

The Admiral James B. Stockdale Lecture in Ethics and Leadership

Moral Saints and Moral Heroes

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In 1941 Father Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish friar from Warsaw was arrested for publishing anti-Nazi pamphlets and sentenced to Auschwitz. There he was beaten, kicked by shiny leather boots, and whipped by his prison guards. After one prisoner successfully escaped, the prescribed punishment was to select ten other prisoners who were to die by starvation. As ten prisoners were pulled out of line one by one, Fr. Kolbe broke out from the ranks, pleading with the Commandant to be allowed to take the place of one of the prisoners, a Polish worker with a wife and children dependent upon him. "I'm an old man, sir, and good for nothing. My life will serve no purpose," the 45 year old priest pleaded. He was taken, thrown down the stairs into a dank dark basement with the other nine prisoners and left to starve. Usually, prisoners punished like this spent their last days howling, attacking each other and clawing the walls in a frenzy of despair.

But this time, a seeming miracle was heard coming from the death chamber; "those outside heard the faint sounds of singing. For this time the prisoners had a shepherd to gently lead them through the shadows of the valley of death, pointing them to the Great Shepherd." The Nazi guards were utterly astounded to see the men they were killing by starvation, at peace with themselves, quietly singing hymns just before they died. To keep one's heart and head in love and courage, in the midst of horror and degradation-- not letting oneself become degraded, but answering hate with love-- that is a miracle of moral heroism. A few weeks later, several SS troopers along with a doctor and a prisoner who survived to report the incident, entered the basement to remove the bodies. In the light of their flashlight, they saw Fr. Kolbe, a living skeleton, propped against the wall. His head was inclined a bit to the left. He had a smile on his lips and his eyes were wide open with a far away gaze, as if seeing something invisible to the SS troopers. A needle injected poison into Fr. Kolbe's arm and in a moment he was dead. He was starved to death by the Nazis, but not before he had aided the other starving prisoners in facing their own deaths. ⁽¹⁾

High altruistic or eudaimonistic morality, held by the likes of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Jesus Christ, and illustrated in by the story of Father Kolbe, has been under attack in recent years by such philosophers as Ayn Rand, Susan Wolf, Michael Slote, Bernard Williams, Gilbert Harman and David Gauthier. These ethicists do not reject morality altogether, but contend that we can overvalue morality. They advocate a minimal morality, of which traditional rule-governed ethics--such as Hobbesian contractualism-- is a paradigm. Most forms of contemporary ethics tend to be minimalist, calling on us to adhere to a core of

necessary rules (e.g., do not steal, harm, murder, or lie) in order for society to function. The accent is on *social control*: Morality is largely preventive, safeguarding rights and moral space where people may carry out their projects unhindered by the intrusions of others..⁽²⁾

Moral minimalism has an advantage in that it appeals to minimal common sense and so can easily be universalized; its injunctions apply to all rational agents. The claims of moral minimalism are exceedingly modest, since it permits most of life to go on without the scrutiny of morality. As J.S. Mill says, "Ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other [than moral] motives, and rightly so done if the rule of duty does not condemn them."⁽³⁾ The major portion of life comes not under the domain of moral obligation but under the domain of the permissible. We are given a generous portion of morally free space in which to develop our personality and talents as we see fit--just as long as we do not break out of the broad confines of moral constraints. The morally free zone is sometimes identified with what is prudent or what pertains to our self-interest.

Classical eudaimonistic ethics, on the other hand, going back to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, presupposes two theses absent in minimalist ethics: First of all, "morality is coterminous with human life and unrestrictedly pervasive within it." There is no separate moral-free zone, and prudence cannot be separated from morality, at least not to the extent that minimalism separates it. The Good is good for you, so that the better you become, the truly more excellent you are. Second, eudaimonistic ethics supposes a duty of moral development or growth, so that while not everyone is called on to be a saint or hero, if we develop properly, we may all develop moral sensitivities and abilities in ways that approximate those of the saints and heroes. Let me define *moral saint* and *moral hero*. A hero is one who accomplishes good deeds when the average person would be prevented by fear, terror, or a drive of self-interest. A saint is one who acts for good when inclination, desire, or self-interest would prevent most people from so acting.

In 1982 the Johns Hopkins' philosopher Susan Wolf wrote an article "Moral Saints,"⁽⁴⁾ which has been celebrated as one of the best essays in moral philosophy in recent times. Wolf, espousing a minimalist position, argues that moral saints, if they exist, are unattractive [419, 426F] because they lack the "ability to enjoy the enjoyable in life"[424] and are so "very, very nice" that they have to be "dull-witted or humorless or bland" [422]. Moral saints have no time for literature, music, or sports and so live a life that seems "strangely barren"[421]. Wolf argues further that what is missing in the saint's life are the non-moral virtues: a robust sense of humor, a refined musical or artistic ability, culinary acuity, and athletic prowess. It is not that these virtues are logically incompatible with saintliness (a saint could accidentally possess one or more of these virtues if, for example, he became a saint late in life), but saintliness simply allows no time or energy to develop these talents. "The moral virtues, given that they are, by hypothesis, all present in the same individual, and to an extreme degree, are apt to crowd out the non-moral virtues, as well as many of the interests and personal characteristics that we generally think contribute to a healthy, well-rounded, richly developed character"[421].

The moral saint seems to lack a self. Wolf claims: "The normal person's direct and specific desires for objects, activities, and events that conflict with the

attainment of moral perfection are not simply sacrificed but removed, suppressed, or subsumed. The way in which morality, unlike other possible goals, is apt to dominate is particularly disturbing, for it seems to require either the lack or the denial of the existence of an identifiable, personal self"[424]. Even Christian philosophers, like Bob Adams (formerly of UCLA), have conceded Wolf her thesis, reserving *saintliness* for religious contexts.

In this lecture I want to argue, contrary to Wolf, that moral saints and heroes, whether religious *or* secular, are the most important types of people we should be developing, the kinds of people who will be necessary if our nation and world are to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Using Wolf's own definition, let us define a moral saint as "a person who is as morally worthy as can be" [419]; "Who will have the standard moral virtues to a nonstandard degree" [421]; and, by appropriate substitution, a moral hero is a person who exhibits abnormal moral integrity, courage, and self-control, who does his or her duty in contexts in which most people would panic or be paralyzed by fear.⁽⁶⁾ I will defend a classical *eudaimonist* ethic, as held by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, which holds that minimal morality is only the beginning, but not the end of the moral life and that true happiness or *eudaimonia* consists in being as morally perfect as possible.

The heart of the matter is Wolf's charge of a character flaw in moral saints. They are *boring* and *unattractive*, for they will almost inevitably lack the nonmoral virtues that make life interesting. Regarding this accusation, I wish to make three points: (1) what is and what is not boring or unattractive is largely a subjective matter, and the fact that we find the saint boring may say more about us than about him or her; (2) we may have a duty to forego certain interesting things in life, and this may at times cause us to be bored or boring; and (3) all the classic moral theories, deontological, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics, have arguments in favor of saints and heroes. After showing that Wolf fails to make her case against moral saints and heroes, I sketch a theory of moral saintliness and moral heroism. However, before I begin my criticisms of Wolf, let me point out that I agree with her that morality is not the only good thing in life. Morality may not even be an end in itself, but a means to happiness, peace, flourishing, and suchlike. It is true that we can be overly preoccupied with morality to the neglect of scientific knowledge, art, and other valuable things, but there is no need for the moral person to be distraught by these points. Morality is sufficiently important to override all other reasons when they conflict with moral reasons.

(1) The Subjective Element in Boredom

Some people find football exceedingly dull (and even resent having to attend these pagan rituals), whereas others find the game exhilarating. Albert Einstein might seem boring to a group of basketball fanatics, and Michael Jordan might

not be the most intriguing guest at a conference of astronomical scientists. Alas, even Wolf's article, which excites most philosophers, leaves some students bored to tears. For those deeply interested in morality, subtle moral arguments, as well as exquisite moral action and character, are profoundly interesting. Perhaps we would be overdoing it by always talking about moral dilemmas or admiring the virtuous, but, I submit, these things will be fascinating to people who value them. I, for one, confess to admiring an underweight, ugly, unathletic, wizened old saint like Mahatma Gandhi far more than the heroes that Wolf says evince our ideals (Katharine Hepburn, Paul Newman, Fred Astaire, Natasha Rostov, and Lambert Strether [422, 431]). These are certainly not my heroes. It is not that we never admire the non-moral virtues (or those who possess them). It is simply that Wolf underestimates the attractiveness of both the moral virtues and those who embody them. One wonders who she has in mind? She gives no evidence here to support her contention. One cannot help but wonder, Can she have neglected to read the Socratic dialogues, the life of the great lawyer and philosopher, St. Thomas More 1478-1535), that "Man For All Seasons," the Spring of Love, the Summer of Success, the Autumn of Agonizing Opposition to King Henry the 8th, and the Winter of Martyrdom? Would she have been bored in the presence of one of the wittiest and wisest men whom ever lived? We can judge each other in part by what and whom we find interesting or boring, but I find it incomprehensible that one should find "saints" like More, Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer dull and tepid. Having met the saintly Mother Teresa, I found her a charming and delightful conversationalist, preoccupied with helping the poor and oppressed, and by no means "dull-witted, humorless or bland." Other deeply moral people (who might qualify as moral saints) I know are pianists, medical professionals, bus drivers, and environmental activists. Sadly, I can't think of many politicians since Thomas More, who exhibit the qualities of moral saint or heroes, though Abraham Lincoln and Jimmy Carter may be two that qualify. Our current President does not qualify, though he certainly fulfils Wolf's criterion of value by being interesting.

Perhaps Wolf simply means that the saint has too much of a single type of virtue [424]. It is possible to have too much of a good thing. Carrots are a nutritious food, but people who have eaten too many of them have died of carotene poisoning, and one can get sick of a favorite food, movie, or acquaintance if one has no respite from them. This may mean that normal humans need a certain amount of variety in life. If this is the case, and I think it is, then morality can take variety into account in building the completely happy life or the highest type of society. It can build a prima facie duty to display variety in the scheme of things. A moral saint (or hero) may even have an obligation to develop nonmoral virtues, such as musical talent, philosophical ability, and athletic prowess. ⁽⁶⁾

(2) The Duty to Boredom

Wolf and others who demean the notion of moral saintliness, seem to value the trait of *interestingness* to an abnormal degree. But, fascinating as the *interesting* is in life, it is more an *aesthetic*, than a *moral* category. We may have a duty to forego certain interesting things (or aesthetic delights) in life, which may cause us to be bored or boring. It may be the case that a moral saint will be more boring than he or she would have been if he or she had not been a saint. Conversely, King Henry the 8th might have been less interesting had he stayed married to Catherine of Aragon instead of divorcing her and marrying five other wives, two of which he murdered, but more good might have been done, England might still be Catholic, and Thomas More would not have lost his head.

Imagine that the French painter Paul Gauguin, instead of abandoning his wife and five children for an artistic career in Tahiti, had stayed at home and cared for his family. He would never have painted *Ia Orana Maria* or *Manao Tupapau* but would instead have gone through life as a quiet stockbroker and an undistinguished painter, but a morally admirable father and husband. But suppose that we agree that he had a moral duty to stay home in order to care for his wife and children, and that we could reasonably predict that his abandonment of his wife and children would cause them unacceptable suffering. Then the fascination we have with his life in Tahiti and his art are ill-begotten. We may appreciate his paintings' genius (and be grateful we have them) while deploring their causal history. In a similar, though morally problematic vein, we may make use of the data gathered by Nazi scientists while condemning the manner in which their experiments were conducted. No doubt there are innumerable men and women who have stayed at home because they saw it as their moral duty to do so and thus are less interesting than they would otherwise have been. We may even sympathize with those who are tempted to abandon their moral duty for other values.

Gauguin may well have asked himself, "Why should I accept a boring life when I can have the delights of Tahiti?" But if people do seriously consider these sorts of questions, it is an indication that moral education has failed. A society that has a well-ordered set of values will aim at inculcating a deep sense of satisfaction in being moral and a corresponding deep sense of guilt in being immoral. Moral virtue will be a prime index of social approbation, and people will be valued according to their *moral merit*. A moral society approximates the Kantian ideal that people will be happy in proportion to their moral goodness. In a moral meritocracy the issue of separating self-interested reasons from moral reasons becomes less acute, because the society sees to it that to a large degree the Good is good for us.

Wolf and others speak of making morality an idol, but our times, which Wolf's judgments reflect, have made the *interesting*, the *aesthetically and sensuously gratifying*, into idols, so that reemphasizing the moral virtues may actually be an antidote to our present preoccupation with aesthetic and hedonistic values.

Furthermore, with regard to the fascinating, Evil, like a mysterious plague, is often fascinating, but it invariably turns out to be destructive. Ted Bundy and Jack the Ripper were fascinating, but Evil, men. Trade-offs are not uncommon in ethics, so that the sacrifice of the seemingly "interesting" for a measure of Stoic "boringness" may be morally required at times.

Moral Theories and the Heroic Life

The three principal moral theories, deontological ethics, utilitarianism and virtue or eudaimonistic ethics traditionally all reserve a place for eudaimonistic morality, involving moral saintliness and heroism.

Deontological Ethics, with its emphasis on the idea of the rightness of the act itself (apart from consequences), encourages the perfect fulfilment of the moral law. The deontological saint, whether Stoic, Intuitionist or Kantian, recognizes that he or she need not save the world, but do one's duty regardless of the consequences; martyrs are often deontologists. Moreover, the Kantian saint internalizes the moral law, including the principle of self-development, in a way that provides personal space. Having a holy will and possessing high moral character involve an appreciation of the nonmoral virtues.

Utilitarian Ethics uses a different type of argument to establish the duty to develop both the moral and nonmoral virtues. Utilitarianism links the two types of virtues, arguing that some non-moral virtues are instrumental in bringing about morally good ends, ends such as human survival and flourishing, happiness, and the like. For example, high intelligence combined with administrative and economic expertise may be necessary conditions for producing the desirable high standard of economic welfare in a modern society. In order to maximize utility, saints must not only be as harmless as doves, but as cunning as foxes. The moral saint needs to be highly intelligent and well-educated in order to obtain and process large amounts of information. All things being equal, the more information and the better the comprehension of that information, the better the chances of making the right decision. Education, intelligence, courage, and a sense for the ridiculous may be necessary enabling virtues for the utilitarian saint.

Second, the utilitarian saint will see that other virtues, which traditionally have been deemed to be non-moral, significantly contribute to the total and average welfare of the moral community. Music, sports, dance, art, literature, good food, and good conversation all make life more enjoyable. So the requisite virtues connected with these activities will be encouraged in the moral community by the utilitarian saint. Different people will contribute differently, and it may well be the case that there is a trade-off between individual moral development and

development of non-moral talents.

It may not be necessary that everyone actually becomes a moral saint in the utilitarian kingdom. In fact it may be very un-utilitarian for everyone to be maximally moral for exactly the reasons that Wolf gives. Developing only the moral virtues or the enabling virtues may preclude other good results. If one community in which all are saints yields 1000 hedons, but another in which half are saints and half are talented, good people (five-percent saints) who add artistic spice to life, yields 2000 hedons, then the latter state is to be preferred. But this is not a judgment against saintliness or morality. Rather, it is, as I previously noted, simply a recognition that there are other values and virtues that serve morality and which themselves are not necessarily moral virtues or values.

The third theory, *Virtue (or Eudaimonist) Ethics*, sees the inculcation of the virtues of heroic and saintliness or high altruism as admirable in their own terms. The early education of children assumes critical importance in the development and promotion of virtue ethics.

Essentially, Wolf's thesis rest on the idea that moral saints and heroes are depriving themselves and others of personal fulfilment. But this seems to miss what is called a level-distinction. Just as a self-interested person may paradoxically see it as in his best interest to become on a first-order level an altruist in order to serve his best interest, and just as the rational hedonist may see that in order to reach maximal happiness, she must paradoxically give up the pursuit of her happiness and live for others; so one who would be morally as perfect as possible may paradoxically see that the best way to become so is by not being preoccupied with saintliness in carrying out his duties, but simply by concentrating on the matters at hand and living faithfully according to his lights. One may have a second-order desire to be maximally virtuous, but realize that the way to achieve that end is by thinking about the needs of others instead, rather than about becoming maximally virtuous. I may want to be a moral person more strongly than anything else and still realize that achieving high moral character may involve self-forgetfulness, may even involve forgetting about being moral, and sometimes involves acting spontaneously. The saint need not be self-indulgently moral. The two concepts (saintliness and spontaneous action that is not consciously motivated by the wish to be saintly) are compatible. Perhaps the ideal moral saint seldom thinks about moral saintliness, let alone doing her moral duty. He or she simply has been so well brought up (or internalized moral virtue) that goodness flows naturally from their deepest selves.

Wolf presents us with an alternate vision of moral reasons in the scheme of things. Moral values are simply another type of value on a par with aesthetic, athletic, and prudential values. There are no clear rules for deciding which of these values is to be preferred.⁽⁷⁾ The standard view of the place of morality in human life, from Socrates to Kurt Baier, has been that moral reasons are overriding. Moral principles are objectively right, absolute, and decisive. They,

not rights, serve as trumps over all other principles in human action. If and only if Gauguin can make a moral case for the abandonment of his family (for example, "Our marriage is on the rocks, the children will be better off without having a frustrated father around," and so on), is his action permissible, absolutely permissible. If he cannot make that case, his action is wrong. Not just morally wrong, as though there were some other sense of right that could override that judgment, but wrong absolutely.

The motivation of the classical account is that ethics is action-guiding. There must be some set of constraints and ideals that have to do with actions and outcomes. The dominance of ethical reasons is included, implicitly at least, in the definition of ethics as that which strives to promote the flourishing of rational beings, the amelioration of suffering, and the resolution of conflicts of interests. We want to know what is the best way to live, all things considered, and we presume that there is an answer to this question that is universalizable, and we call this way of life *ethical*. While the application of ethical principles at times may be relative, ethics, as that which aims at realizable ideals, is absolutely and unconditionally binding.

However, although moral reasons are paramount, this does not imply that we ought to be morally perfect. There are other level-distinctions to be made. There are moral reasons for allowing (and even prescribing) that people not be overly preoccupied with being moral. Much of morality is imbibed during the socialization process of early childhood. Thus, it may be that moral character is a gift of good upbringing, one that frees us to some extent for other pursuits in adolescence and adulthood.. Saintliness and heroism may be burdens too heavy for ordinary people to bear unless they have been predisposed to a virtuous life from childhood. But if they are virtuous by upbringing, there is little worry of saints lacking a self, as Wolf fears. These people, call them "Loving Saints and Heroes," would be to a large degree spontaneously saintly and heroic.

What Are Moral Saints and Heroes?

The sort of view that I have in mind is illustrated by Plato's rhetorical remark on the function of government: "Can anything be better for a commonwealth than to produce in it men and women of the best type?"⁽⁸⁾ The view is also found in Mill: "The most important point of excellence which any form of government can possess is to promote the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves."⁽⁹⁾ And John Dewey said, "Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society."⁽¹⁰⁾

The crucial factor in classical eudaimonistic ethics is the *duty* to grow as a moral

person, so that one may be able to take on greater moral responsibility. With increased responsibility comes increased competence in making moral choices and increased exhilaration at scaling moral mountain peaks. Consider Reinhold Messner's description of his state of being while climbing in the Himalayan mountains: "Striding along, my body becomes so highly-charged it would be quite impossible for me to stop. It feels as if something wants to break free, to burst from my breast. It is a surge of longing that carries me forward as if I were possessed."⁽¹¹⁾ Every true saint and moral hero must have similar sensations. The deeply moral person can experience joys and hardships unknown to the "flatlands" minimal moralist who has not developed his or her moral-climbing abilities.

Examples of Moral Saints and Heroes

When I think of moral saints and heroes, several people come to mind. The first is Socrates, the father of ethics, who heroically refused to flee in battle when the Spartan army had routed the Athenians, and who refused to grovel before the prejudiced Athenian jury in 399 BC, which would condemn him to death. Socrates combined the virtuous life with dialectical rigor never excelled in the history of humankind, totally dedicated, even at the cost of his life, to challenging the people of Athens to live a reflective and heroic moral life. Does Wolf think Socrates dull and boring? Do you? Then I think of Albert Schweitzer, a man with doctoral degrees in philosophy, theology, medicine and music, and a world-class organist, who willingly renounced fame and fortune to serve the poor of Equatorial West Africa, mostly at his own expense - dedicating himself to the extended moral ideal of *reverence for life*. In order to live his ideal, Schweitzer worked in an oppressively hot operating room with the windows closed lest the hot electric light bulb in the room should attract and exterminate the insects. Is Schweitzer a boring, dull pedant?

There are other contemporary saints and heroes that come to mind - Mohandas Gandhi, who led the fight for Indian Independence without guile or vindictiveness; Mother Teresa, who with her fellow nuns rescued abandoned orphans off the streets of Calcutta and raised them to be productive citizens; Martin Luther King, Jr., who faced the threats of racist people and bull dogs with almost superhuman equanimity; a bus driver in Cincinnati, who served his passengers by functioning as a lay priest, hearing their troubles and comforting and counseling them as he drove through the urban streets; and, of course, the hero we are here to honor,

Vice Admiral James Stockdale, who endured 7 _ years in a North Vietnam prison (what he refers to as the *World of Epictetus*)- 4 of them in solitary confinement- 2 of them with an untreated broken leg, who nevertheless, managed to maintain dignity and self-respect and to inspire other prisoners to maintain their commitments to their ideals. These, my friends, are the kinds of people who, while being at least as interesting as Ms Wolf's idols, contribute incalculable wealth to civilization. They are the kind of people we must develop, if civilization is to survive the challenges of terrorism, fanaticism, irrationality, and hate.

The Necessary Characteristics of Moral Saints and Heroes

The first minimal ingredient of a moral hero or saint is *discipline and self-control*. The Greeks valued *Sophrosune* as the minimal virtue every citizen must possess if civilization is to endure. Self-control or discipline are not sufficient for morality; Stalin, terrorists and other perpetrators of evil might possess it also, but it is a prerequisite for success in achieving the good. Note that all of these saints and heroes I have mentioned are either military persons, philosophers or religious people, especially, Catholics. This is no accident. Only two large American institutions are succeeding in promoting this minimal condition of success: the Military and the Roman Catholic Church. It is no accident that the regime at West Point was modeled on St. Patrick's College, the Roman Catholic seminary at Maynooth, Ireland. What I find most refreshing about teaching at the US Military Academy at West Point compared with the civilian universities at which I have taught, is the fact that discipline and rigorous self-control (what the Greeks called *sophrosune*) are expected of every cadet. In his narrative, *The World of Epictetus*, on why he succeeded in enduring the horrors of prison camp, Admiral Stockdale gives considerable credit to the teachings of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, but also to his plebe year at Annapolis, which he says helped pull him through those 8 years in a prison camp. He's right on target. The discipline internalized in the military gives its members resources for dealing with life's stresses that others are sadly lacking. Without discipline, we're not even going to be in the ball park, let alone win the race of life.

The second virtue that characterizes both moral saints and heroes is *courage*. Reading the accounts of Socrates' life, we wonder, how could he stand unperturbed before the attacking enemy army in the Peloponnesian War?, and before his malicious calumnious accusers at his infamous trial? Whence did Thomas More derive the strength of will to resist King Henry and his minion? How did Father Kolbe find the fortitude to face the tortures of Auschwitz? Was it a superhuman gift?

Thirdly, moral saints and moral heroes both supplement their self-control and courage with *practical wisdom* (the Greek *phronesis*), insight into the contingencies of the situations in which they find themselves. They are able to distinguish between sensible and irrational goals, typically doing, in the words of Aristotle, 'the right thing in the right way, at the right time.' The Stoic ideal teaches us to relinquish trying to change the whole world, but concentrate on the duty at hand. In the prayer set forth by my teacher, Reinhold Niebuhr:

**Lord give me the courage to change the things that
can be changed;**

And Lord, Give me the patience to accept what cannot be changed;

And, most of all, Lord, give me the wisdom to know the difference.

It's that difference - wisdom - that makes all the difference - the difference between a fanatic and fool, on the one hand, and a wise sage on the other.

The fourth virtue saints and heroes embody is a *deep sense of personal responsibility*, willing to be held accountable for their actions. Contrast this with the current, prevalent, trend to claim rights. For example, might it not be a moral cop-out to sue tobacco companies for individual health damages when there was good reason to know of the risks of smoking? Or consider a couple in Montclair, New Jersey (Warren and Patricia Simpson) who declared that they're not very good at child rearing and don't much like it, so they're exercising their *right to retire* from it. "Between the crying and the fighting and asking for toys, it was getting to be very discouraging," Mrs. Simpson said. "We're both still young, and we have a lot of other interests." They've put their three small children up for adoption, and after seven years of parenting, they "are moving on."⁽¹²⁾ All of us who have raised children can understand the temptation the Simpsons feel (parenting may be the toughest job in America - but it's also the most important), but to be deeply moral, not to mention being a saint, is accept one's responsibilities and not to shirk one's legitimate burdens or blame others for one's failings.

Finally, saints and heroes are deeply committed to *high moral ideals*. Their repertoire of moral categories goes beyond mere minimal morality with its categories of morally wrong and morally permissible, encompassing high altruism and the greater good of society. The motto "Duty, Honor, Country" is not a mere shibboleth, but the expression that these ideals are worth living and dying for. The honor codes at the military academies, minimalist though they may seem,

requiring honesty and non-tolerance of violations are, at least, a reminder of the importance of the moral domain (a recent study of more than 200 colleges and universities showed that in schools without an honor code, 68% of the students reported repeated instances of serious cheating; in schools with a code, a minuscule percentage of students reported any cheating at all).⁽¹³⁾ I'm proud of so many of our youth, budding saints and heroes, who do live by high ideals, striving to enhance personal and environmental wholeness and make this a more just world. They live by a higher standard than the average "decent" person, the minimally moral citizen. These young people fill me with hope that our nation will have leaders of excellence in this century.

So, what is the value of moral heroes and saints? Of the Early Christian martyrs it was said "The blood of these martyrs was the seed of the Church." For every martyr who burned at the stake or was fed to the lions, a score of converts, inspired by their commitment and heroism, took their place and enhanced the Christian community. I believe that the sufferings and sacrifices of the past and present moral saints and heroes are the seed of a more moral future world, where peace, freedom and justice triumph over injustice and evil. But even now we can witness tokens of their accomplishments. The courageous integrity of Socrates, refusing to avail himself of an opportunity to escape his execution, set a fire of philosophical inquiry in the hearts of people that ignited his first disciple, Plato, who in turn is most responsible for setting the course of philosophical thinking in the West, a course that has enlightened the minds of men and women throughout 2 _ millennia throughout every nation. Every philosophical mind pays tribute to Socrates' moral and intellectual heroism when he or she lives a self-reflective life. Gandhi's steadfast, indefatigable idealism and hopes for Indian independence melted the hearts and guns of the British imperial power, finally resulting in India's independence in 1948. And Gandhi's ideas inspired Martin Luther King, Jr., another moral hero who, like Gandhi, paid for his dreams for a just society with an assassin's bullet, but who without ever striking anyone, led the movement which broke the back of Jim Crow and ushered in a new era of equal justice for American black people. The civil rights movement had a rippling effect, reaching out to inspire many others in quests for fairness and justice. And God only knows how much good has come about from the lives of those rescued orphans in Mother Teresa's Calcutta orphanage, as they are growing into adulthood as brands plucked from the burning! The Socrateses, Schweitzers, Fr. Kolbes, Martin Luther Kings., Mother Teresas, and Admiral Stockdales - these are the people we ought to be emulating and holding up as role models in our quest for a better world, a national and international community where liberty and justice prevail. Admiral Stockdale points out that moral heroism shows itself best, not in success, but in failure, where the good is threatened. Perhaps, it doesn't seem as though we need saints and heroes today when our national and global economy is at an all-time high, but, if history is any guide to the unknown future, we should not bet on infinite prosperity, but realize that Evil always finds a way to reemerge. When it does, the saints and heroes will be needed to defend the

Good, but like Tomas More, they must be men and women for "all seasons," peace and war, success and failure. Even in prosperity they stand out to remind us that what really matters in life is centered in, and hallowed by, the moral life.

No, moral saints and moral heroes, today's equivalents to Socrates, the Stoics, and the Early Christian martyrs, are not as glamorous as the Hollywood stars that Wolf so admires, nor are they as physically spectacular as the professional athletes who are lionized by the masses and the media, the mainstream of Mediocrity, but they do constitute our most precious *moral capital*, capital we desperately need at a time of threatened moral bankruptcy. Moral saints and heroes are the hope of the world!

Thank you.

Endnotes

1. See Charles Colson's 'The Volunteer at Auschwitz' reprinted in L.P. Pojman, ed., *The Moral Life* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p.529-34.

2. " "

It has been one that stressed the transcendence of the individual over the community, the need to tolerate all moral viewpoints, the autonomy of the self as the highest human good, the informed consent contract as the model of human relationships. We are obliged under the most generous reading of a minimalist ethic only to honor our voluntarily undertaken family obligations, to keep our promises, and to respect contracts freely entered into with other freely consenting adults. Beyond those minimal standards, we are free to do as we like, guided by nothing other than our private standards of good and evil. The idea of altruistic morality, the kind found in moral saints and heroes has been under attack in our culture. Ayn Rand asserts that the most important virtue is *selfishness*, and the followers of Nietzsche advocate egoism as the only basis for the good life. During last year's impeachment hearing of the President, many people were aghast that personal morality should be thought to have anything to do with political leadership. Now none of these forces deny the need for morality in general. They recognize that prohibitions against stealing and perjury and killing are necessary for a civilized society, but , they seem to think, that anything

beyond this minimal morality is irrational. And it is not only the press and literature that demeans the ideas of the supremacy of morality. Ethicists too have denounced the idea of *saints and heroes*.

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12. *The New York Times* Op-Ed. "Retirement Fever" by Michael Rubiner in early February 1996. This may be an extreme example of the abuse of the philosophy of entitlements, but is indicative of a trend.

13. A Report of More than 200 American colleges, discussed on National Public Radio February 17, 2000.