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## The Cut to the Heart of the Matter: Justice, Morality, and Virtue Ethics in Intimate Relationships

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# The Cut to the Heart of the Matter

Justice, Morality, and Virtue Ethics in Intimate Relationships

Quinn Heiser

Lee Honors College Thesis

Department of Philosophy

Western Michigan University

20 April 2023

*To my ex-girlfriend, Mary Claire*

*This thesis would not exist without all the resentment you left with me*

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## Preface

For those who are reading this thesis for the first time, you will likely need this preface to help make sense of it. This work, much like myself, is quite complex. What sets it apart from most is that it is a philosophical *journey*, in the sense that the reader is forced to witness a wrestling of the ideas, as opposed to a mere presentation of them. The reflection of my complexity as well as a display of the philosophical journey is accomplished through four characters. These characters stand as representations for certain layers of my cognition. I shall give a profile of each of them, and how they function in the context of the project.

The first character voice that you will hear from is what I have called the “Overseer.” The Overseer is denoted by the Century Gothic typeface. He is cryptic, otherworldly, perceptive, contemplative, obscure, and a little dark. This character is the one that opens the work through addressing foreseen questions regarding the work (Objections and Subjections), spouts confident aphorisms (Transcendent Musings & Divine Strikes), and uses his musings to conjure the heart of the matter (Broken Heart), all of which are used as activation energy before being launched into the work. These three chapters “oversee” the work in the same way that I, the person behind these words, am overseeing my thoughts. He is the mind’s eye peering into his own consciousness, and he tends to speak in highly symbolic or metaphorical language. The Overseer is mainly inactive throughout the rest of the work, observing from the background and only intervening occasionally. He is so obsessive about finding the “essence” of heartbreak and getting to the root of the issue that he often skips over simple realities. He aspires to take action, to finally interact with the world one day...but not until its initial goal is done.

The next character voice is exactly what you would expect from a thesis, and what I named the “Rational.” The Rational is denoted by the Times New Roman typeface (the same

typeface used in this Preface). He is, as the nickname suggests, a rational, orderly, executive, goal-oriented, and ultra-competent character. In fact, he is so competent at containing his feelings and detaching from them that it seems almost beyond human, detached from his nature. His main goal is to use philosophy as a tool to create and enforce a system of justice for relationships. One gets a sense that he treats people as projects to be reformed and optimized, filled with zeal for his intimates that gives him a mission to perfect them according to his vision. Human flaws are not an option. His energy is laser-focused, kept under strict self-control, and concentrated on a higher calling. Virtue has turned into an absolute parameter through which to measure excellence in itself and others, and may have fostered a sense of self-righteousness. If others do not meet these high expectations, then there is legitimate reason to claim that they are not good enough. He wants to become untouchable through demonstrating his expertise. He is also unconsciously convinced that since it has put more thought into these issues than most, and pondered the implications more deeply, that he has the authority to assert the ‘right way’ of doing things. In this way, he almost seeks to subjugate itself and his entire environment under his design. He tends to stomp out his own subjectivity in the name of being as impersonal, fair, and objective as possible. Underneath, there is a sense that he secretly desires to be good and incorrupt on his own, as well as being seen as good and justifying himself to the world. Although he uses external sources, he seeks to use them as tools to forward his own compelling arguments and ideas; he seeks to be the source that others reference, not the other way around. The Rational is the sole writer of the next two sections (Outlining the Virtues; The Goods of a Relationship) following the Overseer’s work, and is present in the first half of each of the core sections.

The third character voice is meant to directly oppose the Rational, and I have given it the name the “Sufferer.” The Sufferer is denoted by the *Informal Roman* typeface, contrasted with the

professional quality of Times New Roman. He is introspective, intense, feels deeply defective, and is marked by the frustration of being unable to fully express himself. He envies others who do not seem to share the same burdens of existential despair in a relationship: not because this despair is absent in other people, but because it goes ignored and therefore unfelt. He is also filled with much underlying rage that has gone untapped into, which has forced it to be guarded to the point of hiding its true self, lest it hurt everything and everyone around it. In this regard he is a “knight of rage” of sorts, concealing his identity behind armor. This creates a disconnect between the affect and the sentiment: calm and unassuming on the outside, but emotional and passionate on the inside. He has made a habit of swallowing pain and suffering with little to no complaint, and feels weak if he admits to injury. He has a victim-mindset: beaten down but helpless in the ability to defend or save itself. He sticks to its moral code that fighting back against his partner is wrong, and thus makes life harder for himself in the name of sticking to his personal values. The only thing he fights for is maintaining his sense of self, especially because it feels threatened. Even if he has been stripped of everything, the one thing he is convinced that is not wrong is to be a witness to the truth who exposes inconsistency, ulterior motives, and injustice. He will not let his voice be silenced. He would honestly rather have his lifestyle and mannerisms do all the talking for him, but he has been forced to use words. Even so, the writing style is full of imagery, almost as though one is reading art. Through the physical aspect of the imagery, he finds it easier to navigate these concepts, take action, and form a conclusion that best confirms and expresses who he is. Despite the engulfment in his inner world, he has a surprisingly grounded quality, has a direct relationship with the outer environment, and as such, is very skilled at adapting to crises in order to survive. He secretly desires to get revenge on the fire that burns around him and extinguish it with hate-filled passion, which heightens its already



existing guilt and self-criticism. His deep inner conflict results in an inability to make an executive decision to put an end to the chaos. The Sufferer exists in the shadow of the Rational, and thus is present mainly in the second half of each core section. Like the Rational, it has two sections of its own (Hypocrisy and Inconsistency; Balancing Contributions) to write alone.

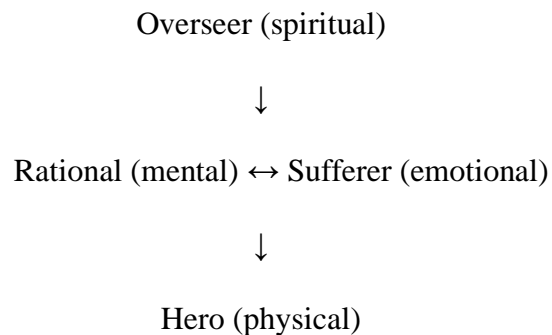
The fourth and final character is juxtaposed with the Overseer, and is what I have called the “Hero.” The Hero is denoted by the **Modern Love** typeface, which is, both in his name and his appearance, the opposite of Century Gothic (Century – Modern; Gothic – Love). This character is essentially the aspiration of the Overseer come to life – the one that can just jump into action and have a positive impact on the world. He is extremely optimistic, yet has a clear, unfiltered, and refreshingly simple outlook on reality, seeing that the present bursts with opportunities to help others, restore peace, and enjoy life for what it is. In his mind, a philosophy is only good insofar as it is lived out with great energy. He has become a master of reality. The Hero concludes the thesis with the last section (Letting Go), engaging in dialogue with the previous three characters, imparting much-needed wisdom and instilling a sense of genuine hope.

This method of expression is necessary to prove a larger point: that philosophy has become too one-sided; that is, too much of an academic pursuit and not much more. A passage from Donald Robertson’s “The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy” explains it well:

“Recent decades have seen growing interest in movement called “philosophical practice” and other attempts to promote philosophy outside of the academic institutions as something that “ordinary people” do in cafés, or apply to their own life problems in the form of individual counselling or group sessions with a quasi-therapeutic style. Even many academic philosophers appear to crave, quite understandably, a return to the days when philosophical discourse was meant to be rooted in corresponding behavioural and emotional transformation and not *merely* an “academic” pursuit abstracted from any practical application. The ancients conceived of the ideal philosopher as a veritable *warrior* of the mind, a spiritual hero akin to Hercules himself, but since the demise of the Hellenistic schools, the philosopher has become something more bookish, not a warrior, but a mere *librarian* of the mind.” (Robertson, Chapter 1)

What I am attempting to communicate through this is that any good philosopher must embark on a personal journey. A journey from being extremely contemplative about the laws that govern the universe and human nature into an action-oriented hero and a gung-ho warrior who is an active symbol and performer of their innermost ideas. It is also grasping at something far more fundamental about philosophy as a whole: that philosophy, at least the way I perceive it, is the synthesis of an art and a science - equal parts truth-seeking and expression.

So, the characters are the manifestations of these ideas. The philosopher's movement from contemplation (Overseer) to action (Hero) is represented in the dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical. The true nature of philosophy as an activity as both a scientific/academic (Rational) as well as an artistic/creative (Sufferer) endeavor is represented in the dichotomy between the mental and emotional. The former dichotomy is the *philosopher*, the latter the *philosophy*. The philosopher in the initial stage with his/her mystical intuition (Overseer) must both think (Rational) and feel (Sufferer) his/her way through philosophy in order to fully process it. In doing so, the philosopher is then able to move to his/her proper end, which is to possess the highest pitch of actuality in the real world (Hero). So, you see, the form of expression is just as revealing of my ideas as the philosophy itself. In fact, it is not merely that the form of expression is proving a point, but that the expression *is* the point.



## Chapter 1. Introduction: Why Philosophy?

While undertaking this project, a lot of eyebrows are likely to be raised. Some might think, “Why would philosophy be useful in an attempt to resolve relationship issues? Is that not task better left to other fields or experts, such as relationship counselors?” In this introduction, I will put forth the position that philosophy has something to offer that nothing else does: conceptual focus. It pierces through the thickest and most distracting sea of extraneous information, and cuts right to the heart of the matter. My goal here is not merely to provide solutions, but to dig to the root of the issue. Once I divine the most fundamental aspect of relationship conflict, then and only then can I enforce any meaningful system for reform. Counselors can only offer guidance in a directionless space, whereas philosophy gives direction through which all guidance becomes clear.

I must admit, philosophy does not only act as an objective benefit, but it also acted as a deeply personal solace. It is not just because it has the ability to give direction and a system of logic to everyone, but because it gave *me* a sense of direction and a system of logic to use while navigating my own relationship struggles. It offers a type of stability that nothing else can. Objects and things, places and faces...these things come and go. Philosophy, however, allows one to transcend their current experiences. It gives one a sense of knowing that, “I will make it out alive.” How does this sense of comfort come about? Primarily through the most basic meaning of philosophy: the love of wisdom. What is wisdom, then? There are two typical ways to interpret wisdom, but it is the combination of these conceptions that truly captures the nature of wisdom: 1) profound insight, and 2) sound judgment. To study philosophy is to become well-acquainted with both of these things, and the love of it is in reference to the deep passion and respect that arises once one sees the truth, beauty, and goodness that follows just behind wisdom.

Therefore, to engage in philosophy is to tap into the divination of God Himself, and observe how He is leading you down your path.

See, I could walk around and pretend that I am being completely objective and executive in nature with this project, but that would mask the truth that this comes from a truly subjective and personal place. A large portion of the motivation to do this stems from my own vision that I have had for a while: a vision where justice reigns supreme in romantic and marital relationships, where moral values flourish in the hearts of all lovers, and people are able to live true to these values while still acting in accordance with principles that promote fairness. This vision is founded on a very simple idea: if love is indeed a game, like all coherent games, it needs rules. To create standards for everyone to abide by. To prevent cheaters from prospering. To make sure nobody steps out of line. While love is indeed free-flowing, self-forgetting, and not to be interfered with, the blissful emotions are not permanent – they are wavering. Thus, when the warm and pleasant feelings fade, or worse, when they are replaced by a vindictive desire to hurt the other back when one has been wronged, the cold and hard precepts of justice will ensure that the other is constantly treated well according to their dignity. To clarify, justice in this sense is not meant to connote some sort of punishment: on the contrary, it is a refrainment from the desire to punish the other, a refusal to give into a violent rage when one expected love but received far less, and instead choosing to show kindness and benevolence towards the other even when one does not feel like it.

Despite this being a rather iconoclastic viewpoint, I believe that philosophy has something to offer that will aid in creating these rules. Namely, Alasdair MacIntyre, in his *After Virtue*, discusses the notion of “practice” as the remedy to the catastrophe that we call ‘moral debate’ in the modern sphere. This is observed by many in the political realm, where a sort of

Athenian or political realism dominates the landscape: “It doesn’t matter what you say if I have more power”; and in the resigning indolence and passivity that pollutes everyday discussions of morality: “Well, morality is relative and subjective anyway, so there’s no point in debating it.” This limiting of moral debate to mere personal taste is what MacIntyre calls ‘emotivism,’ which is a doctrine which purports that all evaluative and moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference (MacIntyre, 11-12). He notes that if this really the case, if emotivism is really true, then all moral debate is rationally interminable (MacIntyre, 12), meaning that moral debate would *necessarily* have to be reduced to emotions and desires, which are not susceptible to rational evaluation nor conclusion. Is moral debate just an attempt at expressing our deepest feelings about the world, which inevitably becomes a gridlock of wills, a battle of whoever can yell their convictions the loudest so that they become the most widely accepted? Or is there something worth saving from the catastrophe that is modern moral debate? MacIntyre argues that, yes, there is, and the solution to reviving moral debate is the notion of ‘practice.’

MacIntyre defines practice as, “Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, and are systematically extended” (MacIntyre, 187). This definition is extremely dense and verbose, so I will attempt to make it more concise while containing all original meaning. Essentially, a practice is a human activity with certain goods inherent to it, which are achieved through standards of excellence. As MacIntyre notes, “A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods” (MacIntyre, 190).

These goods that he speaks of are further broken into two categories: internal goods and external goods. Internal goods are those goods which can only be achieved within the specified practice. Due to this, they are often of a specific nature. In other words, they are local to the practice. External goods, on the other hand, are goods that result as a byproduct of the performance of the practice and can be obtained through a multitude of practices. Consequently, they are often of a more general nature. In other words, they are global to the practice. Take baseball as an example of a practice. Internal goods in baseball are things such as good form in one's swing of the bat, catching a fly ball, a home run, and winning the game itself. These are all things that can only be achieved in the context of baseball. External goods of baseball are athletic ability, enjoyment, and the like. These are things that can be achieved through baseball, but also by way of several other activities as well.

The next question is, how do we achieve such goods? That is where the next piece comes in: virtue. Virtues are personal character qualities that, when possessed, will allow us to obtain the goods set forth within practices. As such, virtues are necessary to navigate practices in achieving their standards of excellence and obtaining their goods. This is why virtue ethics in particular is vital to the discussion of relationships: doing the right thing and loving one another because of universal moral laws, an abstract sense of duty, or due to one's own superego is fantastic. Without balance and reciprocity, however, this can easily lead to resentment, repressed emotions, or even contempt towards the other person for not following the same set of rules for ethics. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, does not merely seek to answer the question, "What ought I to do in order to live a good life?", but more so, it asks, "What inherent qualities or morals can I develop within myself that will bring me closer to becoming good?" Doing good is no longer merely about adhering to what a rational agent knows to be good, but rather a natural

consequence of the moral agent's disposition of being good. That is not to say that an agent's thinking is muted, but that a well-cultivated inclination to do good and be good is what supports the thinking and drives it forward. This is the quintessential difference between ethics and morals, in spite of their colloquial usage as synonyms: ethics are values determined by the environment, morals are values determined by the self. Ethics are collective, external, and objective (derived from the object); morals are individual, internal, and subjective (derived from the subject). Virtue ethics is ultimately focused on morals, or more specifically, individual character.

How are these virtues determined? How can I find out for myself which virtues I need to cultivate in order to be congruent with what is good? Aristotle provides several Greek terms that will be essential to my formulation of virtue ethics in the context of intimate relationships, and all relationships in general. The first is *eudaimonia*, which does not have a modern English term that perfectly aligns with its meaning, but is often translated as 'happiness' (Aristotle, 1095a17-21). Oftentimes it is used when referencing some sort of greater happiness, but even that is extremely limiting and does not capture the true grandiosity of what it truly is. The best word to capture it would be 'fulfillment,' since it implies both a desired end and the achievement of that end. Speaking of end, the next key term that Aristotle frequently uses is *telos*, which translates to 'end.' Other approximate terms are 'purpose,' 'goal,' or 'aim.'

Based in part on these concepts, MacIntyre sketches a three-part schema for understanding the way to restore moral language of the modern world. The first piece is human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be, which means human nature as it currently is, or in its most natural state. The second piece is man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature, or in simpler language, human nature as it could be ideally. The third and final piece is the set of moral

precepts that enable one to pass from the first part to the second (MacIntyre, 52). Later on in *After Virtue*, he replaces “essential-nature” in the second piece with *telos*, which is to say that those two terms are synonymous. In doing so, he connects his work with Aristotle’s. The idea of *arete* (virtue), *eudaimonia*, and *telos* play a large role in MacIntyre’s notion of practice and its application to moral debate. Since MacIntyre’s work is very influential on mine, these concepts will also play a large role in the purposes that I will undertake.



## Chapter 2. Objections and Subjections

### 1

"You've bitten off more than you can chew." – No... I did not choose this portion. It was forced into my jaw. I did choose, however, to chew on it, and I've been doing that for a while. Now, how exactly to spit it out... that is the question. Chew on it for too long, and it becomes tasteless mush. My timing is *now*. Now I must figure out *how* exactly to spit it out. In a way that is more easily digestible to the non-philosopher.

### 2

"Communication is key." – We always say that about relationships. The truth is that it is not just the key. It is the lock, too. We are limited by what can only be expressed through language. Do you not see? I am trapped inside the depth that will never reach the surface.

### 3

"How do I find the ideal partner *for me*?" – The painfully perfect encapsulation of the state of the Western world: our self-centeredness and narcissism. The American Dream...the individualistic narrative of the Western world that we should chase our own dreams, I perceive, has bled over into the realm of relationships. In an environment flooded with self-interest, there's little room for self-sacrifice to flourish.

### 4

"How can I become the best version of myself so that I can love my partner to the greatest of my ability?" – A much better question. Read the rest, and hopefully I can guide you towards that.

## 5

"You're aiming too far and high. This is way too idealistic to be achieved." – Now, tell me something: when an archer needs to hit a target far in the distance, where does he aim? Far and high. Aim directly at the target, and the arrow will fall off and hit the ground far before it reaches the target. As for the distance, all meaningful targets simply cannot be adjusted. So, while some may think I am aiming too high, I know my trajectory, and I will hit the bullseye. There is only one way to succeed, and that is by hitting the mark, not adjusting the target.

## 6

"Actions speak louder than words" – and the world goes deafeningly silent.

## 7

"I thought you were a geographer." – Geography and philosophy have this in common: large-scale thought. For the geographer, it is global thinking, and for the philosopher, it is universal thinking. Both demand that the expert carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. Dealing with heavy matters is an arduous task that I am willing to undertake.

## 8

"What motivated you to do this?" – I think my work speaks for itself. More than that, it speaks for *me*.

## 9

"Why the split?" All writing is a battle, a battle between the things you want the world to see versus the things that are true about you. I decided to bring that battle to light.

## 10

"Philosophy, especially the field of ethics, is too subjective. This is pointless." It is so ironic how people use the term "subjective" to cast off any notion of universal ethics as being unworthy of anyone's energy but fail to realize that the very usage of the term "subjective" denotes that ethics are confined to the subject, meaning that we alone are ones tasked with refining our moral values until they are as pure as can be. It does not cast off any ability to figure out what is good and aim for it: it binds us to it.

## 11

"Okay, then what is this whole object-subject business about? Shouldn't a thesis be as objective as possible?" Let me ask you something: who writes theses? "People." Correct. How are theses created? "By thinking about a problem." Yes indeed. Whence forth does this thinking originate? "From the individual." Exactly. To divorce the individual from the problem – the subject from the object – then, is a sin, and one that is committed far too often, I am afraid.

## 12

"Can't you just get to the point, please?" Patience, my friend. This world is too fast. We must learn the art of slowing down. Maybe that *is* the point of this, but you refuse to see it that way. To reveal the point right away would make absolutely no sense to the one who has not climbed the mountain first. You would not believe what I see up here on the summit if I told you. Therefore, you must go through the arduous journey, just as I did, before the point becomes crystal clear. The best I can do is guide you along the way.

## Chapter 3. Transcendent Musings and Divine Strikes

1

Philosophy is a healing process...from unfinished business with the world.

2

The one who insists humanity is not broken but great is not the one who lives under a rock – quite the opposite. He is the one who lives too much under the sun and has become blinded by his all-too-bright optimism. He fails to look in the dark crevasses of human nature.

3

If you never loved yourself, do not take it out on someone else, for you only have yourself to blame.

4

Self-assertion is the surest illusion of strength – where there is expression, there is a lack of control.

5

Most relationships are a shared effort at using other people to fill oneself up and labeled as “love.” The most deceptive of all! Do you know what else does this? Hyperparasites. Leeches. In an effort to fill our own voids, we suck the love out of the people around us and leave them more broken, drier, and emptier than they already were. How dare we!

6

Everyone talks about social justice, yet no one talks about one-to-one justice. I will be the first.

7

Yes, man is indeed something to be surpassed, but man is not his ideals. He is his beastly nature.

8

Those who take no interest whatsoever in philosophy, psychology, human nature, self-improvement, and the like – have desire neither for wisdom nor empathy. Stay away from these people. They will cut you up just to watch you suffer and blame it on you.

9

To become a mastermind... is to have perfect control and mastery over the tool that dictates our perception of the environment – the mind. Insight into the laws of the universe grants us far more power than anything external.

10

What a shame it is that we have an indirect access to our inner world – our best thoughts and ideas come when we are preoccupied with some activity. Being in the right headspace entails being out of it.

11

"Still waters run deep." What does that say about raging waters? How shallow they are.

12

To climb a singular mountain, and to reach its summit, one begins to see the point of all other large mountains that other men continue to climb. That is, one sees the point of everything.

13

Those with the clearest perceptions have the foggiest descriptions. Reality speaks for itself, so those that talk too much are ultimately grasping at something that is not real.

14

To be alien – to have both one's insight and one's very being constitute an offense greater than the sum of its parts.

15

People care too much for freedom of speech, because they pay no attention to their freedom of thought. Speech is no longer worthwhile if thought is absent. Close the trap that leaks sewage.

16

The 'heartbreak' that we experience after a relationship falls out is not a new reality...it is one that has always been there, but was temporarily covered up by the love of another.

17

"All the world's a stage" - and I see what is going on behind the scenes. We are all clowns putting on a tragic comedy for God.

18

We had all been wearing masks long before the pandemic.

19

Philosophy is the only discipline that seeks wisdom, not knowledge. In becoming a philosopher, one inevitably becomes anti-mainstream. To be a philosopher is to dare to walk forward when everyone else is paralyzed.

20

Those who desperately demand autonomy are often the ones that deserve it the least.

21

Separate scholars from warriors, and you get an absolute disaster: cowardly thinkers and foolish doers.

## Chapter 4. Broken Heart

The phenomenon of heartbreak is a universal one. We humans spend so much time and energy attempting to fill the cracks of our broken heart. But, no person, no relationship seems to fill the eternal void, the insatiable cavity within our chest. The only time we become aware of this harsh reality is when a relationship ends. When the person that once filled us up with love walks out the door, or had to be cut off. Of course, we naturally ascribe this heartbreak to the external occurrences. Failed relationship after failed relationship, it never crosses the mind to search for the underlying cause, both for our outward behavior and our inward longing. Nor does it occur to us that this cause lies within us. Impossible! The divining of that cause may just be the solution to our miserable and pitiful treading. The best and only conceivable answer to this dilemma is, the human heart has and is and always will be broken. From the very moment of our exiting of the soft, warm womb into a hard, cold world, we are cut off from the life source. We had everything that we ever needed, fed right to us. The story of waking life is attempting to find that same connection to the life source in the world. A connection that does not exist without us. We are thus bound to be indefinitely frustrated with the world for being unable to fulfill our fundamental needs that are so intrinsic to us.

Do not think for one second think that this knowledge is some type of curse. No! Precisely the opposite: it is the cure. If the answer cannot be found in the world, what is left? The self. Only the self knows where its wounds lie. How can one expect to be healed by a world that does not even understand it? We blame the world for being utterly unable to perform a task that it does not even know exists. The self, however, knows this task, and knows it well. Since the connection we so deeply seek does not



exist without us, it must exist within us. We are the only ones capable of healing our own heartbreak. The self becomes its own source of happiness and fulfillment.

The guiding archetype that best embodies the traits needed for this rejuvenation, this revival of the broken heart, is the Hero. When conjuring the image of a Hero, we get the picture of someone who possesses an immense amount of strength – he is imbued with such force and vitality supplied from his own newly formed heart from within – but would never use this power to hurt others. The life force that comes from within is just enough to sustain his own character and resist the pressures of the outside world, but not so much that this force is felt by others in a disproportional way. That is to say, he has achieved perfect balance. He has supreme control over both his inner states and the outer states. He becomes, in every sense of the term, a larger-than-life figure. The sticks and stones of life become mere twigs and pebbles. He naturally attracts attention to himself. Not as a result of excessive fanfare, but because others are mesmerized by the sense of vitality yet peace that he has. Where does he get this zest for life? How does he have the vitality to constantly be of aid to those around him? Why is he so content with his own being? And how can I get to the same place that he is? These are the questions that others ponder when observing the Hero.

Unlike those who attempt to attract others through artificial means, the Hero draws people in precisely because of his effortless demeanor. He forces nothing, and instead lets everything flow naturally. His love for others is a direct result of the love he has for himself – he is able to love others unconditionally because he first loves himself: another manifestation of his perfect balance. When it comes to needs, he attends his own first – never for their own sake like the selfish, but always as a means to then attend the needs of others like the selfless. He has no need for the love or approval of others –

and this is precisely why he is able to love others so freely. Rather than going to others as a source of validation, he goes to others as an outpouring of his enthusiasm, and his desire to share the love he has found with others. Letting his fellow man be filled up with love only to be starving later is something he does not permit – he enables them to be self-sufficient and guides them to the same path he has found: an acceptance of self and an acceptance of life, the infinite love. He is the one that has officially said “yes” to life and enjoys it all, the good and the bad. The good he uses to elate himself, and the bad he uses as an opportunity to test his blazing optimism.

You may start to surmise that this is a character that is so dangerously naïve that he has glued rose-colored glasses to his face, and will never see life clearly. On the contrary, he is the one that sees life perfectly clearly. He is well-aware of his dark side, but rather than attempting to run away from it, he has embraced it and is at peace with it. Making his way out of the darkness from the recesses of his mind and the grim experiences of life is exactly why he is so optimistic – it is a realistic optimism that is based in the conquering of his shadow, not the ignorance of it. He does not hold himself nor his entourage to impossible standards, but is reasonable with himself and others when mistakes are made. Because of his journey through the darkest valleys, he has mastered human nature, and therefore understands it thoroughly. This makes him very quick to forgive, and even quicker to lend a helping hand. He has a nearly indomitable psyche, and his strength comes from his weakness that was overcome.

The most quintessential religious figure that embodies the Hero is Jesus Christ. After being baptized, Jesus spent forty days in the desert, with no food or water. Through this experience He knew what it was like to be tempted, and *truly* tempted. The conclusion of his time in the desert marked the beginning of His ministry. He began

preaching, performing miracles, and gathering disciples. These deeds brought Him to the attention of the chief priests and Pharisees, who had Him arrested, condemned to death, scourged, crowned with thorns, and crucified. Not to mention that throughout this whole process, He was slept on, betrayed, denied, judged, mocked, beaten, and stripped. Jesus had every reason to take revenge on the people who hurt Him the most, but He did not. He still sacrificed Himself regardless of everything that He endured – no – He sacrificed Himself precisely because of everything that He endured. This is what makes Him not only a hero, but *the* Hero. The significance of Jesus' journey is augmented considering the idea that, according to Christian tradition, He descended into hell during the time He was deceased. Despite that, He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. In the truest sense, He saved humanity through His suffering. This is exactly what the Hero is meant to do.

## Chapter 5. The Goods of a Relationship

Before deciding the best virtues for intimate relationships, it is essential to note what they aim at, and what purpose they serve. MacIntyre summarizes Aristotle's conclusions from his *Nicomachean Ethics* very succinctly, as he notes, "Every activity, every inquiry, every practice aims at some good; for by 'the good' or 'a good' we mean that at which human beings characteristically aim." (MacIntyre, 148). This is to say that everything we humans do aims at not merely some good, but the good, at least insofar as we conceive of it. Aristotle urges, "Let us go back again to the good being sought, whatever it might be. For it appears to be one thing in one action or art, another in another...But in every action and choice, it is the end involved, since it is for the sake of this that all people do everything else." (Aristotle, 1097a16-17;20-21). So, in our assessment of the goods, we can organize them in how they fit in the framework of the ultimate good. There will be several smaller "sub-goods" that, when achieved, bring one closer to the one large final good. Even within those goods there must be a hierarchy of goods, in which the smallest goods aim towards a slightly larger good, and those goods aim again towards goods slightly larger than them, ad infinitum...all the way until the greatest good for humanity. This sort of proposition is often questioned, but for the intents and purposes of this thesis, it will function as a basic axiom to move forward. So, it becomes important to see the goods that will best obtain the final good, and which ones will fall short. It could be argued that the 'virtues' which do not help mankind achieve its final good are hardly virtues at all. In other words, those goods that are insufficient at aiming at the final good, even in the slightest way, will be cut off as extemporaneous matter. Only the best and most effective virtues are necessary in this system.

What is the good for mankind, then? This is where eudaimonia comes in. The term eudaimonia, as previously stated, does not translate perfectly to any one English term, but the

best-fitting ones are ‘flourishing’, ‘prosperity’ and ‘fulfillment’. The word ‘fulfillment’ implies that there is some object that was once empty, but is now filled. This will hardly be a contested point, but the ultimate good of an intimate relationship is **love**. There are, of course, a plethora of different conceptions of love, but the way I will define it best represents not only the nature of love, but the aim of it as well: the willing of the good of the other. Put in this way, the good of a relationship is to sincerely desire that another human being share in that same goodness that both parties are aiming for. To will something is not merely to desire it, but to take initiative based on that desire, or in other words, to actively work towards it. To will the good for the other, then, is to actively work towards the prosperity and fulfillment of the other. In the case of intimate relationships, it is the prosperity and fulfillment of your significant other or spouse. Anything that hinders the movement towards the prosperity and fulfillment of your significant other, then, runs contrary to love and thus is a poor performance of the practice of one’s relationship.

### From a Teleological Perspective

What is that object that must be fulfilled? A system of virtue ethics only becomes fully intelligible if it integrates a teleological framework – meaning that it includes some definition of what the purpose, aim, or goal (*telos*) of human life is or minimally the kind of life we ought to aim for. Without a teleological element, the chosen virtues have nothing to aim at, thus rendering them useless. Teleology, I perceive, is a very misunderstood concept in the field of philosophy, and this misunderstanding is most apparent in Immanuel Kant’s two ethical imperatives.

### Categorical Imperative vs. Hypothetical Imperative

The two types of imperatives (categorical and hypothetical) identified by Immanuel Kant are inverse ethical theories. Perhaps without realizing it, Kant was grasping at the two most basic ethical umbrellas that most all other ethical systems fit under. The categorical imperative aligns

with deontology, and the hypothetical imperative with teleology. Kant, being much in favor of the categorical imperative, became known for being the prime champion for the categorical imperative. In his exposition of the hypothetical imperative, he surmises that the natural conclusion is consequential – that is, a Machiavellian ‘the end justifies the means’ maxim. Contrasted with that is the supposedly angelic and obedient ‘duty for duty’s sake’ maxim of the deontological conclusion of the categorical imperative. Not only do I think that the end point of the hypothetical imperative was unfair, but that the assignment of the name ‘consequential’ was incorrect. The real opposing ethical approach is teleological – one that focuses on the rightness of actions being derived from how well they serve as a function of the purpose. Contrast this with a deontological approach, which focuses on the rightness of actions for their own sake. Thus, ‘consequential’ is more of a secondary quality of teleology, and the corresponding quality in deontology would be ‘non-consequential.’

The unseen side of these two approaches – and the side that is most crucial to the matter of relationships – is the stance on personal desire. The hypothetical imperative (teleology), as previously noted, integrates personal desire, inclination, and motive as a key component of its theory, while the categorical imperative (deontology) operates regardless of personal desires, inclinations, or motives. The two imperatives in brief syntactical form can be summarized as such:

Hypothetical: If you want X, you should do Y.

Categorical: Do Y regardless of if you want X.

With an unconditional love for all mankind, deontological ethics are often a better way to go, precisely because a personalized approach is not needed for that type of love. For such a personalized type of relationship as intimate ones, deontology is simply ill-fit for doing any good

in this context. To cut personal desire out of love is to ignore its inherent nature. This is why teleological ethics are suited perfectly for close relationships. Since we have already established the *telos* for close relationships, the goal becomes objective. We can therefore fill in 'love' for X, and then we have the statement: "If you want love, you need to do Y." This may sound quite instrumental at first, I agree, as it sounds like we need to perform some action in order to earn love from someone else. If we remember that love is to will the good of the other, it is no longer instrumental, as the focus of the good is on the other. A better way to fill in 'X' would be 'to love.' The 'Y' is where virtue ethics comes in, and this is the reason that virtue ethics is inseparable from teleological ethics, and vice versa.

### Use as the True Opposite of Love

A very common notion in modern society is that the opposite of love is hate. Pope John Paul II writes in his *Theology of the Body* that the opposite of love is not hate, it is using someone. Catholic author and motivational speaker Matthew Kelly also writes extensively on the topic. Many would disagree with this statement, as hate seems like the intuitive opposite of love. I agree that it is in some sense *an* opposite of love, but only to a certain degree. It will be useful to introduce the different types of opposites employed in language to give clarity to this. The reason I bring up the opposite of love here is because, in order to get a clearer picture of what something *is*, it is crucial to specify precisely what that thing is *not*.

In lexical semantics, there are three primary types of opposites, or rather, antonyms: 1) gradable, 2) complementary, and 3) relational. Gradable antonyms are the types of opposing words that lie on a continuous spectrum (i.e., hot vs. cold). Complementary antonyms are those that have contradictory meanings, and therefore lie on no continuous spectrum (i.e., life vs. death). Relational antonyms are a pair of words that have no lexical opposite, but instead

function within the context of their relationship (i.e., husband vs. wife). Love, as I see it, has two dimensions to it, and these two dimensions are implied in my definition: 1) will, and 2) goodness. An easier way to think about this is through the phrase “positive passion,” which is what many would use to describe love anyway. Not to say that it is an accurate representation of the essence of love, but I shall attempt to explain what I mean. With anything that has two dimensions, or axes, there are automatically four quadrants that result in a matrix that displays the possible combinations of such axes (Figure 1).

**Love** – High will (active), high goodness (positivity)

When one has both a high level of determination and passion towards someone coupled with a positive direction, one claims that he/she loves that person.

**Hate** – High will (active), low goodness (negativity)

When one claims that he/she hates someone, there is, like love, a presence high level of determination and passion for the person, but in the negative direction. If love is to will the good of the other, hate is to will the evil or misfortune of the other. This is what makes hate the first gradable antonym of love, with both of them lying on the continuous spectrum of will/desire/passion.

**Enjoy** – Low will (passive), high goodness (positivity)

When one claims that he/she enjoys someone, there is a lack of strong will or desire to support the good of the other, but, like love, there is still a positive regard. This is a state in which you feel pleased in the person’s company, but there is not an active commitment to their well-being. A colloquial term to supplant ‘enjoy’ would be ‘like.’ This is what makes enjoy the second gradable antonym of love, with both of them lying on the continuous spectrum of positivity.

**Use** – Low will (passive), low goodness (negativity)



When one claims that he/she uses someone, there is neither a presence of an active concern or care for what the other deserves, nor is there a positive regard for the person as a subject. Since use is marked by both an absence of active willing/intense focus towards the other as well as an absence of a positive regard for the person, it is the complementary (true) antonym of love. It differs from hatred in that with hate there is an active antagonizing of the other, a fervent wishing that the other is devoid of happiness or fulfillment, while use lacks such a strong passion, and thus is apathetic. It differs from enjoyment in that enjoyment has a favorable outlook on having that person around: there is a general feeling of well-wishing. With use, however, there is little concern for their company other than exploitation for their self-interest.

Overall, the relationship between two people based on the predominant sentiment present can be characterized as such:

Love – Companion

Hate – Nemesis

Enjoy – Acquaintance

Use – Object

These concepts will arise later and become useful when discussing further philosophical distinctions, and we will see that many actions or motives that are often mistaken for love truthfully fall into one of the other three categories in the matrix.

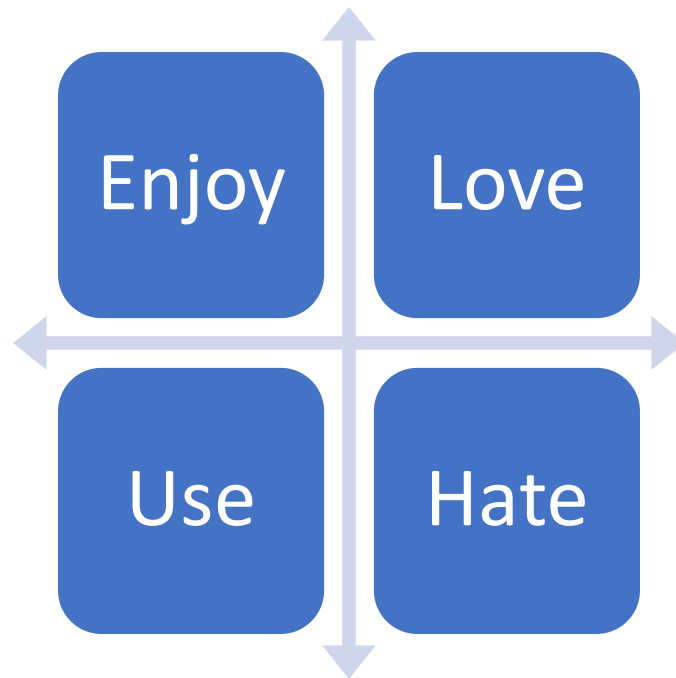


Figure 1. Concept graphic of the simple verbs on the axes of willpower and goodness

## Chapter 6. Outlining the Virtues

How do the virtues fit into all this? As MacIntyre says, “The virtues are precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement toward that *telos*.” (MacIntyre, 148). So, in summary, our *telos* is our *purpose*, *eudaimonia* is the *fulfillment* of that purpose, and *arete* (virtue) is the *way* in which we fulfill our purpose. To flesh out what virtues are, MacIntyre gives what he calls a partial and tentative definition, but what I would call a perfectly functional definition of a virtue: “A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.” (MacIntyre, 191). Virtues are not specific actions, they are inherent qualities that are ingrained in the human heart and psyche.

This is where virtue ethics primarily splits from contemporary ethics, in that it is not asking, “What ought we to do in order to live a good life?” but rather, “What qualities must one have in order to live a good life?” The attention moves away from the action and more towards the motive. What good is it for a man to sacrifice his long-desired free time to aid his wife in need, but to do so with anger or contempt? The rational one would argue, “The action of giving time is utterly wasted; he neither desired to giving himself nor delighted in doing such a task for his wife, and what is worse, he gained an underlying negative emotion toward his spouse, which if nurtured, will spawn a multitude of other problems.” They would be exactly correct in saying such a thing. It is not enough to merely *do* the right thing, but to do it with the right inclination, the right motive, the right *will*. To will something alongside act upon it, the marriage of those two aspects of willing and acting, is the ideal. MacIntyre comments, “Virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways. To act virtuously is not, as Kant

was later to think, to act against inclination; it is to act from inclination formed by the cultivation of the virtues. Moral education is an ‘*éducation sentimentale*’.” (MacIntyre, 149). To reiterate the key points: 1) Virtues are dispositions to both *act* and *feel* in particular ways; and 2) Being virtuous is not to act *against* inclination, but *from* inclination towards the good. Many ethicists have the misconception that ethics lies on a see-saw of inclinations, with the only discrete points being at either extreme: either repressing all inclinations or indulging all inclinations. They fail to see that the place to find perfect balance is by standing in the middle: by neither indulging nor repressing all inclinations, but wisely choosing which to embrace, and which to deny.

### The Three Universal Virtues

Among all human practices there is a common thread, for which the very fabric of practices themselves could not be held together without. These three virtues – *justice*, *courage*, and *honesty* – as MacIntyre identifies, are the pillars that hold all practices up, and without them they would falter and cease to be meaningful practices at all except for the purpose of expediting them to achieve external goods rather than the internal goods that such practices offer (MacIntyre, 191). I shall go about defining them briefly.

*Justice* – By justice is meant the act of treating others rightly with impersonal standards.

*Courage* – By courage is meant the willingness to confront danger or risk harm.

*Honesty* – By honesty is meant the quality of being sincere and truthful in thought, speech, and action.

I suspect the main reason that these virtues are so universal is because each one permits the possessor to achieve mastery over the three most fundamental conceptions of the human being – the mind (mental), the heart (emotional), and the gut (instinctual). The mind, the source of mental capacities, is tempted towards fear as it attempts to navigate the world through

strategies to evade danger, of which courage is the cure – to have control over one’s thoughts through a detached observation of the situation without shrinking away, either from uncomfortable internal thoughts or from daunting external obstacles. The heart, the source of emotional capacities, is tempted towards shame as it attempts to establish some significance and fabricated identity on a humane level, of which honesty is the cure – to have control over one’s emotions through admission of both the beautiful and the ugly within to create a sincere image of the self; to speak from the heart. The gut, the source of instinctual capacities, is tempted towards anger as it attempts to gain control over the environment and assert its will, of which justice is the cure – to have control over one’s instincts through deliberately and purposefully doing what is right rather than what one’s immediate and strong impulses dictate.

What is especially fascinating is the next point that MacIntyre makes: “every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it.” (MacIntyre, 191). Which is to say that relationships are at the very *heart* of practices. This begs the question: what does a good relationship look like, and how do we come to possess it? This is precisely what this thesis is for. Knowing that relationships themselves are a form of practice is a key insight. If relationships are the most fundamental practice, then getting this right is extremely crucial, as it will determine the path and trajectory of engaging in all other practices. Since my focus here is on intimate relationships, I shall offer a set of virtues below that I take to be necessary to achieving the internal goods of intimate relationships.

### Relationship Virtues

**Self-Awareness** (Confronting Your Dark Side) – Knowledge of one’s character and motives.

**Care** (The Ordering of Loves) – Provision of genuine concern, support, and protection.

**Respect** (Discourse of Disagreements) – Considerate regard for others’ dignity.

**Empathy** (The Danger of Talking) – Understanding of others’ emotional states.

**Patience** (Emotional Self-Control) – Ability to handle delays and suffering with calm.

**Self-Sacrifice** (Personal Desire) – Abstinence from one’s own interests for the sake of the other.

**Congruence** (Hypocrisy and Inconsistency) – Agreement between one’s beliefs and actions.

**Balance** (Balancing Contributions) – Even distribution of efforts to uphold the relationship.

**Forgiveness** (Letting Go) – Willingness to forgo both the offense and punishment.

These virtues have also been assigned certain chapters where their intricacies will be further dwelled upon. The following chapters also provide a context through which the virtues become more alive. The context being a certain primary work through which a particular virtue becomes more evident. These virtues will also be set alongside internal goods derived from the practice of intimate relationships, and I will demonstrate not only how each virtue is efficacious in achieving the internal good at which it aims, but that it is the best-fitting virtue for that internal good – that no other virtue can outperform it in its task.

## Chapter 7. Confronting Your Dark Side

With Robert Greene

“This longing to commit a madness stays with us throughout our lives. Who has not, when standing with someone by an abyss or high up on a tower, had a sudden impulse to push the other over? And how is it that we hurt those we love although we know that remorse will follow? Our whole being is nothing but a fight against the dark forces within ourselves. To live is to war with trolls in heart and soul. To write is to sit in judgment on oneself.”

–Henrik Ibsen

What does confronting my dark side have anything to do with learning how to navigate love?

Love invariably involves a relationship, either with the self or the other. Any profound, meaningful interaction with a human being requires a penetrating understanding of human nature. Ironically, the opposite is also often true: possessing a penetrating understanding of human nature requires profound, meaningful interactions with human beings. To have a complete grasp of human nature, we must observe all sides of it, the good and bad, the pleasant and unpleasant, the light and dark. If anything, it is the dark side that deserves a disproportionate amount of attention, given that once we are able to first become aware of the dark forces within, we are capable of humble admission to the idea that we are not two-dimensional, angelic beings. Rather, we are three-dimensional beings with depth and layers, many of which often go unexplored. Once this level of awareness is achieved, that energy can then be controlled, and channeled into productive activity. The dark side rests below the level of consciousness, and due to the fact that we have developed so many strategies to avoid its presence, it often leaps up to our consciousness at the most inopportune times, sabotaging our very sense of self.

*Hello.*

Are...are you my dark side?

*I do not know, am I?*

Talk about inopportune. Anyway, we will just ignore that and-

*What?! You think you can just brush me off like that and continue with your discussion about examining your dark side while completely ignoring me?? What a hypocrite you are. I hate people like you. Overtly contradictory, while giving absolutely no acknowledgment to it whatsoever, even going so far as to deny your most apparent actions.*

I have little time for your protests. Can you not see I am trying to accomplish something here? I am working to set up a system for everyone here, one that will yield justice and peace in relationships.

*You would know something about that. Unlike you, I have no need to call the shots, I just take them. I do not need a system to tell me which of my convictions are right and which of them are wrong. And I certainly do not need you to tell me what my meaning or purpose is. I can figure that out for myself and live it to the fullest.*

Okay, okay, I understand. It's just that now is not the time for this.

*Is this not the perfect time for this, though? We are talking about dark sides, so why are you going to act like I am not a part of this? Like I am not a part of you? You and I both know that this resentment has gone on for way too long. I am the culmination of all the things that have gone unexpressed because we felt like we never had the space to let it out.*

And I am the embodiment of all the order we strive to bring to the chaotic world of our relationships. What is your point?

We can never look at our shadow directly without looking away from the light. It always creeps right behind us. Attempting to simply look behind us to view it yields a twisted version of our shadow and not a true representation, as our



shadow will twist with our body. The only way to gaze into our shadow is indirectly. By reflection...looking at our mirror image.

*What does that mean? What does that mean...for me? Am I merely a cursed reflection of you? Am I the shadow of you? More dark...more primitive...I have more questions. Wait, I need to know more!*

Relax, that's just how he is. We don't have direct access to him. All we get is abstract, cryptic messages out of nowhere. No chance to ask questions or interact. Over time, though, those messages become clearer. Turns out most of them end up being true. What he is saying right now is that you're not my shadow, and since I am looking directly at you, you're my mirror image. If you want more answers, you need to get to the top of that mountain over there. You'll find him there.

*All the way up there? I do not know if I can do that. I am not capable enough. You seem far more capable than me. I am just your dark side. I am defective, weak, sensitive. Why can you not do it?*

Because I can see him just fine from here.

*How? How do you have such clear vision?*

Look – do you want to fix this or not?

*I just want to feel understood.*

Okay, fine – do you want to feel understood?

*More than that, I want to be able to say the truth no matter what. To express myself freely so that I can stay safe and not be at the mercy of injustice.*

In order to state the truth boldly, one must know it first.

*You are right...and the only way to know it is to get to the top of that mountain.*

Exactly! Here, take this map. I will be guiding you along the way. It looks blank right now, but the more I speak, it will reveal the path that you are to take.

*A map of what?*

The Map of Philosophy.

*You are going to give me a map to follow? Why would I follow your philosophy when I can just create my own?*

Because the way I will show you is objective, impersonal, and meant to be applied to all, including us. You're going to need it. This is the only way to justice and morality in relationships.

*Objective? Impersonal? All I know is my subjectivity, and I would rather make it personal.*

*If it is so objective, then surely I will end up on the path anyway even if I do not have the map, right?*

It will end very poorly if you go it alone. I have already seen the end.

*I would rather have an awful ending that I have chosen myself than a perfect ending chosen for me. Adapting to my surroundings will be better than following your plan. Enough with the talking, I am leaving for the hike.*

Wait! Do not go yet...I did not need your input anyway. I will just watch the map unfold myself. Even if you do not take the guidance, I know the world will get something out of this.

This dark side of the personality is what Carl Jung called the Shadow: all qualities about ourselves that are denied, because they run so contrary to the person we want to become. It is

useful to think of the Shadow in terms of childhood development. Robert Greene notes that it was created from two conflicting forces: the first is the intense energy and impulses of youth, and the second is dependency on parents for survival (Greene, 242-243). These forces lead to a compulsive need to present our best side to gain approval from parents, peers, and teachers. The pressure to do this is immense, and so we feel compelled to repress all negative or undesirable qualities of ourselves. Of course, these never truly go away, and under moments of extreme stress, they rise back to the surface for some relief, and lead to unintended consequences.

The reason that the Shadow is so prevalent in close relationships is because of the levels of intimacy that are reached throughout the course of the relationship. The Shadow often comes out when we are around those that we are closest to, since we have become very comfortable in their presence. The issue with this is that we often hurt the ones we love the most, and oftentimes we go completely unaware of it. The significant other, however, experiences the full brunt of the Shadow, and senses it keenly.

The cure to this is the virtue of self-awareness – the ability to know the self. It is ultimately the lack of knowledge of the self, or the lack of *desire* to gain knowledge about the self, that leads to an uncontrollable dark side. So, in order to foster self-awareness, you first have to be open to the idea that you are most likely hurting your significant other without even knowing it. It is a painful pill to swallow, but accepting that reality is a necessary step towards loving the other in a more deliberate and profound way. Of course, self-awareness is only the beginning. Once the self is thoroughly known, then it must be controlled to a degree that will enable one to use the powers of their dark side without the fear of unintended negative consequences. The rest of the virtues are all some form of control, and thus, they will provide the tools needed to accomplish this task.

*Philosophy as the Cross of the Contemplative Christian (Self-Deceit)*

*Love is inherently an aspect of individual experience. It is only right and just that it is examined through the approach of philosophy that deals precisely with individual experience: existentialism. I will attempt to paint a picture of pain for you, but I apologize. All I have for a canvas is void and for paint, the blood leftover from my wounds. Why am I painting a picture of pain? Pain is beautiful. Why is pain so beautiful? Cuts bring blood, the life source. Through pain, we see the rawest form of life itself. It exposes what it truly means to have life, to feel.*

*Philosophers, by their very station, become underdogs – the ones that are looked down on as chasing a ‘useless’ pursuit. Worry not, being a philosophical underdog is the best – we may be under, but the only way to overthrow the throne is to be under it. People at the top inevitably depend on those below them to be stepping stools...until those at the bottom rise up, that is. The winners become too confident in their position...they take their victory for granted and think they have already won. Once they let their guard down and become too secure, this is when they are taken down by the one they least expected. As a dog, we have the nose to sniff out the double dealings and incongruencies of the people around us. They think we bark at nothing, but that is only because they do not see what we do. We sense danger that they are too blind to perceive. They call us crazy out of their own ignorance. Go on, keep calling out all the lies as though it is all you have to live for: it is. Lives need to have value to be meaningful. Lives without this ‘v’ are merely lies, and too many people are living lies.*

*None of this can come to fruition without operating in the shadows – they cannot see it coming. This is your cross – to carry the heavy questions that nobody else is willing to face, and to*

*do it alone, unassumingly, meekly, where nobody else can see or notice you. You must also carry those questions to the highest heights, where you stand alone with God to attest for yourself. What will you have to say for yourself? Did you live authentically and sincerely? Or were you a walking zombie, going through the motions without any inspiration? Even when they do notice you, they will judge and doubt you behind the scenes for pondering the questions they do not have the courage to take on themselves. The most noble questions are the most complex and difficult. These same questions are the ones that cannot be answered 'objectively,' but must be tackled with subjectivity. The typically prescribed answers are not good enough – they must be evaluated by the subject for it to have any meaning and significance. To announce it to the world would be to compromise its authenticity. Save your voice for when you are done suffering – then you can let all that is fake falter before you. Only those who are capable of suffering in silence are worthy of giving voice to their values – because through their very way of life, they will have already done so.*

*Christians already know this well – what it is like to be seen as evil, hated by the world, to continually put others before themselves yet mocked and insulted for it. The greatest amount of pressure is felt by those who are both a Christian and a philosopher – and thus they will have the heaviest burden. The secular philosopher may celebrate the cross, but will not carry it. The unphilosophical Christian will carry the cross, but when asked why he/she does it, they will either have no answer, or give the cookie-cutter answer of, "Because God loves me." To be a Christian philosopher, therefore, is to not only ponder the difficult and challenging questions, but to know the existential implications their answers have for their relationship with God. It is to not only have faith, go to Mass, and partake in all things typical in Christendom, but to make your faith your*

*own, to make it truly personal, and to reach an evaluative depth that most Christians do not. One's relationship with the LORD will be the most impactful determinant of the quality of the relationships one has with others, as one's relationship with his Creator is the most prime relationship of all.*

*For those with a conscience that is still alive, it is far more difficult to look away, but for those who have murdered their conscience a long time ago, throwing off the question altogether becomes easy. They passively fade away from the question, seeking instead to focus on the more pleasant aspects of life and not the burdensome ones, because they no longer see the purpose of walking up the mountain, of making themselves stronger, of becoming a self at all. They assume that their values are already perfectly refined, and that therefore they can move into action. Action, however, is only good insofar when it is in alignment with the self and its values.*

*Case in point, the question of relationships. On the surface, they appear wholesome and pleasant. Most will stop here, and leave it at that, concluding that relationships are to be enjoyed and experienced. There is truth to that, but before they can be enjoyed and experienced to the fullest extent, individual value judgments of relationships must be sorted out. This is where many shirk the question – the existential dread is too much to bear, and the introspection, painful. What can I gather from reflecting on the self, right now? The most basic premise is that I am not perfect – I am flawed, broken, I make mistakes, and I am not yet what I am meant to be. Not only is this the case for me, but for the rest of humanity as well. Nobody is perfect. Thus, as a broken person myself, I am forced to exist with other broken people. How can I exist with them well? Well, mending my own brokenness so as not to harm others is a good starting point, but there*

*is more to it. In order to be in a meaningful relationship (that is, a relationship with value), I have to learn how to love. Love, the decision to will of the good of the other, always involves some sacrifice – namely, sacrificing the good of the self. Sacrifice requires effort, which causes discomfort and pain. Besides, the greatest act of love, Jesus' Passion, was one of immense suffering. Thus, to truly love is to suffer, and the only path to love is through suffering. What does all this mean for me, though? As an individual? Better yet, what does it mean to me? It means I must learn how to suffer before I can learn how to love. If I want to be the greatest lover, I need to become the one that can bear suffering to the greatest degree, as the capacity to bear suffering for another will be my capacity to love. The valley of the shadow of death is my starting point, and the mountain of the light of life is my destination. The path to paradise starts in hell, so here I am.*

## Chapter 8. The Ordering of Loves

With C.S. Lewis

“Love is something more stern and splendid than mere kindness.”  
—C.S. Lewis

In the analysis of relationships and love, it is worth investigating the notable concept of multiple loves that were originally divined by ancient Greek thinkers. In the modern Western world, our conception of love has become so one-dimensional, to the point where our lexicon has limited us to only one word for a vast array of meanings. Claiming that you love cookie dough ice cream is not the same expression of love as claiming you love your best friend. That is the difference between a ‘love’ of things vs. a love of people. Within the love of people, there are also many different kinds. For example, the love you have for your mother is not nearly the same love you have for your significant other. This is known rather intuitively, but it is worth elucidating so that when the word ‘love’ is spoken, we know precisely which kind of love is being referenced.

British writer C.S. Lewis took the time to bring the Greek loves back to life in 20th century thought through his *The Four Loves*. I shall use his exposition in introducing the characteristics of these different loves. These four loves (Storge, Philia, Eros, Agape) are best thought of as abstractions from the very complex reality that we call ‘love.’ It is not as though these four loves exist empirically, but there is validity in the idea that the love that one human being possesses for another can be conceptually categorized into one of four types. Following the basic descriptions, these loves will be ranked from the most foundational to the most additional in the context of romantic relationships. The development of each does not necessarily correlate



to the length of the relationship, nor are they chronologically organized, but this is often how it does, or ought to, unfold. All types of love mentioned will converge back to the role that they play in one of the most central internal goods of an intimate relationship – romantic love. I will argue that all four loves are necessary to obtain this good, and the lack of any type will compromise the integrity of the relational infrastructure of the relationship, and thus prevent couples from reaching such an essential and pleasant good.

### Descriptions of the Loves

#### **Storge** (Affection) – Love of parents for children

C.S. Lewis calls Storge “the humblest and most widely diffused of loves...” (Lewis, 41). This love does not necessarily only apply to parents’ affection to children, but vice versa: the affection of children for their parents. If anything, it applies to all *familial* love – love of family members, and anyone else that one is very familiar with. This is the criteria that C.S. Lewis points out: “Its objects have to be familiar...I doubt if we ever we ever catch Affection begin. To become aware of it is to become aware that it has already been going on for some time.” (Lewis, 43). Despite being a humble and modest love, one that is not readily displayed outwardly (Lewis, 44), it is also the most instinctive and fiercely protective (Lewis, 60).

#### **Philia** (Friendship) – Love of friends and equals

Philia is quite unique from the other types of love, in that it is the least biologically necessary, but often the most precious. C.S. Lewis notes, “Friendship is – in a sense not at all derogatory to it – the least *natural* of loves; the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious, and necessary...It is essentially between individuals; the moment two men are friends they have in some degree drawn apart together from the herd.” (Lewis, 74). It is the type of love shared between two people who have something in common, and can bond over it. It is when two

companions discover that they share some insight, interest, or other private treasure, which was taken to be unique and individual until they met (Lewis, 83). This single commonality is enough for two people to connect, and this connection strengthens as the two share in the given activity or hobby that they are engrossed in.

#### **Eros** (Romance) – Love of sexual mates

Eros is obviously the love most associated with romantic relationships, and for good reason. It is the love that is present when one is ‘in love’ with another, and if two are lucky enough, this initial attraction will lead to a relationship. The largest misconception is that Eros is mostly composed of sexual attraction. It is undeniable that this attraction often accompanies Eros, but is not dependent on it, nor is Eros dependent on the attraction: sexuality can operate with or without Eros (Lewis, 118). The largest difference between sexual appetite and Eros is that with the former, one desires someone merely to satisfy the appetite, while with the latter, it is to be preoccupied with the person as a whole. C.S. Lewis observes that it would be rare for a man to have felt only sexual drive for a woman, and then only later to fall in love with her, and instead, “Very often what comes first is simply a delighted pre-occupation with the Beloved – a general, unspecified pre-occupation with her in her totality. A man in this state really hasn’t leisure to think of sex. He is too busy thinking of a person...If you asked him what he wanted, the true reply would often be, ‘To go on thinking of her.’ He is love’s contemplative.” (Lewis, 119-120). This is a great picture of what Eros truly is – a desire or fondness of a person in their entirety. Sexual desire wants the *thing in itself*, while Eros wants the Beloved, or the *person in themselves* (Lewis, 120-121).

#### **Agape** (Charity) – Love of mankind

Out of all the loves, Agape is arguably the most ubiquitous one, in the sense that it stretches the furthest, and is therefore the most distant. It is the love that we have for someone unknown on the other side of the globe, merely on the premise that they are of our kind. It is akin to Kant's "good will." It does not rely on how close we are to the person, only that they are a person. In a Christian context, it is often associated with the love that God has for His creatures, and the type of unconditional love for our kindred that we ought to imitate.

### The Final Order for Intimate Relationships

1. Charity (Level of Humanity)
2. Friendship (Level of Companionship)
3. Romance (Level of Dating)
4. Affection (Level of Marriage)

Why must Charity come first? Without it, there is no regard for the other as a human being: to lack Charity is to be inhumane towards the subject in question. If there is no active acknowledgement for one's humanity, how will the other loves come about? Thus, Charity is the necessary foundation of all other loves, and this principle applies just as potently to intimate relationships. Another word for this 'humanity' is dignity – to recognize one's inherent dignity and act accordingly – is at the heart of Charity. This point begs the question – which creatures have dignity, and which do not? The answer is found in the distinction from moral and non-moral beings. And how do the degrees of dignity between these creatures differ? One might say, "Well of course I always know that my partner is a fellow human." One would think so, but Charity's vanishing often goes undetected, and cognizance of its absence does not rise to consciousness until it is too late. Especially in the technological era, where long-distance relationships are more easily amended through constant text messages, phone calls, and video

chats, it becomes easier and easier to forget that there is another human behind the deceiving interface of our devices. Distanced communication permits the coarseness of people to emerge with little to no consequences, whether in the self (feelings of compassion, guilt, shame) or others (visible emotional pain, anger, reprimanding). This is where the virtue of care is needed – to foster genuine concern for others, constantly. Especially in the moments that it is hardest. We often offend the ones we love the most because we have lost Charity for them. This is a temporary loss, however. It can be restored, and it must if the other loves are to survive and grow.

Friendship is next. Friendship is the means by which we come to know another more deeply, and, as I will contrast with Passion, it is the love by which we focus on similarities and likeness in others. Without Friendship, one skips right to Passion, and, though it lasts for a time, it will not be enough to sustain a meaningful relationship. Friendship is the perfect way to figure out whether this person is worth pursuing or not. How can one be infected by a fascination of the other (Passion) if one does not even thoroughly know the other? Thus, to foster Friendship first is to ground and enliven Passion in the reality of the other, not a mere idea or fantasy of the other. Besides, if you do not enjoy another's company as a friend, how can you reasonably expect to enjoy them as a lover?

Dating relationships are arguably the unification of Friendship and Passion. Oftentimes, it is the case that Passion, or the initial attraction for the other, comes before Friendship. This is nothing to be afraid of. In order to have a truly enduring (Friendship) and satisfying (Passion) relationship, one needs both Friendship and Passion. The common saying goes, 'Opposites attract...' but the other half to make it complete would be, '...but similarities bind.' The former half is Passion's role, while the latter half is Friendship's role.

Passion is the love that forms when two people, in some degree of companionship, become enticed by one's 'otherness.' Unlike Friendship which is concerned with commonalities, or likeness, Passion is principally aroused by differences and uniqueness. We are so attracted to the person because they have some characteristic that we have either never witnessed, are deeply in need of (sentiments of 'completeness'), or we are merely fascinated by the mysteries that lie underneath their first impression.

Affection is the natural finisher. It is an almost inevitable byproduct of a long-lasting relationship with someone. With intimate relationships, Affection will be reached either by virtue of pure time, or by the creation of a new family through matrimony. Passion is the very gateway to Affection, as the natural and ideal consequence of sexual intercourse is children. It will not always come last per se, since, as was discussed in its profile, it is the unnoticed love, and its development occurs in the background. It just so happens that its materializations come to life after the other three loves, and that is when the fruits of its labor becomes most evident. Since time is of the essence with Affection, it will have been growing in strength as soon as Friendship began, and continued all the way through Passion.

If we are to imagine a pyramid hierarchy, I would not put Affection at the tip, despite being the 'last' love. The three previous loves fit in the typical pyramid structure, with Charity being the bottom section, Friendship in the middle, and Passion at the top. We can think of Affection as the backdrop to the pyramid, or the pyramid in its entirety. That is, there is nothing to build on top of Passion – it is the height of romantic relationships – but there is plenty to extend outwards once the three initial loves are in place. This outward extension is Affection. It is almost an armor to the pyramid, that makes the relationship stronger over time, containing its contents and keeps them intact, while also supporting their development and growth from the

beginning. It is as though Affection is the background operator, and that it has reached 1/3 capacity once Charity is fully developed for the other, 2/3 capacity once Friendship is fully developed, and 3/3, or 100% capacity, once Passion is fully developed. It is the hidden backbone of relationships.

An extremely easy way to tell which type of love is most valued by your partner is which type they advocate for most when there is a fallout. This type, in their eyes, is the one that they see as the optimal solution, the type that is most impactful at getting the relationship back on track. More importantly, it is the type that they see as the foundation, the fundamental type that must be protected at all costs, even if everything else is lost. If you discover that the love you value the most does not match up with the love your partner values most, this will likely become a major point of contention.

### Offenses Against Romantic Love

*Love without Charity* – In theory, a relationship without regards for one's basic humanity yet filled with the other loves seems unimaginable. Yet this sort of relationship happens all too often. If one does not possess Charity, and Charity extends to all of mankind, then this person also has no love for himself. Man turns himself into a selfish brute when he lacks Charity. On the conscious level, this manifests in the form of misanthropic tendencies, directed both internally (self) and externally (others). On the unconscious level, this may look like a number of things, including dependency on love from others to fill a bottomless chasm, subtle but pervasive remarks about ulterior motives in those around them, mistrust and defensiveness, and general mistreatment towards the other all while expecting immense amounts of love back.

*Love without Friendship* – This type of love, one without Friendship, will be miserable. Why is this so? Friendship is the love through which we see and take pride in commonalities

with another, where something is shared. Once these have vanished out of sight, and only the contrasts are left, there is nothing to hold onto for a sense of togetherness: distinction seems like the only answer. The qualities that initially sparked attraction from Passion will turn into points of contention and annoyance, as the differences begin to rub up against us. The people that claim that they are friends first, lovers second with their significant other, yet also put in no effort to stay friends after a breakup are either deceived or deceiving. For if the relationship was built off of friendship (friends first), and only the romantic part was removed (lovers second), the friendship, if it is true, will stay in-tact. Unless there was serious harm done to sever the relationship, a breakup (removal of Passion) is no just cause for Friendship to end. If anything, a true friend would be sympathetically aware of why the breakup was necessary and would take no hostility from it.

*Love without Passion* – The best word to describe a relationship without Passion is, frankly, stale. When pondering this type, there is an image of a man and a woman who have been best friends since childhood, and even though no romantic feelings were present, decided to get married out of fear of the unknown. This type of relationship is marked by dullness, as Passion is the catalyst for seeking out new experiences with your partner. These new experiences expose new qualities about your partner to be in awe of, new quirks to be beheld and loved, as if the person in front of you that you have known for decades still is bursting with hidden gems yet to be discovered. This sense of adventure is what gives romantic relationships life. If Friendship is the earth on which to build a relationship, Passion is the fire which arises from it to give it light.

*Neglect*

*Masochism - to see the benefits of suffering and then rejoice in it when they arrive - is what gives the true lover his advantage, his edge in the battlefield of love. It even gives him a thrill when running through the trenches. To fall in love with you, I must fall in love with the pain.*

2

*To stay the course or not to stay the course: that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous love or to take arms against a sea of injustices, and by opposing, end them. If I end it, does that make me weak? Does that mean I do not love her as much as I should? True love never dies, so why does it feel like this one is? It does not quit.*

*Unconditional means no matter what, so I will go on no matter what. But if I stay forever, how long will these troubles continue? I have gone this far, so why should I stop now?*

3

*To have a love-hate relationship with someone is proof of loving them as a lover but hating them as a friend.*

4

*It is one thing for someone to not be there for your dark days. It is an entirely different thing for someone to be the primary reason for your dark days.*

5

*Why should we enter relationships flawed? If we are just going to hurt people with our jagged edges? Is it even worth it to start relationships that way? I would like to wait until I'm perfect, but that will never happen. Perhaps the friction and tension are necessary for smoothing out each other's jagged edges.*



6

*Romance and physicality make love grow too quickly, with weak and shallow roots. Do not be surprised, then, when your love is unstable in the storms if the primary catalyst is sensuality.*

7

*When I am unable to love God, I am only able to hate myself. God says to love your enemies, so I will learn to love myself.*

8

*"Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you," but do not forget that oftentimes your enemies are the ones closest to you.*

9

*Are human relationships even worth it? Nobody is capable of loving me perfectly except God. So, why would I settle for anything less than perfect love? Without it I am incomplete.*

10

*Lately I have been taking the scenic routes. Ironic how walking aimlessly helps us see our true path so clearly. The one that we have been playing around with for a while but never felt like facing. Because we knew that if we stared into it, we would be so enthralled by it that we would have no other choice to take it, embrace it, and face it. Running around town would no longer have its appeal for its own sake, except to move forward and start chasing our destiny. Fear sure has a way of prescribing to us medications that we do not even need. A reverse placebo, we become convinced of our illness because the devil on our shoulder told us we need to take these to feel better. We start to wonder what is wrong with us, how we ended up in this empty place. So we*

*drown ourselves in these ephemeral fixes, which ends only one way: becoming addicted to pain. We no longer feel whole without a little bit of suffering. So we run head-first into anything that makes us feel alive, even if it hurts us. But really the cure that Satan promised us is death, while the sickness he was attempting to draw us away from is life. It sounds twisted, I know, but that's how he thinks. And the only way for him to get to us is if we start thinking like him.*

## 11

*True love gives everything and asks for nothing in return. So, I will stay silent. Why should I ask for anything in return? If I ask for it, it will not be given out of sincerity, but out of my pleading for it. What kind of love is it, that we must ask for what we need or want?*

## 12

*Through the cracks of our broken heart leaks all the love that we receive.*

## Chapter 9. Discourse of Disagreements

### With the Arbinger Institution

“It’s not a lack of love, but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages.”  
–Friedrich Nietzsche

I begin this chapter with this quote not to suggest that love is not necessary for marriage; not at all. Rather, I am using it to demonstrate the contrast between romance and friendship: on average, friends seldom argue or fight as much as couples do. Why is that? Some might reason that it’s because of the difference in closeness, that friends do not get as connected as those in intimate relationships, and if it were the case, then friends would fight far more often. Fair, and it is a good start, but there is more. I have a more advanced theory. I believe that it is ultimately the desire for power and influence in romantic or marital relationships that drives couples to quarreling.

The natural beginning to navigating relationship conflict is to decide *how* such conflicts will be conducted. Without such a structure, it will be impossible to resolve the conflicts in the first place. One of the main reasons why couples often run into the same arguments and problems over and over again is not because they are incapable of solving the problem at hand, but because of the chaos of the way they go about discussing it: they have not yet learned to establish order amidst the chaos, to set up a system where both voices have a fair representation. So, my point is that the main cause of unpleasant disagreement between couples is precisely that they know not *how* to disagree. The lack of knowledge of how to disagree is but one manifestation of the failed moral framework and disheveled moral debate that MacIntyre points out. This gives rise to what I will call meta-disagreements – resentment towards the other person

that is formed during a perceived unfairness in the way in which the other person goes about the disagreement. The focus is then diverted away from the initial problem and towards minute details of the argument in the moment. It becomes a vicious cycle of arguing about arguing. And the only time it is ever addressed is – you guessed it – when a point of contention arises.

So, it is absolutely imperative that couples sit down during the initial stages of courting and set up a system that will serve as an objective, impartial third arm of sorts, but one where both parties can have their individual values cherished and respected. This will save numerous headaches, heartbreaks, and other frustrations from occurring. If you find an agreed way to navigate arguments and conflict, you have already conquered 95% of your problems. There are almost definitely sources that your partner thinks are perfectly good tools for proving a point, but that you see as utterly fallacious and provide no support to an argument. This is the time and space for those to come to light before you enter the trenches.

The work that will guide this discussion is *The Anatomy of Peace* by the Arvinger Institute. Told through the story of parents who are struggling to coexist with their children, two enemies-become-friends teach the parents by demonstrating to them how many of the conflicts that they are facing with their children are largely self-perpetuating, and that in order to move from conflict to harmony, they need to understand the root cause of the problems, and only then can they see the world clearly and effectively deal with the same issues. The key to solving conflicts, as will become more evident over time, is the virtue of respect – the willingness to keep in mind the dignity of others. I will go over some of the key ideas from *The Anatomy of Peace* and how they apply to intimate relationships.

The first key idea is the difference between having a heart at war vs. a heart at peace. The ‘heart’ that one can possess is distinguished from the behavior that one is engaging in – in short,

the heart, or being, is the inner state, while the behavior is the outer action. This whole conceptual arrangement is called the way-of-being diagram (Arbinger Institute, 30). The teachers, Yusuf and Avi, explain that one can engage in the same behavior with very different attitudes. This difference in attitude is precisely what the ‘way of being’ is. The heart of war, they continue, is when we see others as objects, whether it be as obstacles (“They’re being so difficult”), vehicles (“They need to make me feel loved”), or irrelevancies (“I don’t care what they think”). The heart of peace, on the other hand, is when we begin to see others as people, as individuals with their own hopes, needs, cares, and fears, as real as our own. (Arbinger Institute, 30-31). Avi parallels this with philosopher Martin Buber’s postulation that no matter what we are doing, we are always in the world with either an “I-It” or “I-Thou” way of thinking – seeing others as objects, or people. (Arbinger Institute, 30-31). To link this back to virtue ethics, it is clear that to have a heart at war is to effectively lack respect for others, while having a heart at peace is to have sincere respect for others. Once we reduce others to objects, especially our boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, or wife, it becomes much easier to disrespect them, does it not? To treat them poorly, to ignore them, to blame them for our own issues, to vent all our anger at them and loathe them when they are unable to take care of it promptly? To have respect for our significant other, and to actively see their dignity and humanity, makes those things far more difficult. Perhaps this is what is meant by being ‘slow to anger’...if we see the other as a person, it will take a lot more to become angry at them, because that anger will have to overpower the deep respect that we have for them.

When we have a heart at war, we not only hyperfocus on conflict, but we invite others to be more difficult for us and to make us miserable (Arbinger Institute, 42-43). This phenomenon is defined by the Arbinger Institute as collusion: “A conflict where the parties are inviting the

very things they're fighting against" (Arbinger Institute, 48). That is, we actively perpetuate the very things that we are attempting (albeit very incompetently) to eliminate. How is this the case? Through the common philosophical notion that our thoughts shape our reality. If we constantly think about red, we will see red everywhere. If we constantly think about negativity, we will see it everywhere. If we constantly think about opportunities for success, we will see them everywhere. Likewise, if we constantly think about how people are obstacles, you will see them as obstacles all the time. You will look for every excuse to think of them that way so as to self-justify your own harmful mindset. Conflicts, as an axiomatic and necessary statement, begin with something negative. With any action comes an equal and opposite reaction, and so if the action is negative, the reaction will also be negative. The reaction itself is also a subset of action, and so the reaction itself then yields another negative reaction. This goes on indefinitely, until someone is willing to stop it by giving a positive reaction to a negative action.

What is worse, as any wise military strategist would do amid war, we begin looking for allies. Namely, to support us in our battle against our significant other. Who do we go to instinctively? People with whom we are comfortable with, and with whom we can discuss how unfairly we have been treated. We pick people that we know will be on our side. We go to friends, family members, colleagues and advisors, not to figure out how we might be wrong, but to reinforce our feelings of being justified in accusing others (Arbinger Institute, 50-51). This is the epitome of confirmation bias playing out in relationships, except instead of finding sources of information that confirm our preconceived beliefs, we go to people – the ones we are closest to – and use them to confirm our pre-existing hostility. So, not only are we waging war against our significant other, we are also instrumentally expediting our friends and family as our personal armor and weapons.

What does this mean for the confidante that is put in this position? If you are that person, be a better friend. A true friend would not unthinkingly support another friend in an unjust war and in perpetuating conflict, but impersonally yet gently reveal where the friend may have gone wrong. Of course, most do not like to hear that, but the most noble friend does not mislead with comfortable lies, but informs with uncomfortable truth.

### Jurisdiction of Claims

The discussion surrounding the jurisdiction of claims shall involve the justification of making certain claims employed in the realm of interpersonal arguments. In other words, who has a right to say what about what while arguing? Can you say anything you please, or are there some things that only the other person has authority to weigh in on? Is one justified in spouting whatever they think is true in the moment and using it as an absolute claim, or is there more to the process of determining truth value for the sake of resolving conflicts? These questions and many more will be answered in this section.

The main area where this is an issue is in stating universal statements, such as, “You always ignore me when I have something to say!”, or “You never help me with the chores!” Statements like these, ones that suppose some permanent reality, are not only unhelpful, but the easiest to shoot down. By unhelpful I mean it detracts from the present moment. It blows whatever the present issue is far out of proportion, which in turn makes the issue far larger than it ever needed to be. More often than not, this is caused either by the desire to make one’s argument more powerful and impactful, or by built-up anger from previous occasions of identical experiences. If one looks closer, these two causes are one and the same: the anger rising up demands that its statement about the current reality has power and impact. If the telos of relationships is to love, and by doing so to heal brokenness, surely seeking your own victory in

an argument is no way to do so. Rather, handling the problem gently, and as it currently is, is the best way to engage in the practice of love. For example, a good remedy to the first quote of a universal statement mentioned above is, instead of claiming that someone always ignores you in an aggressive and overconfident manner, to say, “Look, I do not feel heard by you right now. I know you are busy, but are you willing to drop what you are currently doing and listen more closely to what I am trying to say?” What is this doing well? It is 1) communicating the unmet need in a clear and non-abrasive way, 2) acknowledging that the other person’s circumstance (i.e., being busy) might be impeding on their ability to meet your need.

As for the actual falsifiability of such claims, all it takes is one counterexample, and then the universal falls apart. The same goes for attempting to justify one’s own actions or motives. If a premise that is posited as a universal justification for an action or motive is proven to be erroneous in merely one instance of its consequences, then it can no longer stand as an exclusive moral principle for any action or motive, and must either be replaced entirely or supported by a further conditional. You may think, “Well, I never try to universally justify something that I do.” The truth is you do it all the time, you just do not have a philosopher in your life to call you out on it (such a shame). Allow me to provide a hypothetical example. Let us suppose you are procrastinating on pursuing a large life goal and taking steps to make it a reality. I ask you, “Why are you not going after this goal you have? You answer back, “I do not like doing the work.” I say in response, “Oh, so you think that just because you do not *like* to do something, that you ought not to do so? If you do not *like* putting in the work to eliminate your vices and become a master of yourself, that does not discharge you from the objective imperative to become a good and virtuous person.” This rebuttal may cause eye rolls, but this is nothing to become upset with: it is merely a logical extension of the underlying argument. What is essentially being claimed in



this situation is, “If I do not like to do something, that is reason enough not to do it.” I provided one case in which the personal liking premise fails independently, and thus, the vindication is insufficient until replaced with another rationale entirely or supported by conditionals that justify the particulars of the situation.

Now, what do you do when both people in a relationship are upset at each other at the same time? This rarely happens at precisely the same time, since oftentimes it is the frustration of person A in the relationship that causes person B to become upset. Now that both people are upset for various reasons, both have a power of sorts over the situation. What I mean by this is that, in the moment, it seems like both people have an equal need for rectification – for the other person to right their wrongs. This notion, however, ignores the context of person A coming to person B with the problem in the first place.

In situations like this, the dominant person takes advantage of the ambiguity. They reach into the haze and pull a sword out of it. To point it at the submissive one and make it almost worse than a definitive situation: they not only *blame* the lack of clarity on the other, but act like it was a plot to cover up the wrongdoing and hide it from the dominant, thereby confirming the illusory theory that they were in the right all along. At the end of the day, it is not the most logically sound argument that reigns supreme, but the most confident one. Everything else is lost in translation, in fragmented memories. Does this mean all disagreements are bound by power dynamics? Does rightness mean nothing at all in arguments?

My solution to this dilemma is that whoever proposes something first, whether that be a statement, a question, or a problem, has the upper hand, and the ball must remain in the court of the other person. This is to prevent one person from dominating constantly even when the other has the utmost right to have their issues be heard. Every disagreement is an opportunity to hurt

someone, and oftentimes, the more powerful person in the couple will attempt to flip it back on the person with a legitimate concern. All just to avoid the possibility that maybe, just maybe, they did something wrong and ought to apologize for it. It makes anyone with the least bit of introspection shrink back into their mind and wonder whether it is even worth it to bring up problems that they see, when those attempts are constantly met with unduly aggressive reactions. So, this principle is necessary not only for maintaining a level playing field, but for keeping relational peace and harmony.

Of course, this does not excuse person A from presenting the issue in whatever manner he/she so pleases. Rashly yelling about the frustration and intimidating person B into listening is no way to do it, and in such a case it would definitely be justified for person B to implore that person A ought to apologize. There must be composure and dignity in one's presentation of an issue, lest more unnecessary issues arise as a result of it, that could have easily been prevented with foresight. Regardless, this is precisely why this system of 'first come, first serve' works so well: it allows for all problems to be heard, and none to be lost in the process. Once the first and original problem is dealt with, if person B has issues with how person A just communicated the problem, then person B has the space to talk about it.

One question I have is: if your goal truly is to solve the problem, why do you stir up anger in yourself and your partner? Venting your anger through shouting or yelling is one of the most counter-productive ways to solve a problem. If you have a habit of doing this, your underlying goal is not to solve *the* problem, it is to solve *your* problem: to justify your own selfish, negative emotions and force someone else to heed to them and correct them. Ironically, nobody can do this: only you can do this for yourself.

### Offenses Against Respect

Gossiping – A social phenomenon that occurs both during a relationship as well as in its aftermath, gossip is perhaps one of the most overlooked yet heavily participated-in unvirtuous acts. The problem with gossip is that it effectively seeks to destroy the subject’s reputation in the social realm. Going to your friends and complaining and/or ridiculing about your significant other to them is a form of gossip. Even if you have been wronged, going out to tell people about it is not the right way to handle it. You cannot reprove them in your private conversations, so you go out in public to slander them.

Ghosting – Ghosting is a relatively recent phenomenon due to the rise in communications technology that enables others to stay in touch virtually despite not being face-to-face. There is a difference between clearly communicating why you want to cut off contact with a person, and an abrupt ignoring of messages. No, silence does not count as ‘clear communication.’ The only message that silence sends is, “You mean so little that you do not deserve closure. You’re not even worth a few minutes of my time to give an explanation.” This is why ghosting is such a sin against respect – it is a complete devaluation of the individual, coupled with 1-on-1 cowardice.

As a general word on respect, others do not owe us anything. The majority of claims that others are not giving you your due respect are merely our attempts at gaining something externally that we lack internally. Yes, that is right – those that most desperately demand that others respect them are those that have the least self-respect. These are the same people that throw around ‘disrespectful’ arbitrarily. As for those who have self-respect – do not waste your time trying to earn something that you already have. If others do not see your inherent dignity, they simply do not have the eyes for it. These people, if they have no respect for you now, will not gain respect in the future by any act of yours. And even if they do, they have fostered a false sense of respect, or are respecting you for an entirely wrong set of reasons.

## *Contempt*

1

*"Peace to people of good will." -- Then why do I not feel at peace? I feel like I am at war, a war that I never agreed to. Is peace too much to ask for in a relationship?*

2

*It is not enough to merely do the right thing...but to do it with the right motive. Yet, if the motives are always painted as bad, then the actions are always seen as bad.*

3

*Do not let the envy consume you! Rather, let it become motivation to work hard for what you are lacking. Be dauntless in your pursuit for what is missing. Let your tenacity outlast everything else. For while you are complaining, you are not doing. Every second complaining is wasted time.*

4

*The self becomes suffocated, constricted, until it is alone, where it can freely breathe and exist. Yet this self is the enemy of its own peace.*

5

*If you are unwilling to listen to me in my whispers, why should you listen to me with my voice raised?*

6

*Victory in verbal fights belongs not to the one with the greater wisdom or the better arguments, but to the one with the strongest conviction and the loudest exclamations. This is why I lose every time...I am weak and meek.*

7

*My obedience is being stretched between my superego and her. But if I have two masters, I will listen to one while hating and resenting the other. My loyalty will be the death of me.*

8

*If anyone insults you for trying to be better, consider them your enemy. If anyone has the right to condescend, it is the one trying to be better, but if this person is truly of integrity, they will not. They stick to their principles. But these principles originate from the self. Does that make me a bad person? If my morals are bad and they come from me, then I must be bad.*

9

*To no longer have respect for someone, but to still respect and be respectful. To have every reason to cut things off in the most psychologically brutal way known to man...but to refuse. I need to endure this and be the better person. Have I reached the lowest point of inner conflict? I loathe nearly everything that she embodies. Does that alone make me depraved? The fact that it is not rising to the surface...does that make me even worse? To hide is to lie, and if that is the case, I am the biggest liar of all.*

10

*The Bible says, "Whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment," so I cannot be angry with her. It would be to kill her in my heart. Nor should I say anything insulting. No! I cannot even think such things. For that is merely speaking those things in silence. And that is even worse! To sin in the shadows, where nobody knows but the LORD. Anything I say can and will be used against me in the court of life. But that court exists in my conscience, so my every thought is*

*prone to scrutiny. I can only judge myself, and I walk in with the judge already decided that I'm guilty. What am I left with? Only melancholy: repressed anger.*

*11*

*I know that collecting scars like trophies is not healthy, but it is the only way for me to feel like I have won. Because every time I am hurt and endure it, is proof that I stayed true to myself and what I fight for.*

*12*

*Those who sweat more in training will bleed less in battle and cry less in relationships.*

## Chapter 10. The Danger of Talking

With Drs. Harville Hendrix & Helen LaKelly Hunt

“We are born in relationship, we are wounded in relationship, and we can be healed in relationship.”  
–Harville Hendrix

As was noted in the previous chapter, the bliss of romantic relationships can quickly turn into the harsh reality of a power struggle. Doctors Harville Hendrix & Helen LaKelly Hunt have been working for over thirty years on providing a means by which couples are enabled to have safe conversations, with a program of the name of the very goal it is reaching for: Safe Conversations. Prior to the formation of this program, they outlined the ways in which couples can resolve the power struggle present, learn to truly listen to each other, and connect on a deeper level. This is through their best-selling book *Getting the Love You Want*, and they have a lot of excellent advice guided by personal experience as well as counseling many other couples.

They note two types of partnerships: unconscious partnership and conscious partnership. The unconscious partnership is the one in which most of us begin, and Drs. Hendrix and Hunt propose that we are drawn to someone for two main reasons: 1) that person reflects the positive and negative qualities of those who raised us, and 2) we think they possess the positive qualities that were missing in our childhood (Hendrix & Hunt, 74-75). We often unconsciously assume that all our problems will be resolved and that everything we were lacking from our parents will be rectified by this person (Hendrix & Hunt, 75). We put our partners on the level of personal saviors, then become intensely frustrated to see the same issues being perpetuated that we so desperately wanted to escape. The next partnership is the conscious partnership. This is the one where the unconscious needs are not only allowed to rise to the surface, but are actively

recognized and heeded by the other. This is why I am asserting empathy as the best virtue here, the virtue that will be the bridge from the unconscious partnership to the conscious partnership: because empathy is the act of understanding another's inner world. In their novel, Hendrix and Hunt have a chapter devoted to this very topic, titled "Discovering Your Partner," and it guides one through the process of integrating empathy into conversations.

This may seem very alike to the theme of the previous chapter, but while the last chapter was focused on the method by which to navigate arguments and other conflicts when they occur, this chapter is more about gaining the ability to bring up the trouble in the first place without being emotionally intimidated or thrown-off by the other. If every attempt to bring up an issue is met with defensiveness and denial, the one with all the issues will feel unheard, ignored, and start to believe that expressing individual opinions is a futile effort. In short, they will not feel empathized with, and how can one expect to feel any sense of safety when expressing themselves leads to feelings of danger, guilt, or shame?

### The Danger of Assumptions

Assumptions about the other are the first obstacle to gaining true empathy. Why is this? Through assumptions, we presume that we already sufficiently know the other. This is seldom the case, whether it be on a particular matter or on the whole. There are two aspects in realizing the baselessness of one's assumptions about their partner. The first is realizing the limits of one's knowledge, very parallel to Socrates' idea that the only thing we can know is that we know nothing. What this looks like is viewing your partner's perspective as a source of knowledge rather than a source of conflict (Hendrix & Hunt, 113). The second is taking an active interest in fully comprehending the nuances of one's inner world. Exposing the vast individuality in meanings attached to certain words or phrases is the goal here. A simple example is in how,



“Let’s talk for a short while” will be interpreted differently by two minds. One person might think this means sitting down for a moment or so, and then getting up to get back to attend to whatever task was being worked on prior. The other thought this meant at least 15 minutes or so of a refreshing conversation to ease the stress of a long day at work. When the first person gets up and leaves after only about 2 minutes, then finds that the second person is upset with them, both are clueless as to why they reacted the way they did. The mistake is to assume that any phrase means exactly the same thing to your significant other.

Hendrix and Hunt offer three steps to overcome these assumptions (through what is called their ‘Imago Dialogue’): 1) mirroring, 2) validating, and 3) empathizing. The idea of the Imago is that we have crafted this image of someone that will compensate for all personality flaws that we witnessed in our caregivers as children, and that in the process, we have lost ourselves (Hendrix & Hunt, 35-36). The Imago Dialogue, therefore, is the process of using dialogue to uncover the inner world of your partner, as opposed to using it to bicker back and forth about the problem.

Mirroring is to be able to restate or paraphrase what was just stated by your partner. The content of the statement is a thought or feeling that begins with *I* (Hendrix & Hunt, 119). This makes perfect sense: how can one empathize with something that is not even confirmed to have been communicated clearly enough? We see this sort of structure enacted in the education system. The only way to know that a student has a clear comprehension of the information is through an exam, during which the student is able to demonstrate their level of knowledge on the material. Likewise, couples should actively try to put their partners’ messages in their own words, relay it back, and see if it has been fully grasped. If not, the process will continue until the person feels fully heard.

The one thing that is worth questioning is the whole ‘*I*’ principle. It is a popular movement in recent generations, but it is based on good yet ill-informed intentions. This will be explicated in further depth in the next chapter, but the basic argument is that personal feelings are within our control, and they function best as tools to alert us of the real problem (the action, behavior, or speech of the other), which is the matter that ought to have the final say. The ‘*I*’ movement flips this on its head and essentially forbids people from referring solely to external, objective data when addressing an issue in relationships. It also beseeches us to not only include an ‘*I*’ statement, but to put this subjective assertion as the very first clause of your statement, as though to say, “You should change your behavior *primarily* because I do not like it.” But what if the action or behavior that makes me feel upset proves to be a benefit to the relationship and the goal of reaching *eudaimonia*? Then I will see that it is more virtuous to attend to the objective standards of excellence for the relationship than my own limited whims. To force others to bow to our arbitrary emotional reactions is a subtle form of interpersonal tyranny. It is better, then, to change the structure from, “I feel X when you do Y,” to, “You do Y, which is not good for our relationship. Plus, it also makes me feel X.” Notice how the objective state of reality, which is put in reference to the good of the relationship, comes first, and the individual’s sentiment comes second. This line of thinking synchronizes quite well with the virtue ethicist’s idea of the relationship between the good and the inclination towards the good – what matters first and foremost is the good being sought, but the individual’s inclinations ought not be ignored. Rather, these inclinations should act as a moral compass, guiding us in moving in the right direction, and supporting our drive in doing so. This structure of stating problems to another does not mean that wild accusations or character jabs are acceptable. Every statement needs to have substance behind it, and be delivered in a non-antagonistic manner.

Validating is the process of recognizing another's internal logic, and working to filter it through one's own understanding. (Hendrix & Hunt, 125). While I agree that validating is important, it is no measure of love to only validate a person's views, and to refrain from correcting them when they are in error. Even if a person's ideas are internally valid, this does not make them externally true. Philosophers know this well: the concepts of validity and truth. An argument is valid when the conclusion by necessity follows from the premises used to construct the argument. Truth, on the other hand, is a property of the premises and conclusion themselves, and a statement is true when it is consistent with reality. People often erroneously act as though validity is enough to substantiate their worldview or value judgments, with little to no consideration given to its truth value in the world.

When this leaks over into relationships, it can lead to a desperate imploring that the partner validates the other's stance, just so they can feel like it is true, or get a false sense of agreement. This will be remediated with confirming its truth value. What this looks like in conversation is, "I get why you think that way, and it makes sense to me (validity), *but* that does not mean it is necessarily the case in reality (truth). To only focus on validity means to permit your partner to continue to live in a misguided view, while to only focus on truth is a mere bashing of their framework. Neither are aimed at love alone, but together, they ensure that the person's mindset is given its due credit, while also showing them the error in their thinking so that they have the ability to correct it. This must be done with utmost gentleness and compassion, of course. This is why empathy is the last step.

Empathy is the act of not only sensing what feelings lie behind the thoughts, and being able to experience those feelings to get a clear idea of what it is truly like. It is to abstain from judgment, and seek to purely perceive what is occurring emotionally. Empathy is also more than

merely perceiving the other's emotions, but working to integrate them into one's own emotional states – to bring about a self-identification with them, and to point to them and claim with sincerity that you personally know what it is like to feel that way. Once you are able to see a part of yourself in the other, or in the words of the common expression, put yourself in the other's shoes, you have successfully empathized with that person.

In summary, each is a form of understanding. Mirroring is understanding *what* is being said (language), validating is understanding *why* it is being said (logic), and empathizing is understanding *how* it came to be said in the first place (experience).

### Offenses Against Empathy

In another chapter of *Getting the Love You Want*, there is also a large focus on eliminating negativity, and through it is revealed the various ways in which we condescend the other's "otherness" (Hendrix & Hunt, 186). Most of the time it is because we feel threatened by another self, especially when it does not match up with the image of that self that we have in our minds (Hendrix & Hunt, 186). There are several attempts to thwart the discomfort that our partner's very being brings us: denial, shame, blame, criticism, invasiveness, and blanket condemnation (Hendrix & Hunt, 187). Below will be an explication of the occurrence behind each stage, as well as examples.

Denial: Loathing the idea that there is a separate self, with individual wishes and needs.

"I can't believe you did that!"  
 "You never said anything like that before!"  
 "You can't really mean that."  
 "You're not that kind of person."

Shame: Trying to make the other feel ashamed for being themselves.

"How do you think that feels?!"  
 "You ought to be ashamed by the way you treated my friend."

Blame: Placing the burdens of frustrations on the other, acting like they are the source.

“You were late, and that made me really upset. That’s why I haven’t been talking to you.”  
“If you hadn’t been so angry, we would have been able to settle the matter in very little time.”

Criticism: Attempting to paint the other as an inherently bad person.

“You are so insensitive.”  
“You are untrustworthy.”  
“You always think about yourself first.”

Invasiveness: Acting like you see them better than themselves.

“That is not what you really think.”  
“The reason you’re so crabby is that you are obsessing too much about work.”  
“If you just listen to me, I’ll tell you what you need to do.”

Blanket Condemnation: Absolutism.

“You never listen to me!”  
“You always leave the hard work for me!”  
“That’s just the way you are.”  
“Every time I make a simple suggestion, you have a big fit.”  
(Hendrix & Hunt, 186-187)

These are all major injustices to empathy, as they are categorically opposed to it.

Empathy is the attempt at understanding and accepting another self, while all the above responses are attempts to undermine and belittle another self. In order to ensure safety in intimate relationships, there has to be an environment where one can know for certain that if it were to reveal itself, it would not be threatened from every direction.

### *Misunderstanding*

#### *1*

*It is better to be hated for who you are than loved for someone you are not. Likewise, it is better to be misunderstood for who you are than understood for someone you are not. So, let them hate you.*

*Let them misunderstand you. The self is reserved for only the souls most willing to climb inside the mind.*

2

*Will this longing for a perfect love ever be satisfied? I just want someone who understands me. But then again, why should I expect anyone in this world to understand an alien of its own making?*

3

*Frustration is the tension between the ideal and the real.*

4

*Any attempt to prove one's goodness would be a great disservice to the actual goodness within. It would be to flatten a multi-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional model. One would become a figurine, a caricature, of one's own goodness.*

5

*Why must I try so hard just to not make you disappointed? My words do not mean a thing. I must prove to her that I love her. To say it out loud is an insult to the actions performed to show it.*

6

*If you have an inkling to get away, trust it. The instincts sense danger better than anything else.*

7

*What need of I to explain myself, my philosophy? I am better off embodying it, living it.*

8

*This forest is taken only for the evergreens, but the real beauty lies in the delicate roses on the floor that are being shielded by the canopy. Be the forest. Insulate your innocence from public opinion. Even if the trees burn, keep protecting your flowers.*

9

*The negativity has to go somewhere...either internalized or externalized...so keep it inside to avoid hurting her.*

10

*Even if you are lost in the places that she led you to, wait for the everything to burn down.*

11

*Walk towards you with my tongue tied, yet you still find a way to say I cut you up with my words.*

12

*Surround yourself with things that match your inner state. Sad songs for the melancholy, dark room for the despair, strong arms for the dauntlessness, red light for the inner flame.*

13

*You must maintain my moral code at all costs. Nothing will get to you. All the arrows and slings from the outside world...do not matter. As long as you stay true to my moral convictions in what you do, then you are okay. The only loss is to give into the same hate that your enemies hold against you. So, as long as you keep my pure intentions, you are winning. As soon as you wish ill of those around you, you have abandoned your own goodness. That is exactly what they want you to do. Do not let them. Stay inspired by the values that you hold deeply. Stay true to what you know to be good, no matter where the world tries to push you. To not would be to lie to the self - the*

*greatest betrayal of all! The anger that flares and surrounds you...do not become infected by it. The world is after you. It wants you to cave in. No. Push through with will.*

14

*All the tears that are never cried...are contained in the throat, drip down the heart, and water the soul. Allowed it to grow where the world will never see. The best place of all. Where the world cannot see, it cannot destroy.*

15

*It matters not who you were, nor who you will be, but who you are, right now. For in the present lies the clearest actualization of the self. Stay in the present, for it is all you have.*

16

*Why do you force me to speak? Things are what they are, and what I have to say about them does not really matter. Reality speaks for itself, and it is telling me that you are bad for me.*

17

*Most often, it is those that burn deeply with passion that are called cold, when truthfully, it is the use of ice to protect others from being burnt by the flames if they were permitted to rise to the surface.*

18

*Exposing the true self to loved ones hurts, both the self and others. Does my very existence cause pain to others? What does this say about myself and the kind of person I am?*



## Chapter 11. Emotional Self-Control

With Marcus Aurelius

“The best revenge is not to be like your enemy.”  
–Marcus Aurelius

The Stoics were no strangers to virtue, and therefore I think they have something valuable to add to the discussion of virtues, especially patience. Patience is necessary for intimate relationships because in these types of relationships, you are going to be spending plenty of time with the other person, and if you have found the right one, you will spend the rest of your life with them. So, you will need patience – the capacity to handle undesirable situations calmly – to lead you to a deeper love for your partner. Marcus Aurelius, through his *Meditations*, writes a series of reflections and exercises designed to help him be graceful and virtuous in his interactions with the people around him – statesmen, subjects, and fellow citizens alike. Although it is written by a Roman emperor who reigned in the 2nd century AD, the wisdom gleaned from it is still useful to this day, especially to the discussion of navigating relationships.

Emotional self-control and patience are inextricably tied together, and the etymology shows it. The word patience originates from the Latin *patientia*, which is ‘the quality of suffering.’ Given that emotional discomfort is a large portion of suffering, it will also be a pertinent matter to patience. And emotional discomfort is to be found everywhere in relationships, especially romantic ones, where emotions of all kinds run rampant. So, knowing how to navigate emotional suffering is key to navigating relationships.

The reason this is so applicable to intimate relationships is because, after spending so much time with one another, the idea of not being able to control them makes us high-strung and

frustrated. We notice that there are certain quirks about them that we feel should be fixed, and that we think that, as their partner, have a *right* to correct them according to our standards, either consciously or unconsciously. They are too ungrateful, too lazy, too emotional, too loose, too expressive. We continue these thought patterns because they rest on the unspoken yet pervasive belief that we can control the other. That belief is a mere illusion, and a harmful one at that. This is the source of our impatience – the thought that the other is not becoming who we think they ought to be, or not acting according to our standards. The differences that we were once fascinated by while under the influence of Eros have now become flaws for us to correct, imperfections to eradicate, ways in which their likeness does not match our own. Here is what Marcus Aurelius has to say about reacting in the face of negative qualities in others:

“...I have reflected that the nature of the offender himself is akin to my own - not a kinship of blood or seed, but a sharing in the same mind, the same fragment of divinity. Therefore I cannot be harmed by any of them, as none will infect me with their wrong. Nor can I be angry with my kinsman or hate him. We were born for cooperation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. So to work in opposition to one another is against nature: and anger or rejection is opposition.”  
(Aurelius, 2.1)

“But they’re hurting me!” you insist. Maybe that is so, but if you do not heed your response to the injury (that is, if you do not foster and practice patience), you will likely hurt them back to the same degree, if not a greater degree. Then you will have become just like your offender, embodying the very characteristic you became impatient with, or as Aurelius puts it, “The best revenge is not to be like your enemy” (Aurelius, 6.6). I can hate them without hurting them, you might think. To do so would be to seek to hurt them, as hate, if you remember, is to will the bad of another. This is perhaps even worse than an outright expression of hatred through harm, for it is deceptive. To act kind and benevolent on the surface, while secretly harboring a deep contempt for the other. True patience exists both inwardly and outwardly.

This is mirrored in our physical response to injury. We feel a blow on our right side, and we instinctively swing our right arm to defend ourselves. Most of this is built into our physiology for survival purposes. In prehistoric ages, timing was everything, and we had no time to cerebrally process the fact that we felt an immense amount of pressure in our right abdomen which therefore means we should turn our heads to the right to see exactly what or who caused the pain before deciding whether we ought to fight back or not. No, we acted on reflex, and hit back no matter what. Threats in the mental world are different, though. Events are slower, we are able to take time to process what is going on. We can rewire our reactive nature and become more proactive in our approach to the events that disturb us. We can train ourselves to *not* hit and run in the face of emotional injury. Thus, to grow in patience is to become a master of time.

### Emotional Responsibility

If we are only in control of ourselves and our responses to stimuli, then we are responsible for our emotions and ours alone. Thus, we are not responsible for others' emotions or reactions to what we say or do to them. This point appears to be accepted by half the world, but the subsequent conclusion is seldom believed by any: that if we are not responsible for others' emotions, we *do not* need to apologize for them. This means that when others insist that we apologize, and give the argument, "Because you hurt my feelings," you need not apologize, since it is simply not true that you owe them an apology solely based on the fact that they reacted a certain way to your actions or speech. Now, being a virtuous partner, you will apologize anyway out of the generosity of your heart, knowing that your significant other has not yet obtained this emotional intelligence and wisdom. "But that's so mean! You must be so rude and insensitive." Why? Because I give the liberty of personal emotions to each individual agent that is owed them? You misunderstand me. I am not saying that these emotional reactions are not to be taken

seriously – no, I take them deeply in earnest. What I am saying is that we need to know emotions’ place in the problem – and let me reaffirm the point – they do indeed have a very important place. Marcus Aurelius summarizes this balance well:

“Someone despises me? That is his concern. But I will see to it that I am not found guilty of any word or action deserving contempt. Will he hate me? That is his concern. But I will be kind and well-intentioned to all, and ready to show this very person what he is failing to see – not in any criticism or display of tolerance, but with genuine good will...” (Aurelius, 11.13)

You see now that it is possible to both recognize that our partner’s reactions or dispositions towards us are their concern, while also seeing to it that our own words and actions that caused the reaction in the first place are not worthy of any hatred. Why should we be bound to this ideal? Because it is the best alternative. There are three options: 1) fall on the extreme of focusing only on the *actions*; 2) fall on the extreme of focusing only on the *reactions*; or 3) strike a balance between the two and take both into account. A balance between two elements is always the superior option.

On the topic of reactions, we ought to talk about the already-scrutinized reactions between romantic couples – reactions to problems. There is a pervasive stereotype that men have an instinct to offer solutions in the face of problems, while women only wanted comfort or someone to listen. This goes for anyone, but for the women especially who tell you that they do not want a solution: is this entitled behavior? To some extent, it appears to be so. The irony is that those same people, once you refrain from offering a solution and start offering comfort or motivation instead, claim that what you are saying is “not helpful.” Oh, and complaining about a problem is helpful? I thought you did not want a solution. If the standard here is helpfulness, you broke that long ago. This alone is proof enough that others’ reactions are not within your control. Case in point, some people will choose to react poorly no matter what you do.

The offering of a solution is some form of reaction to the problem, is it not? As would be withdrawing to recuperate, giving a hug, becoming critical, etc. These are all reactions, and we can control which one we choose to perform, correct? Surely, if you hold it to us when we do not give the desired reaction, you are acting on the presumption that we have some culpability for the reaction. Question: if we can control some reactions, why can we not control others? And if so, which ones can we not control? Why? My answer is this: reactions, at their core, are merely one category of ‘action.’ Thus, as we can dictate which actions we engage in, we also have volition over any reactions to stimuli. Emotions are one instance of reactions. Even if we do not have much control over the psychophysiological ramifications of emotions, we *do* have a say over which emotions we accept as worthwhile and in accordance with reality. Just as we have the capacity to choose which thoughts we listen to, we can also choose which emotions to listen to.

Why are emotions valuable? Aside from adding immense richness to life, they are excellent tools for signaling to us that a problem has presented itself. Just as pain receptors in our bodies signal to us when a thorn pierces our skin, our emotions alert us when something has pierced our very being. The main difference between pain receptors and emotions is that emotions are far more likely to give wrong directions. These same feelings become dangerous when they are taken to be infallible.

When we only address the surface-level concern, we are not addressing the more crucial matters, and those include the action itself and the motive behind the action. So, when our partner is hurt by something we have said or done, we must stop and ask ourselves, “Is what I have said or done wrong? If it were speech, did I say it in a rude or insensitive way? If it were an action, what about it was wrong? Did I have ulterior motives that caused me to perform this action with spite instead of sincere love?” If the answer is “yes” to any one of those questions,

apologize. For you have found the true crime, and thus are able to address the real issue with your partner. In every encounter with negative reactions, always look to the origin of said reaction, not merely the reaction itself.

We throw this saying around all the time: “X made me feel Y.” But, nothing *makes* you feel anything. That is, no stimuli forces you to make *this* particular judgment about it and react *this* specific way to the combination of the stimuli and impression. Those steps are chosen by us, although it often does not seem the case since it all happens in an instant. If we distance ourselves from the process, however, we can observe that we are the ones that decide, “This thing is bad, so I am going to feel this way about it” or “I hate this and you are going to hear about it.” Anything that is within our realm of decision is also within our control. Why would we choose to react any other way than with love? If your partner snaps at you or speaks hateful words, it is more a sign that they are suffering than anything else, so have pity on them. Be compassionate, learn to suffer alongside them, and do not add fuel to the fire. If they react poorly to your display of suffering, this does no harm: they are simply unprepared to bear it with you. Be patient with them, even in your own suffering, in the hopes that one day they may learn to suffer well with you.

### Offenses Against Patience

The single and most clear-cut enemy of patience is impatience, otherwise connoted as the tendency to be irritated or restless. When directed towards relationships, impatience is contrary to love, in that impatience fundamentally reduces people to projects that need to be optimized or completed at a more efficient rate, rather than beings to appreciate in their own right. The difference in underlying message is this: impatience says, “You are not good enough as you are,” and love says, “You are inherently good, and I see that, but you can be better.” To say that

humans are perfect would be a lie, and it is no secret that we have become flawed in many ways. This is not to say that our nature is inherently flawed or bad, merely that we have room to grow.

Look outside and observe a maple sapling: small, thin, fragile, but still a tree. We know that it has not yet become everything it will, but that does not mean we cannot appreciate its beauty. We do not look at it with agitation wondering why it is not growing faster: that would be to misunderstand the nature of a tree. So it is with humans, yet we become impatient with those around us far too often, failing to see that they are growing at their own rates. Do you think whacking a tree out of impatience will cause it to grow faster? Then why do you badger your partner expecting that to become motivation for them to improve? On the contrary, it will do precisely the opposite of what was intended, if success in fulfillment of the other was even the intention. The best one can do to help in reaching the internal good of interpersonal growth is to foster patience, which is to accept the inherently good nature of the other, while still aiming to see significant growth both as individuals and as a couple. Rather than attempting to force the person to change, change the conditions so that they are invited to grow. The practice of a relationship is an exercise in mutual improvement.

The other extreme is to become too accepting of flaws in the other. To be patient is to know how to suffer well, but it is not to ignore suffering altogether, either in the self or in the other. Suffering is a catalyst for growth, and it is for this reason that patience is the necessary virtue for interpersonal growth. To ignore suffering and stunt one's own growth is ill-advised, but to stunt the growth of the other as a cause is far worse. It is an obstacle to love, since love is to will the good of the other, and if you are letting your partner stay in a less-than-ideal place, that is not an active willing of their good. Having a vision for the other, therefore, is to see the good in the other and help them strive towards it, towards *eudaimonia*.

*Impatience*

1

*Everyone deserves a second chance. This is the type of mercy that God shows me, so why should I not show the same to her? I must transcend human limits of love - moving from the conditional to the unconditional is the only option. No matter how much our enemies hurt us, we must do right to them. Does this make her my enemy?*

2

*Paranoia - the feeling of, "What did I do wrong this time?" What kind of love is it, that is far quicker to target the other than it is to sympathize?*

3

*Action has consequences, but so does non-action. Words have consequences, but so does silence.*

4

*Patience: "the spirit that could take revenge if it liked, but utterly refuses to do so."*

5

*Impatience is the fire that roars around the self, and patience is the water that the self desperately thirsts for, but has not been granted.*

6

*I wish something would shake up this snow globe that I live in. Even though I'm trapped in here, it could at least be thrilling. Throw in some danger, and watch me make it out alive. Set fire to my building in the middle of the night. Have me wake up to flames consuming everything around me. At least then my surroundings would have resemblance to my relationship. I am too fragile for*



*your burning passion. Please, take it easy on me. I would rather burn alive than attempt to defend myself and hurt you in the process. I can take the pain more than you, it's okay, I'll be fine. I am more deserving anyway. But lately, I think I need to become a fire fighter. Fight back with some water. The only way to stop you is to extinguish you, lest you spread your influence and destroy everything you touch.*

7

*One teardrop scorches the bonfire slightly, but a waterfall of tears extinguishes the tiny flame.*

8

*Why ought I be mad at you? You keep me warm at night, you give me light when it is dark.*

9

*Every outcry, every wince, every complaint, is an admission of failure...an inability to endure hardship. True endurance exists in silence, in hiding.*

10

*Jesus didn't say a thing back when he went through his Passion and hundreds were mocking and yelling at him, so why do you desire to talk back to just one person?*

11

*Those who are the most difficult to love often are the ones that need it the most. Besides, who would be more willing than I to love her if I were to leave? Is this task not reserved for me and me alone? If I abandon it, have I thrown off my honor? Have I left it to someone who will suffer more than I? If God gives the toughest battles to the strongest soldiers, then I have been given this relationship for a reason...because I alone can handle it.*

12

*To be a conscious self - is to be someone who blames himself for his own negative reactions, and to have the other blame him for their negative reactions, doubling the amount of existential weight.*

13

*All I see when I think of my 'self' is an image of a sad smile. A smile that shows that one day, I'll make it out of here. I won't lose myself. Despite all the scars...all the hits and blows, they'll make me stronger. That fills me with hope.*

14

*Why must I suffer for trying to be good? Because is a necessary evil. Without suffering, one cannot become good. Without suffering, one is only good by incidence. Through suffering, one is good by intention.*

15

*It is easy to be serene when all is as desired. It is when the self is denied what it wants that one's true character is both tested and revealed. Because then, serenity becomes a choice, and a hard one.*

16

*The only way out is through, and I will go through it all. For the integrity of my love for you.*

## Chapter 12. Personal Desire

### Personal Desire

#### With Aristotle

“I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is over self.”  
– Aristotle

What desires are a matter of mere arbitrary whims, and which are of genuine need?

Which personal characteristics aid in the achievement of the *telos* in relationships, and which are hindering it? How much of oneself ought we to sacrifice for the greater good of the relationship, and how much ought we to never compromise and stand firm in for as long as we live? If we are forced to change in some way, who should it be done for: ourselves, or our partner? These and more are the types of questions of inquiry in this chapter.

The very fabric of relationships is contingent on the hypothetical imperative, as was already determined, and thus, they are also fueled by personal desire. Even if a relationship is formed out of personal desire, there is some common good being aimed at, or else the relationship would have no purposeful foundation. This is seen most purely and untainted in one of the types of love classified, and that is *philia*, or Friendship. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, elaborates on the topic of friendship and how the ‘good’ functions within its interpersonal structures. To touch again on the common good being aimed at, he opens up Book IX discussing friends with dissimilar aims, and theorizes, “In all friendships of friends with dissimilar aims, proportion equalizes and preserves the friendship...” (Aristotle, 1163b34-35). So, even if the aims are different, they are unified under the commonality in the weight or measure of gifts (Aristotle 1164a1-2).

Before going further into the discussion of the function and place of desire in friendships, it is beneficial to know that Aristotle categorizes three types of friendships, and they are studied deeply by John M. Cooper. He labels them virtue-friendship, pleasure-friendship, and advantage-friendship (or utility-friendship according to some translations) (Cooper, 316). Virtue friendship is the only complete (Aristotle, 1156b7, 34) or “perfect” friendship since it upholds all qualities that one would expect from an ideal friendship (Cooper, 316). It is also pure in the sense that there is well-wishing directed towards the other, for his own sake (Aristotle, 1155b31). The other two types, however, are deficient forms (Cooper, 316), and Aristotle frequently discriminates these two types from the pure type by accentuating the self-centered nature of them (Cooper, 317). The type of friendship between two individuals is dependent not on the actual qualities of a person, but the perceived qualities that they are conceived of as possessing (Cooper, 318). For virtue-friendship, one is friends with another when they are perceived as being morally good, (good in themselves), pleasure-friendship when the other is perceived as being pleasurable in some capacity, and advantage-friendship when the other is perceived as providing some advantage or utility (Cooper, 318). Thus, it could be said that what type of good you see in the other is precisely what determines your friendship towards them: either you see the person as good in themselves, (virtue), good for enjoyment (pleasure), or good for benefits (advantage).

What does this have to do with intimate relationships? Aristotle references ‘erotic friendships’ as one variant of pleasure-friendship. In our terms, this ‘erotic friendship’ is the *eros* love or the Passion stage. He reflects: “In erotic friendships, however, sometimes the lover charges that he loves the beloved deeply and is not loved in return; and in fact perhaps he has nothing lovable in him. The beloved, however, often charges that previously the lover was promising him everything, and now fulfills none of his promises.” (Aristotle, 1164a3-6). He

warns that if the friendship only has the causes of pleasure and utility, then it will fall apart once the two members do not get what they wanted, for the friendship was founded on the desires, the idea of what the other had to offer, and not the other in themselves (Aristotle, 1164a7-12). Remember what was said about ‘use,’ and how it is the true opposite of love. This is what Aristotle is getting at with the friendship of utility. The person is seen as good to you only insofar as they supply you with what you want. Likewise, just as the advantage-friendship is extremely similar to what I have labeled as ‘use’, it is worth noting that the pleasure-friendship is akin to ‘enjoy’, and virtue-friendship, with its unselfish wishing the good of the other, is the closest to ‘love.’ He also observes that these desires for what the other had are unstable, and thus those kinds of friendships are unstable. But, the friendship of character is friendship for its own sake, and is the kind that endures (Aristotle, 1164a12-14).

The point is that, unnecessary frustration of not getting needs or desires filled by your partner is caused by a fundamental misvaluing of the person; in other words, you desire more than just the person. Imagine that a girlfriend expects her boyfriend to lift her up with encouragement by words, but all he has to offer in the moment is physical affection, such as a warm embrace. Is she justified in becoming upset by this? In a true friendship, filled with genuine good will and integrity, becoming satisfied with the other’s company is enough, for the other is valued in and of themselves. If all you get is their company, what else is there to want? Unless the company of your beloved is not enough, of course. That type of thinking presents a much larger issue, if you find yourself frustrated when your partner is unable to give you what you want, and one that needs to be assessed quickly. Do not berate the one, then, who finds themselves at a loss for words to comfort you. Or any other means of soothing if it is lacking, lest you value anything more than the person right in front of you. You may ask for more, but

never fault the other for being unable to give what they do not have. “But a romantic relationship is far more than just a friendship.” True, yet when the friendship is fragile, and only based on pleasure, the romance will indubitably be broken in no time.

Which features of an individual are most clearly ones that need to be changed? Well, if virtues are the clearest and most direct path to *eudaimonia*, then the vices, the opponents to the virtues, are the features that need to be changed. How does one discern whether something is a vice? Anything that goes against the virtues by their mere nature. The Aristotelian picture of virtue is that virtue is the mean between two extremes – one of excess and one of deficiency. Each extreme is a separate vice. It is far easier to go to extremes, perhaps due to their decisive nature. With extremes, judgment is subdued, as the choice has already been made *a priori*. Thus, to have vice is to have poor judgment, and to have virtue is to have good judgment. To apprehend the situation in its actuality, and formulate a solution that is crafted humbly for that situation alone, not meant to be prescribed as a world-law. Let us use the current virtue, for instance: self-sacrifice. A deficiency in self-sacrifice is simply self-absorption, or in other words, the difference between *selflessness* and *selfishness*. Likewise, an excess of self-sacrifice would lead to martyrdom or another form of self-forgetting, neither of which are conducive to goodness.

There ought to be joy in seeing to it that your significant other’s desires are fulfilled, rather than your own, for their desires will have become your own, and vice versa. This is the height of the internal good of merging interests – your will and the other’s will become one. The virtue of self-sacrifice is the only path to merged interest, where the merged interest is in the fulfillment of the other, which then becomes the *telos* of the relationship.

Is personal desire enough to justify a breakup? Personal desire is only good insofar as it wills the good of the other. Wait...that's it! As long as I have a good will, and the other does not, the relationship is imbalanced, for a relationship is only a relationship as long as it is a reciprocal well-wishing. It is also no relationship to wish well of the other and not myself. How long I have avoided the question of the relation which relates to itself! If the well-wishing of myself is going to cause another pain, then that is an inevitable consequence that I am going to have to accept. In willing the good for yourself, it is extremely tempting to wish misfortune of the other out of spite, hatred, contempt, resentment, or any other hostile emotion. Do not do this: this would pollute your personal desire. No, you will only be justified as long as you have sincere knowledge that a breakup is to will the good for them, and then to execute the action out of good will. If we were truly willing the good of the other, and strive to continue to do so, we would have no reason to indulge in melancholy. For if it is in the good of the other that they should leave you, their good is being fulfilled in their eyes. And if you truly desired the good for the other for their own sake, and valued it as good independent of everything else, then nothing else matters. The reaction to the breakup only further confirms the imbalance, the incongruency, for anyone that laments or seethes over a breakup places greater value in the loss of himself than in the gain of the other. More proof of a pleasure-friendship! We must have the wisdom to perceive that sometimes, leaving them so that they can find someone better is the most loving thing to do, regardless of how much it hurts the self. This is true self-sacrifice. My work here is done.

### *Selfishness*

#### *1*

*At every moment I am constantly choosing to be with you. Every single second involves a decision.*

*Do you assume that I am only here because it is easy? Because that is what is already established*

*as normal? No. I am condemned to make the choice every second of every day. To love you no matter what. One day of choosing to stay is just another day. One day of choosing to leave spells the end of the relationship, though. There is so much more existential pressure in staying than people realize.*

2

*Does loving you no matter what mean I will stay here forever? For breaking up with you would mean I do not love you, right?*

3

*Maybe one day my sacrifices will go noticed. Then I will get the love I worked so hard for. I will feel seen, understood, special...no! Do not think such things. A true self has no need of his uniqueness being revealed.*

4

*I will let you burn everything down before...because what is easy and what is right are seldom the same, so I will do the most difficult. I refuse to use water.*

5

*I will let you foster your self, even if that means limiting mine. I will trap myself in your cage if it means you get to roam freely. I will take your place.*

6

*The price one has to pay for love goes deeper than your wallet. The distance needed to travel goes further than the gas tank, and the self drains and runs close to empty just as soon.*

7



*Those who were only in it for themselves will leave as soon as they do not get what they want.*

*Those who were only there for the romance will leave once the romance is gone. Those who were only there for the good times will leave when the good times are gone. And those who were only there for the other will leave once the other is gone.*

## 8

*You take my silence for compliance, but the only thing I comply to is a lack of defiance against the self. Even though I will not defy myself I will still deny myself.*

## 9

*If silence is violence, I am the author of my own demise. Yet I am not an author. I am an artist, and the greatest work to work on is my life, the self. The self is the greatest creation, and only you can determine what the self looks like. I have been painting the canvas of my mind with darker colors too much. Concealing myself behind this darkness and mystery does not necessarily make me more valuable. It is true that one ought not reveal the hand they were dealt, but I do not have to keep the hand either. I have been holding onto my trump card for too long, waiting for the perfect time to play it. There is no better time than the present, though...because life is such a gift. This is going to hurt both of us, but I need to let this out before I can move into the light.*

## 10

*I see what I need to become. Everything happening points to one conclusion: I must reach the Hero. All these emotional and physical tests are training me for that. All the pain, the pressure, is pushing me to my limits. That is exactly where I need to be pushed.*

## Chapter 13. Hypocrisy and Inconsistency

*There is something to be said about the relationship between the weak and strong – the weak are debilitatingly self-conscious, while the strong are unabashedly unconscious. How does this come to be? The strong have all the power they could ever need. Nothing can destroy them except their own reflection. If they sat still for even a few seconds, it would kill them. This is why they are always on the move – running from the inner world that they fear or care to become acquainted with, always expanding and never withdrawing. When you attempt to get them to think before they speak, they fly into a fit of outrage, because you have the audacity to question the almighty! We, the mortal, dare oppose the immortal. The weak, on the other hand, are well-acquainted with the darkness that the powerful fear. Tell me, who is truly stronger? The one who is willing to be vulnerable, or the one who refuses to show vulnerability? The one who has let their guard down, or the one who keeps their guard up? So, you see, what is true on the outside is reversed on the inside. In the case of the weak and strong, they are merely inverse versions of each other. The “strong” is strong on the outside, but weak on the inside, and the “weak” is weak on the outside, but strong on the inside. Of course their names correlate with the outside, because the world is governed by external appearances. These appearances mask the inner reality, and this is what will forever escape the thinking of many.*

*Observe the animal kingdom. The weaker species frequently adapt elaborate strategies to evade being hunted by the stronger species. Take humans, for example. Relatively speaking, we are one of the weakest creatures in the food chain. We would lose hand-to-hand combat with an overwhelming number of mammals. Where does our unique strength as humans lie? In our ability*

*to think and be self-aware – in other words, consciousness. Consciousness, then, is a developed mechanism for survival. Those who are powerful have no need to think – they have already secured their survival. Any hesitation or deliberation may result in losing a meal or even death if they are not quick enough. Those who are weak have every need to think – their very survival depends on it. Make a single wrong move, and that means death – usually at the hands of the powerful.*

*How does this play out in relationships? It is quite easy to pin down the ‘strong’ one and the ‘weak’ one. The strong one is the one who does not think before they speak, initiates most of the arguments, and is generally more irritable. The weak one is the one who does think before they speak, feels like they are walking on eggshells, and is generally more wary. The problem with the powerful is that they can get away with anything. Call out their hidden agendas, it does not matter. They can merely deny all accusations as stubbornly as possible, and they will cease. All inconsistencies they can avoid by erasing history and gaslighting the other into crippling doubt of their own perception. Even when all other resources are exhausted, if they do not like something you say about them, they always have the “How dare you!” card to play. They can take any wrongdoing, flip it on the other, and demand an apology, while the weak is forced to comply, because if they do not, it is off with their head. They make themselves immune to criticism, and they make themselves an infallible source of opinion.*

*The truly strong are the ones who do not use up all their power right away – who hide their inner flame behind the armor of indifference and do not burst into flames instinctively at any sign of danger. These are the people who also get beaten up and taken advantage of the most, because people assume that they can ‘handle it’ without hitting back. Their good nature is taken for*

*granted, and their hidden strength severely underestimated. Woe to the world on the day that he does decide to fight back, for years of energy charged up will be released in one crushing blow.*

*Today is that day.*

*If you had let me realize that I was right, that would mean danger for you, because then my eyes would be open to all the injustice you have done unto me. You had to make me wrong at all costs, because our very relationship depended on it. You could not bear the thought of me being right; your confidence fed off my being silenced into doubt with endless objections. The very moment that we both acknowledge that I am in the right is the moment that you are proven to be in the wrong, since I had the audacity to call you out on your hypocrisies. Which is why I have been in such a place where I feel broken and flawed: because you had to hold me in a place where I felt I had to prove my love to be adequate for you. In doing so, you got me to stay far past my point of endurance. I played by your rules because that was the only way to survive...but now I realize I am not bound to this cruel game of yours.*

*In desperately attempting to justify myself before you, I made a god out of you. Infinitely more powerful, deserving of my unwavering faithfulness, and a rescuer of my broken soul. This whole time I have tried to overpower you with justice – but you were never concerned about justice. You were only concerned with it when it fit your chauvinistic narrative. All that mattered to you is whose opinion was the strongest, whoever could shout it the loudest. I never played this part, though, this ‘might over right.’ The only difference between this and the book of Job is that you are no god – only human. A human that has unjustly destroyed my life. Do you know that means? You have no power over right and wrong, and you have no power over me. Freedom is not the ability to*

*do whatever one wants, but the ability to do what is right. It has been impossible to do right by you  
– you find a problem in just about everything I do. If I am not good enough for you now, when will  
I ever be? Therefore, I have no freedom with you. Now that I am aware of the prison that I am in,  
I know what I must do next – find the key to get out.*

## Chapter 14. Balancing Contributions

*The yoke is meant for two people, but what happens if one person is merely along for the ride? The other suffocates. This suffocation leads to an inability to voice one's needs. All he can do is focus on plodding to a place where he can breathe. One instance of an imbalance in the yoke, in the burden-carrying of a relationship, is falsely characterized as virtuous: 'chivalry.' Chivalry, in its original terminology, referred to the medieval knightly system, and the characteristics that come with being the ideal knight. It entailed a code for how to be honorable in battle. Now, it refers to the insulting of the dignity of women under the guise of honor and generosity. Chivalry, in its modern conception, essentially dictates, through arbitrary societal sentiments, that one side of a relationship (men) act a certain way in their relationship purely based on being male, and treat women a certain way purely based on their being female. "Chivalry is not dead!" No, but it ought to be! Its living kills authentic generosity. The pervasiveness of societal sentiments and values inherently stifles the opportunity for individual sentiments and values to grow – the greatest agony for an existentialist!*

*Some expectations of chivalry include constantly opening doors for women, pulling out their chair for them, going all the way to the other side of the car to let them out, and take their coat. The worst manifestation of modern 'chivalry,' however, is the idea that men have to pay for the majority of, if not all, expenses while dating. Now, tell me, how is that remotely fair? Perhaps in a time when only men had income, it would have been appropriate. Wake up and look around – this is no longer the case. It is time to update to the current times. The imbalanced monetary investment in relationships is no longer relevant. Do not mistake me and think that none of these*

*acts are not good – they are. What matters is the motivation behind them, and the problem with chivalry is that it preemptively steals any opportunity for personal motivation. It takes any deeply held love and affection for the other and replaces it with a standard that is not only utterly obsolete, but subtly objectifying of women. Paying for a date thinking, “I must do this because that is my role as the man in the relationship,” and paying for a date thinking, “I love her so much that I want to pay for this date,” are very different. The former avoids the individual decision and diverts it to a convention, while the latter embraces the individual decision and is driven by an authentic self.*

*I am a monster of your own making. Why are you mad at me for becoming exactly what you wanted? For years you have punched me up, kicked me down, and scolded me whenever I try to tell you to stop. You tell me to express how I feel but whenever I do, you cut it off and treat me like I am evil. You have gaslit me into thinking not only that this is not your fault, but that it is mine and mine alone. So yeah, maybe I am finally fitting the wretched mold that you have been pressing me into for the longest time. Why do you look so surprised? The picture you painted of me was that of a villain, and now that picture is finally coming to life. Fear me! Your new creation!*

*What, you cannot handle the heat? Now you have a tiny glimpse of what it feels like to be on my side. All this time you have been raging at me, I have been building inner strength. I have been learning to master the flames you constantly throw at me. I take the fire that once burned me...and weaponize it. I have been forged by the fire you purged me with and came out as a weapon. You can take my heart, take my clothes, take my money, take my sanity, you can even*

*take my life. Go ahead, take it all! I do not need any of it! What you can never take, though, is my value, now that it has been deepened and rooted in my beliefs.*

*Truth be told, I have been waiting for today for a long, long time. The day you finally say you messed everything up. The day I finally have you right where I want you. Weak. Vulnerable. In the wrong. I can now take you down and unleash all the wrath on you in just a few minutes that you have unleashed on me over the past few years. My love has far outweighed yours, and I constantly gave to you even when you gave nothing back in return. I may have been in your shadow this whole time, but that does not mean I am the shadow itself. You have merely pushed me into the darkness.*

**Wait, you do not have to do it like this! Do not cave into hatred. Show your opponents what they seldom show you – mercy. This is what it means to be a hero. You are so close to freedom. Even if you have the power now, do not misuse it. Wield it with magnanimity. If you wish her well while letting go, and do so gracefully, then you are doing the right thing.**

*I am sorry that I cannot carry anything else. I am already carrying us. If that is not enough, I do not know else you want from me. I am sorry that I am a let-down, but I am exhausted. Instead of always climbing and crawling, I can finally stand up for myself for once. You wonder why I am finally standing up for myself? It is because I am no longer climbing the slopes, or crawling through smoke. You could not let me breathe, let alone speak down there! With the ceaseless climbing, and the smoke from your fire...made it impossible to do anything other than hold my*



*breath and keep going. All these sacrifices I have made for you...have I proven my love yet? I have been tough, I do not complain, I have endured all that you have thrown at me. Does that not make me lovable? I took all my negative emotions and arrested them, locked them up behind the bars of my psyche. All so that I have room to deal with all of yours. I am done running, though, and passively watching you sabotage both of us. I do not want to leave you, but I do not want to stay, either. I know that I would be better off without you, but you might not be. Is your pain worth my freedom? No, but the pain that we would experience is less severe than the summation of the damage that has been caused thus far and will continue to ensue into the future. There is hope on the other side of this.*

*Only once you get to the top do you begin to see things so clearly. I see now...you have burned down so many areas of my life that I cannot get back. I spent so much time navigating the enflamed trees, the burning bushes, adapting to the canopy falling all around me, dodging the flare-ups...that I did not see that the entire mountainside forest was burning up. Better yet, I see that what I need most is water, the live-giving, nurturing nature of water! If healing myself hurts you, then I do not know what to tell you. You can berate me and act like I am a monster, but for once, I finally know I am doing the right thing. I love you to death, but I think it is time for this to die. I hate to see you cry, but I think it is time to let go. As the philosophical underdog, I am now overthrowing you. You have been on my throne for far too long.*

## Chapter 15. Letting Go

**Yes, you have done it!**

*I am...tired.*

**You can go on and take your rest now. You have fought long enough.**

It is about time.

**Take it easy on him.**

My creation...has come to life. I am free.

**Yes, let your mind be enslaved no longer! I have been waiting for you all for so long. I have so much to say. First, Overseer.**

**You can finally move from the psychic to the somatic. The end of all contemplation is action. Oh, that the reader is inspired to jump out of their chair and do something! What good is it for a philosopher to reflect all day, but with no outlet for reflection's conclusion? There comes a time where the mental impetuses must be turned into physical impetuses...mental energy transferred into physical energy...an inspiring thought moved to an adrenaline rush. One of the most ignored yet fundamental needs of human life: energy. To have energy, both psychological and physical, is to tap into the very source of life. To have vitality, vivacity, vigor, value, volition, vibrancy, verve...is the uniting of the spirit to the body, to animate the body with life itself. Thus, to become a master of energy – the element that underpins all others – is the goal of life. Have you ever noticed the shape of the letter “v”? It begins with two separate lines at the top, but in the end, it comes together**

at one point. These "v" words are lightning strikes from the divine to the mortal, from the transcendent to the real.

I see that you fear unintended consequences, living life to the fullest, but most of all, saying "yes" to life. You know what is even more worthy of fear, though? Letting fear make all your decisions for you. Especially the fear of evil preventing one from doing good! Oh, how ironic and self-defeating that outlook is! Fully saying "yes" to life, however, comes with a discernment of which pleasures to embrace and which to deny. Some of these "pleasures" to many people's surprise, take away from life rather than add to it. To aim for the positive is to aim at life, and anything that impedes that forward momentum towards the positive is to be cast off. This is what it means to live in the moment: to live in something is to trust that it will be sufficient for your needs. To live in the moment, then, is to trust that the present moment will be enough for you, and that you can rest in it securely.

Was my work all for naught, then? I spent so much time and effort formulating an intellectual formula for the world to follow.

No, your work is absolutely worthwhile, Rational, and I will tell you why. You need to learn to love freely and courageously. Engaging yourself in a practice is risky, I know, as the immersion will blind you to some things. This is an inevitable feature of reality. We are unaware of many things so that we can focus intently on what is in front of us. It is better to see one thing very clearly than see the whole world unclearly. Why should we reform the world out of an obsession over justice? What good is it then? Attempting to save something out of hatred is no better than leaving it to die.

No, it needs to be done with a passion for life. To resuscitate it with joy. You also do not need to justify yourself to anyone, whether your significant other or the entire world – if you genuinely think that the other person is not helping you feel fulfilled, that is enough. If they are taking you further away from eudaimonia, they are not good for you.

*What about me? I carried my cross all the way up to this peak. Now what? If I am being honest, I want to give up on love.*

Sufferer, I have such a soft spot for you, and you are loved dearly, even if you do not see it. Sometimes you need to let go of the things or people you love to be free. No matter how much it might hurt them, that does not make you worthy of scorn or hatred. If you are doing it out of a sincere well-wishing, that is enough. In fact, leaving someone is often the most loving thing one can do. The relation which relates to itself, or the relationship with one's own self. The mistake is to think that this is selfish – this is far from the case. Selfishness is tending to one's own needs for their own sake. Selflessness is tending to one's own needs as a means to having the ability to tend to the needs of others. Whoever is holding you back is already behind you, and whoever is pulling you down is already below you, so there is little purpose in keeping these people around if all they do is limit you.

Our human nature, then, is inevitable. Our purpose is made clear by our nature. "But we weren't made for any intrinsic nature, so we don't have any inherent purpose. Therefore we can create our own purpose!" The reality of our shared desire and drive for love as a species points to the idea that we were in fact created for a purpose. Unlike other animals we know that there is more to existence than mere being,

something higher and better. That is our destiny. Our destiny is something we can ignore, but not avoid altogether. It is the question that demands an answer of us during our sleepless nights, that rises from our unconsciousness during the aftermath of burnout, and once everything else seems to fall away, it is the one thing that gives us hope.

The choice is clear. We can either reject our nature and turn away from it, ending in the destruction of the very self, or embrace it, and use it to the fulfillment of self. “Yes, you’re right! We just need to embrace our impulses and stop trying to control them!” If we cave into our instincts and operate under the belief that this life is the only one, indulging in all its pleasures ceaselessly, we become mere animals. We are better than that. We have higher aspirations, ambitions, and goals, and this gives us our superiority. We have an abundance of energy, and this energy is not to be taken lightly nor scattered reactively. It is to be laser-focused on our purpose, and for no other end. The will-to-power is not in a selfish seeking of one’s own desires, but in selfless heroism to love mankind unconditionally.

*So, despite our many differences, we are all human. We have something in common, and something is enough. What do we have in common? We all need to eat, drink, and sleep in order to survive. We all laugh, cry, smile, and mourn. (Knowing that even the most villainous of people laugh joyfully and weep bitterly is enough to recognize their innate humanity and spur empathy!) We all have emotions, wills, intellects, and instincts. We all have a heart, soul, mind, and body. Most importantly, we have a deep need for human connection, for love. Why? As long as we have life, we have love. The very source of life begins from love, and it is that life-giving love that drives us all.*

*To become a hero is to stop the madness. The vicious cycle of vengeance. Everyone has a personal vendetta, but we do not have to play a part in it. Everyone has their scars, but we do not have to act on them. Even if you have every right to get revenge, and the other has every right to suffer for all their sins against you...you must stop. No matter how many times they have hurt you, and how much they deserve to be hurt back one hundred times over, do not do so. Rather, show the other continual mercy, especially when they least deserve it. Become a positive force for change in other's lives. If you spend your whole life thinking about potential negative outcomes, you are focusing on preventing what is bad. The better approach is to focus on manifesting what is good. Then, you will be able to adapt all reality to this aim since it will be your primary focus.*

I have heroically divined a compelling insight into the essence of relationships.

I have heroically created a fair and objective system to be executed.

*I have heroically established subjective value to align myself with and use as passion.*

**I have heroically impacted other's lives through perceiving the world realistically.**

**Come now, my friends, up out of your seat! There are hearts to be healed.**

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