. Because the problem can only be solved by a god-hybrid, it increases the scope and the magnitude of the problem and the magnitude of the story. Achilles could have solved many worthy problems because of how strong he was, but it was not the power of Achilles that prevented him from solving significant and worthy problems; it was due to his pride.

The prominence of god-hybrid myths is more evidence that Jesus is the object of the monomyth. Man, alone, cannot save himself. Man, alone, cannot transcend himself. Ancient myths often included god-hybrids because myths about gods produce greater sentiments of transcendence. Mythmakers used gods because there is an implicit knowledge that man is unable to cure his own affliction and that something greater than man is required to solve his ultimate ailment. The problem with the pagan gods was that they were as equally afflicted by sin and contingency as man was; therefore, they were unable to solve the problem of the Fall. Just because pagan gods have greater power or knowledge than contingent man, it does not entail that the contingent gods are able to solve their own problems, let alone the problems of man.

The fact that writers in the ancient world often felt compelled to write myths about hybrid gods seems to confirm that the fulfillment of the monomyth and the solution to the fall requires something bigger than what mere men or contingent gods are capable of solving. If the biggest problem of man is going to be solved, a being of higher function and ability—even higher than a god-hybrid—is required. The use of a god-hybrid is an attempt to solve a bigger problem of man, but in nearly all of the ancient myths, the god hybrid hero was only used to further the agendas of the gods or to solve less-than-worthy problems. Even if a god-hybrid solved a worthy problem—like when Odysseus killed the suitors—since he never acted in accordance with the soft virtues, he cannot be the best possible hero.

Whatever the reasons were for the ancient writers to include god-hybrids in their myths, those reasons are completely different from the necessity of Christ's virgin birth. The reason behind Christ's virgin birth is directly related to the vicarious system of atonement. If Jesus were to act as the savior for man and present Himself as a worthy sacrifice, then he cannot be tainted by sin. Phil Fernandes argues that the sin nature of man (who is himself sinful) is passed from the father to the mother, and at conception that sin nature is passed onto the child. To avoid Jesus becoming tainted with original sin, he had to be born without an earthly father, and therefore a virgin birth was required.

The primary mentor for Jesus Christ was the Holy Spirit. The most crucial and mundane aspects of Jesus' life were all guided the Holy Spirit. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a work of the Holy Spirit that began the mentor relationship. An angel explained to Mary the role that the Spirit would play in the birth of her son: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that

Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’” (Luke 1:35) The Spirit would continue to mentor and lead Jesus throughout his life.

The ordinary world is crucial for both moral philosophy and myth. Concerning moral philosophy, no matter how fantastical a world is, if it contains moral agents, then it implies moral realism. Moral agents can only exist if there is a clear moral standard. No matter how absurd a hypothetical world is, if it contains moral agents, then there must be a means of measuring that moral agency. Just as it is impossible for a hypothetical world to exist without the laws of logic, so also it is impossible for a hypothetical world that contains moral agents to employ anything other than the same reductions to the natural moral law to evaluate moral goodness. If moral agents exist in a fantastical hypothetical world, no matter how marvelous that world is, the means for morally evaluating those agents is identical to the real world: the reductions to the natural moral law (subjectivism, nominalism, the arbitrary, finite prescription, and infinite prescription). The ordinary world establishes the limits of the hypothetical and the fantastical world.

The ordinary world of myth is important because it provides the hero with a safe place wherein he can develop his skills and heroic Tao as well as learn from his mentor before being thrust into the dangerous world: the special world. The ordinary world is contrasted with the special world wherein the hero will endure his various trials. For most myths, there is no essential difference between the ordinary world and the special world. Luke Skywalker was born into an “ordinary” world that contained a mystical Force, advanced technology, and various creatures and monsters, but he did not actually leave the ordinary world and enter the special one until he accepted the call to adventure and his quest began— the ordinary world becomes the special world when the hero begins his

quest.⁴¹

Stage 4: The Young Hero and the Mentor

The young hero is filled with existential anxiety due to the fall: Luke Skywalker often stared at the twin settings suns of his home world and longed for adventure. Achilles did not know his role or purpose in the world. A young Clark Kent was frustrated because he had the capacity to outclass his peers in every way imaginable, but his earthly father made him hold back and not reveal his giftedness until it was appropriate. The existential angst is directly related to man's fallen nature and an inability for one to satisfy himself with either what is known or even what is imagined.

Jesus was born without the effects of the fall, and he never experienced the same existential angst had by other heroes. Jesus' family did experience angst: a young unmarried pregnant couple, living in a shame-honor culture, was told by an angel that Jesus was the Son of God, and that they had to flee from their home country because an evil king had sought the death of him would likely prompt uncertainty and angst. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the raising Jesus, since Joseph and Mary were Jewish they at least knew to raise Jesus just like every other Jew: circumcised him on the 8th day (Luke 2:21), introduced to him the ways of the Torah, instructed him in Jewish theology and culture, and taught him to fear and love God.

One of the more important Jewish customs was the feast of Passover that required the family to travel to Jerusalem:

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the

⁴¹ Vogler, *The Writers Journey*, 87.

Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” (Luke 2:22-26).

It was during the observance of Passover when Jesus was about twelve years old that his mentor was revealed to be the Holy Spirit. While on the pilgrimage, Jesus decided to remain in Jerusalem even though his family was leaving. He used his time to visit the Temple and reason with teachers and scholars:

When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:44-52).

This passage is crucial for several different reasons: it displays Jesus’ commitment to doing the work of God, it implies that Jesus was motivated and directed by the Holy Spirit, and it proves—when coupled with a consistent systematic theology—that Jesus suppressed part of his divine nature. If someone grows in wisdom, then he must, by definition grow or progress. If one were already omniscient, then he could not progress in any area related to knowledge. Jesus was fully God, but he was also fully man. Because Jesus was fully man, he was able to progress in knowledge.

The Holy Spirit began his mentor relationship with Jesus at this time. It was because of Jesus’ commitment to God that the Holy Spirit acted as his mentor. At 12 years of age, Jesus was considered a man, which meant he would either take on the trade of his father or begin to study under a Rabbi. Jesus did not undergo the formal rabbinical training, but instead took on the trade of his father. However, Jesus did not fully become

a carpenter, but was rather trained by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the purpose of the Law and to become the best possible hero. This time of training lasted until Jesus was about 30 years old.

It was likely that the Holy Spirit was mentoring Jesus because as a contingent 12-year-old boy, it would be impossible for him to have the knowledge required to debate with the world's leading Jewish scholars. It would make sense though that if Jesus were being led and prompted by the Holy Spirit, then he would be able to achieve such a feat—"But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding." (Job 32:8). The Scriptures constantly proclaim that it is the Holy Spirit that is the source for all wisdom and knowledge. The writer of Hebrews even explained that it was Jesus' following of the Spirit that allowed him to live a sinless life. (Hebrews 9:14).

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Jesus trained for his role as a hero in seclusion. Ostensibly, he appeared a humble carpenter that followed the Jewish religious and cultural traditions. But Jesus was growing and becoming stronger and more proficient as the ultimate hero in secret. He became masterfully skilled in the Law and was continually progressive in obedience to God and the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus developed his heroic Tao: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37-39) The heroic Tao is a shortened version of a much deeper philosophical system. Jesus explained that his code was based on the Old Testament Law and the proclamations of the prophets, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:40). The

infinite prescriptive good, the law given from God to man, and the Law that was written on man's hearts all contributed to the formulation of Jesus' heroic Tao.

Jesus trained in secret until it was time for him to enter into the special world. However, before Jesus could pass the threshold into the special world, he needed to be fully equipped. Gandalf was the mentor of Frodo and equipped him with the Fellowship of the Ring. Obi-wan Kenobi was the mentor of Luke Skywalker and equipped him with his father's lightsaber. Link had a variety of mentors throughout the series of games, and they always equipped him with a weapon, usually the Master Sword. The Holy Spirit was the mentor of Jesus, and he equipped him by fully indwelling within him.

Jesus went to John the Baptist and asked to be baptized; John initially hesitated, but he eventually relented,

But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:15-17).

While Jesus had experienced an indwelling of the Holy Spirit for his whole life, the Apostle John explains that through baptism and obedience to God, Jesus received the power of the Holy Spirit without measure. (John 3:34).

Even though Jesus was fully equipped at this point, his adventure did not yet begin because he had yet to receive (and refuse) his call. After the baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness to fast and pray for forty days. During this time, Satan tempted him. From a purely literary standpoint it makes no sense for such a confrontation to occur so early in this story. Satan contributed to the fall of mankind, it seems likely that an encounter with him would occur much later. The early encounter is analogous to if at the

very beginning of the *Odyssey*, before Odysseus even began his quest to return home and set to order his household, he was confronted with the evil suitors then and there. Odysseus would have simply and easily slaughtered the men. Why did Jesus confront the serpent even before his quest began?

Video games often employ a similar tactic of confronting a significant villain early in the game. This is done to display the power disparity between the protagonist and the antagonist. In *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, Link is confronted by Ganondorf (the antagonist) as he is kidnapping Princess Zelda. Link, being a small boy with no real weapons, could not even impede the progress of the kidnapper. At the beginning of the game, it was evident that the hero Link, though set apart due to his moral faith, was at that point completely unprepared for such a menacing foe. If Link were to stand a chance against such a formidable enemy, he would have to increase his strength, health, abilities, weapons, and tools.

Conversely and curiously, Jesus had a “boss battle” even before his journey began, and he not only survived the encounter, but he actually proved that Satan was completely and utterly outclassed. The reason that Jesus had such a crucial encounter so early in the story was to prove that even the most destructive and powerful contingent creature in the universe was of absolutely no match for the creator of that universe. The reason that Jesus had such a significant battle so early on his quest was to prove that there was actually a more significant problem, and one that required much more than a mere battle of wits to overcome. Man’s greatest enemy is not Satan, but it is his inability to have proper fellowship with God. If Jesus were to solve such a daunting problem and kill the symptom of that problem, death, then the amount of effort and heroism that was

required to defeat the Devil would not be sufficient. To solve the problem of fellowship with God, a greater act of sacrifice and heroism would be required.

Stage 5: Call and Refusal: Crossing the First Threshold

To cross the first threshold is to move from the ordinary world into the special world. When the hero attempts to cross into the special world, he is confronted with a threshold guardian: something or someone who tests the purity or the ability of the hero. The guardian need not be a villain or even a person at all, but rather just something that tests him. Usually the first threshold guardian is one of three things: the road, a source of authority, or a villain-type. The purpose for the road threshold is to test the humility of the hero. The hero needs to initially refuse the call to adventure but needs to do so for the correct reason: humility. Achilles and Han Solo failed to properly traverse the threshold of the road because they did not refuse the call to adventure for pure or humble reasons. Achilles and Solo both failed because neither were willing to adventure until they knew that they would be properly compensated. A true hero adventures due to an obligation to what is right and wrong, not because of personal gain or benefit.

Link, Superman, Luke Skywalker, Frodo, and Jesus all refused the initial call because of reasonable and good doubts. Link thought himself as just a little boy that could not properly wrestle against the cosmic forces of evil to which he would be pitted against. Superman did not know what role he was meant to play in the world, and his doubt elicited hesitation. Luke Skywalker doubted his ability and worth, and even though he had been longing to set out on adventure for years, he wavered nonetheless. Frodo had never even left the Shire when he was tasked as the ring bearer; of course, such an overwhelming assignment would provoke doubt. Doubt is required to pass the threshold

guardian of the road because a true hero must question himself and his motives.

The authority threshold guardian tests the hero's resolve with competing goods; he must choose the proper and deeper good. The foundation of the authority threshold is a trusted source of wisdom for the hero. Spider-Man never doubted the significance of his abilities nor that they could be used for good, therefore he failed the test of the road guardian. Spider-Man's most significant threshold guardian was not the road, but an authority guardian: Uncle Ben. Uncle Ben warned his nephew Peter, "With great power comes great responsibility." Peter did not have the humility to listen to his uncle and disregarded his advice. Peter's disregard for his uncle's advice directly contributed to his death. The death of his uncle caused Peter to take on his heroic Tao. By accepting the authority and commission of the heroic Tao, Spider-Man was able to properly take on the mantle of a super hero.

Peter Parker was confronted with two goods: a desire to use his abilities to make his own life more comfortable and using his abilities with responsibility and in service of others. Both are good, but one is better. It is good that one use whatever resources he has to live a better life, but it is better to use those abilities in a responsible way that also aids those in need. It is through the competing goods that Peter eventually understood the significance of his heroic Tao. Because Spider-Man's Tao is a constant reminder of his failure to properly traverse the authority guardian threshold, he actually passes the guardian; the constant employment of his uncle's heroic Tao reminds Spider-Man of his initial failure and his continual need for responsibility.

The villain-type threshold guardian usually tests the skill of the hero. The villain-type is not necessarily a villain but merely takes on the role of a villain. The goal of this

guardian is to make the hero prove that he has the skills and aptitude required for adventure. In the movie *Rudy*, the protagonist's (Rudy) brother acted as the villain-type threshold guardian. Rudy was a dreamer who desired to play football at Notre Dame, and his brother who lacked any similar desire was able to mock the hopes of Rudy by proving that he—though he had not the talent or the aspiration to play football at a collegiate level—could easily outclass his brother on the playing field. Rudy ostensibly failed the villain-type threshold guardian by being unable to best his brother in skill or ability. However, if the primary hero fails this guardian test, then it is meant to display the hero's resolve.

How the hero passes the villain-type threshold tells one something about the hero. Concerning Rudy, it informed the viewer that his determination would not waver. Sometimes the hero passes this threshold by proving his skill superior to that of the villain-type. In the movie *A Knight's Tale*, the sudden death of his mentor and knight, a young squire, the protagonist William, takes on the mantle of his master to finish a medieval jousting tournament. Up to that point, William was just a young man of who had dreams of greatness. Though William often sparred with his mentor, he had yet to test his talents in a tournament in front of an audience and against an unknown opponent. William won the joust. His opponent was not a villain, but rather was merely a villain-type. William passed the threshold and traversed into the special world by winning the joust. Therefore, the villain-type threshold is passed either when the hero bests the villain-type or when the hero demonstrates his relentless commitment to enter the special world.

In *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, Link is unable to leave the ordinary world of his

village to travel to the village's god: The Great Deku tree. Link is not allowed to leave because unlike the rest of the villagers, he does not have a fairy companion, he has not been summoned by the god, and does not have the skill or equipment to deal with the dangers along the route—all three were required for Link to enter into “the special world.” Mido was the one who guarded the entrance to the path. After initially failing to get past Mido, Link's resolve did not falter:

Hey you! “Mr. No Fairy!” What's your business with the Great Deku Tree? Without a fairy, you're not even a real man! What? You've got a fairy? Say what? The Great Deku Tree actually summoned *you*? Whaaaaaat?! Why would he summon *you* and not the Great Mido? I don't believe you! You aren't even fully equipped yet. How do you think you're going to help the Great Deku Tree without both a sword and a shield ready? What? You're right. I don't have *my* equipment ready, but if you want to pass, through here, you should at least equip a sword and shield!

Link equipped himself to pass the guardian.

Mido is not a villain per se, but he acted as a villain to test the hero. This threshold guardian proves that the hero is set apart from his peers. Mido thought himself great—and in many relative aspects he probably was—but since he failed the test of the road, and lacked humility and moral faith, the tree would not summon him. Just because Mido lacked moral faith and humility, it does not entail that he is a villain, but since he is impeding the progress of the hero and tests the ability of the hero, then he acts a villain-type threshold guardian.

Jesus encountered all three of the threshold guardians at the same event. It was at the wedding at Canaan. At the wedding, Jesus was confronted with the villain that he would fight against for the entirety of his ministry: improper function. A lame man has improperly functioning legs; a deaf man has improperly functioning ears; a blind man has improperly functioning eyes—Jesus restored proper function of faculties to all who

asked. Jesus corrected how man was meant to live: that treasures should be laid up in heaven instead of on earth, worshiping God is always good, hypocrisy should be avoided, and that loving God and man was crucial to a good life.

The Devil is not the nemesis of Jesus or God. The Devil is a symptom of the problem of improper function. God played his perfect melodious tune via creation and established the perfect harmony through the correspondence of the good: Himself. God set the melody and called out to his creation and asked for harmonious chorus. The devil purposely sang out of tune, and he began to play a song that lacked goodness and harmony. The sour notes of Satan spread to all of creation and interrupted God's unspoiled melody. The ensuing suffering, toil, and death were all due to the improper function of both the devil and man—both were meant to faithfully worship and serve God. Once infected with sin, man joined in disharmony and failed to properly function and live for the true, the good, and the beautiful. Jesus was sent to fix the improper harmony; he came to restore man's proper function. Jesus' entire ministry was the correction of improper function: the purpose of the Law, the meaning of true love, the meaning of forgiveness, true servitude, and the Aristotelian good of man.

The account of Jesus' first threshold is as follows:

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him,

“Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!” This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. (John 2:1-11).

Jesus clearly doubted that his time for adventure had begun (“Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?”), and he refused the call (“My hour has not yet come”). Jesus’ doubt and refusal is very similar to that of other heroes as well. Luke Skywalker said, “But there's nothing I can do about it right now” (the doubt), which was then followed by “It's such a long way from here” (the refusal). The doubt and the refusal must be based on the threshold guardian of the road. Jesus doubted because he had not yet been prompted by the Holy Spirit to begin his journey, which is how Jesus proved his humility and moral faith. This is also an example of an authority threshold because Jesus was weighing the good of honoring his mother with the good of waiting on the Holy Spirit to begin his quest.

The villain-type threshold guardian at the wedding was the improper function of a marriage. The first ritual in the Bible is a wedding. The first wedding was successful, but the result of the marriage was the Fall of mankind. The first miracle performed by Jesus was for the proper function of a wedding ritual. There is an obvious parallel between the first wedding and the wedding wherein Jesus was called into adventure. Jesus’ ministry and adventure began at a wedding because this is where his purity and abilities were tested. The first man Adam sang out of tune and harmony with God; Jesus was sent as the second Adam, the one who could sing with perfect harmony and restore man’s ability to have fellowship with God. The wedding ritual would not have properly functioned had it not been for Jesus’ miraculous intervention. Jesus passed this threshold guardian by

proving that his ability and skill was so great that even reality itself would bow to his will.

The parallel between the first wedding in the Old Testament and the first wedding in the New Testament is symbolic of Jesus' purpose. Jesus represented both *a* new way to be human and *the* way to be human. Jesus' life was meant to reflect what Adam and Eve's lives were meant to look like. When Jesus intervened and ensured the wedding properly functioned, he was displaying that he was acting as both God and Adam. He acted as God to prove that he can take the non-functional and make it functional, and he acted as Adam, in the sense that he was going to live how Adam and mankind in general were meant to live.

Jesus initially doubted and refused the call, which ensured his humility, and he passed the road test. Since all of Jesus' actions were based on the prompting of the Holy Spirit, he passed the authority threshold whilst still honoring his mother. He passed the villain-type threshold by ensuring the proper function of a sacred ritual of marriage. Jesus had now passed into the special world.

Stage 6: The Road of Trials

This stage is usually when the bulk of the plot or conflict occurs and when the hero has the majority of his encounters. The more encounters a hero has, the more opportunities he is presented with for compromise. Conflict and compromise are connected. Without conflict, a hero cannot progress towards his goal, but the more the hero is in conflict, the more chances he has to compromise against his heroic Tao and for him to falter in his usage of the soft virtues. The most important of the soft virtues is

humility because it allows for moral faith. Jesus is the ultimate example of moral faith because every single decision he made was based on his submission to the Holy Spirit.

Every conflict that a hero endures is a type of authority-based threshold guardian. All heroes, no matter the alignment, are all confronted with the capacity for compromise.⁴² The capacity for compromise is often based on conflicting goods. Just as Jesus was conflicted about the good of honoring his mother and the good of waiting for the prompting of the Holy Spirit to begin his quest, the hero is often met with similar dilemmas. There are two mistakes that a hero can make while attempting to determine how to respond to a conflict. The first mistake occurs when the hero seeks out conflict that does not aid him in his pursuit of the worthy goal. Odysseus is a prime example of a hero that became distracted by non-relevant conflict. It is definitely good to adventure, for one to test himself, and to experience various aspects of life, but it seems that such experiences should not occur whilst the hero is attempting to return to his wife and family—Odysseus errantly chose the good of adventure over the good of the proper functioning of his household. The conflict between goods is the conflict of authority. When one chooses a good like adventure over a good like Oikonomia, the hero is essentially conceding that he has the authority to seek non-essential or non-urgent goods over the ultimate good that he is progressing towards. Those who choose a personal, non-essential and non-urgent good, lack the humility required to be the best possible hero.

The opposite problem occurs when a hero shuns conflict that does not aid his quest, but the conflict is urgent and requires a hero's attention. In the movie *The Book of Eli* the protagonist (Eli) was commissioned by God to find a book (the Bible) and deliver

⁴² Villains, of course, are also met with continual opportunities to compromise, but since the consequences of a villain compromising are not as severe as a hero compromising, it is not worth mentioning.

it out West so that it could be mass-produced. He was forced to traverse a scorched earth filled with raiders, cannibals, and warlords. Eli knew that his primary goal was to deliver the book, and he was focused and singular to that end. His goal was worthy, and he did not compromise in that pursuit, but he also allowed innocent people to needlessly suffer. As he was approaching a settlement, a group of raiders came across a pair of travelers on the road. The raiders began to harass the travelers until they shot the man, raped the woman, and robbed them both. As the conflict began, Eli was far enough away to be safe from the threat, but close enough to aid the desperate travelers. At the sight of the scuffle, Eli hunkers down as his conflict about interceding becomes evident, and he attempts to soothe himself, “Stay on the path. It’s not your concern. Stay on the path. It’s not your concern.”⁴³

Eli was conflicted because although he knew his goal was good and worthy, he also knew that human life was valuable and that heroes interfere when the strong exploit the weak. Eventually Eli was able to avenge the victims of the raiders, but he knew that he should have done something in the first place. He finally realized his mistake at the end of his life and journey. In reference to the Bible, he said, “In all these years I’ve been carrying it and reading it every day... I got so caught up in keeping it safe that I forgot to live by what I learned from it.”⁴⁴ He knew he was right by keeping the Bible safe and delivering it, but he knew that the Bible obliges not only worthy goods and ends, but also worthy means as well. The movie does not depict Eli as doing anything overtly bad or evil, but it seems based on his closing monologue that his indifference towards non-

⁴³ Allen Hughes, dir., *The Book of Eli* (Warner Home Video, 2010).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

essential, but urgent needs resulted in a type of evil:

Dear Lord, thank you for giving me the strength and the conviction to complete the task you entrusted to me. Thank you for guiding me straight and true through the many obstacles in my path, and keeping me resolute when all around seemed lost. Thank you for your protection and your many signs along the way. Thank you for any good I may have done, and I'm so sorry about the bad.⁴⁵

Jesus always progressed towards his goal without compromise and yet he always engaged in non-essential, but still worthy conflicts. The humility of Jesus and his submission to the Holy Spirit ensured that he met as many needs as he could. For the purposes of this work, Jesus performed miracles and taught for two primary reasons: to aid man and to establish his authority. The events surrounding Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 was an example of him acting towards non-essential or secondary goods:

When Jesus heard *it*, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." (Matthew 14:13-16).

At the sight of people in need, Jesus was moved with compassion. He chose to heal the afflicted and to give food to the hungry. In this scenario, the healing and the eventual feeding of the multitudes did not aid Jesus in progressing towards the worthy goal of atonement and the reconciliation between God and man, but Jesus decided to act with humility and rightly stray from his primary goal so that he could meet the needs of people.

Jesus acted as both the best possible hero and a good hero at the same time. His engagement with conflict that did not aid his progress towards his commissioned end

⁴⁵ Hughes, *The Book of Eli*.

certified his status as both a good hero and the best possible hero. The best possible hero solves the biggest possible problem, and a good hero either delays death or improves quality of life. By healing the multitudes, casting out demons, and taking care of the basic needs of people, Jesus was not necessarily progressing towards his commissioned end, but because of his love for people, he wanted to ease their burdens. Healing and casting out demons were not a part of his primary mission; however because of his love for people and his desire to be a good person and a good hero, he nonetheless met lesser needs while attempting to solve the biggest possible problem. Jesus was a good hero because he solved finite problems. Jesus was the best hero because he solved the ultimate problem.

Being a good hero is not without its pointlessness however. The futility of being a good hero, even a hero that can bend and break the laws of nature, is typified in Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. The brother of some of Jesus' followers (Lazarus) had died. Jesus asked to see where he was buried. When he was shown where Lazarus was entombed, Jesus wept. In response to Jesus' compassion, "Then the Jews said, 'See how He loved him!' And some of them said, 'Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?'" (John 11:36-37).

Jesus did not weep because of his love for Lazarus; he wept because he knew that not even a hero with colossal power could cure the affliction of man: death. C.S Lewis claimed that Lazarus had received something of a raw deal with his miracle because the miracle would eventually be undone. The lame that Jesus made walk would likely never become lame again. The blind that Jesus gave sight to would likely never go blind again. But, Lazarus would die again. Jesus wept because raising Lazarus from the dead was only

a stopgap; Jesus was merely healing a symptom of man's ultimate problem: his inability to achieve proper fellowship with God.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he proved, more than any other miracle, that he was sovereign over life and death itself. However, being sovereign over life and death itself was still insufficient to satisfy the needs inherent to the atonement with the Father. Having such authority is of course not without merit, as it proved that Jesus' message of being the true prophet, priest, and king was true. Jesus' message was confirmed, but his status of being the best possible hero was about to be tested.

Stage 7: Approaching the Innermost Cave: Last Threshold

No matter the conflict (demons, commoners, his own students, or the religious leaders), Jesus did not commit any compromises while fulfilling his worthy cause. The final threshold is always the most difficult conflict to overcome. "Thus, the hero is separated from his helper, possibly from the call of his higher nature, and from his true anima—without which unity, completeness, wholeness, holiness are impossible."⁴⁶ This threshold lets the hero know that he is ready to tackle the final and ultimate problem, whilst simultaneously being as difficult to overcome as that ultimate problem. A threshold guardian in general is a character, concept, or circumstance that tests the knowledge or skill of the hero.⁴⁷ The innermost cave represents the final test that the hero must endure before the actual climax. The final threshold not only tests the knowledge and skill of the hero but also his greatest fear. This is where the hero encounters his

⁴⁶ Jr. Jos. A. Johnson, "The Journey of the Red Cross Knight and the Myth of the Hero," *The South Central Bulletin* 33, no. 4 (1973): 203–6, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3187085>.

⁴⁷ Michele D. Dickey, "Game Design Narrative for Learning: Appropriating Adventure Game Design Narrative Devices and Techniques for the Design of Interactive Learning Environments," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 54, no. 3 (2006): 245–63.

internal nemesis. After the internal nemesis has been defeated, then the hero can attempt to defeat the external nemesis or villain. There are several different kinds of nemeses, but the encounter in general will be referred to as “The Mirror Match.” The internal nemesis (the mirror match), must be bested before the external nemesis (the source of evil that the hero is combating) can be bested.

While the notion of “nemesis” dates back to ancient Greece, the phrase “mirror match” first appeared in the video game *Mortal Kombat*. In the game, the player chooses between one of several playable characters.. The chosen character must defeat all of the other characters before moving on to the final two bosses. Before the player can progress to the final two fights, he must face an identical version of the character that he is currently playing: the mirror match. Since each character has a unique skill set that has various strengths and weaknesses, when one is pitted against his mirror, any advantage that they character previously enjoyed becomes nullified. While the term mirror match is a relatively new term, the idea of a nemesis is not new to myth.

It does not matter the genre of myth (movie, video game, comic book, or literature), given the sufficient development of any hero, the eventual result will be an introduction of a nemesis: an enemy that nullifies the strengths of the hero. There are four types of nemeses: brother, clone, antithesis, and authority. The brother nemesis is not necessarily the brother, or sister, of the hero, but rather someone with whom the hero has shared in a series of common events that date back to childhood. Usually a conflict between the brother and the hero arises when the two are young and while sharing a common tutelage with the same mentor. Eventually a schism occurs between the hero and the brother. The brother feels dishonored or under-appreciated, and therefore he forsakes

the philosophy behind the training. The brother leaves in an attempt to complete his training on his own without the limitations imposed by the mentor. The brother becomes obsessed with his dishonor and is driven to kill the mentor and the mentor's prized student: the hero.

The brother and the hero are similar in many respects. The primary difference between the two is that the brother often exhibits violent or malevolent tendencies, and the hero follows the teachings of the mentor with more fervor and dedication. Popular examples include Vash and Knives (*Trigun*), Cloud and Sephiroth (*Final Fantasy*), and Splinter and Shredder (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*).

The clone nemesis is not necessarily a literal clone, but rather he is a darker version of the hero. The second Legend of Zelda game, *The Adventures of Link*, introduced an eventual staple to the series: Dark Link. Dark Link was a malevolent shadow that shared in all of Link's abilities, weapons, and equipment. Dark Link could even mirror his attacks in real time, which nullified many conventional attacks. The clone represents the repressed rage and angst of the hero. The clone acts like the hero would if he did not have a good and proper heroic Tao. The clone is a temptation for the hero because he represents what the hero could be if he were willing to let go of the soft virtues and all inhibitions. The clone is the epitome of compromise. Popular examples are Spider-Man and Venom, Superman and Bizarro Superman, Jack and Mad Jack (*Samurai Jack*), Picard and Shinzon (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*) and Goku and Black Goku (*Dragon Ball Super*).

The antithetical nemesis is rare, but he does exist. These nemeses are usually polar opposites in every conceivable way when compared to the hero. The plot of the

non-traditional comic book movie *Unbreakable* centers on an antithetical nemesis relationship. In the movie, David (the protagonist) slowly realizes that he is invulnerable to physical damage, has a superior immune system, and has super human strength. Conversely, his nemesis (Elijah) was literally the opposite of David. While David was “unbreakable” Elijah had the quite accurate nickname: “Mr. Glass.” Mr. Glass had weak bones that would snap at the slightest trauma, he was sickly, and his strength was less than that of the average human. It is easy to overlook such a villain especially when compared to the physical prowess of a superhero, but as the mother of Mr. Glass said, “But he [Glass] said, there's always two kinds. The soldier villain who fights the hero with his hands, and then there's the real threat. The brilliant and evil arch enemy who fights the hero with his mind.”⁴⁸

The Joker is the antithetical nemesis of Batman. From a purely aesthetic sense, the two are antithetical, but they are antithetical in many different respects. The joker is brash and loud; Batman is patient and silent. The Joker wears flamboyant clothes that attract attention; Batman wears black so that he can fade into the night. The Joker thinks of nothing as sacred or important; Batman considers human life to be sacred and justice to be important. Batman is disciplined, principled, goal oriented, and focused on the good. Conversely, the Joker lacks discipline, lacks principles, his goals are only chaos, and his focus is the same as his goals: chaos.

The authority guardian of the final threshold is the same authority guardian that protected entry into the special world. Both guardians are concerned with competing goods. While Luke Skywalker was training with Yoda on Degobah, Luke felt compelled

⁴⁸ M. Night Shyamalan, dir., *Unbreakable* (Touchstone Home Entertainment, 2001).

by an obscure sensation. He saw a cave and went to inspect it. Inside the cave was Darth Vader, the very villain that he had been training to defeat. The duel was relatively brief, and it ended with Luke decapitating his enemy. Before Luke had a moment to gather himself from the ordeal, the severed head of Vader laid to rest, and the exterior mask blew away to reveal Luke's own face. Yoda led Luke to the innermost cave threshold because Luke needed to experience and see the effects of his proclivity towards the dark side.

Luke's cave encounter was an example of an authority threshold guardian. The competing goods were Luke facing his greatest fear and Luke not allowing that fear (and hatred) to overcome him. It was something of a paradox because Luke had to face his fear, but in facing his fear, the Dark Side could seduce him—he had only a narrow margin for error. The authority threshold is the most difficult of all the threshold guardians to traverse because the good hero is, due to his humility, always questioning and attempting to properly implement the greatest good, and the authority guardian obscures and questions that greatest good.

The cave tests the deepest convictions of the hero. Nemeses are often used as the test for heroes due to their intimate knowledge and connection to the hero. Such insight grants awareness of the hero's flaws and failures. But the villain need not be a nemesis to lead a hero to an ultimate cave conflict. In the first Spider-Man movie, Green Goblin acted as an authority threshold guardian when he put to test the deepest conviction of Spider-Man and his heroic Tao: "with great power comes great responsibility." This occurred before the final fight between Green Goblin and Spider-Man, which makes it a threshold guardian. Green Goblin arranges a moral dilemma for Spider-Man by standing

on a bridge tower and holding M.J., the love of Spider-Man's life, in one hand and a cable car filled with children in the other:

This is why only fools are heroes! Because you never know when some lunatic will come along with a sadistic choice...Let die the woman you love or suffer the little children. Make your choice, Spider-Man, and see how a hero is rewarded! This is your doing! You caused this! This is the life you have chosen! Choose!⁴⁹

Green Goblin released both of his grips. Spider-Man was forced to choose between two goods: the love of his life and innocent children that his heroic Tao demanded that he save. Like a good hero, he attempts to save both.

The Green Goblin does not meet the criteria of a nemesis, but he fulfills the same function of a nemesis by forcing Spider-Man to question his deepest convictions. No matter if the hero is introduced to the cave by a nemesis or mentor, the motivation for each is always the same: to test the purity, convictions, and the goodness of the hero. The villain and the mentor actually test the hero for the exact same reason; both the villain and the mentor want the hero to realize "Look, don't you see? You are just like me." The motivation of the mentor is of course altogether different than the motivation of the villain. The mentor wants the hero to experience the cave, so he will prosper; and the villain wants the hero to experience the cave, so that he will falter, doubt, and eventually abandon his quest.

It was the evening before Jesus' trial, torture, and death. Jesus had been preaching, teaching, ministering, healing, casting out demons, and debating for several years. The number of his enemies and his followers had both greatly risen during that time. As he was nearing the final battle, he would first have to traverse the innermost cave threshold. Similar to every decision that Jesus made, he was prompted by his mentor

⁴⁹ Sam Raimi, dir., *Spider-Man* (Marvel Enterprises, 2002).

to withdraw from the crowds and pray. As he prayed, he entered the cave.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there."... Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*." (Matthew 26: 36-39).

Jesus' whole life had been concerned with fulfilling his heroic Tao (loving God with all of his heart, soul, and strength) and solving the ultimate problem of sin and death. But the cave tests the deepest convictions of the hero. Jesus' two deepest convictions are the two primary aspects of his Tao: love God and love man. Up until that point it was relatively easy for his two greatest convictions to work together because when one truly loves God with all of his heart, he will also love his fellow man. However, what makes Jesus' cave encounter so tedious is that God asked Jesus to choose a lesser good.

In order for Jesus to fix the problems associated with the Fall, he was going to have to take on the sins of the entire world and then die as the perfect sacrifice for those sins. Jesus did not fear death. Jesus knew that God was bigger than the laws of nature and death. However, Jesus knew what God was not bigger than: his own righteous standards. Since God cannot be in fellowship with sin, Jesus was in conflict. Jesus' innermost cave was an authority threshold. Jesus was meant to obey the Father so that man could have proper fellowship with God, but such was the lesser good. The greater good for Jesus was to continue on in harmonious fellowship with God. The Father insisted that Jesus give up his song so that humans could finally join the chorus. Jesus knew that humans joining the chorus was good, but he knew it was better to have communion with God. Despite his reluctance Jesus relents, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Jesus chose the lesser good that was commanded by the greatest good giver.

Jesus was torn between his love for God and his love for man. It was good that he remain in fellowship with God, but it was also good that he obey God and act as a sacrifice and the best possible hero. It was not the sacrifice that Jesus feared, but it was his separation from his beloved Father that gave him hesitation. It seems trivial that Jesus would be so distraught over something as seemingly simple as him being separated from God, however Jesus was so distraught from his cave experience, that God was forced to supernaturally support him: “Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Luke 22: 43-44). Jesus’ cave experience was so excruciating and difficult that even in light of supernatural aid, he was so distressed that he sweat blood.

Jesus asked God if there was another way to fix the greatest problem of man, but since there was no other way Jesus conceded with “not as *I* will, but as *You* will.” Jesus successfully passed through the innermost cave because he was obedient to his heroic Tao, and he obeyed the difficult command given by the Father.

Stage 8: The Ordeal

The ordeal represents the reason for the hero’s adventure in the first place. Everything that the hero has been training and fighting for is about to come to fruition. After the cave, Jesus was ready to act as the atoning sacrifice and the best possible hero.

One of the more universal aspects of the hero’s journey is “resurrection.” While the term resurrection has been employed very loosely in reference to a number of various myths, there are at least two aspects of resurrection that even the most ardent opponents of Christianity must concede: (1) There are no accounts of bodily resurrection that

predate Christianity, and (2) the Christian understanding and usage of resurrection was altogether different than the pagan notion. The supposed similarities between Jesus and pagan gods is a modern invention, “The alleged parallels between Jesus and the ‘pagan’ savior-gods in most instances reside in the modern imagination: We do not have accounts of others who were born to virgin mothers and who died as an atonement for sin and then were raised from the dead (despite what the sensationalists claim *ad nauseum* in their propagandized versions).”⁵⁰

Ronal Nash argues that the death and resurrection of Jesus is different in six key ways to the Mystery religions, and these can be applied to most pagan myths as well. (1) “None of the so-called savior-gods died for someone else. The notion of the Son of God dying in the place of His creatures is unique to Christianity.”⁵¹ There are some notions of divine kings dying as scapegoats, but the divine king was not considered a savior in the same sense that Jesus was. What makes Jesus unique in terms of saviorhood is his usage of the soft virtues. The ancient Pagan gods did not have the humility of Jesus and were not concerned with willingly and selflessly dying for others.

(2) “Only Jesus died for sin. No pagan gods died for sin.”⁵² The pagan gods died for a multitude of reasons, but none of the deaths resemble a sacrificial system of atonement to reunite fellowship between God and man. The pagan gods died because they were contingent beings. While sacrifice is an integral notion of heroism, true heroism—the solving a worthy problem by worthy means—is not found among the pagan

⁵⁰ Bart D. Ehrman, “Did Jesus Exist?,” *Huffington Post* (blog), March 20, 2012, accessed February 2018, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bart-d-ehrman/did-jesus-exist_b_1349544.html.

⁵¹ Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 160.

⁵² Ibid.

myths. Aspects of Heroism are readily apparent in many ancient myths, but none of them were heroic like Jesus and none of them died to fix the transcendent problems with sin.

(3) “Jesus died once and for all (Hebrew 7:27; 9:25-28).”⁵³ The pagan resuscitations were concerned with the vegetation cycle. The pagan world was only focused on survival and sentiments of transcendence. Pagan gods and religions were not based on sacrificial deaths, bodily resurrection, and atonement, but rather it was a death and resuscitation that promoted only finite gods and goods. No one argues that a deciduous tree dies in Winter and then is resurrected in Spring, but rather one knows when a tree sheds its leaves it does not die but rather becomes dormant. In the Spring, the tree is not resurrected because the tree did not die. Because the deaths were based on the vegetation cycle, the pagan hero, unlike Jesus, dies continually and not once and for all.

(4) “Jesus death was an actual event in history.”⁵⁴ There is no other pagan “resurrection” that can be verified apart from the religions’ claim. The death of Jesus is one of Gary Habermas’ minimal facts: it is an aspect of the New Testament that has near universal agreement amongst critical scholars as being historically true. Even skeptics like John Dominic Crossan believe the death of Jesus is one of the most historically defined and knowable events in ancient history. C.S Lewis argued that, in part, the historicity of Jesus is what set him apart from the pagan myths:

The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens — at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person

⁵³ Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 161.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

crucified (it is all in order) under Pontius Pilate. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle.⁵⁵

Jesus is the true myth because he actually achieves true transcendence and not merely sentiments of transcendence, but he is also the *true* myth because he really lived and died, and it can be verified historically.

(5) “Unlike the mystery religions, Jesus died voluntarily.”⁵⁶ Jesus was the best possible hero because he intentionally and willfully presented Himself as a sacrifice to God as a fulfillment of man’s atonement. The pagan gods were not portrayed as benevolent and self-sacrificing heroes, but they were contingent beings that were not really concerned with improving the lives of men. The pagan gods and the pagan myths lacked the theological and moral philosophy required to produce true heroism, which is required for a voluntary death.

(6) “Jesus’ death was a triumph and not a defeat.”⁵⁷ The reason why the death and life of Jesus is considered a minimal fact is because Jesus’ death on the cross was an embarrassment. Only the most severe criminals were crucified, and the entire process was dehumanizing and humiliating. It was also an embarrassment that the Apostles fled during the crucifixion of Jesus and that the Apostles, despite Jesus’ teaching that he would be raised from the dead, did not even believe the initial claims that Jesus had been resurrected. Despite the stigma associated with crucifixion and the initial foolishness of the Apostles, the death of Jesus was actually a triumph. Jesus boasted his triumph:

⁵⁵ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 66.

⁵⁶ Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 161.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

“I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” (Revelation 1:18). While initially the death of Jesus seemed like a defeat, it eventually proved itself to be an integral aspect of the atonement. The classical idea of Jewish resurrection was based on the triumph of God, “the origin of resurrection faith lies in the idea of YHWH as the Divine Warrior who rules over nature, chaos and death, and in the belief that his followers are incorporated into his kingship of victory over death.”⁵⁸

There are seven more differences that Nash did not mention; these points are not necessarily limited to the Mystery religions but rather can be applied to paganism and myths in general. (7) There was a longstanding preexisting notion of Jewish resurrection that was unique from paganism, and the Christian notion is based on that Jewish understanding. There are some parallels between Greek and Christian thought, but the true source is found in Jewish thought:

The anthropology of the New Testament is not Greek, but is connected with Jewish conceptions. For the concepts of body, soul, flesh, and spirit (to name only these), the New Testament does indeed use the same words as the Greek philosopher. But they mean something quite different, and we understand the whole New Testament amiss when we construe these concepts only from the point of view of Greek thought.⁵⁹

The Jewish notion of resurrection is based on several Old Testament verses. The book of Daniel paints a clear picture of resurrection, “It is impossible to make of this anything else than a statement of the doctrine of a resurrection quite similar to that found

⁵⁸ Willem S Vorster, “The Religio-Historical Context of the Resurrection of Jesus and Resurrection Faith in the New Testament,” *Neotestamentica* 23, no. 2 (1989): 159–75.

⁵⁹ Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000), 15.

in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians."⁶⁰ Paul wrote extensively on the resurrection, with his Jewish background and education preparing him for the full significance of Jesus' resurrection.

Even New Testament critic Bart Ehrman, who denies the historical reliability of many aspects of the New Testament argues that the Jewish notion of resurrection was altogether dissimilar from paganism:

The idea of Jesus's resurrection did not derive from pagan notions of god simply being reanimated. It derived from Jewish notions of resurrection as an eschatological event in which God would reassert his control over this world. Jesus had conquered the evil power of death, and soon his victory would become visible in the resurrection of the faithful.⁶¹

(8) The Christian and the Jewish understanding of resurrection was bodily,⁶² and it was a requirement for entrance into heaven. Jewish bodily resurrection was based on Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 12:2-3. Much of ancient Greek thought was influenced by Plato. Plato did not think of the body as being sustained through death. "For Plato, only the body died, while the immortal soul was reborn, often over thousands of years. The just were rewarded and received a better destiny while the unjust were judged."⁶³ There are classical notions of heaven and hell: Elysium and Hades. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus travels to Hades. The people there were ethereal spirits. While they were able to drink blood, Odysseus errantly attempted to hug his mother, but was unable to because she did

⁶⁰ Willis J. Beecher, "Daniel 12:2, 3," *The Biblical World* 14, no. 1 (1899): 54–57.

⁶¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 226.

⁶² N.T. Wright, "Jesus' Resurrection and Christian Origins," *Gregorianum* 83, no. 4 (2002): 615–35.

⁶³ Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 152.

not have a body. The Jewish and Christian notion of resurrection and the immortality of the soul requires a body.

(9) The Jewish notion of resurrection is based on righteousness. Jewish resurrection was a reward for righteous living, and it was limited to Jews alone.⁶⁴ It was also a reward for enduring persecution.⁶⁵ The pagan notion of “resurrection” was not based on righteousness, and it was solely limited to a specific hero. The hero did not necessarily have to be righteous in order to be “resurrected.”

(10) The New Testament teaches a general resurrection of all people despite one’s righteousness, “I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” (Acts 24:15). There is nothing in pagan mythology that describes a global resurrection of all people.

(11) Resurrection is not the same as rebirth or resuscitation. The common belief about resurrection and myth follows: “The outlines of myth of the rebirth or resurrection are universal and clear. The hero progresses from a state of nonlife to one of life.”⁶⁶ It does seem apparent that resurrection is a common theme, but all of the ancient pagan understanding of resurrection was actually cases of resuscitation or rebirth. The Christian conception of resurrection is related to new birth, but the new birth is separate, yet also dependent, on the resurrection. There are longstanding ancient concepts of ritual cleansings, which were meant to act as a form of rebirth for people. With Christianity, the resurrection of Christ is what changes believers, “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, he *is* a

⁶⁴ Vorster, “The Religio-Historical Context of the Resurrection of Jesus and Resurrection Faith in the New Testament,” 163.

⁶⁵ Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 225.

⁶⁶ Leeming, *Mythology*, 292.

new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Heracles (Hercules) persuaded Hera to adopt him through a rebirthing ritual; this ritual was common in many barbarian tribes.⁶⁷ A ritual rebirth is not a resurrection. Adonis is considered a dying-and-rising god archetype, but there are no Greco-Roman accounts of anything which resemble a resurrection.⁶⁸ Adonis was turned into a flower that bloomed each year. A flower that blooms each year is not an example of a resurrection, but rather a resuscitation based on the vegetation cycle. Osiris was not resurrected; his body was broken and scattered, then the pieces were reunited, and he came back to life. Attis died and was reborn as a tree. Dionysus has several obscure notions of resuscitations and rebirths; one of the more popular is that all but his heart was destroyed, and Zeus gave the heart to Semele to impregnate her with it so that Dionysus could be born again. None of these are real examples of resurrection.

(12) Many myths, primarily evident in modern myths, do not actually employ a resurrection or resuscitation, but will employ a symbolic “resurrection.” A symbolic resurrection can take several different forms: feigned or implied death, the hero is fundamentally changed,⁶⁹ or the hero sacrifices a belief of habit.⁷⁰ The hero can even die, but is “resurrected” by living in the memory of those he had saved.⁷¹ The resurrection of

⁶⁷ Leeming, *Mythology*, 269.

⁶⁸ Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). 143.

⁶⁹ Vogler, *The Writers Journey*, 210.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 209.

⁷¹ Ibid., 201.

Jesus is remembered symbolically through the rituals of baptism and the Eucharist, but the actual resurrection of Jesus was not a symbol, but rather an actual event.

(13) The resurrection of Jesus is a proud proclamation that is openly and doctrinally related to the key sacraments: baptism and the Eucharist. Some scholars have attempted to base baptism and the Eucharist on the practices of the pagan mystery religions. However, the mystery religions, by definition, did not readily expose either the purpose of their religious rituals or explain publicly what those rituals were. In order to participate or understand the rituals of a mystery religion, one had to make vows and prove loyalty. In Christianity, baptism and the Eucharist are not hidden behind vows of fealty, but they are public proclamations based on the literal death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In general, the Christian notion of resurrection was important because it confirmed both the message (“When I have been raised up I will draw all men to myself,” “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man can come to the father but through me,” and “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up”) and the messenger (Jesus without whom God raised). God would not resurrect a liar or a charlatan but would only resurrect someone who faithfully preached his truth.

All heroes must prove themselves superior to the problem that they hope to solve. Aquaman proved himself superior to even the mightiest of tempests by preventing a vessel from sinking. Spider-Man proved himself superior to the laws of gravity by swinging between skyscrapers. Superman proved himself superior to the strength and speed of a locomotive by being able to stop or divert it. And Jesus proved Himself superior to death by being raised from the dead.

Through the resurrection, Jesus proved Himself to be the best possible hero because he was able to do more than delay death or improve quality of life. Jesus was able to beat death: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Stage 9: Atonement with the Father

Some formulations of the monomyth have a stage that precedes this one that is focused on a goddess: “The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented as a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World.”⁷² The marriage to the goddess is confirmation of the worthiness of the hero. The marriage of the hero to the goddess implies a type of approval from the father: atonement.⁷³ The ordeal for Jesus is also a divine engagement between Christ as the bridegroom and the church: those who trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and salvation become the bride.

The Apostle Paul seemed to argue that Christ was like a righteous Odysseus and that it was Paul’s duty to ensure that the church did not give in to sinful seduction (“the suitors”): “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:2). Jesus represents the new Adam and the church represents the new Eve. The union between the new Adam and the new Eve is the actual obtainment of human Aristotelian goodness. Before the marriage, the church and

⁷² Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 91

⁷³ Donald Palumbo, “The Monomyth and Chaos Theory: “Perhaps We Should Believe in Magic,”” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 12, no. 1 (45) (2001): 34–76.

Christians in general can cognitively understand man's Aristotelian goodness and can theoretically or with limitation act in accordance with it. But because Christians are still limited by original sin, they cannot fully achieve it. The goal of the church and Christians is to strive to obtain man's Aristotelian goodness: to love the LORD with all of one's heart, mind and strength, and to love his neighbor as himself. The promise of the return of Christ is a divine comedy because of his eventual marriage to the church. "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (Revelation 19:7). At the marriage, the church is able to love God without the limitation of original sin or sin in general—the good is achieved. The engagement to the goddess acts as atonement with the Father within Christianity because the church, though not a goddess, is finally able to achieve transcendence and have fellowship with God.

There was also a much more intentional and literal atonement with the Father. When Jesus took on the sins of the world, for the first time in all of eternity past, he was not in fellowship with God. The moment that Jesus had begged to avoid while in the innermost cave came to light while on the cross:

But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon him,
And by his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5-6).

There was no means of pleasing the holy and loving natures of God other than a worthy sacrifice. There had to be a sin-bearer, and that sin-bearer had to be perfect, "For He

made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus was able to do what no other human could do. He offered Himself as the blameless sacrifice for the sins of mankind. When Jesus offered Himself to God, the loving and holy natures of God were equally satisfied. God’s holy nature was satisfied because a worthy price was paid for sin and God’s loving nature was satisfied because man was given the capacity for proper fellowship with him. The wrath of God was satisfied. Atonement has been achieved.

Stage 10: Master of Both Worlds: The New Adventure

This stage is also known as “The Return with Elixir.” This is when the hero returns to the ordinary world to either proclaim his conquest or return with something the ordinary world needs. Odysseus’ return was needed because his family was under siege. Frodo’s return was one of triumph. When the hero returns, he is completely different from when he left. His return marks his successful mastery of both the special and the ordinary world.

One of the best examples of “master of both worlds” is Neo from the Matrix series. The original Matrix movie is one of a few myths that actually and truly represents a resurrection. Neo was demonstrably dead. He was not brought back to life. He came back into life with a new body and abilities. After Neo was resurrected, he was able to actively manipulate various aspects of the Matrix. However, when Neo was in the real world, he also had unique abilities there as well. Neo became a master of both the ordinary and special world.

The same is true with Jesus. The resurrection gave him the ability to live as a

human and yet also have proper fellowship with God. His mastery of both worlds is evident when he instantly appeared before the Apostles:

Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" So they gave him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence. (Luke 24:36-43).

Because Jesus was able to both move at the speed of thought and yet also participate in events reserved for contingent beings, such as eating and physical contact, Jesus proved himself a master of both the world of becoming and the world of being.

The heroism and drive of Jesus did not end with his mastery over both worlds. True heroes do not retire without training the next generation. Luke Skywalker eventually started his own Jedi academy and trained other heroes with his skills and his Heroic Tao. Jesus too had been training the next generation of heroes while he was progressing towards his goal.

After the resurrection, Jesus took on the proper and full role of the mentor and commissioned his pupils. Just as the Holy Spirit commissioned him, Jesus too commissioned the next generation of heroes who were his Apostles. With the Apostles, the monomyth began anew. The commission of the earliest disciples has been the same ever since: to teach that Jesus Christ is the true myth.

Jesus Christ is the Best Possible Hero

The good is proper function of intended purpose. The goal of the good is to achieve perfection, which is the perfect function of intended purpose. Perfection of the

good is the great. When perfections of the good are attempted, the hope is to achieve transcendence. Perfection of the good will obtain a form of transcendence. The great is transcendental and objectively beautiful. A scene from the movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer* explains the difference between the good and the great; it describes perfection function leading to transcendental beauty:

Bruce is a worn-out, disheartened, and disgruntled chess master and former chess teacher. Fred is looking for a chess teacher for his son Joshua, who is a prodigy. Bruce had witnessed Joshua's skill first-hand. Bruce invited Fred to a "prestigious" chess tournament. The room was dim, smoky, and cluttered. The chess players did not look professional, and the whole scene was drenched with disillusion and desperation.

Bruce: So, what do you think? Have you ever been to a tournament before?

Fred: No.

Bruce: Ah. You're in luck then. This is one of the most prestigious. The talent gathered here's the strongest in the country. Everybody's here: Joel Benjamin, Former U.S. champion. A few years ago, he was ranked among the top ten players in the world. Asa Hoffman. He's the son of two lawyers. He grew up on Park Avenue, went to Columbia and Horace Mann before dropping out to play chess full-time. He plays about 200 chess tournaments a year.

Bruce: Asa...Asa...How much do you make at the tournaments altogether?

About 2,000 a year? [Asa was so focused on his game that he barely acknowledged his friend. When he finally responds the response is hurried and distracted.]

Asa: Look at that. I got him thinking. I got him thinking. Maybe I can win a pawn. [His words dripped of desperation. Bruce and Fred walk away.]

Fred: Clearly, you had me come here so I could see all this. But if you really wanted me to say no to letting my son play, you wouldn't have bothered. You want me to think you want me to say no, but you actually...want me to say yes.

Bruce: You have no idea what I want. What is chess, do you think? Those who play for fun, or not at all, dismiss it as a game, the ones who devote their lives to it, for the most part, insist it is a science. It's neither. Bobby Fischer got underneath it like no one before him and found at its center...art. I spent my life trying to play like him. Most of these guys have. But we're like forgers. We're competent fakes. His successor wasn't here tonight. He wasn't here. He is asleep in his room in your house. Your son creates like Fischer. He sees like him, inside.

Fred: You can tell this by watching him play some drunks in the park?

Bruce: Yes. You want to know what I want. I'll tell you what I want. I want back what Bobby Fischer took with him when he disappeared.⁷⁴

Bobby Fischer's chess-play was beyond the good. A world chess champion has obtained the good. Many of the people described in the previous scene had likewise achieved the good. But, it is so exceptional for one to achieve perfection, that even the best chess players in the world were merely imposters attempting to achieve perfection, beauty, and art. Fischer's perfection of chess transcended chess and it became art.

⁷⁴ Steven Zaillian, dir., *Searching for Bobby Fischer* (Paramount, 2000).

Transcendence of the good also occurs when one perfection is compared with another. Some perfection may, depending on one's knowledge, only be understood in light of other perfections. A good example of this is found within a relatively obscure movie: *Camp Nowhere*.

The young man "Mud" walks in on the middle-aged Dennis who is listening to a speech given by Winston Churchill. The conversation between the two is an example of the perfection of the good achieving transcendence:

Mud: What is that?

Dennis: Winston Churchill. The Jimi Hendrix of the spoken word.

Mud: Who's Jimi Hendrix?

Dennis: The Michael Jordan of the electric guitar.⁷⁵

Winston Churchill had perfection, or at least the good, of speech. Dennis attempted to portray that transcendence with another perfection: Jimi Hendrix. But, when Hendrix was unknown the perfection was portrayed to a more contemporary and readily knowable perfection: Michael Jordan. Each man had achieved not only their relative good but did so to a degree that they are compared to other perfections. To compare one perfection with another is evidence of transcendence.

All religions hope to achieve transcendence. The ultimate form of religious transcendence is salvation, eternal life, and fellowship with God. The hero of a religion (a myth or the founder) must prove that through him or his ideology one can achieve more than sentiments of transcendence. The situation comedy *Community* comically and accurately portrayed the problem of heroes and religion in general. The community

⁷⁵ Jonathan Prince, dir., *Camp Nowhere* (Walt Disney Video / Mill Creek, 2003).

college had an obscure annex known as the “Air Conditioning Repair School.” The school was a satirical representation of religion. Supposedly the school dated back to ancient Egypt, and the first “air conditioners” were slaves tasked with waving fans to keep their masters cool—the religion was born. The school existed for centuries and evolved into a religious devotion to air conditioning repair. The school had a prophecy about the ultimate repairman, one that did more than merely fix air conditioners, but could fix something deeper—something transcendent. There were many skilled repairmen who achieved the good of air-conditioning repair, but none achieved perfection or transcendence. The followers put faith in a future hope of a great repairman who could do more than merely fix air conditioners, “The truest repairman will repair man.”

All religions, and all people, know that man is broken. Religions exist to either cover up man’s brokenness or attempt to fix that brokenness. The truest perfection, the truest good of man, is to overcome the fallen condition of mankind and be elevated into fellowship with God. Jesus acted as the truest repairman because he repaired and restored man so that he could seek and obtain the true, the good, and the beautiful: proper fellowship with God

Jesus is not merely the repairman who repairs man, but he is also a hero that saves heroes. Jesus once said, “physician heal thyself” (Luke 4:23). But perhaps Jesus could have said, “hero save thyself.” To save himself, a hero must conquer death. Link cannot save himself from death. Frodo cannot save himself from death. Achilles and Odysseus cannot save themselves from death. And Superman, even with his nearly limitless strength, cannot save himself from death. A good hero is a hero that obtains the heroic

good by solving worthy problems by worthy means. The perfection of heroism is the hero who can save good heroes.

Jesus is the best possible Hero. He had the best possible heroic Tao, which was based on the best highest understanding of the natural moral law: the infinite prescriptive good. His story was the most significant kind of story: myth. But the myth of Christ is more than mere story, and he is dissimilar from all other myths because he can be historically verified—he is the true myth. He solved the biggest possible problem, which was death. He did what Frodo, Superman, Link, Odysseus, and Achilles were unable to, and he solved the biggest possible problem whilst also employing the best possible means: continually progressing towards the good while employing the soft virtues and helping those in need. Jesus was humble. He did not engage in useless conflict but rather he helped the afflicted as fulfilled his quest. He loved the unlovable. And he, like no hero who proceeded or followed him, was able to solve the problem of death. Jesus is the true hero myth because he is the perfection of the heroic good—he can save heroes. Jesus is the true hero myth because through him, man can achieve true transcendence, true being, and true salvation.

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