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Dr. Helman

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Abstract

The Virtuousness of Passivity

In works such as *Watchmen*, *City of God*, and *The Power and The Glory* characters approach dire situations with either an air of passivity or rebellion. This benefits characters like Rocket, from *City of God*, who neither fights for nor acts against the underworld crime that surrounds him. Other characters such as Rorschach, from *Watchmen*, suffer for refusing to be passive in the face of catastrophe.

I plan to explore the merits and morality of passivity versus activity in works such as *Watchmen*, *City of God*, and *The Power and The Glory*. In these works I will choose specific characters and situations in which the individual decides to act against a certain situation or stand idly by.

From *Watchmen* I will analyze the ending scene where Rorschach is killed for refusing to compromise while Nite Owl and the Silk Spectre accept the fate of New York City.

From *City of God* I will contrast Rocket, who does not seek revenge for his brother's murder (but rather aims to keep out of trouble while pursuing a career in photography), with Knockout Ned, who becomes consumed by his desire for revenge against Lil Ze for the rape of Ned's girlfriend and murder of his family members.

I will evaluate the whiskey priest from *The Power and The Glory* since he faces the conflict of whether or not to be passive in regards to his duty as a clergyman throughout the novel.

With each of these works I will evaluate whether or not the characters seem to be making virtuous decisions. I will also speculate as to what each character's primary motivation is for making their respective decisions.

Drew Miles

EQ

April 23, 2012

Abstract

Throughout the semester, we have discussed a lot of different topics and ideas presented in the works we have encountered. Some works have focused more on certain topics, but some themes have come more frequently than others. One theme that I found to be brought up a lot was personhood and identity. These themes were discussed in many different ways, whether it was through an author's argument or the presentation of a character in one of the readings or movies we studied. My paper will focus on several works that present similar and contrasting views on this topic.

My paper will begin with the subject of personhood. Personhood was a highly talked about and debated subject in our class due to the different views that were presented to us. The first and most memorable work I will discuss is *In Defense of Dolphins*. I think that the main focus of this work should not be "Are dolphin's people?" but the qualities that define personhood and the things that make someone a person. I will present some of the things that I found to be good, valid points from this work.

Expanding on the idea of personhood, I will also focus on people and characters finding their identity. In many works, characters seem to have a hard time figuring out who they truly are and what they need to do. As young, male, college students, many of us are facing or will face some identity issues. That is why this was a very interesting topic for me. In *City of God*, many of the characters seem to wonder what their identity is. Knockout Ned, Benny, and Rocket all experience issues with who they truly are and what they need to do in their lives. The Power and

the Glory also demonstrates problems with character identity. The Priest and the lieutenant both have to face their identity problems throughout the book and make big decisions based on their identity. Finally, I will present some ideas of identity that are presented in The Daodejing.

Personal Identity

Throughout the semester, our class has struggled with establishing a clear-cut definition of what a person truly is. Although many varying themes have been brought to the attention of the class, the idea of identity seems to always breach its way into conversation. Personhood seems to be a very abstract, if not impossible, term which describes what gives someone an identity. Ideas have challenged our class many times throughout the semester and personal identity is an idea which I believe has yet to be defined. In my paper, I intend to formulate a response and support to the following questions: “What is personal identity? Is personal identity a function of the human mind, a mind of any species, or simply an overall subjective idea which cannot truly be defined?”

During my first semester of my Wabash education, my brain was taxed on multiple days, if not every day, in which I attended my freshman tutorial, “Me, Myself, and My Brain.” The course focused strongly on the human mind and how we interpret it. I came to the conclusion that personal identity relies solely on psychological continuity. I won’t delve into the concept considering it took me 12 pages to break only the concept’s surface. However, this enduring questions course has forced me to rethink my take on the concept completely. For one, my freshman tutorial focused only on the aspects relevant to human beings. For this reason, my ideas never brought into account nonhuman persons. I intend to use *In Defense of Dolphins*, *The Extended Mind*, and *Blade Runner*.

For *In Defense of Dolphins*, I will take the stance that nonhuman persons do exist. The minds of nonhumans, in some cases such as dolphins, do have the capacity to be what I call “psychologically continuous.” In the summary, it is evident that dolphins do have many similarities to human beings and the author has quite a definitive definition for personhood and how dolphins have the requirements to fit that definition.

Using *Blade Runner* and The Extended Mind, I will argue that the idea of personhood is too vague and too subjective. In terms of the The Extended Mind, it is clear that there truly are too many factors to any species' minds which allow humans to even define how the mind works. If we cannot establish definitively how the mind works, how can we establish how that mind defines an identity? *Blade Runner* is especially important in answering this question. In the movie, people, replicant or not, are analyzed using a series of questions to determine if they are human. However, like we have so often agreed upon, humans can put on a mask which conflicts with analysis such as this in many aspects.

I am aware that this is quite vague, but to elaborate would obviously require much more space, 6-8 pages to be exact. However, my intention was to be quite vague as to warrant an abundance of opinion and response to the questions I have posed. In what ways do agree or disagree with the texts I have chosen to take a specific stance on the idea of personhood? Do you all have any other texts, I have pondered the idea of using Gilgamesh, which could effectively take a stance on personal identity?

Cam Stewart

EQ-Abstract

Professor Helman

April 25, 2012

How virtuous is a tragic hero?

A tragic hero is a character in a book, movie, or play with a tragic flaw. The tragic hero is destined for downfall or defeat. In my paper I will discuss three different characters that could be seen as tragic heroes and I will discuss the virtue of each character. The most common type of tragic hero is noble and virtuous. The three works I will use to address this issue are *Watchmen*, *Gilgamesh*, and *City of God*.

The tragic hero has appeared in literature for as long as literature has been in existence. An unfortunate issue in life is tragedy. We feel empathy for tragic heroes because typically they are virtuous characters that mean well. The characteristic of virtue is difficult to define because in many cases it is subjective. A character may appear virtuous in helping one person, but in helping this person they may not appear virtuous to someone else. How virtuous must a hero be in tragedy to be defined as a tragic hero?

In the comic book, *Watchmen* the character Rorschach could be seen as a tragic hero. It is obvious that Rorschach has a tragic flaw, and it ultimately leads to his death. In order to classify how virtuous he is, it is important to remain as objective as possible. Rorschach has the hardest time of all the heroes in *Watchmen* letting go of his alter

ego. Even after all the other heroes are retired, Rorschach still keeps his mask on and fights for justice which is quite virtuous. However, his methods are questionable at times. For instance, he breaks the man's fingers in the bar when he is looking for the mask killer, and he kills when it may be argued to be unnecessary.

It is argued that Gilgamesh was a tragic hero in the novel *Gilgamesh*. Upon first glance he doesn't fit the criteria of a tragic hero, but when we look further he shows tragic hero qualities. Gilgamesh is not virtuous as the story begins. He is an unjust ruler who sleeps with any woman he wants including other men's wives. Gilgamesh's tragic flaw is that he is more concerned with his own power and fame than the well being of his people. This tragic flaw leads to his downfall in a different way than the stereotypical tragic hero. Gilgamesh's tragic downfall is not his own death but the death of his close friend Enkidu. After Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh goes on a quest for immortality, and eventually becomes a wiser leader. Gilgamesh gains virtue after his downfall. While this may not be the classic example of a tragic hero, it is still an interesting perspective.

In the movie titled *City of God* there is a tragic hero named Knockout Ned. Knockout Ned stands out in the City of God because his life isn't consumed by crime and gang violence. Until his woman is raped by the gang leader in town named Lil Ze. When Ned teams up with Carrot's gang he has a rule not to kill innocent people. This shows Ned's virtue, but when he breaks his own rule it leads to his downfall. Ned's virtue comes into question but I still believe he was virtuous compared to the other residents of the City of God.