

HONOR IN THE MODERN WORLD  
(NEW YORK: LEXINGTON BOOKS, 2016)

SEVEN

Good Citizens

*Gratitude and Honor*

Anthony Cunningham

At first glance, notions of honor may seem like a poor bet to keep any close company with the likes of a liberal society. One doesn't have to look long or hard to find glaring examples of honor codes that seem irredeemably incompatible with core liberal ideals. For instance, witness practices like "honor killings" and serious fetters on women predicated on honor, the sorts of everyday examples that are so difficult to square with the notion of a liberal society. Despite these poor prospects, I contend that a robust sense of honor is not only compatible with liberal ideals, but that any liberal society ignores honor at its own peril. Honor can be only as good as the particular forms of life and character deemed honorable by any given society, but a *sense of honor*—the predilection to measure the self by the lights of things deemed noble or shameful—should have a place as an important psychological force in any enlightened conception of a liberal society. Furthermore, substantive elements long associated with traditional honor cultures—"substantive" in the sense of what specifically is deemed honorable—play a key role in ideals at the heart of liberal societies. Honor has wielded a very heavy hand in inhumane practices throughout human history, but as I hope to show by way of some examples of gifts and gratitude, so too has honor been at the center of things that are best and most beautiful about us. So with this in mind, let me turn to gifts and gratitude.

Toward the end of Homer's *Odyssey*, Penelope extends a gracious hand to Odysseus in his disguise as a beggar. The crass and unruly sui-



tors treat Odysseus as a good-for-nothing by mocking and insulting him mercilessly, but Penelope, with no inkling that this man is her husband come back to her after his long journey home, goes out of her way to protect him and to see to his needs. Indeed, she treats the beggar as an honored guest. A woman in her high position certainly doesn't have to lavish such attention on someone like him, but she does. She has nothing obvious to gain, and no external force or threat compels her to treat him so well. This old man is just a beggar, someone who an important person like Penelope could overlook without suffering undesirable consequences. Her gestures on his behalf, both her direct kindness and her pledge to have nothing to do with any suitor who mistreats him again, say something essential about her character and how she sees and moves through the world. Penelope does as she does because she is an honorable woman who would be ashamed to treat the beggar the way her suitors mistreat him. She is above such rudeness and cruelty, and she has contempt for bullies who fail to realize the fact that but for the vagaries of their good fortune, they could easily find themselves in this beggar's rags. In her precarious world, no human being is safe from dramatic reversals in fortune, and this vulnerability should chasten the smug and hard-hearted. As Penelope sees things, a noble person would never stoop so low as to mishandle or have sport with this fellow, so she extends her protection and instructs her servants to take care of him.

And now, you maids, wash his feet for him, and make him a bed on a couch with rugs and blankets, that he may be warm and quiet till morning. Then, at day break wash him and anoint him again, that he may sit in the cloister and take his meals with Telemachus. It shall be the worse for any one of these hateful people who is unkind to him; like it or not, he shall have no more to do in this house. For how, sir, shall you be able to learn whether or no I am superior to others of my sex both in goodness of heart and understanding; if I let you dine in my cloisters squalid and ill clad? Men live but for a little season; if they are hard, and deal hardly, people wish them ill so long as they are alive, and speak contemptuously of them when they are dead, but he that is righteous and deals righteously, the people tell of his praise among all lands, and many shall call him blessed.<sup>1</sup>

Penelope's ideal of hospitality plays a significant role not just in Homer's ancient world, but also in many honor stories from disparate times and places. In many cultures, good people take pains and go out of their way as a point of honor to make guests feel welcome and comfortable. Such hospitality is an undeniable gift, and sincere gifts express the conviction that people warrant going to some trouble on their behalf. Gifts not only testify to the importance of the guest; they also say a great deal about the character of the giver, and in particular, about what matters deeply to the giver. Notice that hospitality is not a strict obligation in any way that implies some kind of indefeasible right on the part of a recipient. For

instance, if I borrow money from you, then you have a clear right to repayment, and you can duly complain of an injustice if I fail to pay my debt. Likewise, if I make you a solemn promise, I have an obligation to keep it, and devoid of any extenuating circumstances to excuse me, you can hold me to my promise. By contrast, the ideal of hospitality doesn't strictly bind a host as these examples of promises and loans bind people, and yet, neither is hospitality experienced as a matter of purely personal prerogative on the part of an honorable giver. If you are my guest and if I make little effort on your behalf, I insult you in the sense that my modest efforts are an implicit reflection of how much I think you are worth. The thought, "This is my guest," really means something to a hospitable person. Of course, practical considerations can bear on such situations. If I am desperately poor, the best I can do may be quite modest in an absolute sense, but all the same, my efforts may well be an immense effort in a relative one. Well-intentioned hosts can be stretched beyond their means by circumstance, and therefore they can find it impossible to give as they might wish to give. Moreover, gifts can err not only in the direction of being too meager; they can invite troubles by being too grand or by being offered in ways that are not adequately attuned to the circumstances and the recipient. Gifts can be a complicated business that both givers and receivers must manage artfully.

We see interesting examples of the subtleties of gifts in colorful honor stories like the Icelandic sagas, where even benign gifts can create problems. In *Egil's Saga*, a young man meets Egil Skallagrímson, a master poet, and they become good friends. Einar later proves himself a good poet, and after he is rewarded with a magnificent gold shield, he goes to visit Egil. When Einar does not find him at home, he leaves the shield as a gift, and when Egil returns and sees the precious object, he cries out, "That scoundrel! Does he expect me to stay awake making a poem about his shield? Fetch my horse, I will ride after him and kill him."<sup>2</sup> Once Egil learns that Einar is long gone, he turns his attention to composing a poem in return for the younger Einar. No doubt irascible Egil indulges in some curmudgeonly hyperbole in this scene. Nevertheless, even gifts with good intentions can threaten or dishonor someone in the perilous world of the sagas. In this instance, the shield is an extraordinary gift, and since saga recipients incur a debt of honor to gift-givers, a gift can shame them if they can never repay the gift equitably. If they cannot reciprocate, they remain forever in the gift-giver's debt, and they may suffer humiliation for their impotence. And even if they can repay a gift, repayment can be burdensome, an unwelcome onus on the recipient, even if the intentions of the giver are entirely benign. If this saga example seems foreign or irrelevant to modern life, it really shouldn't. For instance, giving to the needy in ways that do not undermine their sense of dignity can be a tricky business in our world. Despite their best intentions, generous peo-



ple can unwittingly run roughshod over people who genuinely need their help.

When it comes to giving and receiving, both givers and recipients have responsibilities. For their part, recipients should properly appreciate the beneficial things that are done on their behalf, both for the tangible benefits and for the good will in the gifts themselves. A sense of appropriate gratitude manifests the earnest desire to return good for good, both to acknowledge the kindness and to pay it back with something fitting if possible. Grateful people remember what others do on their behalf, and they yearn to return favors if they should get the chance. Such sentiments are on display in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, where gratitude is the flipside of something like vengeance, another vital point of honor for Homer's characters. When Agamemnon insults Achilles at the beginning of the *Iliad*, the aggrieved warrior means to make the offending king pay at all costs. Likewise, when Hector kills Patroclus, Achilles will stop at nothing to make the Trojan prince pay the blood price. In much the same way, these Greek warriors usually spare no efforts as a point of honor to return generous deeds done on their behalf. Honor commands that they give people their due, for good or ill, not because they must under pain of external threat or sanction, but because human affairs depend so vitally on it.

In everyday life, grateful people may not always be in a position to return good for good, and in some cases, so doing may even be impossible. For instance, one can be duly grateful for the prodigious efforts and sacrifices of ancestors who are long gone, but in this situation, the best one can do is to be thankful for these people and to be mindful to try to live up to their good example. *Ingrates* take without any thought of returning, whether they fail to reciprocate with the people who benefited them, or whether they enjoy the benefit of those who came before them, only to deny the same benefits to other contemporaries or those who come after them. Thus, as depicted in *Hecuba*, Euripides' version of Odysseus comes off badly because he refuses to return Hecuba's gift of sparing his life after he stole his way within the walls of Troy and was recognized. When the Greeks eventually prove victorious, he not only fails to speak out against sacrificing enslaved Polyxena, but he sways the divided ranks in favor of taking her life as a sacrifice to Achilles. Hecuba reminds him of his precious debt and begs him to sacrifice her and to spare her daughter, but Euripides has Odysseus coldly refuse, putting what must be galling words for Hecuba in Odysseus's mouth: "A man will say anything / anything, to live."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps wily Odysseus is right about what most men would say and do in a life-and-death situation, but Hecuba can hardly be impressed by his hard-hearted ingratitude when he is firmly in her debt. It would be difficult for her to imagine Hector following this Greek warrior's lead in such things.

When honor cultures value hospitality and gratitude as points of honor, they deem them excellences, things that should inspire admiration from observers, pride in those who possess them, shame in those who don't, and contempt for those without them. Thus, the psychological sense of honor connected with these things is a fundamental measure of the self by the person in question and by the community. The latter is important to notice because a sense of honor does not get off the ground without some shared social component. If such generosity and gratitude are seen as defining excellences, just what do people who honor these things see so good about them? To appreciate them, consider other sorts of exchanges that we depend upon for the everyday business of living. Thus, I ask you for directions, and I assume that you will answer me honestly. You promise to see me at three o'clock, and I expect you to keep your word. You agree to buy my horse, so I hand over the steed and expect you to pay me. If we could not depend on such basic exchanges, things that have little or nothing to do with gifts and gratitude, the world would be a very different and far more hostile place. Yet, the landscape of hospitality and gratitude is notably different. For instance, suppose that I am a weary traveler, and you bid me to rest on your porch, there to have a cool drink in the shade on a hot day. Say that I am just passing through, so you may never see me again. Hence, any seeds of good will and affection that you sow with your kindness may never bear any discernible fruit for you. As people say, you would have little or nothing to gain. And say that when I am finished, I consider your kind gesture as nothing more than a stroke of good fortune, some much-needed manna from heaven, and I continue on my way without a word of thanks or any desire to return the kindness. However, suppose instead that I am not this kind of person, an ingrate. Say that I understand your gesture for what it was, a small act of kindness freely given without any expectation of recompense, much less any demand for such. In this case, what I am likely to value about the gesture as a grateful person, over and above the tangible benefit I derive from the rest and sustenance, is the fact that you did not *have* to do what you did, and yet you graciously chose to do so. The gesture cost you something in terms of your time and energy and resources, so the gesture expressed an implicit form of intrinsic regard for me. Simply put, I mattered enough to warrant your time and expense in this way. In this case, as a grateful person, I take note of the gesture as a matter of honor, both in the giving and the receiving. I would be loath to take advantage of your kindness without expressing my appreciation. And when I sincerely express my honest thanks, you understand my appreciation as something other than a case of mechanically discharging an obligation. Just as your freely gave, I freely thanked you; our parts in the exchange manifest a kind of mutual regard that is not predicated on any kind of compulsion.

Notice that when it comes to telling the truth, keeping promises, and respecting people and their possessions, people depend on stealth and indirection to get away with not living up to such responsibilities. Others can publicly call us on our misdeeds in this regard, and there is little we can say to defend ourselves, short of disputing the charges and proclaiming our innocence, or else proffering some excuse of extenuating circumstances. The landscape of generous gifts and appropriate gratitude is considerably murkier. Were Penelope to turn a blind eye to how her suitors treat the beggar and simply wash her hands of the affair, or were I to jettison your cool drink from my mind without a word of thanks or any resolve to return the favor, no great hue and cry would likely follow. People can easily get away with such things without being hounded or haunted by their deeds, particularly if an instance is a one-off or if the trail is cold, as it must be when benefactors are long gone or very distant. In this regard, contemporary Americans (along others) surely owe a debt of gratitude to the Allied soldiers who stormed the beaches of Normandy in 1944, but not many of these soldiers are still around to collect on the debt. And even if more of them were with us today, the demands of gifts and gratitude are not always so clear and specific as to demand anything of us *right here and now*. In other words, people can get away with being miserly and unthankful, so when people extend a gracious hand or when they clearly appreciate the generous things done on their behalf, they testify to ways of life and forms of character they prize for their own sake. They effectively say that these things really *matter* to them, that they cannot turn their backs on ideals that *constitute* them at what they see as their best, even if they could easily get away with ignoring such things. Achilles would no sooner fail to repay meaningful gifts than he would fail to repay Agamemnon for insulting him. Doing so would be beneath him, and were he to face up to abandoning such things as a way of life, he would feel shame.

Of course, people can easily go through the motions half-heartedly or mindlessly in these respects. Hospitality and gratitude can assume the form of manners, where behaviors become ingrained habits that are largely perfunctory. Thus, I offer you a score and a cup of tea, or you offer me the same, and we mouth our appropriate thanks and compliments on the refreshments. For the most part, we pay attention to such things only when they are obviously *missing*. If a person on the street makes a pointed show of refusing me the time of day, or if I hold a door for someone who walks through without a word of thanks or so much as a cursory look, I am taken for granted like someone who warrants no attention. Some victims of such slights learn to brush such things off, while others feel indignant. If the things at stake are relatively small, people are wise to develop the ability to put such slights aside because life is too short to hang on every such insult. In this sense, people can injure themselves on molehills. Nonetheless, most people depend on

some backdrop of willful giving and thankful taking in daily life, and as the stakes rise, when the things that are given and taken matter a great deal, or when the giving and taking take on greater import as instances of explicit respect, we tend to care deeply about people extending a kind hand and returning such gestures in kind. In fact, we don't just mildly *prefer* gracious and grateful people, we actually *look down* on stingy ingrates. If we imagine ourselves as such people, we recoil from such ways of life and forms of character as beneath us. Or at least this is how things look and feel to anyone for whom these things are points of honor.

Now suppose that we happen to be people who honor hospitality and gratitude in the sense that I am describing, and suppose we are also citizens of a liberal democracy. No doubt a fair number of people fit this description in everyday life. In this case, can we legitimately extoll generous hospitality and gratitude as requisite virtues for a good citizen in a liberal society? I mean something beyond personally endorsing such traits, the way I might exhort fellow citizens to be fit or to write poetry. Whatever we think about physical fitness or poetry, we do not consider a disinterest in either pursuit as any inherent shortcoming so far as citizenship is concerned. The fundamental ideals of a liberal democracy do not compel such interests, though they allow for citizens to pursue them if they please. Citizens are on their own with respect to these activities, even if it might just so happen that we'd all be indisputably better off as fit poets. Generally, where beliefs about a good life are concerned, interpreters of the notion of a liberal society insist that it must be *neutral* to competing visions of how to live and what sort of person to be. On this interpretation, a liberal democracy should strive not to favor one conception over others. Keep in mind that such neutrality doesn't entail any indifference to citizens leading good lives. Ultimately, a liberal society must have a fundamental interest in its citizens living good lives, but it leaves it up to citizens to figure out and to pursue their own conception of such a life. Neither does a commitment to neutrality call for ignoring the fact that certain conditions must surely be met for citizens to have any realistic chance to pursue their own vision successfully. After all, citizens in all societies undeniably have basic needs that they can ignore only at their own peril. But unlike some societies that embrace a shared conception of the good—a so-called "thick" conception, complete with a shared understanding of and commitment to practices, roles, and forms of character that are faithful to the conception of the good they share—liberal societies usually strive for a "thinner" conception that strives not to privilege one vision over another. Instead, liberal societies look to key ideals that supposedly serve the goal of sustaining the possibility of a pluralistic way of life where the pursuit of conceptions of the good are concerned, as distinct from ordaining favorites.

When it comes to such key ideals, liberty and equality are two pivotal ones for a liberal society. These two ideals obviously speak to vital ele-



ments of the human condition. Consider liberty. When constructing any plan for a good life, a person needs to be free in particular ways, free both *from* interference and free *to* pursue choices realistically. If others are dishonest with me, cheat me, break their promises to me, speak falsely about me, usurp my power to choose for myself, lord arbitrary power over me, harass and intimidate me, or harm me physically, my life suffers for these forms of interference. Moreover, even if people leave me alone in these vital respects, my liberty is not apt to flourish unless I happen to be self-sufficient in the myriad ways that matter in human lives. If a liberal society is genuinely committed to people being free to pursue a chosen life plan, it must heed what people need to exercise their liberty effectively. For instance, one can contend that physically handicapped citizens are at liberty to move about the world as they please, but if nobody pays any attention to the design of physical surroundings, such liberty is not apt to be worth much. Stairs, and nothing but steep and forboding stairs everywhere, might as well be an immense moat or an impenetrable wall to a citizen confined to a wheelchair. Lives can be effectively stunted and squashed without intentional interference. Benign neglect can be a killer.

By extolling the value of liberty, a liberal society commits itself to people having a vital say over their own destiny. It does so knowing well that the free exercise of personal choice can sometimes be the downfall of foolish and unfortunate people. In this case, citizens can sensibly rue the actual results of the exercise of such liberty, even while they also acknowledge the inherent value of being the captain of one's own ship, so to speak. Despite this distinct possibility for mistakes, even foolish ones, liberal societies usually take some comfort in the hope and trust that certain liberties tend to grease the wheels of human flourishing. Choosing my company, my loves, my profession, my personal projects—such choices deeply shape a life, and a liberal society's respect for them manifests the conviction that people stand the best chance at flourishing if they can pursue lives that are their own and largely unfettered in significant ways. Sensible people can hardly deny that human vision and imagination can suffer badly when it comes to reckoning the possible elements of a well-lived life, particularly when it comes to judging these things for others, so the experiments in living that one encourages by protecting the liberty to live as one sees fit provide vital opportunities for self-expression and self-development, the sort that can easily be pinched even by the very best of paternalistic intentions.

Keep in mind that when people respect the liberty of their fellow citizens, they usually prize more than just their liberty. On the most basic level, they tend to prize *the people themselves* as the bearers of such liberty. This point warrants explicit mention so that liberty itself isn't misconstrued as the be-all and end-all in a liberal society. As Amritai Elkzoni contends, good societies invariably draw upon *multiple* values that can

conflict, values that can only be adequately understood in dialogue with each other.<sup>4</sup> The precise shape and boundaries of liberty in a liberal society can only be charted against a larger backdrop of the things that matter, and an essential element of such a backdrop includes a fundamental commitment to the well-being of the bearers of essential liberties.

Of course, liberty and well-being are not conjoined in anything remotely close to some kind of blessed harmony. Life is not so simple. People can make a mess of their lives when left to their own devices, so a concern for their liberty and their well-being can clash, and sometimes clash in tragic and intractable ways. In the case of young children, liberal societies traditionally err on the side of protecting their well-being while trying honestly to cultivate the kind of wise judgment that might eventually allow them to steer a prudent course of their own making. On the other hand, provided that people do no serious harm to others or to the common good, liberal societies usually stay their hand in important ways with respect to the choices of adults out of concern for protecting their say over their own lives. Such respect is not born of indifference to the ultimate results, and neither does it rest on making an unequivocal god of liberty. Instead, this respect embodies the considered judgment that various forms of liberty are necessary for well-being, though they are far from sufficient.

This commitment to the well-being of citizens in a liberal society also finds expression in an ideal of equality: we all count, and we all count the same in some respects. Without a doubt, human beings never have the *same exact* commitment to the well-being of each and all. Most of us care about ourselves, our intimate loved ones, and more distant others, and these distinct forms of concern make considerably different demands on human lives. The things we would do for our intimates ordinarily go well beyond what we would do for strangers or acquaintances; these commitments differ not only in degree, but in kind. Nevertheless, despite these differences, a liberal society must hold fast to the idea that everyone matters. Once again, consider physically handicapped people who may technically be at liberty to go wherever they like so long they have the means to navigate a world designed without them in mind. The failure in such cases is not just a failure of liberty, but also one of equality. Ultimately, handicapped citizens in a liberal democratic community must be able to sustain the plausible conviction that they are not excluded or forgotten if they are to feel like meaningful citizens. Likewise, those who were denied the advantages of white citizens under the guise of "separate but equal" in the Jim Crow South would not have been treated as true equals even if black schools had been equal (and of course, they were not, not even remotely). When Southern whites effectively banished black children to the social periphery, they implicitly proclaimed that black children were worth less (maybe even worthless). True enough, people in any society can be left out inadvertently, rather than by intentional de-



sign, but if people care about their fellow citizens, they keep a vigilant eye out for accidental exclusions, and when they spy them, they make a serious effort to redress them. If they refuse, either by way of refusing to look or by refusing to do anything about what they see, the message from those on top can only be clear to those who are ultimately left out or left behind: We, the powerful people, do not care enough to treat you (the powerless or less powerful) as equals, as citizens who matter just as much as us. In this case, the operative rules of association can only feel badly rigged to those left on the outside, and any societal talk of loving liberty and equality must seem like a bold lie. If I cannot plausibly see myself as a free *and* equal citizen in a liberal society, then my supposed "duties" to fellow citizens can hardly seem like any point of high principle.

Notice that these twin ideals of liberty and equality can only be adequately understood in concert, and their practical integration tends to be anything but obvious. Moreover, notice that they are sometimes mentioned in the same breath with a third ideal—fraternity. For instance, the French Republic explicitly embraces the triad of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* as its national motto. Common enough as this famous political triad may be, one can sensibly ask what the relationship between these three elements might possibly be, and depending on the answer, one might argue that fraternity has no appropriate place as an *essential* ideal in a liberal society because even though it may be something laudable, perhaps it is too "thick" for any liberal society committed to remaining neutral to diverse conceptions of the good. A liberal society without a serious commitment to liberty and equality, difficult as that commitment may be to flesh out in both theory and practice, is simply a contradiction in terms, but perhaps the inclusion of fraternity is simply one ideal too many.

One way to imagine fraternity as a member of this triad is to imagine people joined together in a sincere commitment to liberty and equality as *indivisible* ends. If you and I share an interest in money, we share an interest in the same thing, a *divisible* thing in the sense that one of us having it isn't necessarily tied to the other having it (this result may even be unlikely or impossible), and so long as our relationship to money is purely self-interested, we are unlikely to identify with each other psychologically just because of our shared interest. In this case, the sense in which we share this interest is purely accidental and incidental. By contrast, if you and I share an interest in clean air and water, our fates in this respect may well be joined indivisibly (we both enjoy them, or neither does). Nonetheless, our interests may still be purely self-interested. We share the same boat together, but we do so only through sheer circumstance; perhaps we can both get to the other side only by cooperating. This kind of indivisibility needn't encourage any identification with each other. However, suppose we share the end of eradicating a serious disease or saving an endangered species. If so, our end may be indivisible not just in the practical sense that realizing it for one person entails realiz-

ing it for everyone, but also in the sense that we prize the sharing of this end because of what it means to us. With this cause, the way in which the end matters makes no fundamental difference to me: I care about eradicating a disease or saving polar bears *for their own sake*, not simply for some personal benefit. When I care about things in this fashion, I am likely to see others who share my ends as brothers and sisters in a common cause, and thus I am likely to identify with them psychologically as a result of our shared ends. When people love what I love in the way I love it, we share a love in a nonincidental sense. Notice that a commitment to liberty and equality can be just like this, and in fact, any attractive conception of a liberal society ultimately depends upon liberty and equality being indivisible ends in this sense. By contrast, in a Hobbesian society, I might campaign vigorously for liberty and equality to protect my vital interests, but in this case, the liberty and equality of my fellow citizens might simply be the invariable price to be paid to advance my own interests. I might not care a whit about my fellow citizens. A more robust commitment to liberty and equality understands these ideals as final ends, not simply as a means to advance one's own interests. And provided we care about liberty and equality in this way, we might naturally come to care about each other as brothers and sisters who prize what we hold dear.

On this description, a sense of fraternity is a possible, but something short of inevitable upshot of sharing an intrinsic interest in liberty and equality. Such a result is hardly improbable, psychologically speaking, but notice that one can conceivably imagine people who are attracted to liberty and equality *in principle* without truly caring deeply about other people. In other words, one can imagine people who love liberty and equality without giving much of a damn about others. I doubt many people actually fit this profile, but the reason for my skepticism is that I believe some sense of fraternity invariably precedes and best explains our concerns for liberty and equality in the first place. In other words, because I care about my fellow citizens, I would ultimately prefer them to be free and be treated as equals. Far from being a superfluous psychological upshot of some *in principle* adoration of liberty and equality, I believe that fraternity is best seen as the psychological bedrock of these two concerns, and as such, at the very least, as first among equals in this famous political triad.

Lest these remarks about fraternity seem too "thick" for any coherent conception of a *liberal* society bent on remaining neutral to the conceptions of the good life—say, well beyond the pale for any standard liberal conception—consider an esteemed liberal source like John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Even those who persevere with this large work may tire before the latter parts of the book where Rawls discusses the idea of a "social union," a notion that fits squarely with his suggestion about how his "difference principle" corresponds



to a natural meaning of fraternity; namely, to the idea of not wanting to have greater advantages unless this is to the benefit of those less well off. The family, in its ideal conception and often in practice, is one place where the principle of maximizing the sum of advantages is rejected. Members of a family commonly do not wish to gain unless they can do so in ways that further the interests of the rest.<sup>5</sup>

In the years soon after the publication of what is now considered a classic in liberal political thought, interpreters spent a great deal of time on the minutiae of Rawls's "original position," a notion that seemed to embody the concern for avoiding any thick conceptions of the good that might unduly impose upon the lives and choices of free and equal citizens pursuing their own life plan. However, I think that some notion of fraternity was at the heart of Rawls's conception of a liberal democracy as a people sharing a fate in some meaningful sense and mutually committed to liberty and equality because in the end, they genuinely care about each other. The original position and its "veil of ignorance" served the purpose of helping people imagine how to construct a society where people might share a fate together in this meaningful sense, duly guided by ideals of liberty and equality.

Should I be wrong about Rawls, nothing important hangs on the error. I do not advert to *A Theory of Justice* as any "Biblical" authority. Indeed, if I am wrong in my reading of his work, then I say so much the worse for Rawls so far as constructing the most attractive conception of a liberal society is concerned. Ultimately, I think a liberal society is best viewed through an illuminating prism of fraternity. Keep in mind that by claiming that a liberal society should start from a foundation of fellow citizens caring meaningfully about each other, I do not intend to engage in any mad flight of fancy about our empirical psychology. If I profess to love my fellow Americans the way I love my family or friends, then I suffer under a fantasy, and potentially a pernicious one at that. Indeed, speaking for myself, if I profess to like all my fellow citizens, much less love them, then I am badly exaggerating my actual affections. I don't even like all the people who live on my street. Fortunately, a sense of fraternity as I mean it doesn't hinge on wildly implausible psychological propensities. Return for just a moment to the Allied forces that landed in Normandy in 1944. Or consider the men and women who attempted to make the fifty-four-mile march from Selma to Montgomery slightly more than twenty years after D-Day to defy racial segregation and repression. No single thought can adequately capture all the motivations at work in the participants in these two cases, but hate had to be a key part of the picture. Surely the Allies hated Hitler and would see him defeated, and nonviolent as Martin Luther King and his company may have been, surely they hated Jim Crow without reservation. Thus, hate had its distinct place, but so too did love. Any picture that leaves out the notion of *willing sacrifices* on behalf of the others that these people cared about surely

misses a vital element of their courageous efforts. Ultimately, such extreme sacrifices of life and limb—over 200,000 Allied soldiers were killed or wounded during the Normandy invasion, and the long march from Selma was a bloody one—can only be adequately appreciated against a backdrop of caring about those who stood to benefit from the defeat of Nazism and Jim Crow, and this kind of caring doesn't rely on any quixotic view of love. In the end, the operative concern is relatively simple: *Do you care about someone else?* If the answer on the ground is "no," then people are unlikely to make such sacrifices, and the fact that real people regularly make them in everyday and not-so-everyday life provides some compelling psychological evidence that enough people generally care enough about their fellow citizens to make such things possible.

Is this notion of caring too thick to serve as a cornerstone for citizens in a liberal society in principle? If it is, I honestly see no way to get any conception of an attractive liberal society off the ground. In that case, where a sense of fraternity is too thick to qualify as a liberal ideal, then suitable ones like liberty and equality by themselves are just too skinny to sustain any robust conception of a real *people* joined together in any true fellowship with any genuine fidelity to each other as fellow citizens. Can something less than this kind of fraternal vision possibly hope to survive as a workable society? Yes, though one should not underestimate the immense hit that widespread indifference to fellow citizens would entail in such a society. By "indifference," I mean something short of outright hostility. In a society where citizens mutually root and vie for each other's downfall or suffering, the prospects are invariably bleak. I mean pervasive disinterest merely in the sense of people having little or no intrinsic interest in reaching out to others or in returning kind-hearted gestures should others be willing to reach out to them. In this regard, we do well to remember that citizens of liberal democracies are human beings before they are citizens, and bringing fundamental human social proclivities to bear on how people might come together as citizens in a liberal society does not run roughshod over the ideals at the heart of such a society. Hospitality, broadly construed in terms of a sense of personal responsibility for reaching out to others generously, and gratitude interpreted as thankfulness for such gifts and the desire to return them when possible, are at the very center of our social lives as human beings. We enter the world entirely dependent on the goodwill and care of others, and if we are fortunate enough to enjoy the great gift of being loved well, we are apt to develop not just the capacity, but also the decided proclivity to care about others in kind. This leap, from the self to others, is the first and most fundamental ethical leap for human beings. Like all psychological leaps, it can be halting and labored, but lives with and without the leap are entirely different.

Of course, one can insist that citizens in a liberal society can't legitimately be compelled to care about others in these ways, and one would



be quite right to say so. A liberal society can certainly hold people to various behaviors compelled by reasonable interpretations of the demands of liberty and equality, but it can never *make* people care about each other (no more than it can make people intrinsically care about ideals of liberty or equality either). Yet if there is no such concern—if citizens do not have a fundamental concern for and commitment to each other that goes beyond serving their own interests, a concern that extends over and above holding certain abstract principles dear—then the virtues of such a liberal society might still be noteworthy in key respects, but the vision would be impoverished in a crucial way.

Proned as we are to make the kind of leap I mean here, the habits of the sense of humanity that sustain the bonds that tie us together require abundant and consistent cultivation and sustenance. Perhaps there really are forms of caring that are genuine *no-matter-what* forms of love. Maybe I can deeply love my children no matter who they are, what they do, or how they treat me. To be honest, I have profound doubts about this. At the very least, such love will be seriously tested if children hurt and scorn their parents at every turn. Given our psychology, anything along the lines of unconditional love is bound to suffer enormous stress if burdened in this fashion, and everything in the world eventually breaks under enough weight. Moreover, most of us are undeniably built with a powerful proclivity to answer in kind. When we are the beneficiaries of kindness, we naturally incline toward returning good for good. On the other hand, when we are wronged, most of us wish to get people back, even if some people may do their best to divest themselves of such desires. If one goes back to Homer's world, this view of human nature driven to reciprocate in kind is on full display without any apologies. Achilles cannot turn a blind eye when Agamemnon seeks to humiliate him. Agamemnon must pay, and Achilles thirsts for the day when Agamemnon will tear his heart out and curse himself for what he has done.

Hospitality and gratitude are the bright side to the undeniable darkness of Achilles's profound indignation and desire for vengeance. And just as the capacity for appropriate anger must be duly cultivated, shaped, and moderated (some things really should make good people mad, other things shouldn't make good people *that* mad, and good people must know and feel the difference), so too must our basic proclivities with respect to hospitality and gratitude be cultivated and carefully reinforced. Any society that deeply values these things—and any liberal society *should* prize and herald gracious giving and receiving as pivotal for developing and sustaining the everyday bonds of sentiment that ultimately bind citizens together in the most basic sense—does well to encourage them as vital points of honor. Though the proclivity to return good for good is a well-entrenched part of human psychology, the proclivity requires consistent and plentiful nourishment to keep from withering beyond intimate circles in any given culture. If citizens are inhospit-

able with their neighbors, or if most citizens are ingrates, the precious soil of gracious giving and gratitude can be rendered barren, and in this case, the bonds of fraternity that are so important as the foundation of a liberal society face a huge uphill battle, and maybe an impossible one at that.

Honor can be a formidable defense against such a calamity. Again, a robust sense of honor has to do with things we deem so important that our very identity hangs in the balance. Shakespeare's "If I lose mine honour, I lose myself" gives voice to the thoughts and feelings at work where honor is concerned.<sup>6</sup> Shame and pride, properly understood as deep measurements of the self, are two psychological reference points for any sense of honor. A shameless person, someone devoid of the *capacity* for shame, is someone without any functional sense of honor. While a sense of honor is rooted in measurements of excellence, not all excellences are points of honor in any given life, and not all the points are equal. If everything is a matter of honor, then in a very real sense, nothing is. Whenever hospitality and gratitude are matters of honor, citizens in a liberal society stand a far better chance to be brothers and sisters in a common cause. When miserliness and ingratitude are occasions for shame, fraternity stands a far better chance.

Notice that the inculcation and sustenance of these proclivities for generous giving and grateful taking are fraught with complexities and possible pitfalls. For instance, consider my comments about an American debt of gratitude to those who invaded Normandy against a backdrop like Paul Robinson's concerns about seeing the Crown's veterans as "super-citizens" entitled to special considerations by virtue of their service.<sup>7</sup> Part of the immense power and beauty of gratitude resides in the fact that it is freely given and not strictly claimed like some straightforward contractual debt. It is one thing for me to express my sincere gratitude to those who served, and quite another for those soldiers to think I do them wrong by not expressing my thanks. Such cases can easily run afoul of a subtle "one thought too many" provision when it comes to an honorable life and character. As Ryan Rhodes details in his story of the poor lady who loses her head, when Lancelot's first thought is that he has suddenly been shamed, we think that he looks in the wrong direction, at himself rather than to the lady's sad fate.<sup>8</sup> In this vein, we admire Penelope's hospitality because she cares about a poor beggar enough to protect him, not because she assiduously checks off some hospitality box so as to preserve a conception of herself as a good host. Though a sense of honor always engages the self deeply, ultimately honor must be about more than just that self and its status, or else it can devolve into nothing more than narcissism and vanity. If Penelope gives with an eye to what her beneficiaries will owe her in the future, she does not give from the heart as a good host gives. And if citizens lionize soldiers and police officers as supercitizens who automatically embody everything that is



good and noble, they succumb to a form of cheap sentimentality that does no justice at all to genuine gratitude.

Getting things right in this vein can be a subtle enterprise, one that requires a rich and fine-tuned awareness of the things we might do for each other and what those things cost. In this light, let me conclude with an appropriate literary example drawn from Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. The protagonist in the tale is an Australian surgeon in World War II, an officer charged with commanding the Allied prisoners working on the impossible task of constructing the Burma railway as prisoners of war. Dorrigo Evans, a flawed man, rises to the occasion to spare as many of the men as possible, day in and day out. He realizes that the men need a strong, inspiring figure—an impossible figure in many respects—to help them survive the brutal conditions, and somehow or other he finds the strength to be more than himself, the man the men know as the *Big Fella*. At one point, an Allied prisoner steals a cow and the men offer Dorrigo a steak as a kind of tribute to his inspiring leadership. In his terrible hunger, he desperately wants to eat the steak before him, but instead, he makes the profound sacrifice of giving it to others who need it more. He understands their need for food, and more importantly, he understands their need for the kind of leader who can set such a magnanimous example. He makes the sacrifice, but not because of vanity or some penchant for virtue; quite simply, he does so for the men. And at another point, a Japanese commander orders him to select one hundred prisoners to march to another work camp. Dorrigo insists that the men are not up to the trek, that they will perish on the way, but the officer insists on the selection. Knowing that the officer will choose the men randomly if he refuses, Dorrigo tries to select the men who stand the best chance of surviving the trek, but he has no illusions about their chances. He knows that many will die, and he bears an enormous burden with the thought that he is sending good men to their deaths. But the appointed surprise him:

And so Dorrigo continued on, up and down the lines of those he had tried to save and now had to pick, touching, naming, condemning those men he thought might best cope, the men who had the best chance of not dying, who would most likely die nevertheless.

At its end, Dorrigo Evans stepped back and dropped his head in shame. He thought of Jack Rainbow, whom he had made to suffer so, Darcy Gardiner, whose prolonged death he could only watch. And now these hundred men.

And when he looked up, there stood around him a circle of the men he had condemned. He expected the men to curse him, to turn away and revile him, for everyone understood it was to be a death march. Jimmy Bigelow stepped forward.

Look after yourself, Colonel, he said, and put out his hand to shake Dorrigo's. Thanks for everything.

You too, Jimmy, Dorrigo Evans said.  
And one by one, the rest of the hundred men shook his hand and thanked him.

When it was done, he walked off into the jungle at the side of the parade ground and wept.<sup>9</sup>

The great beauty of this scene rests in the humane nobility of the participants, nobility marked neither by naive sentimentality nor crass narcissism. Dorrigo Evans gives his men the incalculable gift of heroically looking out for them at every turn under the savage conditions of the railway line, and in this particular moment, all he can think about is how he cannot protect them from what is to come. The men understand that the march may well be the death of them, but they appreciate Dorrigo Evans, not just for what he has done for them before this fateful day, but for what he suffers on their behalf now by having to choose them. Both the surgeon and the selected testify to the ennobling features of such gifts and gratitude. Together, they all rise to the occasion. Of course, the circumstances and the profound stakes of the situation amplify the poignancy of the scene, but the literary moment makes nothing up about giving and gratitude. The scene simply illuminates the complex innards of gifts and gratitude, delicately weaving together disparate elements of honor and love. The men love Dorrigo Evans, and they are right to do so. Dorrigo Evans loves these men, and he too is right to do so. Without the innumerable instances of looking out for each other in any given day, these soldiers would surely close in upon themselves, concerned only for their own survival, their eyes only on a steak for themselves.

On his thwarted trip to the South Pole in 1908, Ernest Shackleton commanded one of his men, Frank Wild, to accept one of his own biscuits on the uncertain return journey. With rations running low, they were fighting for their lives and they had no way to know whether they would make it. Wild had not begun the expedition as Shackleton's admirer, but this small gesture induced a profound change of heart. Wild's journal gave voice to it with, "I do not suppose that anyone else in the world can thoroughly realize how much generosity and sympathy was shown by this. I DO by GOD I shall never forget it. Thousands of pounds would not have bought that one biscuit."<sup>10</sup> Wild never forgot; thereafter his loyalty to Shackleton was absolutely unwavering. In the end, the gifts we give each other and the appreciation we express for them play crucial roles in forging and sustaining a genuine sense of fraternity in any society, including liberal societies, so we should duly honor them because we are never apt to embody difficult things that we do not hold dear as a point of honor.



## NOTES

1. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Samuel Butler, Book XIX, "The Project Gutenberg EBook of the Odyssey, by Homer," [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1727/1727-h/1727-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0026](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1727/1727-h/1727-h.htm#link2H_4_0026).
2. *Egil's Saga*, trans. Bernard Scudder, in *The Sagas of the Icelanders* (New York: Viking, 2000), 167.
3. Euripides, *Hecuba*, in Euripides I, eds. David Slavitt and Palmer Bovie, trans. Marilyn Nelson, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 89.
4. Anibal Etzioni, "Communitarianism Revisited," this volume.
5. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 105. For a discussion of Rawls's work and communitarian critiques, see my "Liberalism, Egalité, Fratimité?" *Journal of Philosophical Research* 16 (1991): 125-44.
6. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Antony & Cleopatra*, 3.4.22-23, in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 1365.
7. Paul Robinson, "The Honour of the Crown: The State and Its Soldiers," in this volume.
8. Ryan Rhodes, "Putting One's Best Face Forward," in this volume.
9. Richard Flanagan, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 329.
10. Caroline Alexander, *The Endurance, Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 13.

## EIGHT

### Winston Churchill and Honor

#### *The Complexity of Honor and Statesmanship*

Mark F. Griffith

Rarely can you find a statesman who exemplified the characteristic of honor better than Winston Churchill. His life was unique, and from a very early age he would lead a life of military valor, political excellence, and writing—all in the public eye. For that reason Churchill earned high honors; moreover, he wrote about honor. A statesman, soldier, writer, rhetorician, hero to many, and the recipient of numerous high honors in several countries, Churchill is uniquely situated for an exploration of honor. Yet in his early life, Churchill was skeptical about the concept of honor and lived in an era of incredible change and uncertainty. Later he would go on to defend honor rhetorically and to symbolize honor to his country, the West, and the world.

The evolution of Churchill's thought is complicated and irregular. One writer claimed that Churchill wrote between eight and ten million words, if you include his speeches, and of course every year more books about Churchill are published.<sup>1</sup> Churchill's writings and speeches make direct and indirect references to honor and dishonor. Everything he wrote was personal: it was deeply affected by Churchill's own life, heritage, and history. He comes to life in his writings, and we can see him making references and judgments throughout. These writings and speeches and his own actions reveal that he identified, considered, and evolved his thoughts on not just one but different aspects of honor. Because of the expansive scope of materials, the challenge is to reveal his understanding of honor.