

Observing Heroism

Does being a corrupt hero make you a hero at all? Throughout the semester we have discussed the different role that heroes take. We have also discussed the role they play in their story. A few of them we considered to be true heroes, while others we found to be corrupt heroes. For my final paper I will use three characters that have the characteristics of a corrupt hero. In my paper I plan to discuss three specific characters; Gilgamesh, Rorschach, and Knockout Ned.

When I discuss Gilgamesh, I will focus on his life before his journey to become immortal. Gilgamesh is a god-like man, but uses his powers for the wrong things. Instead of using his heroic qualities to help the people of his town, he uses them to instill fear. This fear ranges from his short temper to sleeping with the wives of newlyweds. In order for Gilgamesh to turn his life around he had to meet someone new and go on a journey with this man. This journey would have led Gilgamesh to immortality. I will also talk about how I think it is selfish for Gilgamesh to try and find immortality. Why does this corrupt hero deserve to be immortal? Along with Gilgamesh there are more characters that display the characteristics of a corrupt hero.

Rorschach is the next character that I will talk about in my paper. We spent a lot of class time discussing this character. We all agreed that he does not take the nicest approach when trying to get things accomplished. He is often a brutal man that will hurt or kill someone just to get information that he needs. He is a part of the Watchmen which is supposed to be a group of heroes. Almost all of them are corrupt in some way, but I decided Rorschach would be the best to talk about in my paper. I will use this section to explain the specific characteristics and

actions that make Rorschach a corrupt hero. Knockout Ned is the last character I will use to display the characteristics of a corrupt hero.

Knockout Ned is a different from Gilgamesh and Rorschach. Gilgamesh is god like and Rorschach is an associated hero with the Watchmen. Knockout Ned is a single man that just happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. From what we learn in the movie Ned was in the war and was the best marksman in his battalion. Some people would consider him a war hero. He then turns into a different type of hero when he decides to try and bring an end to the man who killed part of his family. The new hero that Ned becomes fits into that same category as Gilgamesh and Rorschach. He begins to kill work with a drug gang and kill innocent people if he has to. Although people consider him a hero for standing up to a man with such power, he still does it in a questionable way. All of these examples bring me to my main argument; does being a corrupt hero make you a hero at all?

This is the point in my paper where I will argue that being a corrupt hero does not make you a true hero at all. I will use examples from *Gilgamesh*, *The Watchmen*, and *The City of God* to give my side of the argument. I will then venture into the opposing view of argument.

To give a counter argument I will use good examples from each character to prove why they could actually be considered a hero. I may even tie some of their actions to famous heroes. Example heroes could include Superman or Batman. This is where I need help from the class. How else can I argue that these characters are true heroes? I can bring up the point that they are ultimately trying to better all of humanity, but it seems there is some cost on each side. Any ideas would be greatly appreciated for this section of my paper.

I will then end my paper by bringing everything together in one or two last paragraphs. I will restate my argument and give brief examples from each side of the argument. Lastly, I will use this section to state my own opinion on the topic.

Identity and the struggle between Individualism and Collectivism

Over the years, there has been a fundamental debate about humanity that has been discussed among philosophers, economists, politicians, and even scientists. It's called Individualism vs. Collectivism, and as humans, we instinctively are drawn to each. We are born individuals with our own ambitions and abilities, but at the same time we're naturally drawn together into groups.

I would like to talk specifically about a topic of this debate concerning identity. There are two different arguments when it comes to identity and cultural differences. On one side, you have those who argue that we should celebrate our differences, and on the other side, those who say that we shouldn't judge or evaluate each other at all based upon ethnicity or nationality. Let's refer to the first theory, the "celebrating differences theory," and the second, the "citizen of the world" theory. As we will see, it's not very cut and dry. Both sides of the issue show signs of collectivism and individualism.

To illustrate the relationship between these things, you should imagine a linear spectrum. On one end, you have the individual, and on the other end you have humanity as a whole. Between the two, you have a number of other types of social organization (nation, tribe, etc.). Collectivism encompasses all of these except for the individual end, which individualism covers. Meanwhile, the "celebrate our differences" theory encompasses all of these except the humanity end, which the "citizens of the world" theory covers.

Celebrating our differences when it comes to ethnicity means that we should celebrate and acknowledge our uniqueness, as members of nations and families, but especially as individuals. Most people think of ethnicity as only a racial term, but in my opinion, it can refer to any shared background (national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural, etc.) Those in favor of

the CoD theory would contend that we naturally categorize ourselves, not just by broad terms ("black", "white") but also by nationality or by region. The CoD theory can be narrowed down to tribes, families - all the way down to the individual. The CoD theory argues that diverse people with different ideas are a great thing and that one reason we humans have come up with so many brilliant technologies and developments is because we come from a wide array of climates, regions, and lifestyles. By celebrating our ancestral heritage, we keep unique perspectives. A world in which no one was willing to acknowledge each others differences might result in a less innovative and vibrant society. (I plan on using The Color of Water to support this side)

On the other hand, you have the Citizen of the World theory, which would be on the opposite side of the spectrum. Don't define yourself by race or nationality, but rather just as a citizen of the world or a human. Just as Individualism is a small portion of the CoD theory, the Citizens of the World theory is a small portion of collectivism.

Being a citizen of the world is an ultimate form of collectivism, in that there is but one group that everyone belongs to. Sometimes, in regards to race at least, the CoW theory is called "colorblindness," meaning, one shouldn't take into account or judge a man based upon the color of his skin, but rather by his character. Similar to the Blank Slate theory, mentioned in Steven Pinker's book, The Blank Slate, CoW proponents would say that all humans are the same at birth and that if we didn't categorize ourselves in the first place, we wouldn't be prejudiced. By finding the fundamental commonalities between all humans, proponents would suggest, there wouldn't be as much prejudice or discrimination. (I plan on using Nussbaum to support this side)

In my conclusion, I want to describe how I think that a balance needs to be struck between the two ideologies, as both have strengths and weaknesses.

Abstract

Paper #4

The topic of my paper will discuss the issue of human identity. Using three works that we have discussed in class I will create arguments on both sides for questions that discuss issues of human identity. The first subtopic will consist of questions that address things such as what is a human? What qualities distinctly define us as humans? Are there nonhuman persons? With this question I will discuss both arguments that there are nonhuman persons and that there are not nonhuman persons. To close I will tie this back to the overhead issue of how it contributes to human identity.

In the next subtopic I will discuss questions such as how do humans behave in their natural state? Do we prefer to behave in ways that are to our own benefit or in ways that benefit others? How would humans behave in a perfect world? In a perfect world would there be structure and authority? Would our behavior change if there was no “system?” Is our behavior inherently good or inherently bad? In this paragraph I will also discuss whether the “good” things humans do can ultimately be bad and whether the “bad” things people do can be seen as good in the long run, in other words do the ends justify the means? I may also mention the idea of heroes and vigilante justice and how that contributes to the natural behavior of humans.

I plan on using multiple works to help illustrate and support the claims made in the arguments. When discussing the identity of a human, I intend to refer to Steve

Pinker and the idea of the *Blank Slate*, and *In the Defense of Dolphins* by Thomas White when discussing the idea of a nonhuman person. When discussing the concept of how humans behave in their natural state I will again refer to Pinker’s *The Blank Slate* and *Inconsistency of our Actions* by Michel De Montaigne. When discussing the controversy of a structured society vs. an unstructured society I will likely refer to the *Daodejing of Laozi* and point out how it instructs people to follow “The Way.” I will then move on to discussing the idea of heroes and vigilante justice. This argument is important to the topic of human identity because it reveals a possible characteristic of humans in the sense that some of us would like to sometimes take matters into our own hands rather than leaving the work to be done by higher authorities with the fear that the situation will not be handled the way we want. This also speaks to the question of do the ends justify the means i.e. If we were to take matters into our own hands at the moment, will the result be worth the actions that had to be taken. For this discussion I will heavily refer to *The Watchmen*, but I may also mention segments from *Gigamesh*.

The closing paragraph will tie everything together and restate the original topic of human identity. In my paper I don’t necessarily take a stance on what exactly a human is or how we behave because all humans are different and our behavior is too complex to simplify down to one general description. Rather I present arguments on both sides of what human identity is and what human behavior is and leave it up to the reader to decide for themselves on which side of the fence they wish to lie.

Likai Yan

Freshman Colloquium

Final paper, abstract

Live or die

To choose between life and death is a privilege both because the instances that require such choice are both uncommon (violation of THE WAY) and because the decision one made is a perfect reflection of one's true personhood.

(Explanatory text) According to my point of view, the definition of true self in an oversimplified way could be "a personality with least possible compromise with the environment". Since human beings are scientifically proved gregarious animal, compromising with the society is both reasonable and indispensable. However, death helps a person get rid of social constraints. A coward may die a hero, and a hero may die a coward-- when they are facing the threat of death, people will most likely be their true selves. With obvious possibility of annihilating one's foundation of personhood, i.e., physical body, one will be forced to think soberly and behave accordingly. Under the risk of death, it appears that many if not most social norms shamelessly get in the way of the last chances of one's interaction with his or her surroundings.

Why alive?

There are many reasons for being alive; there can also be only one reason in insisting keeping alive simply. Life meanings certainty, because being alive confirms one's minimum direct influence to his or her environment. For example, claiming to be ambitious in promoting his religious belief, the priest in *The Power and the Glory* tries to disguise, escape, and even violate his own moral code to keep alive. People also wish to be alive for the possibility of life. Consider McKibben's *Thinking Past Ourselves*, it seems that many of us are not willing to trade in our current assured enjoyment for our future generations, let alone to take the risk of death. In *Gilgamesh*, the protagonist's desire for immortality can be interpreted as a desire for the fabulous possibility of future life as a king with absolute power. Before invading the forest, his cowardice is, on the other hand, the fear of the loss of such possibility. The movie *Orlando* also exemplified the hope of optimal changes one can expect from simply being alive.

Sometimes, desire of life is a crude form of physicalist that is arguably carved in our human nature. As one's intelligence grows, other ideology may conceal this nature. This explains why that when it comes to the situation with solid life threat, many if not most will compromise for life.

Why die?

Our physical body is both unique (or *precious*, if "unique" is not too subjective) and fundamental. The reason to give up one's life can be complex, but can also be concluded in short—that certain pursuit more important than life requests death. Rorschach, "never compromise", died in response to his unapproachable ideal. In the comic *V for Vendetta*, created by the author of *Watchmen*, the protagonist sacrificed for his idea, and claims that "Beneath this mask there is an idea, and ideas are bulletproof", a quote that shows great courage in facing one's true desire, and a good reason for death.

In a more abstract way, death is also a choice of certainty. When a person is killed for an idea, his or her death will be sublimated into a symbol that keeps the idea alive in people's memory. If the very same person chooses not to die, the idea she or he promotes may appear to be comparatively less persuasive, and this person has to face the future uncertainty in dealing his relationship with the idea, himself, and others.

Also, sacrifice one's life is often a platonic dualistic choice with an underlying belief that a pure form of mind can subsist without intervened by flesh, as mind and body are of different classes.

Exploration and Transition:

One may better understand his or her perspective on death by experiencing it. For example, after a severe sickness, John Donne wrote *Holy Sonnets* to express his reflection on death. It is thus not impossible to unmask people's persona and help them explore their own selves

Neither?

It seems that Laozi prefer to deprive people's right to choose life or death. Is the situation that asks the choice of life or die a privilege, or a punishment? Will life be better by dying more naturally and less certainly?