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**THE HEROES WE MISTAKE FOR
VILLAINS: THE TRUTH BEHIND
SELF-SACRIFICE AND
TRANSFORMATION**

A thesis submitted to
Regis College

The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors

By Breanna Symmes

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PREFACE

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Special thanks: I would like to also express gratitude to my parents and younger brother, who have stood patiently by my side in the construction of this work and provided nothing but encouragement. I thank my friends, whose witty conversations inspired the writing, and Mr. Thompson and my fellow G/T students, who inspired the topic. True self-sacrificing heroes go unnoticed and even castigated in our society; this thesis is written for them.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION TO

THE HERO AND

CRITERIA OF A

VILLAIN

Throughout the centuries of human civilization, the notion of the self-sacrificing hero has evolved in parallel to the evolution of societies. Heroes are shaped by their creators—the populace of a society—in regards to the ideals that society wishes to uphold. A hero is a person who represents the greatest aspects of human beings, epitomizing the characteristics that society holds most dear. These characteristics have transitioned in their levels of importance over time, shifting the “ideal” self-sacrificing hero from one figure to another. However, as these transitions occur, inevitable discrepancies will evolve in the varying minds of the participants in society. Those who wish to value one attribute above another will disagree with another’s archetype of the ideal self-sacrificing hero. Ultimately, one view will prevail in the mind of society itself, while the other will fall by the wayside. This thesis has been written to contend that the contemporary view of the self-sacrificing hero is incomplete, and that another type of self-sacrifice should be recognized for its contribution to society’s greater good.

The introduction portion of this thesis will explain the evolution of the heroic figure over the course of time. In this process, we will examine the attributes of the hero that are most valued by society as the hero morphs from one form into another. Next, we will examine the relationship between ethics and heroism and utilize this connection to describe the contemporary view of heroism through modern ethicists. Finally, a brief overview of the rest of the thesis will be laid out in order to provide an understanding of the structure of the argument that some self-sacrificing heroes sacrifice more than their lives to save their societies, and that they merit recognition for their contributions as well as other heroes.

According to Joseph Campbell, the figure of the hero has evolved throughout the centuries from a cosmological miracle-worker to a defiant member of society.¹ Early heroic figures derived from myths that detailed their cosmological origins, whether those origins were the blood of a deity or a dragon. The emperor Huang Ti, who united China and was said to have led his people into a golden age was supposedly conceived by starlight and could talk at the age of seventy days.² These types of heroes—predestined from birth and endowed with supernatural powers—are manifest throughout numerous ancient cultures, from the Egyptian pharaohs that were considered descendants of the gods to the Buddha.³ Common folklore endowed the heroic figures with whatever level of miraculous origins was necessary to convince the populace of the hero's power to affect salvation. Over time, these heroes developed more human characteristics that related their innate powers to those of the populace. Stories of miraculous birth evolved into tales of humbler beginnings, such as the infant abandoned by a fearful mother,⁴ or the child sovereign sent into exile by jealous competitors;⁵ these heroes would later return to society and utilize their innate powers to transform the world around them. These progressive myths contributed to the perspective of a hero as merely a human being, but still a human being with superhuman capabilities. Though these abilities were the product of the hero's destiny, the hero had nonetheless to overcome the same obstacles and trials as everyday people in order to gain these gifts through merit rather than miracles.⁶

Incidentally, this notion of striving to attain greatness later inspired the notion that any human being can become a hero with enough dedication. In attaining these new capabilities that render the hero powerful in the face of a society, the hero enters a period of obscurity, separated from society by her talents.⁷ That which makes the hero supernatural leads to her being perceived as an unnatural being, isolating her from her own humble and human origins. However, through this separation and learned dedication, the hero becomes aware of her true

character—her autonomous self—and enters the world as a creator, a person capable of reshaping the world into something better than what it already is.⁸

If the notion of society at this point was that a hero could improve the world, then Campbell argues that the hero must then have begun to represent a transforming force against conservative practices. As he phrases it, “The mythological hero is the champion not of things become but of things becoming; the dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo: Holdfast, keeper of the past.”⁹ Therefore, a hero’s role became to transform society, to unite the present world with the ideal world the hero hoped to attain. The enemy of an ideal world is consistency—generation-to-generation monotony in a systemic structure—and the hero became the agent of change. As an individual who was isolated from society by predestination or by meritorious effort, the hero capably defined his own character apart from the society from which he was born. This introspect rendered the hero with an additional capability beyond those attained through years of separation and training: the ability to view society from an outside perspective and judge it objectively so as to redefine it for the betterment of all within that society. A hero, thus, by definition should instigate change, but whether predestined or dedicated to a higher cause, the heroic figure nonetheless maintained supernatural powers to become that transforming force. Later however, the heroic figure evolved in the minds of his creators once again, this time to encompass the possibility that any living person is capable of being a hero.

Campbell contends that the modern view of a heroic figure is that of a woman who, although she lacks any supernatural powers, maintains the perspective of a heroic figure—she can judge society objectively from an outside perspective and initiate change for the better.¹⁰ Regardless of the idealistic origins and practices of a society, that society can always be transformed into something more. This notion guides the hopes of countless individuals who believe in a brighter future, and gives life to the need for an agent of change: the hero. The

enemy of society then, as Campbell has already suggested, is Holdfast—the dragon of perpetuity, unwilling to release traditions of the past for the sake of an uncertain future. These “keepers of the past” are found in modern times; they are “namely the patriots whose ubiquitous photographs, draped with flags, serve as official icons”¹¹. Those members of society who insist that their society is a manifestation of the ‘best’ society that exists, are precisely the hindrance to attaining an ideal society. Thus, these agents of conservation become monsters in the mythological sense, and the role of the hero is to destroy their strength as retainers of the past, bringing to light a greater future.¹² This type of heroism requires no supernatural birth or powers. Normal individuals with autonomy, an individual perspective to step outside of society and judge its deficiencies, and the willingness to heed this call are what Campbell would deem to be “modern heroes.”¹³ They represent the voices calling out the wrongs of society in the face of oppression, and risk their reputations, sometimes even their lives, for the pursuit of a greater good. The hero then, has transformed over the course of several centuries from a divine force, to a dedicated being who attains supernatural abilities, to an autonomous individual with the perspective and desire to make the world a better place. Modern philosophers emphasize the latter portion of these requirements to define modern heroes, essentially demonstrating that a typical person, in order to be worthy of heroism, must demonstrate qualities of ethics and act as an ethical human being.

Heroism is acting on behalf of others in such a way as to benefit them in ways that they cannot benefit themselves. Thus, the notion of heroism is inherently dependent on the interrelatedness of people within a society, and therefore is dependent on a notion of ethics. Ethics is a method of interrelationships between individuals. Those individuals with ethics of goodness place the needs of other before themselves because they are capable of rendering a service to others so long as they resort to selflessness first. Thus, an ethical person, in essence is

a hero, because an ethical person acts benevolently towards another person for the sake of helping them in a way that the second person could not help his or her self.

Emmanuel Levinas defines ethical interactions through relationships between different people. The entire essence of what is “ethical” is derived from each individual’s sense of the “other”—those individuals separate from oneself that give rise to the notion of “self” as an independent entity. If the “other” did not exist, then we would have no self-awareness, because there would be no “self.” Human beings require an awareness of something separate from themselves with which their independent mind can be compared in order to comprehend even the concept of what is a “self.”¹⁴ Therefore, because the “other” is the partly responsible for our self-awareness, the “other” should be treated with as much respect and dignity as our own personal creator, because the “other” is the creator of the self. Levinas therefore, contends that the greatest good is striving for the betterment of the “other,” because the “other” defines our universe. The essence of a hero then, in Levinas’ view, is that of a person who is constantly in a state of giving rather than receiving, of focusing on the “other” rather than the self, thereby demonstrating selflessness. Levinas contends that whereas the golden rule says that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us, we should actually “do unto others as they would have us do unto them.”¹⁵ The role of the hero, as an ethical human being, is to promote the greater good for the “other,” indicating that a hero plays a completely selfless role in acting on behalf of society. Such selflessness places the burden of suffering on the ethical person, which Agnes Heller advocates as a key feature of ethics.

Heller defines an ethical human being as one who prefers “suffering injustice (being wronged) to committing injustice (doing wrong).”¹⁶ Advocating the same notion of the self as a less important entity than the other, Heller believes that ethical people act on behalf of their community to fight injustice, if not by opposing injustice, then at least by enduring its oppression rather than contribution to it.¹⁷ A hero can be a victim just as much as a normal citizen, but the

hero commits an essence of self-sacrifice to the cause of justice, refusing to do harm unto others, and in turn accepting the harms that others would yield unto him. Even if he is not a powerful figure, a man can still be heroic as a victim by confronting his (and others') oppressor.

Paulo Freire emphasizes this role of an ethical person as one who defies oppression from a weaker position. He also believes, like Heller, that ethical human beings must take a stance on their notions of justice, but he takes this argument a step further, indicating that the role of an autonomous individual within society, as an ethical individual, is to "challenge and question" authority figures.¹⁸ Freire maintains that each individual's critical perspective is absolutely necessary to promoting the greater good, and that these individuals have a responsibility to stand up against injustice.¹⁹ Institutions, he argues, are inherently damaging and oppressive, because they advocate a single perspective rather than the myriad of perspectives represented by the individuals they consist of.²⁰ An ethical individual should act against oppression, therefore, an ethical individual acting as a hero, according to Freire, should constantly criticize and oppose institutions in an effort to enhance the voice of the individual. A hero should not only avoid oppressing others, but should stand up to the oppressors within an institution in society. The role of the hero in this instance relies on her ability to stand out amidst the other members of society, and to influence change therein for the benefit of others.

Renowned philosopher Michel Foucault emphasizes the importance of individuality within a society and the hegemony associated with the development of institutions. Ethical human beings, as argued by Levinas, act on behalf of others. Foucault indicates that this is possible only through the recognition of the autonomous self.²¹ To reach the level of individuality necessary to act against institutions, a person must first be able to determine what is "individual" about herself. The next step then, in beginning to interact on behalf of others, is to renounce this "self" that has been discovered. Renunciation of the "self" acknowledges Levinas' "other" as more important, thereby defining an ethical interaction between two people. Whereas

Levinas emphasizes the importance of one individual never claiming to “know” another,²² Foucault claims that individuals should not permit systems of thought to manufacture individuals through definition of what is “normal.”²³ Political and historical institutions of thought claim to know what is true and what is right,²⁴ but according to Foucault, “Universal truth and general right are illusions and traps.”²⁵ Regardless of how perfect a system appears to be, the power structure of a society inevitably omits the needs of its less powerful citizens. This type of oppression must be overcome by the individuals capable of impressing their notions of “self” onto society, acknowledging the value of individuals even in a consistent power structure. Furthermore, because the “other” is more important than the individual herself, these autonomous thinkers have a responsibility to stand up against systems of thought in order to give voice to the powerless. This movement is not necessarily political or legal, but rather cultural.²⁶ A hero in society must work towards cultural revolution for the benefit of the powerless.

Clearly, contemporary views of heroism inherently rely on a basic understanding of ethics whereby heroes in society are those who place others above themselves, but beyond that, they strive to improve the entire society around them for the benefit of all. This connotation includes a hint of self-sacrifice, indicating that a hero holds the lives of others above his own, as well as the good of the society itself. Such views describe the heroism of real individuals such as Oscar Schindler, as well as fictional heroes like Superman. However, I would contend that while these contemporary views of self-sacrificing heroes encompass broad elements of absolute heroism, they also lack a key understanding of self-sacrifice that can be used to define an entirely different type of hero: the hero who cares so deeply for his society that he willingly embraces the role of the villain for the sake of the greater good. Contemporary heroes are respected for sacrifice of life, liberty, and happiness, but what of the hero who is willing to sacrifice his soul? If the conception of one’s “self” extends beyond the physical, then absolute sacrifice of the “self” would be the sacrifice of the very essence of one’s morality. Levinas argues that the very

definition of “self” begins with ethics, therefore, to eliminate oneself at the very core, one would necessarily have to sacrifice his ethics for the benefit of others. Therefore, the intention of this thesis is to argue that contemporary views of self-sacrificing heroes are incomplete. These views should be expanded to acknowledge the hero whose sacrifice is so complete that he ceases to become a hero and instead becomes a villain.

This thesis will demonstrate the importance of the ultimately “self”-sacrificing hero using a variety of methods. First, we will examine the role of institutions and power structures within society and their effects on cultural understanding. Foucault asserts that power structures lead to the oppression of individuals through a process of normalization, which is called hegemony. Hegemony exists within every power structure, regardless of its design or intentions. The mere construction of a system of thought, a system of ideas, or a system of government requires the definition of normality. Normality, by definition, must exclude certain individuals, or more likely, groups of individuals from consideration of what it means to be “normal,” because a definition, no matter how flexible, imposes boundaries on the notion of normality and prevents it from extending to certain groups of people. For example, Foucault uses the example of mental institutions, which house individuals whose mental status or behaviors deviate from what is deemed to be within the confines of “normal.”²⁷ The only criterion that separates the “normal” from the “abnormal” is the dominant perception of what the word, “normal” signifies. Thus, mental illness and abnormality are not objective states of being, but rather social constructions of the human mind used to draw a line between one individual and another.

The second portion of this thesis will involve the discovery of the individual “self” and how that discovery leads to the creation of an autonomous hero. By defining what is “normal” within a society, systems oppress the individuals that do not meet the criteria of normality, but the nature of hegemony is such that even those who are being oppressed do not recognize the source of their subjugation. Thus, to break the pattern of conformity with an oppressive system,

an individual must become autonomous from the system of thought into which she was born. She gains autonomy through recognition of the part of her self that is independent of society's influence—the part that does not judge “normality” per se, based on socially constructed definitions. Rather than depend on social constructions to define states of being, the individual adopts an independent conception of these states and thus frees herself from the confines of rigid social definitions. This frees the individual to pursue her own reasoning of abstract ideas such as justice, heroism, and love, creating a new perspective through which she participates in society. However, upon this realization of autonomy and its accompanying unique perspective also generates a previously non-existent rift between the individual and the society from which she came, because upon realizing this autonomy, the individual recognizes that complete adherence to the societal norms is incompatible with complete expression of the self. Societal norms require an individual to utilize the socially constructed definitions of abstract ideas in order to live in concordance with the rules and regulations that have been generated from the common understanding of those definitions. When the individual begins to utilize her own definitions, her notions of abstract ideas inevitably clash with those of the system. Hence, the newly born “hero” recognizes that any system used to define normality is inherently flawed, because it does not account for the unique aspects of individuality and the value of every individual, including those who do not meet the social definition of what is “normal.” Thus, in this section we begin to define a hero as a person who recognizes her own individuality and willingly steps outside of the “normal” realms of perception in order to transgress the constraints of socially constructed definitions. A self-sacrificing hero steps outside of the systemic “box” of thought in order to evaluate the integrity of that structure from a new perspective. The autonomous perspective however, is not enough. As Heller, Freire, Levinas and Foucault suggest, heroism also contains a strong element of selflessness, whereby an individual uses her new perspective for the betterment of others. Foucault indicates that upon the final realization of the autonomous self,

the individual then chooses to renounce this self in favor of the others within society. As a self-aware individual who views the flaws within a society because she has an autonomous perspective, the ethical hero has a responsibility to then confront the system in order to instigate change within it.

The third portion of this thesis will be devoted to the notion that the type of self-sacrificing hero described herein not only exists, but *must* become the enemy of the society which he is trying to reform if he is to truly serve the role of a hero. There are numerous historical examples of individuals who have sacrificed their lives and reputations for the good of society, such as Martin Luther and Qin Chi Huang Ti, but there are also numerous fictional examples that are relevant to this study, including Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, and Unamuno's San Manuel Bueno. Philosopher Richard Rorty contends that fictional archetypes of people who exhibit cruelty help us as readers to examine the effects of our actions on others through institutions as well as personal interactions. As an example, he cites the reader's relationship with Mr. Causaubon in *Middlemarch*, or with Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House*. In both instances, the reader becomes more aware of the effects of actions done unto others through sympathy with the central characters.²⁸ Thus, Rorty maintains that fictional examples of autonomous people are just as relevant as historical examples to the examination of the human perspective. Since the type of hero defined in this thesis necessarily implicates the autonomous person, this thesis adopts the same notions of non-fiction and fiction and applies it to the concept of a self-sacrificing hero. By Rorty's examples, we can legitimately contend that Martin Luther's historical self-sacrifice is just as relevant as the Grand Inquisitor's fictional self-sacrifice, and both are equal in validity to the story of Socrates, whose self-sacrifice falls somewhere between the lines of history and fiction.

Up to this point we have demonstrated that upon the realization of autonomy from society, the individual has a moral responsibility to challenge the practices of the existing system

in order to reform it, but now our purpose is to demonstrate that this self-sacrificing hero cannot accomplish this task without becoming the enemy of his society—the “villain” in the perceptions of the populace. Thus, this portion of the thesis will demonstrate that the nature of hegemony is to subjugate the individuality of the populace and its leaders, and to maintain this oppression through the systemic establishment of norms. This systematic approach towards normalization blinds oppressors and oppressed alike to recognizing the suppression of individuality by emphasizing solidarity and faith in a system rather than a system’s purposes. The autonomous individual who adopts the role of the hero then, defies faith in this system by stepping outside of the “normal” realms of thought, effectively becoming an outsider within her society. Outsiders are permitted within a system of oppression so long as they do not oppose the established guidelines of the system. However, as we have already noted, the role of the autonomous individual as an ethical human being is necessarily to oppose the systems of thought that suppress individuality, ergo the hero of a society—one who seeks to reform it for the better—inherently becomes an enemy of the system by nature of opposing any of its established norms. Those who faithfully adhere to the system’s establishments will view the autonomous individual with fear and contempt, because autonomy threatens their sense of solidarity. Similarly, the leaders of society will censure the autonomous hero in order to maintain their seats of power. Within a functional society that has defined its norms and expectations, the harbinger of change is a villain to be opposed and ultimately destroyed, along with her ideas, because those ideas threaten the solidarity of the system, and therefore endanger the order of society—from the perspectives of those within it.

The final portion of this thesis will be its conclusion. Overall, the purpose of this thesis is to define a new type of self-sacrificing hero who currently lacks recognition within contemporary views of heroism. Current perceptions of self-sacrifice are limited to the sacrifice of one’s life, one’s happiness, or one’s livelihood; the hero who relinquishes his reputation and

even his soul is still viewed as a villain until many years after he has truly brought about reform. This thesis proposes that self-sacrificing heroes are those who willingly challenge the norms of systemic thought to embrace change for the better within a society, and that these heroes should be recognized as heroes, rather than as ‘enemies of the system’ or ‘criminals,’ as they are often labeled by the societies they ultimately transform for the better. Thus, in the conclusion we will revisit the contemporary views of heroism and compare them to the realizations we have come across in the course of examining the role of hegemony in society, the importance of defining a notion of the “self” to overcome this form of cultural oppression, and the examples of such “self”-sacrificing heroes that exist in historical and literary examples. Ultimately, we should conclude that some individuals who are perceived as “villainous” in contemporary terms ought to be considered heroes for their efforts to transform the world around them for the greater good.

Notes

¹ Campell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. P. 317.

² Id. P. 317-318

³ Id. P. 321

⁴ Id. P. 323

⁵ Id. P. 322

⁶ Id. P. 334

⁷ Id. P. 329

⁸ Id. P. 336

⁹ Id. P. 337

¹⁰ Id. P. 389

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Id. P. 391

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Murray, Jeffrey W. "The Other Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas: Communication Beyond Relativism." P. 180

¹⁵ Id. P. 176

¹⁶ Christians, Clifford G. "The Social Ethics of Agnes Heller." P. 279

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Arnett, Ronald C. "Paulo Freire's Revolutionary Pedagogy: From a Story-Centered Narrative-Centered Communication Ethics." P. 160

¹⁹ Id. P. 162

²⁰ Id. P. 106

²¹ Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. P. 260

²² Murray, Jeffrey W. "The Other Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas: Communication Beyond Relativism." P. 174

²³ Cooper, Martha and Carole Blair. "Foucault's Ethics." P. 59

²⁴ Id. P. 61

²⁵ Id. P. 62

²⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. P. 267

²⁷ Cooper, Martha and Carole Blair. "Foucault's Ethics." P. 52

²⁸ Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. P. 141

CHAPTER 2:

**THE INHERENT
OPPRESSION
OF HEGEMONY
AND
HEROIC
TRANSCENDENCE**

Hegemony is defined as “the spontaneous consent given by great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group.”²⁹ The dominant group that forms the power structure of a society inherently defines its values of what is ‘normal or ‘acceptable,’ but whether it works by active coercion or subliminal communication, hegemony itself is a term of domination over the human intellect.³⁰ Processes of defining normality occur in daily interactions between individuals, but the perceptions of these individuals are shaped by the definitions of the dominant group—the group within a society that has the most influential power. This group of dominant individuals utilizes these definitions—whether intentionally or unintentionally—to reinforce the social hierarchy and maintain these individuals’ dominant status.³¹ Thus, processes of normalization involve the transfer of concepts of ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ behavior from dominant power structures to everyday communication.

Agnew explains that hegemony has been used in the past to refer to the structure of a dominating empire—an oppressive regime that maintains its standards of normality and rules through coercion.³² Dominant power structures that dictate normality via coercion rarely stand for long, as the general populace is likely to disagree with the structure’s definition of what is ‘acceptable’ within a society because of the inherent feeling of being oppressed. Individuals living under a dictatorship are not permitted to express their personal views; instead their views

are imposed upon them, drawing a natural disconnect between the individual and the perspective they are supposed to have—according to the regime. Those who do not—or are not allowed to—form their own views or express their own perceptions of what is ‘right’ within a society, or what is ‘good’ never have to engage the topics at hand, thus it is easier to say that rather than having their views expressed for them, they have no views at all—their perspectives are merely represented by the dominant power structure, and falsely represented, at that. The individuals hold no views of their own because they are discouraged from doing so. Ergo, what follows from this process is an apathetic populace that does not engage philosophical notions of what is ‘right,’ what is ‘good,’ what is ‘normal,’ etc. Instead, individuals within this dictatorial society repeat monotonously the mantras of the regime, never fully comprehending what the values are that they are supposed to be preaching, much less understanding how to defend those values to criticism from the outside world.

Individuals under the oppressive form of hegemony of which Agnew speaks represent the shells of their philosophies. Coercive hegemony compels individuals to detach themselves from the thought process involved in defining abstract concepts and instead encourages robotic repetition of definitions of which the subjects cannot grasp the meaning because they have no direct connection to the definition—merely a phrase that is to be spoken, and never to be comprehended. Such a type of hegemony is insipid, to be sure, but not so dangerous as more subtle types of sublimation. Coercive hegemony, while compelling, does not reach the subconscious levels of individual mindset, and therefore exists only as long as the dominant power structure that creates it. In a society where individuals are discouraged from autonomous thought, their closest connection to their personal values extends only so far as the depth of their entrenchment within the power structure; most individuals therefore, have no more belief in the values imposed upon them than outsiders—they merely follow the rules and speak the words they are supposed to without understanding their meaning. Therefore, when the power structure falls to

outside influences, the hegemonic ideals that it sustained cease to exist, for there is no one competent left to defend them.

Coercive hegemony is well portrayed in the film *V for Vendetta*. Recovering from an apocalyptic era, the citizens of London live under the commanding regime of High Chancellor Adam Sutler. When a deadly and contagious virus broke out in Britain, Sutler assumed the mantle of leadership and used his influence to diminish the power of individuals within the society and thus further augment his own. With the full force of the military behind him, Sutler restricts the freedoms of Londoners by instituting random surveillance to monitor citizens' dedication to his regime's cause, by heavily censoring the media for messages that run counter to the regime's purposes, and by arresting any members of the public who question his authority or the authority of his representatives, such as his elite police division called "fingermen." This type of domination by power forces the people of London to submit to Sutler's views by preventing them from dissenting and also encouraging them to voice their thoughts in favor of Sutler's regime—lest the random surveillances and fingermen repeat that the individual has not demonstrated significant favor of the regime and therefore must oppose it. Sutler holds the power to execute at will, therefore anyone whom he deems to be opposed to him is subsequently eliminated. In response, the people of London post signs emphasizing Sutler's motto: "Strength through unity, unity through faith," and submit to any demands made by those in power, for those in power hold the power to kill.

This coercive hegemony, while powerful, lacks somewhat in substance, in that it oppresses the majority of a society's population, encouraging widespread internal dissent because anyone who is not a part of the dominant power structure is not free to express their personal views. Individuals outwardly ascribe to the demands of the dominant power structure, as the Londoners of *V for Vendetta* ascribe to Sutler, but in the end when revolution is called for, nearly every person in the city shows up to counter the visible power of Sutler's regime. The individuals who

harbor internal resentment of their own oppression manifest their protest in the form of a demonstration that changes, we led are to assume, the entire power structure of London for many years to come. Thus, the external public assent, while it is influential in leading to further entrenchment of Sutler's power, is insignificant when compared with the genuine values that the people of London hold in their hearts. Coercive hegemony functions, but only so long as the dominant power structure stands. When Sutler and his highest commanders are eliminated, the people of London rise up, demonstrating that coercive hegemony is not so great a force as the willpower of the people.

The other type of hegemony however, the more subtle version which Agnew discusses, is far more insidious because it turns this willpower of the people into the very oppressive force that those who are being oppressed ought to resent. Subtle hegemony is based on what Agnew refers to as, "soft power." This type of power is not coercive, but rather influential, using social constructs to augment the influence of the dominant power structure. This subtle hegemony pervades the perceptions of a society through social influences. By defining what is 'good,' 'right,' or 'normal' within a society, the dominant power structure encourages individuals' thought processes to work in accordance with those definitions. These classifications are not imposed on the populace by coerciveness, but rather utilized tacitly within cultural communication such as the media. The media, therefore, has the power to define normality by ridiculing that which lies outside of the dominant power structure's definition of 'normal,' or by praising that which encompasses that very definition, establishing the 'rules of right.' Such political sway need not be obvious, for merely in presenting the news stories about one side of an issue and not presenting stories about the other side, the media encourages perception in favor of the former. This type of hegemony inevitably leads to the oppression of individuals—or more likely, groups of individuals—by excluding them from the 'normal' category. In defining what is normal, the

dominant power structure establishes what is ‘not normal,’ and abnormality, as a concept, links to negative connotations because it is perceived as that which is outside of society’s preferences.

Brenda Allen notes that dominant groups control the ideologies within a society, and over time, these ideologies disseminate into everyday language, “become taken for granted and accepted as universally valid by most members of a society.”³³ Such blind acceptance of established norms disguises the potentially oppressive nature of these practices. Allen says further:

[Rules of right] guide and regularize our interactions with others, and they help to maintain power positions. Members of society and organizations routinely and robotically invoke rules of right with statements or sentiments such as ‘that’s the way we do things around here,’ ‘these are the standard procedures,’ or ‘it’s just common sense.’³⁴

This “common sense” logic pervades the thoughts of every individual and interrupts the normal continuum of their independent responses. Even individuals that think autonomously from the societal power structures still identify with the central values of the society to which they ascribe themselves, so they contribute to this soft power by ingraining the values of the dominant power structure into their own thought processes. Further, they neglect to recognize the source of these responses—society itself—by connecting the thoughts to such asinine platitudes as “common sense,” ignoring the powerful influence of social pressures and dominion through normalization. Thus, groups of individuals are inherently oppressed by whatever definition of normality is laid out by the dominant power structures within a society. This oppression, while inevitable, also lacks recognition, making it more dangerous to those who are being oppressed. As Freire explains, those who oppress others—whether consciously as in coercive hegemony, or unconsciously as in the use of “soft power”—lack the strength or ability to recognize their oppressive actions, therefore, the oppressed must rise up against the social order that is oppressing them.³⁵

The more subtle hegemony, Agnew explains, is more insipid than the coercive form, for the members of society ascribe to it almost thoughtlessly as those under an oppressive regime, but even more dangerous, they actually take the values of the dominant power structure to heart and assemble it as part of their own value system. Individuals that perceive themselves as “functioning members of society” value the society for its solidarity and therefore submit to its most fundamental tenements so as to acknowledge that they are a part of that solidarity. Society imposes the perception of what is ‘right,’ and what is ‘normal,’ such that individuals begin to perceive righteousness and normality within these contexts and ascribe their reasoning to “common sense” logic. Agnew says, “Hegemony is absolutely *not* equivalent to simple domination (territorial or otherwise) but refers to widespread assent to principles of conduct that are the ‘common sense.’”³⁶ The people give assent to relinquishing their power as individuals by believing that common sense dictates that they should, because they work in solidarity with society, and society demands centralization of power.

In Dostoevsky’s *The Grand Inquisitor*, Christian followers do not question the cardinal’s authority, even when he arrests Jesus Christ, because their faith does not ascribe to Jesus Himself, but rather to the sense of solidarity that the Church under Jesus Christ has come to represent. They believe that it is wrong to question those who speak for the Church, because they have willingly submitted themselves to a “higher power,” which initially was God, but has been twisted through subtle definition to also be interpreted as the Church. Such subliminal manipulation of the understanding of the masses of people that surrender their personal values to that of the dominant power structure is exactly the type of subtle hegemony that Agnew warns us about. In permitting their beliefs and surrender to Jesus Christ to be misconstrued into believing in and surrendering to the values of the Church, Christian followers in *The Grand Inquisitor* give silent acquiescence to the antithesis of their original beliefs. Through internalizing the Christian teachings of submission, and allowing this submission to influence their own values, Christian

followers unintentionally yield the Grand Inquisitor more power than Christ. As Agnew suggests, this hegemony is far more dangerous than coercive hegemony because the people within the society do not realize that they are even yielding power to someone else. Worse, the citizens perpetuate the oppressive hegemonies that they take part in by permitting those ideologies to guide their thoughts and behaviors.³⁷

Unfortunately, the subtle form of hegemony that is demonstrated in *The Grand Inquisitor* and occurs in a variety of ways in every society, not just societies that are dominated by powerful political figures like the Grand Inquisitor. Even societies that do not intentionally create oppression for any of their citizens must inevitably do so when they begin to form laws and regulations, for the society justifies those constraints on human actions through moral arguments. The society ascribes to a specific set of moral guidelines by which all members are expected to abide, and these guidelines themselves derive from the dominant power structure, whether that structure is a dictatorship with one person at its head determining the rules by which all others are governed, or whether that structure is a democracy with a majority at its head determining the guidelines by which all citizens—even the minorities not represented in this instance—are to be governed. In any case, the dominant power will inevitably oppress the non-dominant powers by electing to govern in a way that favors those who dominate society's rules and leadership. However, as already discussed, the people who willingly submit to this system of government, even those who disagree with its tenements, further reinforce the dominant power by offering it their support because they favor the solidarity it brings over their autonomous ideals—as the townspeople favors obedience to the authority of the Grand Inquisitor even after recently witnessing the miracles of Jesus Christ and following Him.

Subtle hegemony is dangerous because it is a form of oppression to which even the oppressed submit. Out of fear of losing solidarity with others, or dedication to a cause that transcends the individual, he relinquishes his personal power and sense of values, electing to allow

the society, which theoretically represents the ‘greater good’ he wishes to promote, to choose his values and actions for him. The individual’s autonomous views may in fact be in line with many of the society’s values, but hegemonic influences manifest in the form of complete submission to the views of the dominant power. Definitions of normality strip the unique attributes of individuals of their potentiality of goodness by emphasizing conformity with that which is not them—that which is the society’s ideal, which no single individual can ever hope to encompass. Ergo, these definitions in a sense, oppress everyone within a society by separating individuals from their ideals and instead encourage them to live up to the impossible task of ascribing fully to an ideal that is not even their own. Individuals that attempt to engender the ideal concept of ‘individuality’ as society defines it, inevitably become frustrated by the fact that even if they appear to succeed, they are just like everyone else who has succeeded, and therefore not individual at all.

Hegemony is suppression of individuality because it is submission of one’s will to the will of the dominant power structure. In a sense, it is a subliminal form of oppression because it is self-inflicted, but that does not make it any less insidious in its effects. Even if not imposed by coercive dominant power structures, hegemony damages individuality by encouraging suppression of unique attributes within an individual. Favoring the protective and social benefits of solidarity over diversity in viewpoints, citizens of a society relinquish their personal values, submitting to a single, unified view regardless of whether that view lies in accordance with their own being. For example, in *V for Vendetta*, Evey’s best interest lies in assisting V in liberating their nation from a tyrannical government; she even agrees that “this world is screwed up,” but when given the chance to help assassinate Bishop Linnamen, she instead attempts to foil V’s plot by revealing it to the disinterested clergyman. She demonstrates the social tendency to favor rejoining the masses in solidarity over going against the grain to bring society as a whole to a higher form of existence. Through manipulation of the ideals of freedom and justice, Sutler’s regime encourages obedience,

and through the desire to become part of a greater whole within society, individuals such as Evey encourage conformity. Within a society such as the London of *V for Vendetta*, individuals have the option of submitting their willpower wholeheartedly to the dominant power structure, as the unquestioning believers in Dostoevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor*, or of conforming to the norms and expectations of that power structure, as Evey consistently attempts to do. In either case, individuals cease to function as individuals—they no longer possess an autonomous mentality to contribute a diverse perspective to their society, ergo they might as well be automatons—robots mechanically performing a designated function but lacking in the ability to change or adapt.

The importance of change and innovation is a widely recognized economic concept—those industries that do not consistently improve their product eventually lose out in competitive markets to newer industries that produce superior products at lower costs.³⁸ History has demonstrated similar tendencies in societies, such as the Roman Empire that could not adapt to the changing perceptions of the populace as they edged more towards pacifism and egalitarianism.³⁹ Stagnation destroys societies as surely as it does industries, because it undermines human tendencies of creativity. Artists exist even in the most oppressive of societies create that which does not already exist, thus these creative spirits assist in the evolution of the human psyche towards new conceptions of the abstract. Under oppressive systems that suppress this individuality, there is no room for creation and thus no room for improvement, but it is in the nature of human beings to perceive the imperfections of their surrounding society. Thus, forbidden from improving a world that they recognize as less-than-perfect, individuals feel smothered. Subtle hegemony prevents these individuals from moving towards revolutionary tendencies, thus further entrenching their own sense of oppression. This oppression manifests and endures because of hegemony, and thus hegemony becomes the source of suffering within society.

The significance of an individual can be stripped away by hegemony through the dehumanization of those who do not conform with the dominant system of thought.

“Disabilities,” as they are termed in society, refer to abnormalities within individuals that inhibit their ability to function as normal individuals. As previously discussed, the definition of “normality” emanates from the values of the dominant power structure, so that which is perceived by a society as “normal” merely reflects these values. In modern society, paraplegia is perceived as a physical disability because “normal” behavior involves walking on two legs. However, if the dominant power structure of society, say for instance, the majority of the population in a democratic nation, experiences paraplegia, then this condition ceases to become an *abnormality*. Thus, a “normal” individual is more likely to be defined as a person who moves about using a wheelchair, and the inability to walk on two legs ceases to become a disability.

Similarly, mental disabilities are distinguished by mental constructions based on definitions of normality. Brenda Allen discusses the effects of the DSM—Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—and explains that any person who demonstrates symptoms of the disorders listed in this manual “is subject to categorization and stigmatization.”⁴⁰ Further, she points out that for several decades, this manual classified homosexuality as a mental disorder, producing a negative social effect on countless individuals through a technique of normalization of heterosexuality. Numerous mental disabilities may be interpreted differently according to whether they are viewed as ‘disorders’ that indicate some form of dysfunctionality of an individual’s mind, or as variations in perceptions or perspectives. Schizophrenia is recognized as a mental illness because “normality” involves hearing only one voice inside one’s head—one’s own—, therefore hearing multiple voices demonstrates a perceived wrongness in a person’s mind. Foucault discusses the fact that madness is the product of social hegemony, saying, “You know very well that the mad subject is not an unfree subject, and that the mentally ill person is constituted as a mad subject, precisely in relation to and over against the one who declares him mad.”⁴¹ In other words, the person who accuses another of being mad defines the concept of madness, and truly no madness exists except that which deviates from the perceptions of the

dominant power structure—in this case, the accuser. This is not to suggest that clinical mental disabilities do not exist, but that perception of what constitutes a mental disability in general, is a social construct defined by those in the dominant role who define normality. Thus, a Nazi-like regime has the power and potentiality to define those who disagree with them as ‘mentally ill,’ because they can convince the populace through hegemonic influences that only the mentally incompetent would express ideals that run contrary to the regime.

In Camus’ *The Stranger*, the narrator of the story is condemned as a murderer with malicious intent, even though he acted in self-defense in killing a man. The narrator is convicted of murder because his behavior deviates from that of the dominant norm. The jury expects the narrator to admit that his actions were the result of an emotional reaction to his mother’s death, which occurred earlier in the story, but upon finding that he has no emotional reaction to this experience whatsoever, and that he shows neither sadness nor remorse for the person whom he has killed, he is assumed to have had malicious intent in killing the man. His lack of emotional response is his condemnation, for it deviates from the expected normal response of a decent man, therefore, the jury assumes that the narrator is not a decent man—rather than someone whom is merely different from them.

Similar to the instance of Camus’ narrator in *The Stranger*, individuals are often condemned of malicious intent within their societies merely for deviating from the thoughts or behaviors of those enforced by the dominant power structure. Indeed, as Foucault suggests, deviation in thought can be interpreted as a mental disability within an individual, undermining that person’s credibility in the public eye, and justifying their seclusion and confinement to prevent these individuals from harming others in society. In this case, individuality is not only suppressed, but it is also punished. Those who do not fit the model of the “ideal” citizen run the risk of being perceived as not only different, but also dangerous.

The irony of this situation whereby the unique individual is perceived as dangerous is, of course, that society is more endangered by stagnation than by revolution. Just as inflexible Rome could not adapt to worldwide changes in perception, societies that prohibit freedom of thought and expression—new ideas—from emerging can buckle under newly emerging pressures. Individuals who demonstrate diverse opinions and ideas expose societies to potential innovation, thus strengthening the likelihood of survival in a constantly changing world. However, societies that discourage these innovative ideas commit the sin of oppression of their citizens, and in addition, they diminish their own ability to withstand change. Hegemony endangers societies that preach freedom and justice by oppressing their own citizens, and it endangers them by putting them in a position to fail to adapt. Yet, hegemony encourages the citizens of a failing society to label any person who perceives this downward spiral as the true “danger,” because these individuals lack “faith” in the system and therefore undermine it.

Perception of individuals who question hegemonic structures as dangerous figures within a society is not new. In ancient Rome, individuals who perceived that the empire was overstretching its resources and expanding too quickly for the government to possibly maintain control were denounced if they shared their opinions with the general public. Those who thought the empire was heading towards ruin and destruction could not possibly believe in the empire’s invincibility, and in ancient Rome, this was treason. Societal perceptions of Rome’s superiority had, at the point when the empire began to decline, started to encompass the notion of an indefatigable kingdom. Through this hegemonic influence, the public was convinced that any person who believed that Rome could destroy itself by overstretching its resources, did not believe in Rome’s strength as an empire because they did not believe that it was incapable of being destroyed. The obvious error in this line of reasoning is apparent, for while an empire’s ideals may be invincible, its system of government and borders will never be thus.

Regardless of the apparent erroneous nature of ancient Roman patriotism, such hegemony persists in modern nations. For example, in the most recent war engaged by the United States, the justification for going to war against Afghanistan, and then Iraq, was that the United States is a world power capable of dominating many nations, therefore it should serve as the policing force that keeps terrorist nations across the globe in line. In an effort to sustain funding and moral support for troops, military leaders began condemning war protesters as “unpatriotic.” The natural assumption of the military has been that individuals who oppose the war must naturally oppose belief in their military and their government, while the truth is more likely that protesters believe in the role of their nation as a self-sustained democracy that has no more of a right to impose its system of government on other nations than Britain had on the United States upon its founding. Inherent danger lies in these accusatory assumptions, because the oppression of one’s citizens diminishes public morale, and it allows unexpected occurrences—i.e. Rome’s ignominious fall—to blind-side systems of government and the countless individuals who naively submit to their hegemonic structures. Thus we arrive at the role of the autonomous individual and her importance in reforming hegemonic societies for the greater good.

Amidst governments that wield immeasurable control through coercive power and political / hegemonic influence and thus oppress their population and endanger it to unexpected phenomena, the individuals who deviate from the “normal” and submissive group that follows the rules and expectations of the dominant power structure possess the sole ability to recognize the society’s potential flaws and thus reform them before these flaws can be exploited to bring about the society’s unexpected end. Individuals whose thoughts do not depend on the pensive reflections and definitions of others, or at the very least, on the dominant power structure, are autonomous individuals. Their ability to perceive society outside of its own definitions is an invaluable asset to analyzing the society from an outside perspective, thereby presenting alternative viewpoints and possibilities while simultaneously exposing that society’s weaknesses

so that they can be strengthened to make the society better. The role of such individuals inherently lies in their ability to recognize the hegemonic structures within their societies and how those structures are oppressive.

Recognizing Heller's definition of an ethical person, it is at this point which the ethical autonomous individual begins to defy society's rules and expectations. If every society, in defining normality inherently commits injustice by oppressing individuals who do not meet its definition of "normal," then Heller suggests that the ethical person would defy this oppression, either by not taking part in oppressing others himself, or by acting exactly contrary to that system of oppression. Thus, the role of the ethical autonomous individual resides in passively or actively contradicting the hegemonic ideals and practices of his society. The individual that chooses to act contrary to the system of oppression, despite the fact that he need not do so in order to be considered ethical, is exactly the individual whom Campbell would define as a hero, because he directly pursues the greater good of his society by attempting to make it better in ways that other individuals—because they lack the autonomous mindset to recognize the society's flaws—cannot. This hero combats oppression within his own society while simultaneously preventing its self-destruction, thus sustaining the society in spite of the likelihood that his perceptions and actions will be viewed by the dominant power structure and its hegemonic followers as inherently "dangerous" to that society's survival.

In the process of this transition, some would argue that the hero could possibly become the tyrant that she seeks to destroy. Her efforts to impose her autonomous self upon society could easily warp into a selfish act of oppression if she neglects the aim of betterment for those around her. However, recall that Levinas' requirement of the heroic figure is recollection of the role of the 'other' in constructing the self, and deference toward the other before the self for that very reason. A hero's primary concern is for the other, and secondarily for the self because the other is the reason the self exists in the first place. As such, escape from the hegemonic structures of

society necessarily implies that the heroic figure will help the other to escape from them, but never to unjustly impose her own hegemonic structure upon that other for selfish purposes. Indeed, if the necessary evil that this heroic figure recognizes within society is the construction of hegemonic structures within themselves, then the hero must never so much as attempt to introduce a hegemonic structure into the life of the other once the other has been freed from society's constructions.

This is not to say that hegemony is possible to completely escape. We have already explained here that wherever there is an organized system of government, there is a system of moral values upon which it was founded, upon which the citizens rely to define their "normal" existence, and which is inherently oppressive. Nonetheless, hegemony remains a dangerous construct by which society can destroy itself, so it is important for autonomous individuals to fulfill their roles as independent entities by challenging that system to move towards self-improvement. Despite being perceived as the "danger" towards society, the autonomous individual must protect society from the dangers of itself.

The process of autonomy and exercising its influence to better all of society is a difficult one. Autonomous individuals are rare within the context of society because discovering autonomy requires a great deal of self-reflection and a willingness to travel on unknown paths of thought without moral guidance from another person or system. Even rarer is the autonomous individual who chooses to wear the mantle of a hero, because that type of autonomy, while deemed ethical and heroic by philosophers, alienates the individual from her society and thus, she does not accept such a station in life without knowing that in doing so, she relinquishes her former identity and any future attempt to assimilate once more into the dominant power structure. As such, autonomous individuals who combat hegemony in an effort to live as ethical human beings and thus reform their societies as heroes engage in a process of self-discovery that eventually becomes their basis for transformation.

Notes

- ²⁹ Gramsci, Antonio qtd. in Allen, Brenda. *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*. P. 30.
- ³⁰ Agnew, John. *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power*. P. 20
- ³¹ Allen, Brenda. *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*. P. 27
- ³² Agnew, John. *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power*. P. 20
- ³³ Allen, Brenda. *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*. P. 32
- ³⁴ Id. P. 28
- ³⁵ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. P. 44
- ³⁶ Agnew, John. *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power*. P. 26
- ³⁷ Allen, Brenda. *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*. P. 33
- ³⁸ Riddell, Tom, Jean Shackelford, Steve Stamos and Geoffrey Schneider. *Economics: A Tool for Critically Understanding Society, 11th edition*. P. 116-119.
- ³⁹ Heilbroner, Robert L. and William Milberg. *The Makings of Economic Society*. P. 23
- ⁴⁰ Allen, Brenda. *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*. P. 28
- ⁴¹ Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. P. 291

CHAPTER 2:

**SELF-KNOWLEDGE
AND HEROISM
LEAD TO SELF-
SACRIFICE**

The definition of “self” is a complex process, more so when that definition must be constructed outside the contexts of society. Typically, as Sartre tells us, “The other is essential to [our] existence, as well as to the knowledge [we] have of [our]self.”⁴² Individuals define their selves through comparison of their person to the “other.” This “other” is the average citizen that one perceives as the epitome of normality—not a solitary, identifiable person, but the embodiment of what this person represents: a functioning individual within the confines of a defined society. We have already discussed the effects of hegemonic conglomeration—the solidarity enforced by societal ideals that serve as the glue that molds individuals into a solitary ‘people’—but now we must examine the perception of this singular entity from within its boundaries, that is to say, from the perspective of an individual within that solidified mass of others. Comparison is the basis for self-definition, for it allows one to perceive the self in relation to that which is not the self. Nonetheless, it is not possible for an individual to compare herself to a conglomeration of others, ergo she must single out the attributes of what an ideal individual ought to be. Thus, the notion of the ‘ideal citizen’ is born.

Previously, we mentioned the impossibility of embodying all of the aspects of an ‘ideal’ person, and now we will expand upon that notion. The essence of the ideal citizen within a society is that this person fits the mold—the sum of expectations that society imposes upon the

people within it. It may be possible for one individual to fit this mold upon society's foundation if that individual was the founder, because only the founder can hope to encompass every combined ideal of that society—no two individuals share the same sentiments about absolutely every aspect of society's functions. However, any doctrine that is written in stone cannot change as the perceptions of people do. It is in the nature of the person to change his perspective as he grows older and wiser to the workings of the world and its peoples. However, the imposed rules of a society, if they cannot be modified, quickly become incompatible with even the original individual who created them. In large societies, this problem becomes even more pronounced, such as in Camus' *The Stranger*, when a man stands on trial and is condemned for murder, not because his action was not done in self-defense, but because the man feels no remorse for taking the life of another human being. His prosecutor admits that this man cannot be blamed for his inability to acquire the moral tendencies common to the other members of society, but says to the jury, "In a criminal court the wholly passive ideal of tolerance must give place to a sterner, loftier ideal, that of justice. Especially when this lack of every decent instinct is such as that of the man before you, a menace to society."⁴³ The man on trial does not meet the hegemonic ideals of his society as far as what constitutes a 'decent' person, so instead of being perceived as a member of his society, he is condemned by it as a 'menace' to the foundational ideals to which all others in that society ascribe. This man, who had no say in the foundational ideals of society in the first place, cannot hope to live up to the societal expectations of an ideal citizen. Even if he had been more involved in the foundation of society, he still could not hope to meet these guidelines, because even the prosecutor, who represents the ideals of the people, originally attempts to vindicate the man on trial because he knows that he is innocent. Yet, the prosecutor's perspective changes as he discovers the 'soulless' nature of the man on trial, and his entire conception of 'innocence' evolves from that point on. Even secured in the foundations of his original beliefs, the prosecutor's societal perceptions change over time in such a way that he himself no longer embodies the

original ideals he represented, so how can a person, such as the accused man on trial, ever hope to represent these ideals? It is clear from this example that an individual cannot possibly meet all of the expectations of the ideal citizen, for even if that individual exists upon the foundation of the ‘ideal’ model, the definition of ‘ideal’ evolves in the mentality of the individual as well as the society, such that no person can ever hope to entirely encompass the attributes of the ‘ideal’ citizen. An individual self cannot exist within the contexts of society.

Definition of self, therefore, begins where the individual and the society clash, because it is at this point where the individual becomes distinct from the mass of others that comprise the society. The similarities between this individual and the ideal citizen are what contribute to her perception of solidarity with others as a member of the same system of thought. In contrast, the variations between this individual and others distinguish her from the ideal citizen, and thus the society of which she feels she is a part. Societies that encourage diversity emphasize the positive aspects of individuality and differences that distinguish between one citizen and another, thus creating the notion that partial separation from the ideal citizen is not a negative attribute. Ergo, it is possible for individuals to perceive their uniqueness in a positive light, which ultimately enforces processes of social innovation through diversity in perspective.

William James argues, “There can be no final truth [...] until the last man has had his experience and said his say. [...] However, the hypotheses which we now make while waiting, and the acts to which they prompt us, are among the indispensable conditions which determine what that ‘say’ shall be.”⁴⁴ Every individual perspective matters because each perspective contributes to the overall perception of truth. If truth can be discovered through universal knowledge, then everything that each individual knows is part of this conglomeration of truth. James contends that each perception is an ‘indispensable hypothesis’ of truth, and so to find ultimate truth, we must acknowledge and test every hypothesis. Individuals that contribute unique perspectives are instigators of social change because they influence the opinion of the dominant

norm in that they present an opposing view. To present this view is to introduce a new method of observation of circumstances previously unavailable to others because they could not recognize the circumstances outside of their own experiences. Thus, the individual presents a new reality to the conglomerate “other” and influences social change through alteration of perception. Without this individual’s perspective, the other would have no concept of a different situation from that which already exists, thus change would never take place. However, upon the introduction of this altered perception, the other then has the potentiality of recognizing various viewpoints and adopting one that previously did not exist.

In order for an individual to adopt a perspective that varies from that of the dominant norm, it is necessary for that individual to first attain autonomy from the current system of thought. Comparison of oneself to the ideal citizen is merely the beginning of realization of one’s perceived separateness from the conglomerate society, but regardless, it is a critical first step. Perceiving oneself as different from the expectation is vital to understanding one’s role and significance as an individual because it alienates the individual from the sum of norms that diminish the individual identities of all others. By recognizing that he is different from all others, an individual thus acknowledges that he *is*. Such recognition is the realization of existence, not as part of a larger whole that is society, but as an entire whole within oneself who contributes to a larger entity that is comprised of many individuals that are themselves whole. This is William James’ theory at work, for just as each individual perspective comprises part of the larger notion of truth, the mere existence of every individual comprises the entirety of the existence of society. As Levinas declares, recognition of the “other” allows for recognition of the self, ergo the existence of the self is entirely dependent upon the “other.”

In order to escape one’s identity as part of a greater mass and instead define oneself as an autonomous individual, it is necessary to first escape the realms of categorizations and perceptions that are used to define individuals within the context of a society that diminishes their

individuality. Some would contend that this process begins with language, others that it begins with person-to-person interactions, or perhaps visual associations. Regardless of the precise method of the beginning of this process, the important aspect of it is the realization that the definition of self naturally occurs within the context of societal perception, ergo it is dependent upon a system of thought rather than one's self—we cannot define ourselves by ourselves until we have first defined our self through society. This demonstrates an inherent problem with the notion of autonomy, for it is impossible to define the self independently of a system that oppresses the individual. However, as we have previously noted, the key portion of this process is recognition. By defining the self within the contexts of society and using definitions limited by societal perceptions to recognize the key differences that distinguish the individual from others, including the ideal citizen that embodies society's preferred characteristics, the individual realizes a self apart from society, some aspect of her independent being that transcends societal boundaries by varying from the dominant norm.

Recognition of a single, distinguishable entity outside of the contexts of society creates the notion of an autonomous self, but true autonomy derives from what follows this critical realization. "Inasmuch as it can inspire revolutionary ambitions, existentialism must [...] first make a commitment to a self-examination process."⁴⁵ The autonomous self cannot exist autonomously until it severs its existential origins within the context of hegemonic constructions. Once one recognizes the self apart from society, he must then proceed to identify the processes of hegemony that transform this identification into an epiphany rather than a mere reflection, else he will remain entirely dependent upon those processes rather than his autonomous self, and will cease to be autonomous. Hegemony encourages diminishment of the self and loss of individuality—dependence upon the dominant system of thought—for the sake of societal solidarity. Numerous hegemonies construct our entire conceptions of existence, from self-identity to a sense of purpose and action. However, the power of a single individual is no less than that of

a combined consciousness of individuals that represent the same societal ‘self’ that these hegemonic processes create. One individual who perceives differently from the rest of society presents as many new viewpoints as the sum of the rest of individuals who think alike.[⊕] Although his perceptions, too, have been shaped by society and its hegemonic processes, he has escaped the confines of that source of oppression by recognizing it, despite its secrecy, circumventing the most insidious attribute of oppressive hegemony in order to transcend it. He thinks independently of the oppressive system, recognizes its original construction of him as a person, and therefore is capable of stepping outside of the confines of those societal constructs in order to examine them from a personal standpoint and reevaluate himself. Once this individual establishes his personal relationship with the hegemonic structures, recognizing them for what they are and how they have contributed to his self-identity up until that point, he can choose to conform to those hegemonies or to criticize them and fight their oppression of truth based on his personal beliefs. Thus, the individual recognizes the importance of his own uniqueness, and begins to develop that individuality for the sake of becoming even more than what he already is—he begins to develop the self.

In defining the hegemonic processes that oppress individuality, the autonomous person must eventually realize that even the process that led to her self-identification is tainted with groupthink tendencies, and that she has defined herself through hegemony and is not, in fact, a genuine individual until she can escape societal definitions of self and perceive apart from the thoughts of others. This does not necessarily entail total escape from the realms of societal perceptions—i.e., common language, cultural and behavioral practices, etc.—but the individual must at *least* examine these perceptions for what they are. She cannot choose to utilize language as a method of communication merely because everyone else does, but rather because she recognizes it as a common method by which ideas are transferred from one independent being to another. Thus, the individual must begin a process of completely redefining everything that she

perceives in light of self-understanding rather than hegemonic thought. If she defines even one aspect of her life through the lens of society rather than evaluating it in light of her newly-born and autonomous self, then she risks, at least in that one aspect, becoming a part of the hegemonic system she only just escaped. As we have already said, it is not possible to completely escape hegemony—it is too subtle for even the most autonomous individuals to recognize in every aspect of their lives—but to conform without examination of those processes and complete accord with them is to become oppressed once more. Construction of the self, therefore, is a lifelong process of examining which hegemonies contribute towards our self-understanding and asking whether those trades of freedom for systemic order are in accord with our personal beliefs. One must never stop examining oneself and the hegemonic structures that create us, lest we make the false assumption that we have discovered all there is and fall into the same groupthink tendencies we set out originally to avoid. This essay is not written to imply that groupthink tendencies are necessarily bad, nor favoring solidarity over individuality, but for an autonomous person to exist and contribute new perspectives to a perceptually stagnant society, it is critical for her to release herself from the confines of societal definitions and think apart from others.

Solidarity benefits society, but stagnation is its bane. “My brothers!” Nietzsche warns us:

What actually poses the greatest danger to the future of man? Is it not the good and the righteous? Is it not those who speak from their hearts and feel in their hearts: ‘We already know what is good and what is righteous, we already possess it; watch out for those who are still searching for it around here!’

Whatever harm the evildoers may do: the harm the good do is the most harmful of all!⁴⁶

The “good and the righteous” to whom Nietzsche refers are those who are already satisfied with the state of society and believe that it no longer needs change. Perfection is a lofty goal that some argue can never be attained, yet societies all over the world contend that their methods are the ‘best possible.’ Democratic societies admit that although they can never fully represent the

interests of all the people, their governmental systems are the best at doing this, therefore democracy should exist everywhere. Nietzsche's warning to us is that these 'good' and 'righteous' people who 'know' what goodness and righteousness is, and act upon those tenets with every fiber of their beings do society the absolute greatest harm, for as 'perfect' as any society may deem itself to be, James' philosophy resonates within us all—we cannot know absolute truth, therefore we cannot know absolute goodness until the very last person in existence has spoken her very last thought. Perfection cannot be attained until the end of everything, so those who claim to know that we have attained it and should search no more do society the greatest harm by discouraging it from continuing to move forward. "To *know* is one thing, and to know for certain *that* we know is another."⁴⁷ Individuals who think apart from hegemonic structures are needed to help us perceive this reality, for they lead the ignorant righteous out of their dark corners, illuminating the potentiality of society and thus establishing the basis for an ever-brighter future. In order to do this, these autonomous individuals must discover the nature of their inherent selves and delve into that personal nature of existence. The self that exists apart from society is the saving grace of society, because that individual saves society from itself.

Hegemonic processes suppress individuality, and upon examination of them, the individual realizes this and begins to define himself beyond those processes. However, the realization that he is a separate and distinguishable self apart from society occurred within the context of this hegemony, meaning the process itself did not define him. Something that inherently suppresses individuals from developing cannot create individuals, so the mere fact that his individual self exists apart from the society and its constraints implies that something else created him. Since there are only two entities—society, and all of its influences, and the individual—this necessarily demonstrates that the individual is self-manifesting. From the stagnant oppression of society was born a creative individual who thinks apart from all others and perceives differences that draw him apart as a separate and independent self. Deep within his being, this individual exists, and has

always existed apart from society and its definitions. Those definitions may have taught him how to categorize and communicate his individuality, but the similarities and dissimilarities between him and others existed prior to this understanding. He was an individual before he was the citizen of a hegemonic society, and he knows this because the society that assimilated him as a part of itself did not draw him apart by its own devices—something within himself did.

It is at this stage that the individual realizes her own potentiality and the nature of the inherent self that exists independently of societal constraints. The hegemony that destroys individuals can still be recognized as hegemony because certain individuals do not naturally fit the mold of the ideal citizen, and thus they feel oppressed. The fact that these ‘abnormal’ individuals exist implies that their uniqueness manifests from who they are, not who they have been shaped by society to be.[Ⓢ] Thus, the individual recognizes that there is an inherent self that responds to society’s influences apart from the manner in which she has been taught to respond. She perceives herself as different from others, not because she has been encouraged to perceive herself apart from the unified whole of society, or distinguishable from the ideal citizen, but because she *is* different, she *is* self-manifesting, and she *is* defined autonomously. This individual exists as a separate entity. She exists, not as a part of a functioning society of solidarity, but apart from a unified and stagnant system of thought. Her nature as a person who responds to external stimuli exists outside of external influences and instead manifests from an internal self that has always existed and responds in accordance with her personal preferences and perceptions, not the perceptions that she has learned to express. This individual is, in the truest sense, an ideal citizen within herself because she embodies the very conceptions of society through her experiences, yet exists autonomously so as to contribute to its growth. The alienation she feels may diminish her personal self-worth and encourage resentment of society from within because of that diminishment, but Nietzsche says, “I love the great despisers, because they are the great reverers, arrows of longing shot across to the other shore.”⁴⁸ True citizens are they who love society so

much that they begin to despise it, begin to reveal its inner flaws, because ultimately, their way of contributing towards the goodness of that society is by reforming it. There is no better way to do this than to develop the autonomy that breeds this ‘longing’ for a better world. Autonomous individuals can continuously improve their societies for the better, attaining the dream of making the world a better place, and they do this by defining themselves apart from those societies.

Defining the self can be a tricky process, because it involves the use of learned processes of self-examination within the contexts of society’s methods. Psychoanalysis teaches individuals to draw their emotional responses back to experiences in their early childhood, suggesting that experiences shape an individual, rather than the individual being self-manifesting. Other methods of self-examination, such as religious views of determinism relate the self back to cosmic forces. Some psychologists suggest that individuals think merely based on processes of positive and negative reinforcement from others. However, as we have demonstrated through examination of an autonomous individual, the true self that he discovers exists apart from all of these external influences. Society encourages individuals to relate their feelings back to societal influences, but true self-examination must extend beyond these factors to find what is the response of one’s true self. For instance, if our self-manifesting individual was to express the sentiment that “hegemony is bad,” he would have to reflect on where this sentiment is coming from. At first, he might find that society utilizes the word ‘hegemony’ in negative contexts, but this does not reflect his own views, so he moves past such superficial realizations. He might then delve into the definition of hegemony as a process of normalization, but then he must discover why normalization is negative in his mind. Society encourages diversity, so he might conclude that because diversity is good and normalization inherently runs contrary to diversity, hegemony is bad, but this still relies on societal definitions. Perhaps he concludes that he enjoys diversity, but if he enjoys it because society encourages him to do so, then his sentiments still are not self-manifesting. If he takes this examination process one step further and evaluates the value of diversity as something that

recognizes the inherent qualities and differences between separate individuals, he might then conclude that he values diversity because he values differences between individuals. This value may be derived from his personal sense of self-worth, because he recognizes that he possesses inherent qualities and differences, and ultimately, he likes those differences because he values himself as an individual that exists apart from the dominant norm. Therefore, he believes that hegemony affects society in negative ways because it discourages his own existence, which he has come to value through recognition of his self. Overall, the process of discovering one's self can be long and tedious, because it involves going back to the very beginning of one's core beliefs apart from the responses that individuals have been conditioned by society to express. Those who truly examine their selves to the very core might find that their true self is not the kind of person society would encourage them to like—an evil person, for instance. Perhaps they have a natural tendency towards violence and at their very center, believe violence is not truly wrong because it reflects their natural sentiments and the natural order of the universe by encouraging survival of the strong. Ultimately, this process involves finding within oneself the true feelings and emotions that exist independent of societal influences. This is how we come to know the self more thoroughly, and thus develop an autonomous perspective, for the self that we learn to recognize is independent of hegemonic processes and is thus different from all others.

It is not the intention of this essay to imply that experiences and interactions with others do not influence our behavior and thought processes, but rather to imply that people's behaviors and thoughts may not necessarily run in concordance with the sentiments or aspirations of their true selves. Normalization and hegemony naturally encourage individuals to behave and think alike, so these processes draw on similarities in human circumstance to encourage similarities in behavior and thought. Rather than suggesting that some people are merely born with a tendency towards depression, society relates these individuals' feelings to depressing aspects of their upbringing, such as the death of a close family member or friend. This process undermines the

reality that demonstrates that some individuals who lose close family members respond optimistically rather than with bouts of depression. It is simply assumed that depression is a 'normal' human response, and that anyone who responds to the death of a family member differently is lacking in some fundamental human tendency, just like the narrator in Camus' *The Stranger*. True autonomy means that individuals respond in their thoughts and behavior to external stimuli in accordance with their deeper selves rather than in accordance with expectation. Cultivation of the self, therefore, demands that individuals act contrary to society's expectations when their true selves diverge from the dominant norm. An individual who wishes to remain autonomous and has a natural inclination to go sky-diving should do so, rather than avoid the natural inclination because of society's emphasis on risk-aversion.

Autonomous individuals have the potential of revealing a new and diverse perspective to their society by using normal processes of communication to share their abnormal responses to various situations. Autonomy implies creativity, because an autonomous individual can develop ideas outside of the normal realms of thought—her scope has no boundaries because it is not limited by societal norms or perceptions that are funneled through the common lens of the dominant norm. Therefore, autonomy is essential to innovative processes because it allows unique solutions to be presented to new problems. A society is limited in its prospects by hegemonic processes because it inhibits new ideas from emerging by encouraging everyone to think alike, and to limit their thoughts to those that the dominant norm is likely to share. Innovation is an important process in helping societies to face new challenges, like the inherent oppression of a society that defines normality. Hegemony is destructive as a social process because it oppresses individuals, but it is also destructive because it is self-proliferates—hegemony discourages people from recognizing that hegemony affects society in a negative way and should be changed in order to benefit everybody.

Freire says that ethical individuals have a responsibility to stand up against injustice when they recognize it, and to combat oppression for the sake of the greater good.⁴⁹ Ergo, an ethical autonomous individual has the responsibility to combat the hegemonic system of oppression—essentially, society itself—for the greater good of all of society. Oppression limits society’s potentiality, and hegemony further entrenches this system of oppression, so it is the responsibility of autonomous individuals—those who have stepped outside of the cultural norms to recognize independently of an oppressive system—to fight hegemonic processes, vindicating themselves and freeing others from social tyranny. Levinas supports such notions, saying that an ethical individual, out of deference for the “other” who essentially created the self by existing as a basis for comparison, ought to strive for the good of the “other” always. However, in combating oppression, it is important for the autonomous individual to remain autonomous, yet ethical in striving for the greater good. He ought always to have the greatest good of others in mind, not through society’s definitions of “good,” which inherently oppress the minority, but through his own understanding of “good” through his autonomous lens and personal experiences with others’ autonomous selves. Nietzsche “love[s] him who squanders his soul, who neither seeks nor offers thanks, because he always gives away and does not preserve himself”⁵⁰—real heroes are those who know the self first but cares for the self second.

Hegemony suppresses autonomy, but so long as autonomous individuals develop their notion of self and recognize that self independently of hegemonic influences like conglomerate societies, then the hope that the wrongs of hegemony will be undone persists. Autonomous individuals are the creators in society that present innovative ideas, but if they are to be ethical individuals, then they should, as our philosophers dictate, also strive to better the lives of others around them. Not every autonomous individual is strong enough to recognize and work against oppressive forces like hegemony, but those who are become the heroes of society. A true hero is an autonomous individual—someone who recognizes goodness itself apart from society’s

definitions of what is “good”—who works to better all of society and the people therein by helping others to recognize their selves. This may be done by the hero helping others to reach self-realization, but weaker individuals first need oppressive forces to be removed before they can allow their true self to step forward. Thus, our hero, in reaching self-realization and recognizing hegemonic processes, must help others by combating those processes that would oppress others from being who they are in lieu of what society encourages them to be.

Definition of self is critical in the heroic process, for only through self-realization can a hero step outside of the confines of society in order to recognize its flaws. By thinking independently of a system convinced of its own self-worth, the true individual has the power to transform that system for the better. Indeed, as we have shown here, the ethical individual must do so for the sake of the “other,” fighting against oppression. Ultimately, the true hero is a person who not only recognizes his inherent worth as an individual, but also the inherent worth of every individual and the diverse perspective that she represents. By recognizing individuality as a powerful attribute that enhances processes of innovation that drive society towards a greater good for all, autonomous heroes diminish the hegemonic processes that drive individuals towards groupthink, preventing oppression, and they also help society to drive itself towards self-improvement without the need for drastic cataclysms to help society “start over” and thus repeat its mistakes of the past. Heroism is salvation of those who cannot help themselves, but it is also salvation of those who do not realize they are in need of help.

Notes

⁴² Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. P. 41

⁴³ Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. P. 127

⁴⁴ James, William. “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life.” *Essays in Pragmatism*. P. 65

⁴⁵ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. P. 66

⊕ Imagine the power then, of a society of true, autonomous individuals who work in solidarity, but independently of one another to present as much of a diverse perspective as a nation of divided ‘others,’ but with the aim of betterment for all of society.

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” *Nietzsche and the Death of God*. P. 119

⁴⁷ James, William. “The Will to Believe.” P. 96

⊕ This may be why so many individuals discuss the ‘masks’ they wear in society—because they are conscious of the fact that who they have been shaped to be is not in fact who they truly are inside.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” P. 86

⁴⁹ Arnett, Ronald C. “Paulo Freire’s Revolutionary Pedagogy: From a Story-Centered Narrative-Centered Communication Ethics.” P. 160

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.” P. 87

CHAPTER 4:

VILLAINOUS

HEROISM: MIRROR

OF SOCIETY

One of the most critical attributes of the self-sacrificing heroes outlined here in this essay is that these heroes are originally perceived as villains. Numerous characters throughout the course of history have fulfilled this role as autonomous individuals who sought to overthrow a system of hegemony by challenging it, and were subsequently chastised and despised for it, only to be recognized as heroes by society many years later. Martin Luther serves as a valuable example—portrayed as an enemy of the Church for criticizing it to the point of division, he is now viewed as an ethical reformist who elicited the flawed political intrigues of 15th century Catholicism. Luther's sacrificed his reputation in an attempt to help better the Church, and like many such heroes who dare to challenge the systems of which they are a part, he was viewed as an enemy of the system for many years thereafter. Autonomous heroes of history like Luther sacrificed a great deal for the sake of getting their message out, and were only viewed as the heroes they were many years after their deaths. Still more of these heroic figures exist in fictional stories that drive into the heart of mankind for the sake of elaborating on our characteristic

weaknesses. Regardless of their historic or fictional origins, each of these characters contributes towards the overall perception of what the ideal self-sacrificing hero ought to be.

History has demonstrated that those who challenge governmental systems of oppression are the first to be chastised for their efforts, and one of the best examples of this is the story of Socrates. A sage-like figure in democratic Athens, Socrates taught that such worldly pursuits as wealth and athleticism were fleeting, whereas virtues were eternal. The Athenian government encouraged admiration of those who succeeded materialistically, and indeed, a politician's interest lay in securing increasing financial stability for himself and his family. Lawful regulation of men's actions, and encouragement of individual's self-pursuit was what made Athens great during its time, for the governmental system encouraged men to follow their own hearts, and empowered them to do so by having an influence in the governmental process. As Foucault tells us,

Among the Greeks and Romans [...] concern with the self and care of the self were required for right conduct and the proper practice of freedom, in order to know oneself [...] as well as to form oneself, to surpass oneself, to master the appetites that threaten to overwhelm one.⁵¹

Indeed, Athens' system encouraged such individuality as to function as a stable, yet mostly peaceful state surrounded by other cities in turmoil, because its citizens were content to pursue their own goals, and as long as they continued such pursuits, Athenian democracy—in a political as well as economic sense—flourished. Care for the individual fostered care for the society, and thus both flourished. However, as all societies, Athens was founded upon an original system of morals and values that, once undermined, would represent the end of the government as it stood. This is the reason that eventually, Socrates is accused of 'corrupting' the Athenian youth, for his purpose in cultivating virtue undermines the pragmatic purpose of Athenian democracy.

Stanley Fish asserts that it is the moral responsibility of one who believes he is right to assert his perspectives "with a vengeance"⁵² upon others, which is what the Athenian government eventually does in sentencing Socrates to death. However, other scholars contend that in the

pursuit of ultimate truth, which was the aim of Socrates and the Athenian politicians, one must be open and willing to listen to and accept the ideas of others as potential truths within themselves.⁵³

In his trial, Socrates contends,

I spend my whole life in going about and persuading you all to give your first and chiefest care to the perfection of your souls, and not till you have done that to think of your bodies, or your wealth; and telling you that virtue does not come from wealth, but that wealth, and every other good thing which men have, whether in public, or in private, comes from virtue. If then I corrupt the youth by this teaching, the mischief is great.⁵⁴

His stance is that in teaching the youth of Athens to pursue something more than the material gains of life and politics, he has cultivated the truest Athenian citizen the government could ask for. The individuality promoted by democracy encourages citizens to pursue higher truths for themselves, and in exercising this freedom, Socrates has discovered that higher truth resides in contemplation and thought rather than in the gathering of possessions and power. Ultimately, he engages in this higher contemplation only to discover that his thoughts extend beyond himself and, in order to attain their fullest potential, must be shared with the minds of others. As he has been encouraged to share his voice in a democratic society that believes in pursuing the greatest good through the concept of the marketplace of ideas,[Ⓢ] by fully engaging the concept of freedom of an Athenian citizen and exercising his individuality, Socrates fulfills his duty as a moral citizen. His only error, then, lies in the assumption that the Athenian society truly exists according to its philosophical intent, rather than its pragmatic one.

Schauer's criticism of the marketplace of ideas resides within the impracticality of a fully rational society. He understands that complete rationality does not exist "for the public at large,"⁵⁵ and thus for the sake of pragmatism, advocates that some opinions must be suppressed for society's good. In a parallel context, pragmatism outweighs the philosophical aims of the Athenian government, for practicality within society demands materialistic pursuits in order to maintain a functioning economy. As such, rather than extol Socrates for his brilliance in exercising his democratic voice to contribute to the general Athenian conception of truth, the

politicians condemn Socrates as a corrupting force who misleads good citizens on their paths toward greatness. In asserting philosophical virtues over political gains, Socrates undermines the power structure of Athens and turns society on its head so far as its methodologies for functioning from a political, economic, religious, and social standpoint. Pragmatism overrules his pursuit of truth, and thus Socrates, in seeking to become a hero to his society by liberating it from the shadowy falsities of materialism, becomes perceived as a villain who corrupts the youth of his fair city, because he advocates a level of dedication to truth that his society finds unrealistic and dangerous. His undoing is in being the ultimate citizen, because he pursues society's ideals instead of its reality.

In the end, Socrates dies for 'the good of Athenian society' so far as the political leaders of Athens are concerned, because in ending his life, they put an end to the threat to their livelihood that he represents. Athenian society cannot coexist with Socrates' pursuit of truth, although it does maintain that truth can only be attained through pursuit of knowledge and dialogue. In other words, Athens divines a means by which to attain truth, and even asserts to provide that means through a democratic government where society is founded upon the notions of rationality and dialogue. However, the fundamental assumptions of that foundation limit the society to rationality and dialogue only so far as those ideals do not inhibit functionality. As soon as open thought and participation in the democratic process become a hindrance to society functioning with the underlying assumptions of how a society ought to function, that openness vanishes and gives way to a society of boundaries and rules.

Every society is composed of countless hegemonic structures, and one of the fundamental hegemonies from which Socrates sought to escape in Athens was the hegemony of pragmatism over idealism. Ultimately, the higher truth is the aim of both the Athenian politicians and Socrates, but the hegemonic structure laid down with the foundation of Athens placed pragmatism first, because it is pragmatism alone that preserves society from failure. As a true self-sacrificing

hero, Socrates defied that hegemonic structure, challenged it, and lost. He became perceived as a villain, not by all of the Athenians, but by their leaders who recognized the importance of pragmatism and placed the survival of society above its definition as a truth-pursuing society. Clearly such practicality is not a crime, for it represents preservation of the people—a lofty goal, indeed, for supposedly self-serving politicians. Guardini suggests that Socrates' case is not a matter of right and wrong, but rather a matter of right vs. right and who has the authority to assert one over the other.⁵⁶ Athens' hypocrisy therefore, lies in using that power to oppress the type of free-thinking it claims to condone, and Socrates' only 'crime' is in asserting those claims to their fullest extent, living as a true Athenian who puts the pursuit of truth and the common good above all else.

Socrates exemplifies our self-sacrificing hero in the contexts of defying society in order to better it, and being despised for attempting to undermine the false hegemonic structures that construct everyday existence in order to free others to pursue a greater purpose. However, one must not overlook the fact that Socrates is able to accomplish this goal from within the society, without every needing to step outside of it and transcend its bounds. He defies Athenian rationality through rational arguments, using the same discourse that constructs Athenian life, but challenging it nonetheless. In some ways, this is much more difficult than challenging a society from without, but in others it is much easier. Socrates challenges the assumptions that the ultimate pursuits of life are based on materialism, yet he never escapes the material benefits of having grown up in Athenian wealth. Despised only by leaders for endangering their way of life, Socrates dies a villain to very few, because his challenge to society is not great, it merely represents a way of thinking that those in power are not prepared to accept. Those who truly matter—his disciples—see Socrates as a hero from the start, and thus they preach his message of the pursuit of truth, purporting it to be the greatest pursuit and listening to none who would challenge them. Thus Socrates' followers engage in their own, newly-defined hegemony in search for Socrates'

intent instead of the significance of his actual message that truth can be discovered through rational dialogue, and it truly is the highest pursuit of all. The story of Socrates is one of self-sacrifice and heroism, but this heroism does not delve deeply enough to capture the ideals of this essay.

One of the most historical figures who pursued a greater good through less-than-ideal actions was Qin Chi Huang Ti—the first emperor of China. History describes very little of Huang Ti's personal motivations, but Quentin Tarantino's film *Hero* portrays the emperor in a fictional, but ideal mystical light. Perceived as a tyrant by even his closest advisors, Huang Ti begins his conquest as one of many kings in his region. A brilliant military tactician, he ravages the towns and cities of his numerous rivals, forcing his opponents into submission one by one. This ultimately wins him the hatred of countless warriors, including four assassins who risk their very lives to see Huang Ti killed. However, as one assassin named Broken Sword prepares to deliver the death blow to the tyrannical king, he looks into Huang Ti's eyes and sees the king's true intent. He allows Huang Ti to live, as does the hero "Nameless," once they realize that Huang Ti, while malicious and tyrannical, seeks to unite the kingdoms in order to end all wars between his people and others. For the sake of uniting all of the land, he willingly takes on the mantle of the villain, slaughtering hundreds of thousands, leaving enemies and burned villages in his wake, but in the end, as history tells us, it leads to the unification of China, and the founding of a great nation where war is no longer the rule, but the exception to everyday life.

Although Huang Ti's challenge to hegemonic structures in his society is very different from that of Socrates, his mission is no less heroic. Whereas Socrates challenges the predominant notions of materialism through rhetoric, Huang Ti challenges the predominant notions of continuous war. Just like other societies trapped in hegemonic ideals discussed previously, the kingdom of Qin and other surrounding nations have mentally embraced war as a necessary part of life. Caught up in retributive battles based on retribution for more battles in the past, each

kingdom fights ceaselessly with one another because every citizen has adopted the hegemonic ideal, as Brenda Allen suggests, that, “that’s the way we do things around here.”⁵⁷ Citizens of Qin, as well as previous kings of Qin fall into this pattern of thought. They never look past the hegemony that constructs the pattern to realize that reform will not come from continuing to fight one retribution battle after another, but rather from stepping outside of that pattern and mastering the entire region under one unified dominion instead of a conglomeration of regions that cannot coexist autonomously. Qin Chi Huang Ti finally challenges this ideology by refusing to be satisfied with mere vengeance and instead taking his war to a more global level such that his enemies will not return to stab him in the back.

Like Socrates, Huang Ti fails to step outside of the structure from which he seeks to liberate his society, for he commits to warlike action to end war—hypocrisy, in its truest sense. Nonetheless, Huang Ti also takes another critical step beyond Socrates, in that he willingly goes so far to challenge the structure of which he is a part that he becomes society’s enemy in society’s eye. In *Hero*, the king even acknowledges that the people closest to him “regard [him] as a tyrant,” and he willingly accepts that role for the betterment of all. He knows that uniting the land will bring the greatest benefit to his people overall, but that such a task must be purchased with the blood of countless innocents. Huang Ti sacrifices his very soul, becoming the ‘evil’ that he condemns in order to pursue a greater good, demonstrating dedication, in the truest sense, to his cause. Socrates is not willing to compromise himself for the benefit of others, and indeed, he does not need to. However, Huang Ti makes the ultimate sacrifice by recognizing that even though the very people he is trying to save may hate him, he will take the role of the villain and the tyrant for their sake.

Huang Ti’s sacrifice is especially unique because it justifies evil for the sake of a greater good. Is a hero then, any person who challenges society’s norms by committing evil acts? Is Hannibal Lector a hero? Is Osama bin Laden? I would not go so far as to say so. We must always

keep in mind the ethical components of a hero as constructed at the beginning of this essay, that ultimately, a hero is a moral person that, as Heller suggests, prefers “suffering injustice (being wronged) to committing injustice (doing wrong),”⁵⁸ who always keeps in mind a personal conception of the responsibility to the “other” who constructs us. A hero fights against the oppression of others[⊕] out of a sense of moral responsibility and awareness of others before oneself. Historically it is impossible to determine whether Huang Ti’s actions were moral—and therefore heroic—but even in the fictional contexts of Quentin Tarantino’s *Hero* we must ask ourselves whether Huang Ti’s pursuits are made out of an awareness for the sufferings of others, or rather out of his personal sense of suffering from the harms of war. It appears to me that the case falls into the latter category: Huang Ti is still not an ideal hero, because he does not necessarily commit to all-out war for the good of his people, but for his own sense of security. Indeed, an ideal hero might have sought conquest without bloodshed so as to promote the greatest good for all, but he does go one step further in willingly becoming the villain to his society, if only so that society itself would be made better by his actions. Socrates argues against the judgment brought upon him, but still accepts his society for what it is; in contrast, Huang Ti defies his.

At this point, when we find ourselves questioning the importance of morality in a self-sacrificing hero, we should turn to a hero whose morality is considered by many to be unquestionable: Jesus Christ. Whether taken in a historical context or a mythical one, the story of Jesus of Nazareth advocates peace and understanding far above any notions of hostility or retribution. Indeed, Jesus exemplifies our self-sacrificing hero *because of* his peacefulness, for many of his challenges to the authority figures in Rome resounded on the harsh treatment of those who were already suffering—such as beggars, prostitutes and thieves. Jesus called his followers to forgive and be merciful, whereas Roman authorities called its citizens to punish their criminals without mercy. Thus, Jesus preached a message of love in place of condemnation, of peace in

place of hostility, and of forgiveness in place of chastisement, all for the sake of betterment within oneself and of one's neighbors.

Just as in the case of Athens and Socrates, the Romans were not wrong to advocate something different from our heroic figure. Indeed, religious history would have us perceive Roman society as a malicious and evil empire, but one must remember that Rome flourished with great technology, innovation, and social movements for a reason: its societal construction functioned. The punishments that Jesus preached against were harsh in Roman society to deter criminals from repeating their offense, which made Roman citizens feel like they lived in a safe world in which they were free to go about their daily lives without fear of being mugged or murdered. As Moore says, "horrible cruelty was appropriate and necessary to combat morally horrible and socially dangerous crimes."⁵⁹ Castigation maintained order in a free society and encouraged tremendous wealth, prosperity, and growth. Fostered by this prosperity, Jesus grew to recognize that the hegemonic structure of Rome could lead to humanity's self-destruction if that system could not be changed, for the abuse of power is as potentially damaging as the lack thereof. Thus, he took it upon himself to rationalize mercy in the minds of his brethren, to preach peace as the ultimate end for all wars, and to teach forgiveness as the path towards Paradise, for every person in this world has been wronged by another, and in turn every person has wronged another. Pursuit of retribution is what ultimately leads to the vicious circle of wars and poverty; escape from it must come about by another means.

Jesus' recognition of a hegemonic structure within society is perhaps one of the most prominent in recorded history, for his was a method that escaped the cultural norms of thousands of years of western civilization. He truly epitomizes the ideal of escaping a hegemonic structure and defying it in an attempt to re-form society into something better. Indeed, his defiance of Roman culture is what eventually led to his execution, which inevitably causes us to view him as the ultimate self-sacrificing hero. However, in examining Jesus, we must keep in mind that, like

Socrates, Jesus was not entirely opposed by general society. Tales of Jesus record numerous followers who traveled with him and spread his message, and many more who preached it after his death, birthing the religion of Christianity. He is a hero who stepped outside of the dominant paradigm of society in order to reform it, but Jesus was far from an exile within his own community. Unlike Qin Chi Huang Ti, who incurred the hatred of his own people and lived in solitude amidst his own courtiers, Jesus was admired and revered by many throughout the course of his life because he never transcended the boundaries of acceptability, challenging his followers to redefine their existence through a different lens, but rather, he marched to the beat of the Roman citizens' drum and left words in his midst to propagate postmortem. Jesus' sacrifice is different because the sacrifice of his "self" only includes his physical "self"—for that is what inspired defiance and reform in his followers.

In the second chapter of this essay, we examined the significance of the "self" and its discovery in defining the self-sacrificing hero. Jesus Christ nearly captures the ideal self-sacrificing hero, except that the "self" that he gives is less than all of his "self" as it has been described. Self-sacrificing heroes such as Jesus have been revered throughout the centuries for their courageousness in facing death for their beliefs, Socrates being another excellent example. However, the purpose of this essay is not to reemphasize the glory of such heroism, but rather to examine a different type of heroism that is too-often overlooked: that of women and men who sacrifice the entirety of their selves—the hidden essences that extend to their very souls, such that even they might perceive themselves as evil in the end, for they are willing to take on the burden of sin for themselves, that others need not. It is said by Christians that Jesus took the burden of the sins of humankind upon himself at his death, despite never having sinned himself, and he is certainly a hero, in the truest sense for doing so, but Jesus never endangered his own soul by being perceived as a villain for the greater good. He never risked spending eternity in Hell so that his

followers would not have to. The biblical Jesus led his followers to a greater world, so he did not sacrifice his own eternity for their sake; our self-sacrificing hero would.

Contrasting with the mortal self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and paradoxically a fictional tale about one of Jesus' followers, one of the most inspiring tales of a truly "self"-sacrificing hero that comes to mind is Miguel Unamuno's *San Manuel Bueno*. The priest of a small Catholic village in Spain, Don Manuel inspires the lives of countless people around him by demonstrating the utmost faith in God and His divine mercy and compassion. Drawn to the priest's spirituality, the story's narrator, Angela, commits herself to the service of the Church, and attempts to convert her atheist brother Lazzaro to Christianity for fear of his soul. Don Manuel helps Lazzaro to come to terms with the existence of God by confessing that he—a priest—does not believe in God, either. When confronted with the notion that he is living a lie and will probably spend eternity in Hell for his lack of faith, Don Manuel essentially tells Angela that while he does not believe in God, he does have faith in the belief in God—the notion that belief in God brings out the betterment of human kind. Don Manuel, knowing that if he is wrong, he is sacrificing his soul, commits what he knows is a sin—lying—for the sake of promoting a greater good in the lives of the people around him. He improves the entire village through his inspiration, however false it may be, and thus sacrifices himself to their cause.

Don Manuel overcomes the orthodoxy of traditional Christian faith by adhering to its overall message while ignoring some of its moral tenements and topical criteria. Regular practices of almsgiving and forgiveness instill in Don Manuel's Christian followers the notions of serving others before oneself, reinforcing Jesus' message of love through blind action. While beneficial to society, these actions reflect hegemony within the society through consistent and unquestioned—some might say "mindless"—benevolence. The other Christians in Don Manuel's village are charitable to one another, not because they believe in charity, but because they believe that God has instructed them to be charitable. This type of naïve acceptance without consideration of the

hegemonic structures that constructed the ideals in the first place is precisely what autonomous individuals overcome, which is why Don Manuel serves as a prime example of a self-sacrificing hero. Aware of the potentiality of the non-existence of God, and unable to verify either way, Don Manuel transcends the societal paradigm and steps outside of it to justify goodness towards others on his own terms. Autonomously, he discerns a reason to assert goodness towards his fellow human beings—for the sake of goodness itself—and commits to maintain the hegemonic structure, not because he blindly follows it, but because he believes that enforcement of blind Christianity attains the same goals that he wishes to achieve. Exhibiting the process of self-analysis and discovery of the hegemonic structures within society that originally created his notions of self-identity, Don Manuel discovers an autonomous self within until he manages to transcend those hegemonies and utilize his newly empowered ‘self’ for the greater good. Such is the idea behind finding the true ‘self’ in order to become our type of self-sacrificing hero.

Unamuno’s portrayal of San Manuel Bueno brings to light a new notion of self-sacrifice, in that it demonstrates to us the value of becoming evil in others’ eyes, earning condemnation from those one is attempting to save. In Unamuno’s tale, only Angela and Lazzaro know of Don Manuel’s secret atheism, and the latter is inspired by it, while the former does not know whether to berate or admire Don Manuel for it. Regardless, Don Manuel’s contributions to the lives of others are unquestionably benevolent. Ought God to condemn him to Hell for demonstrating Christian values against his own inclination, or is such morality in the face of adversity to be rewarded? Don Manuel lies, knowing that to lie is a sin; he lives the life of an atheist, knowing that to do so is to condemn himself to the inferno. However, given that he does not believe in the afterlife, we may struggle to define whether or not he is truly self-sacrificing. Don Manuel really has nothing to lose by lying to the populace, at least in his view, because there is no Hell for him to suffer in. He may commit any sins he deems worthwhile for the ‘betterment’ of life on earth, without fear of repercussions, so is there truly any sacrifice involved? In asking this question, we

must not undermine the legitimacy of his life's sacrifice, for if there is no Heaven to look forward to, then Don Manuel dedicates his life toward helping his fellow human beings without a chance to gain anything for himself. If he cannot ascend to a paradise, then Don Manuel's mortal existence is all that he has. He purposefully dedicates this limited existence towards helping others; to undermine that sacrifice is to overlook his admirable sincerity in believing that the best meaning in life is to contribute toward another's. Still, Don Manuel's absolute dedication towards assisting the people in his village illustrates his willingness to live up to his personal principles by stepping outside of the hegemonic structure of religion and still practicing benevolence toward others, but it does not demonstrate any sense of willingness to challenge that structure at the cost of one's existence and moral sense of self.

Perhaps a better example of Don Manuel's sacrifice is Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor from *The Brothers Karmazov*. Believing in God and Jesus, this cardinal places the savior Himself in prison after witnessing several miracles. He confronts Christ and tells Him that He is no longer needed—that He in fact, is evil for His expectations of man. The Grand Inquisitor and his fellow clergymen, out of benevolence—Christ's demonstrated mercy—believe that that it is unethical for God to expect weak men to follow Him. A chosen elect might reach Him, but would He really damn the rest? The Grand Inquisitor says, “Man was created a rebel; and how can rebels be happy?”⁶⁰ It is in the nature of how humankind was created that they should sin, so God, having created them, would be wicked indeed to punish humanity for rebelling against His covenant. Instead of preaching Christ's Word as it has been recorded, The Grand Inquisitor and other clergymen preach Christ's message of love—which they deem to be His most important message, and lie about the rest. They claim to the populace that everyone can reach Heaven—they can even sin, so long as they place the burden of their sins upon the clergy. The inquisitor and his followers love the people, even more than Jesus—they claim—because they love *all* of the people, not just a

select group of those strong enough to resist temptation. Demonstrating more love than Jesus Christ Himself, the Grand Inquisitor dares God to damn him for that.

The Grand Inquisitor and other clergymen from Dostoevsky's story transcend the hegemony of traditional Christianity in order to interpret Christian values to their fullest extent. Unlike Don Manuel, these religious leaders hold no illusions that their lies will not condemn them in the afterlife, and yet, the Grand Inquisitor steps forward and challenges Jesus to damn him for his efforts. Loving his fellow human beings enough to make their lives better with hope for a good afterlife, he lies to them, potentially condemning himself to Hell, and misleading the people who trust him. Spitting in the face of the foundation of his faith—Christ—the Grand Inquisitor willingly embraces the part of a villain in order to spare his followers the torturous realization that their faith will be insufficient to save them in the end, for most of them are too weak and incapable of following God's covenants as laid down. He steps outside the orthodoxy of Christianity in order to better Christianity as a progressive method towards peace and love between human beings. In so doing, he takes on the role of an evil man who would steal the free will of others in exchange for their happiness, but is this really a sin? He claims that Jesus does not love His children enough to lead them into Paradise, and thus He deserves no praise. On the other hand, the Grand Inquisitor embraces all of God's children and endures the pains of sin for their sakes. Sacrificing everything for the happiness of others, the Grand Inquisitor appears to be an ideal self-sacrificing hero.

The Grand Inquisitor's dedication to the underlying messages of love and compassion of Christianity parallels Socrates' dedication to Athens' underlying message of individuality. Constructed by hegemonic systems that promote autonomy, individuals such as the Grand Inquisitor flourish in Dostoevsky's story to challenge the paradigms of Christianity just like Don Manuel—taking the ultimate message one step farther and in so doing, undermining many of the fundamental action-based assumptions of what an ideal Christian should look like. We have

already discussed the preference of solidarity over autonomy that unites Christian followers in Dostoevsky's tale to the point where they permit the Grand Inquisitor to reject their own savior. The Grand Inquisitor even says, "This craving for *community* of worship is the chief misery of every man individually and of all humanity from the beginning of time,"⁶¹ but his personal transcendence of this pattern is what distinguishes the Grand Inquisitor as a hero. Fully aware of the hegemonic structures that comprise his society, he rejects Christ's preference of the 'strong' over the 'pitiful'⁶² and chooses to embrace all people as children to be loved. This is in accordance with the hegemonic ideals of Christianity, but not its hegemonic practices. Thus, the Grand Inquisitor demonstrates the nature of heroism ideally by illustrating the significance of defying the societal system of which he is a part, for the sake of enhancing its message and overall purpose in the end.

Nonetheless, one major problem with the self-sacrificing heroism of Don Manuel and the Grand Inquisitor is that the populace does not know what sacrifice they are making. By definition, the type of self-sacrificing hero outlined thus far must not only transcend hegemony in order to define the self and challenge that hegemony from outside of its construct, but they must also lead others to see this hegemony for what it is and lead those others to self-awareness. Don Manuel and the Grand Inquisitor skirt this responsibility by lying to their followers, further entrenching the populace that they are both trying to free in an entirely new hegemonic structure that is centralized around them instead of religion. This oppression is no different from the oppression that the supposed heroes are fighting—it is just another wolf in sheep's clothing. Unamuno's Don Manuel and Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor lack the "hero" aspect of self-sacrificing heroes because they do not lead their fellow human beings out of oppression; they merely oppress their followers in a whole new way. Such behavior suggests a cyclic existence of oppressors, whereby the hero of one generation becomes the tyrant of the next, but the point of a truly self-sacrificing hero is not to reshape society according to her desires. The point is merely for the hero to expose the oppressive

hegemonic structures within her society and help to instigate reform of those structures. A hero is not the leader of a new society, merely the harbinger of change in an archaic one.

Perhaps one of the best examples of a self-sacrificing hero who deconstructs the flaws of his society but refuses to influence the construction of a new society is the character V from the film *V for Vendetta*. Dedicated to the concepts of freedom and equality upon which his country was originally founded, V engages the new government of post-apocalyptic Great Britain in order to win these ideals back from tyranny. V transcends the hegemony of the new government by escaping from one of its facilities for torturing and holding the “usual undesirables” and living in solitude to hone his personal skills that he will eventually use to challenge and overthrow the “prominent Party members.”

Introducing himself to the population of London by blowing up an important government building, V then broadcasts a televised message that exposes the oppressive government for what it is and drives the citizens of London to confront this oppression by joining him in a political uprising one year from the date of his message. V then murders a series of political figures who created the viral apocalypse that drove London’s citizens into fear and panic so that those individuals could exploit that fear in order to establish a new government with them in charge. The deaths of these political figures encourage citizens to begin taking a stand, and ultimately, when every household in London empties out into the streets donning V’s Guy Fawkes costumes, the absence of those political heads prevents the military from massacring the populace. In other words, V leads the citizens of London to freedom from hegemony not only by encouraging them to stand up for themselves, but also by making the personal sacrifice of his own righteousness in order to protect the citizens from harm and carry out the work that they are unwilling and unable to.

Evey—the woman who spends several months underground with V—demonstrates the subversion of the populace that makes V’s sacrifice necessary. At the beginning of the film when

Evey is on her way to a friend's house for a casual date, she is confronted by three "fingermen"—elect officers of the government charged with keeping Londoners in line. Once she learns their identity, Evey is unwilling to defend herself from being raped and instead gives out a cry for help—a cry that no other Londoner heeds for fear of retribution, except for V. Fear has driven compliance into Evey and the other citizens of London—they turn their heads the other way when members of the government act unjustly for fear of reprisal. After helping V by spraying mace in the face of a detective who would have shot our hero, she says, "I shouldn't have done that. I must have been out of my mind!" To which V responds by asking, "Is that what you really think, or is that what they would want you to think?" Evey has no response because she does not recognize the hegemonic structure that has prevented her from standing up for herself in the past and continues to do so in the present.

Just like the 'mask' that autonomous individuals recognize when they begin to define their independent selves, Evey and other Londoners don a separate, public identity in the face of government power. This changes only when the autonomous hero V confronts that distinction and defies it, acting in accordance with his inner sentiments that run contrary to the government rather than in line with hegemonic expectations. Indeed, as if to demonstrate to the people of London that distinctions between outward appearances and inward beliefs has become necessary, V wears a real mask in his public appearances to prevent others from discovering his identity. In other words, his choice to don a physical mask presents a symbolic realization to the people of his country that for self-protection, every citizen must pretend to be something they are not, which is equated to childish costume-wearing fantasies rather than mature societies.

V ultimately confronts London's hegemonic governmental system of oppression by defying the notions of security and control upon which the new government was founded—defying public curfew, blowing up a building under the vigilant eyes of the city's officers, and overtaking a television station to deliver an uncensored message. His methods unquestionably

shake the sensibilities of the people caught up in the hegemonic system—as reflected by Evey’s response to his murder of Lewis Prothero and her calling him “a monster”—but also serve their purpose of undermining the system itself through brute force and popular persuasion. He becomes a villain in the eyes of many for murdering those who stand in his way, but in serving as a villain to the existing society, V becomes a hero to the future society that will not be so dominated by oppressive governmental figures.

Like Qin Chi Huang Ti, V willingly dons the mantle of a villain in the eyes of the populace in order to accomplish a greater good, but he also demonstrates the ethical awareness of Jesus and Socrates by not focusing his killing efforts on the populace itself. Whereas Huang Ti sent his personal armies face-to-face with enemy troops to convert many nations into a unified one through bloodshed, V instead spares the two clashing armies of civilians and military from a bloody confrontation by severing the political heads of the government, preventing the military from putting a quick and violent end to the uprising of the people. Unlike Don Manuel and the Grand Inquisitor, he shares his intentions with the people of London through a televised broadcast, unveiling the hegemony that he has grown to recognize and encouraging others to go beyond that oppressive system. He does not ask the people—as Huang Ti does—to sacrifice themselves to overcome this oppression, but rather takes that burden upon himself, going so far as to be viewed as a “murderer” and “terrorist” by the very people he is trying to save—at least as we perceive the views of the people through the media. Like Jesus, he challenges a hegemonic system by stepping outside of it and encouraging others to do the same, but unlike Jesus—and like our other heroic examples—he accepts the mantle of a “villain” by committing bloody acts of murder that even he considers to be heinous.[Ⓢ] V sacrifices his soul for the sake of others—dirty his hands so that the hands of the rest of the populace may remain clean—then gives his life so that his tainted actions will not tarnish the new nation he has helped to create.

Perhaps the only thing that makes V's character as a self-sacrificing hero imperfect is the fact that his actions as a hero, by the time the film engages, are long overdue. Even though the media portrays V as a villain by claiming that he uses violent weapons "against unarmed civilians in order to broadcast a message of hate," and referring to him as a "terrorist" and a "murderer," the fact remains that at the end of the film when the citizens of London are called to stand beside V to watch the destruction of Parliament, every home shown on the camera is empty, because every citizen in London has shown up in support of V's revolution. V has become the self-sacrificing hero too late in the sense that it takes very little convincing to sway the populace in his favor—the populace already recognizes the oppressive hegemonic structure of the government and has simply failed to act. Our ideal self-sacrificing hero confronts hegemony when it is still too subliminal to be recognized, when the populace itself is unaware of its own oppression such that they would prefer to destroy the hero than allow her to destroy the hegemonic system. The positive attributes of hegemony are too tempting to suggest immediate overthrow, and V's position as a hero merely demonstrates that nobody was willing to stand up to tyranny sooner.

There is no specific model that comes to mind for the ideal self-sacrificing hero that this essay describes, but that does not mean the heroes mentioned above are to be discounted for their efforts. Socrates, Qin Chi Huang Ti, Jesus, Don Manuel, the Grand Inquisitor and V all represent self-sacrificing heroes, and they should be recognized as such by modern society. However, we must recall that Socrates, Jesus and V were mostly disliked by societal leaders rather than the populace, suggesting that their challenging to hegemonic structures were not entirely revolutionary, whereas Don Manuel and the Grand Inquisitor led their followers from one hegemony into another, diminishing their value as heroes in the first place, while Huang Ti lacked the moral component critical to comprising our self-sacrificing hero. Still, Qin Chi Huang Ti, the Grand Inquisitor, Don Manuel and V all demonstrate the fundamental characteristic of unabashed amorality—in one sense or another—for the sake of leading others out of hegemony to a greater

good. Heroes such as Jesus and Socrates were honored in their respective times and are honored now by their self-sacrifice, but the point of this essay is to demonstrate the honorability of heroism as demonstrated by these others.

Mind, this is not to undermine the importance of heroes such as Socrates and Jesus. Indeed, perhaps Jesus was beloved by so much of the populace not because He lacked the dedication to His principles of changing the world for the better, but because His methods of non-violence were more persuasive than those of Qin Chi Huang Ti or V. Similarly, Socrates lives on in the hearts of scholars mainly because of his peaceful resignation to his fate; one could argue that if he had challenged Athenian hegemony more forcefully, we might not remember him at all. The types of self-sacrifice that we already honor are still valid and critical to constructing changes for reform in society, but what of those heroes who are willing to put their souls on the line for the greater good?

The ideal self-sacrificing hero is one who finds the true “self” at his core and recognizes the oppressive hegemonic structures that exist in her society, then uses her new knowledge to free others from oppression, even at the cost of the self that she has found. She has the morality of Socrates and Jesus, but the dedication of the Grand Inquisitor, Don Manuel and V, and the openness and timeliness of Qin Chi Huang Ti. A truly dedicated self-sacrificing hero gives everything at a time when it is inconvenient for other members in society to recognize the need for change, so that she instigates change when it is most important. Hegemonic structures entrench themselves through normalization, and the purpose of the self-sacrificing hero is to be that bold face that steps out from the crowd to cry out in opposition. Those who follow the rules of the system inevitably will protect it and thus condemn the hero, but that only makes the hero’s role all the more important. Her role is to unsettle the founded beliefs of blind followers and lead them to changes for a better world. Ideally, she would be as self-aware as Socrates, as forceful as Huang Ti, as unique in perspective as Jesus, as dedicated as Don Manuel, as defiant as the Grand

Inquisitor, as altruistic as V, and would possess the morality described by philosophers, committing to all action for the sake of others at the cost of all that one can hope to give—if necessary.

It is typical of society to chastise and oppress the abnormal, for that is how societies construct a common identity. Nonetheless, is it necessary to condemn diversity for the sake of self-identification? Current processes of normalization are inherently oppressive, and that oppression extends especially to those individuals who dare to stand out and label hegemonic structures as “oppressive.” Their boldness meets with resistance, whether from the structure of power—as in the cases of Socrates, Jesus, and V—or from the populace itself that the heroes are trying to reform—as in the case of Huang Ti. However, is it necessary to resist them, or ought they to be recognized as the heroes they are, sacrificing self for others in a demonstration of dedication towards the betterment of society as a whole? Just because he lacks the non-violent tendencies of Jesus, V is no less valuable to the citizens of London as an instrument of reform. Just because they lie to the people they are attempting to help, and defy normal sensibilities of morality, Don Manuel and the Grand Inquisitor demonstrate no less dedication to truth than Socrates. These men are self-sacrificing heroes, and they illustrate a different kind of sacrifice—greater in magnitude, in some regards—than even Jesus, because they sacrifice more than life in pursuing change for the greater good; they sacrifice their souls and entire selves for their cause. Such is the kind of heroism rarely recognized in modern society, though it truly is the instrument of reform that brings society towards a higher plane of existence.

Notes

⁵¹ Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. P. 285

⁵² Fish, Stanley. "There's No Such Thing As Free Speech, And It's a Good Thing, Too." *There's No Such Thing As Free Speech, And It's a Good Thing, Too*.

⁵³ Schauer, Frederick. Allen, David S. and Robert Jensen, eds. *Freeing the First Amendment*. P. 15

⁵⁴ Guardini, Romano. "Apology." *The Death of Socrates*. P. 47

Ⓢ This is a notion that Schauer explains as the "survival theory" of truth, whereby, upon hearing all possible perspectives concerning the truth, the rational people within a society will weed out the irrational falsities purporting to be truth, and thus arrive at ultimate truth through presentation, observation, and dialogue. Such a process involves fundamental assumptions of a rational society that recognizes truth for what it is (essentially, that truth is "self-evident"), which Schauer ultimately criticizes. However, he admits that within a society of rational thinkers, it might be possible to engage in such a process and thus arrive at truth in the end. Schauer, Frederick. Allen, David S. and Robert Jensen, eds. *Freeing the First Amendment*. P. 26

⁵⁵ Schauer, Frederick. Allen, David S. and Robert Jensen, eds. *Freeing the First Amendment*. P. 26

⁵⁶ Guardini, Romano. "Apology." *The Death of Socrates*. P. 44

⁵⁷ Allen, Brenda. *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*. P. 28

⁵⁸ Christians, Clifford G. "The Social Ethics of Agnes Heller." *Moral Engagement in Public Life: Theorists for Contemporary Ethics*. P. 279

Ⓢ Recall Freire

⁵⁹ Moore, Barrington, Jr. "Cruel and Unusual Punishment in the Roman Empire and Dynastic China." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*. P. 731

⁶⁰ Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Grand Inquisitor*. P. 5

⁶¹ Id. P. 9

⁶² Id. P. 5

Ⓢ As demonstrated by his throwing the mask into the mirror after Evey calls him "a monster"

CHAPTER 5

REVERENCE

FOR THE

SELF-SACRIFICING VILLAIN

Throughout the course of this essay, we have examined the transformation of the hero in parallel to societal perceptions. Originally, the hero was a mythical figure of celestial origins who altered his surroundings using supernatural powers, then later the hero became a social outcast who overcame adversity under divine guidance to transform the world around him using his natural skills and abilities. Finally, the hero was viewed as a typical individual who overcame normality and self-transformed into something more powerful, then used this ability to alter the world of others. We have examined the process of this latter hero extensively, from the processes of hegemony that inscribe his original notions of ‘normality’ to his realization of autonomy and subsequent ideal interactions with his society. Hegemony is a real force utilized by societies to establish common identities, and thus inherently suppresses individuality, creating forms of societal oppression. Self-sacrificing heroes are the individuals who identify these hegemonic systems upon comparison of the self to society and arrive at a realization that processes of

normalization are inherently oppressive and damaging to societies existing in an ever-transforming world, since innovation begins with diversity in perspectives. These individuals exist autonomously and thus contribute a true ‘self’ to society that has the capability of examining societal practices from an outside perspective. Their autonomy allows them to see the fallibility of ‘invincible’ societies and thus help those societies to improve in anticipation of future challenges, but this ability earns our autonomous heroes naught but scorn for their inability to ‘fit the mold.’

Heroes such as Martin Luther, Jesus, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are renowned for their sacrifices because they placed themselves in danger by challenging authoritative figures in history to follow the will of the populace, risking their lives and reputations so that others might benefit from their actions. However, what is recognized from individual-to-individual—that the best of friends are those that challenge us to be better people—does not typically apply in a societal context. The media and public opinion denounce individuals who dare to speak out and claim the populace is wrong, such as the example of Qin Chi Huang Ti taking matters into his own hands and establishing peace in his geographical region by force. Heroes who take matters into their own hands and challenge the people in this world to make it a better place meet with resistance and must ultimately sacrifice themselves if they are to get their message out, because the hegemonic systems that they must defy in order to instigate reform dominate the actions that the populace takes to defend its solidarity, and thoughts that influence them.

Repeatedly, I have mentioned this connection between solidarity and oppressive hegemony, but is oppression a necessary requisite to social cohesion? We regard solidarity in a positive light because human beings can accomplish more when unified, particularly because disunity frequently leads to conflicts, which negate the efforts of every society. Nonetheless, when an individual submits her will to that of a single entity for the greater good, is this any less noble than an individual who chooses social exile and self-sacrifice for the same cause? The purpose here is not to insinuate that hegemony and social cohesion are inherently bad, but that

linking these two positive attributes to a concept as self-deprecating—from a societal standpoint—as oppression is unnecessary and damaging to notions of progress and innovation. To submit to the hegemony of language is not to inherently negate the value of other forms of communication, unless that submission automatically entails disdain for that which is different from the perceptual norm. Individuals who have not been exposed to people with mental retardation often react negatively towards individuals with mental disabilities because they have accepted the paradigm of what ‘normal’ is without considering that what is ‘abnormal’ has inherent worth as well. Normalization does not necessarily insinuate that individuals that do not fit within the box of ‘normality’ should be devalued, so long as those who accept processes of normalization maintain an open mind. Thus, when a mentally retarded individual confronts the hegemonic perceptions of a ‘normal’ individual and challenges her notions of the inherent ‘rightness’ associated with normality, that ‘normal’ individual ought to remain open to this challenge to her methods of thinking and be willing to constantly restructure her perspective.

Adaptability is just as relevant to the individual psyche as it is to society, for only through adaptation do individuals grow, as well as the societies of which they are a part. If experiences and alternative viewpoints did not consistently undermine individual perceptions, then those perceptions would never change and thus the individual would never grow wise to his ever-changing world. Restructuring of one’s perspective, as we have already examined, leads to further understanding of the self, as well as further understanding of society and the diverse individuals that it consists of. Negotiations between combating nations involve a deep understanding of one’s own societal perspective, as well as a deep understanding of one’s opponents. Only through deep understanding between diverse perspectives can common ground be established in order to link those two perspectives together that they may grown together in the future. We understand the world around us better by understanding the people in it, including ourselves, and through this understanding, we learn to transform this world for the better.

Autonomous individuals serve the same purpose as the mentally retarded individual mentioned above, except that their role is more likely intentional. Like the mentally retarded individual who challenges the naïve perceptions of a ‘normal’ individual, the autonomous individual defies expectations and proves that diversity is a positive attribute. Differences enlighten understanding, and autonomous individuals who choose to be heroes have the responsibility of demonstrating this through their actions. To bring an idea to light that many other members of the populace share, but that the people in society do not share is difficult and worthy of note. However, still more valuable are those individuals willing to step forward and challenge the sensibilities of every person around them, to step outside of the paradigms of society and reevaluate hegemonies in light of individuality, to defy oppression in the guise of normality and encourage others to understand more of themselves for the benefit of all. Self-sacrificing heroes willingly don the mantle of the villain by assuming the role on behalf of others and thus allowing others to see the villains within themselves without ever having to dirty their hands with disgrace. These heroes transform us by holding themselves up as a mirror to society and transmuting the image there in accordance with their self-knowledge to help us see ourselves in a better light. They are not ‘evil’ in the sense that they have no philosophical conception of what is right or wrong—indeed, as we have said before, self-sacrificing heroes *must* have a moral center in order to be deemed heroic—but rather, they are ‘evil’ in the sense that they take the burden of sin upon themselves and give their souls for the sake of others.

A truly self-sacrificing hero recognizes the dangers of groupthink tendencies and automatic, unthinking dedication to social hegemonies. She does everything in her power to defy it and help others to see the potential in reality if only they would be willing to accept change for the better. Change is a frightening concept to individuals; it is what prevents many from engaging in the self-examination process that helps them to find autonomy, because it alienates the self from society in the sense that it causes individuals to perceive themselves and their surrounding world

in an entirely different light. This new perception can unveil horrific realizations of how awful this world is, which is why so many are loathe to attain it, but only through this perception of the world as flawed can we ever hope to change it for the better. Harbingers of change such as our autonomous individuals have not been appreciated in ancient societies, and they are still not appreciated today, for they compel us to look beyond our naïve notions that the world is more pleasant than it truly is, and they require us to either accept that reality and thus lose our right to hope, or to act on that perception, which is much more difficult than leading a tranquil life of apathy.

Self-sacrificing heroes defy the sensibilities of normal individuals for the sake of a better world. Theirs is an autonomous perception of the world as it is: flawed, and ugly, but filled with potential. They do not conform to the oppressive hegemonies of society, nor do they permit others to do so. Instead, they confront the reality that is existence by finding their true selves and extending those selves outwards to encompass true conceptions of abstract concepts, including those of right and wrong, of justice, of love, and of hope. These heroes recognize that helping others to find this realization is more important than maintaining their personal essences of self-righteousness, and thus they willingly sacrifice themselves for that goal. Imperfect examples shown above illustrate the difficulties of a truly self-sacrificing hero, but ultimately, these individuals do exist, and the problem is not that they are truly villains, but that society perceives them as such.

The epitome of the self-sacrificing hero we have outlined in this essay is a self-aware individual who transforms the world around him for the better because of his self-perceived moral obligation towards others. This individual defies the hegemonies that imprison the consciousnesses of others in society by unveiling the existence and malignancy of those hegemonies to the individuals they imprison. At the risk—even certainty—of losing himself, this hero who has transcended the realm of normal understanding reenters the world to save those who

are still ignorant. This self-sacrificing hero is the freed prisoner from Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. Enlightened by the realization that the world is more than shadows on the wall, this autonomous individual frees his fellow prisoners to show them what reality truly is, and is summarily executed for defying those other prisoners' sensibilities. Modern society still plays the part of those ignorant prisoners—chastising those who would dare to say society is imperfect for the sake of promoting its goodness—and the time has come to change.

Occasionally, self-sacrificing heroes of the past are regarded as people who were 'ahead of their time,' such as Voltaire, whose pessimistic criticism of the French system of government did not correspond with optimistic views of his time, and thus he was subsequently imprisoned and exiled.⁶³ Will our modern society be perceived in the future as we today perceive the society of 18th century France? How many brilliant minds do we suppress in favor of solidarity over betterment of ourselves? The time has come to cease suppressing the voice of the enlightened one and to perceive morally-centered autonomous individuals for what they truly are. The harbingers of change are not the villainous demons of uncertainty that society frequently portrays them as; rather, they are self-sacrificing heroes who aid the innovation of the world today in order to better the world of tomorrow.

Notes

⁶³ Butt, John. Introduction. *Candide*.

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