COURAGE
The Politics of Life and Limb

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(Re)Introducing Courage

The Retreat of Courage

Man is nothing other than what he makes of himself, and nothing is more difficult to make than a courageous man. It is for precisely this reason that courage, as a topic of serious political and social debate, is not popular. At dinner parties it occasionally has its moments, and as a theme for ethicists and moralists it is afforded some serious consideration now and then. However, scholarly discussion regarding our social and political lives, for the most part, eschews serious discussion of courage. This has not always been so, and in the history of political thought one finds serious attention and praise given to courage by thinkers as diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Mencius, Bacon, Montaigne, and so on. Much the same can be said of the history of literature, poetry, biography, music, and, for that matter, almost every realm of human artistic endeavor. Only in the modern and especially the postmodern age has courage retreated from the forefront of social and political considerations. There are various reasons for this retreat, but central is that to talk about courage, as will become abundantly evident in the following considerations, is also to talk about manliness. Thus to talk about political order
Courage and its relationship to courage is to be exclusionary, perhaps even sexist—a charge all prudent thinkers need to fear.

Not only do we risk excluding the feminine when bringing courage into political considerations, we risk excluding those who do not live up to the difficult standard presented by courage. Although many modern thinkers regard it as a right and proper virtue, courage cannot be a requisite of political considerations and participation because making it a requisite would be tantamount to erecting barriers to full civic participation. The rationale here is straightforward: courage is a virtue possessed by few, and if one must possess courage to be a good citizen then there will necessarily be few good citizens. As such, many political theorists reject this virtue rather than hold it up as an integral part of general civic participation and good character.¹ For example, Mark Warren argues that participation in democracy and democratic institutions should not require courage at all. If democratic institutions function as they ought, they are “reducing and containing the risks of political engagement.”² The task of democracy is to ensure that citizens do “not require heroism” and to “protect spaces for moral persuasion—the most fragile of public spaces—so that moral voice requires something less than heroism.”³ Good citizenship, it seems, ought to be attainable regardless of one’s courage. And to push this position perhaps to its logical conclusion, if one demands of one’s fellow citizens the virtue of courage by, say, creating anything resembling a confrontational arena of participation, one is a bad citizen.

There is further reason for the retreat of courage from our political and social considerations. To contend that good political order requires courage is to say the coward has no place in political life. We know that not all people are courageous, which means that at least a few people writing about politics will disqualify themselves from political participation. After all, it would be very difficult to hold courage a necessary virtue for political participation yet know oneself to be a coward. In other words, only the courageous will be inclined to say that courage is important, and because thinkers are a notoriously timid lot it stands to reason that scholars not only ignore courage but often reject it altogether. People are hardly inclined to argue that they themselves are inadequate for their own topic.
Much the same can be said of the virtues in general. In the pre-modern world, especially in the world of the ancient polis, talk about virtue (arête) was de rigueur. Courage was considered part of virtue, and the central task of the polis was to assist in the fullest possible unfolding of the virtues and perfection of its citizens. However, as William Galston points out, two generations in the West have functioned on the assumption that one can, and should, sever the liberal polity from concerns not only of courage but of the virtues themselves. This view of virtue, and of courage in particular, is the progeny of Immanuel Kant’s proclamation that the good citizen is not necessarily the same as the virtuous individual. Kant’s point is very clear: man, he claims, “even if he is not morally good in himself, is nevertheless compelled to be a good citizen. As hard as it may sound, the problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils (so long as they possess understanding).” Put otherwise, the virtues, or the perfection of individuals, are unnecessary so long as we adequately rationalize our institutions and procedures.

John Rawls is central in promulgating this argument against “perfectionism.” Rawls posits that the good polity and its institutions cannot aim for the development of “perfected” citizens because such a goal requires an unachievable agreement on how a perfectly virtuous citizen would look. As Rawls says, people “do not have an agreed criterion of perfection that can be used as a principle for choosing between institutions. To acknowledge any such standard would be, in effect, to accept a principle that might lead to a lesser religious or other liberty, if not to a loss of freedom altogether to advance many of one’s spiritual ends.” As such, through much of the twentieth century—especially the latter half—the push was toward a political order predicated on the basic structures and institutional procedures of the polity rather than on virtuous citizens. Because the virtues are manifold they must also be relative, and if they are relative there can be no requirement in a pluralistic polity of any virtue. To demand one virtue of citizens, such as courage, might very well infringe on another virtue, such as passivity, and because all virtues are relative one cannot assert courage to be better than passivity. In other words, one can neither say that courage is better

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than cowardice nor that cowardice is better than courage—one can say, however, that our political and social organization should demand neither.

The Charge of Reason

Looking closely at such attacks on courage and the virtues, it is evident that not all virtues are under attack. What remain insulated from attack, or more precisely, what these attacks tacitly promote, are the noetic virtues. For example, discussions of political order reject courage because it privileges physical capacities instead of intellectual virtues—to exclude cowards is to exclude them for failings in action, not failings in the capacity to reason. While the general run of humanity may not be capable of living up to the difficult standards that courage and most of the other virtues demand, the general run of humanity is capable of reasoning, at least to some degree. Accompanying the retreat of courage, then, are the emergence and elevation of an alternative way of regarding human beings. This alternative informs large swaths of modern social and political order. No longer are human beings regarded as most fully developed when they realize, or at least strive to realize, the moral virtues. No longer does the complete human being need to be pious, just, temperate, or courageous. Instead, the fully developed human need only be intellectually virtuous. Courage thus finds itself in constant retreat from the charge of rationality.

We see, then, two divergent ideas of human beings in our discussion of political order. Political science, as a discipline, is an attempt to construct general principles about the way the world of politics works. But when we say the “world of politics,” we mean a world shared by a plurality of human beings. So political science, as obvious as this may seem, is concerned with human beings, with how they organize themselves and how they behave together. Because it concerns human beings, it must have at its center an adequate idea of human beings. This idea of human beings—this philosophical anthropology—then guides and grounds the search for good political order and the understanding of disorder. Modern political
science, and the social sciences at large, tend toward a certain philosophical anthropology, often called the rational actor model, sometimes the utilitarian model, sometimes the *homo economicus* model. The basic principle of this anthropology is this: human beings are rational creatures employing their rationality instrumentally to further their happiness. There is then a catalog of preferences, interests, or values, each of which contributes to this happiness, each of which is pursued with this capacity to reason instrumentally.

Social scientists, unless they have descended deeply into some second-order reality, recognize that human behavior is often complex, imperfect, limited, self-contradictory, and unpredictable. Therefore, for the most part, they do not wed theories of political order to strict notions of material preferences. Jon Elster, for example, excoriates economics as a discipline for failing to recognize that the end of nearly all human action is to maximize emotional satisfaction. Economists, as he so cuttingly puts it, almost universally ignore emotions and have thus “totally neglected the most important aspect of their subject matter.”7 The assumption that material goods are the end of rational action ignores the fact that quite often people prefer emotional pleasures to material goods and, importantly, that “emotional satisfaction is largely (but not only) derived from encounters with other people rather than from material goods and that, moreover, these are encounters not mediated by the market (‘Can’t buy me love’).”8 This, compounded with the facts that emotions are very difficult to measure, that people are not often good at rationally managing their emotional lives, that emotions and tastes may even be detrimental to our economic interest, and, finally, that emotions “are only to a small extent under the control of the will,” poses some serious problems for the vision of man as a rational actor.9

Beyond the emotional objection to the rational actor model is another problem rarely, if ever, discussed with regard to this philosophical anthropology. Supposing that we recognize a manifold catalog of values, tastes, preferences, and emotions that an independent rational actor can pursue, we are left with one decisive problem: no matter how diverse this table of preferences is, no matter
how it is shuffled, the model proceeds with one preference steadfastly at the top—self-preservation. Self-preservation is the presupposition that underwrites this model. To enjoy the material goods we have rationally pursued, to enjoy the emotional satisfaction of a material good or an emotionally satisfying relationship that we have more or less pursued rationally, we must stay alive. Some thinkers, like Thomas Hobbes, describe self-preservation as the right of nature, something so obvious that we can construct the first law of nature around it. Others, like John Finnis, go so far as to call it “a self-evidently basic form of good (or basic human value).” The problem with this presupposition is that human beings (and this can be vividly, empirically verified) do not always behave this way. We can point to many instances where people are willing to risk life and limb for the sake of something other than life and limb. It is for precisely this reason that courage needs to be brought back into our political discourse. Courage discloses a disruption of the hierarchy of human preferences that predicates the rational actor model.

The rational actor model provides that human beings make cost-benefit calculations. We are willing to pay more and more for something, depending on how much we value that thing. To reap the benefit of that for which we have borne the costs, however, we must remain alive. For example, I am always willing to pay a dollar for a muffin—if I am feeling peckish, the muffin has a value equivalent to a dollar. I might also be willing to give all my money for that same muffin, were I starving to death. In this case, the value of the muffin increases relative to my hunger. However, and this is of crucial importance, I am never willing to die for the sake of the muffin. If I am not starving, I simply do not care enough to risk life and limb for the sake of a muffin. And even if I were starving, dying for the sake of a muffin would defeat the purpose of the muffin. Much the same can be said with regard to any material good, or even any emotional good.

This said, the rational actor model is a good story. It explains a great deal about how we live together, about the political and social order we create for ourselves, and about how people behave with regard to muffins and other things in our empirical world. Courage, however, picks up where this story leaves off. Courage tells us the
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part of the story where self-preservation is bumped off the top of the preference hierarchy. Courage obtrudes when, contrary to the usual calculus of the rational actor model, one is willing to die for the sake of, say, a muffin. In other words, courage obtrudes when our average everyday relationship to life and death is suspended. In this sense, then, to inquire into courage is to inquire into a phenomenon that supplements, perhaps even completes, the story of how human beings live together. Courage tells about how we die together.

Cares and Fundamental Cares

To talk about courage in conjunction with politics is thus to throw the conventional way of thinking about human preferences into disarray. It is to say that there are two discrete models for understanding political action. With one model, we can talk about making rational choices regarding ends that we must be alive to enjoy. With the other, we can talk about courageous actions pertaining to things that transcend our physical existence. In short, we have a rational actor model and a courageous actor model. Yet the difference is not simply alternative ways of pursuing an end. It is not merely the rational pursuit of an end versus the courageous pursuit of an end. Instead, revealed is a basic difference in how we care about things. Whereas the rational actor model demonstrates things we care about, the courageous actor model discloses that which we care about fundamentally. In somewhat prosaic terms, if one acts for the sake of something, one probably cares about it. If, however, one is willing to risk life and limb for it, then one cares about it fundamentally. Of course, it is possible to pursue rationally something we care fundamentally about, but it is hardly likely that we would pursue something courageously about which we do not care fundamentally. People are seldom inclined to risk life and limb for things about which they do not care deeply. We put life and limb on the line only when we care fundamentally about something.

This said, a definition of courage can now be offered: courage is risking life and limb for the sake of something about which we care fundamentally. With this emphasis, courage emerges as more than a
Courage—it is a revelatory phenomenon. What is being suggested here is that courage, like most phenomena, can be regarded through two different lenses. On the one hand, there is the conventional lens magnifying the virtue itself. It magnifies the sort of person who exemplifies courage and, importantly, the boundaries and limits of what can properly be called courage. This is precisely the sort of lens one peers through when engaging in, for example, the debates between liberals and civic republicans. When Galston, for instance, discusses virtue, he is alerting us to certain habits and practices necessary for maintaining the liberal polity. More specifically, virtues, including courage, are needed to buttress “the two key features” of liberal society: “individualism and diversity.” For Michael Sandel, similar virtues are brought to bear for republican ends rather than liberal. The debate, as he informs us, circles around two concepts of autonomy, and it is not clear that there is any enmity per se between the two camps. What is clear is that the lens employed in this debate illuminates the virtues that most effectively lend themselves to their fundamental cares. Let us call this the empirical lens.

The second lens, while certainly lending clarity to the nature of the virtues, directs its interpretive power in a slightly different direction. Rather than asking, “What is courage?” or “How can courage be employed for the sake of our fundamental care?” it asks, “What does the invocation of a powerful concept like courage tell us about our collective lives?” or “What does courage tell us about how we exist meaningfully in the world?” In other words, this lens, which we might refer to as existential, magnifies certain truths about the community from which the concept emerges. It reveals, as my italicized definition of courage suggests, basic “for-the-sakes-of” or “cares.” If, for example, we peek through the existential lens at the liberal–civic republican debate, it illuminates the various virtues invoked for the sake of a shared care of existing together as autonomous individuals. It reveals that both parties hold autonomy to be integral for a meaningfully shared world. It also reveals what they do not hold to be integral. For example, neither Galston nor Sandel suggests that the virtues be brought to bear for the sake of, say, honor, or the glory of God, which would make for a different debate.
indeed. The revelation of what we do not care about fundamentally is as important as what this lens reveals.

Courage, however, is more than one virtue amid a catalog of virtues. Because courage is, at bottom, risking life and limb for the sake of something, it is the existential virtue par excellence. In revealing “for-the-sakes-of” for which one is willing to die, it discloses fundamental cares. In disclosing that which supersedes self-preservation, courage reveals something beyond the physical being of our individual lives. It reveals a distinction between physical life and that which is greater than physical life, a distinction constituting the very basis of transcendence. Transcendence is usually invoked to describe a realm of existence higher than the mundane. Transcendence, however, need not pertain to the divine. To transcend literally means “to climb over.” Courage reveals the transcendent character of human existence. It discloses human beings looking beyond their empirical existence. Courage is thus the existential virtue par excellence because, in disclosing fundamental cares, it brings into brighter light the distinction between empirical and existential. In bringing fundamental cares to light, courage reveals both the mere-ness of physical life and the transcendent possibilities of human life. Courage, in toto, reveals meaningfulness in human existence.16

The power of this second lens should thus be manifest. The existential lens magnifies the kernel of our very being. Human beings qua human beings have the capacity to care fundamentally. It might be argued that other creatures care fundamentally as well, but only human beings care fundamentally about things other than their own empirical lives. Of course human beings can (and ought to) care about their physical lives, but, as will become evident in the following chapters, caring fundamentally about one’s physical life is the hallmark of a coward. Other creatures might appear to care about things other than their physical being, but a simple biology of genetic maximization is adequate to explain away these anthropomorphic views of animals. Humans, for example, are the only creatures that can care fundamentally about, say, abstract ideas. While a dog might put itself between a child and an attacker, it does this because said child is positively associated with food and the exigencies of
biological life. A dog does not behave courageously because it thinks it would be un-dogly to run away. Alternatively, a man can stand courageously because to do otherwise would be unmanly. Only humans are capable of caring fundamentally about things that add meaning to life. Only humans care fundamentally about things transcending their empirical selves.

To claim that humans are unique in their capacity to care is not altogether new. In a chapter of his *Being and Time* called “Care as the Being of Dasein,” Martin Heidegger argues that “Dasein’s Being reveals itself as care.”17 His meaning is fairly straightforward: because human beings are nothing more than what they make of themselves, their very nature is determined by what they care about in the world in which they live. Their nature, which is to say their existence, is coterminous with their actions in their world. Thus, when human beings act, they do it for the sake of something about which they care. And care, Heidegger says, is not to be understood merely in the sense of “will, wish, addiction, and urge” because these types of phenomena are themselves founded on a human being’s cares.18 If we will something, our will points toward a care. If we wish something to come about, our wish points toward a care. Similarly, we can become addicted to something or have urges for something, both of which speak to a care. Of course, we can be consumed by addictions and urges, but this consumption only further discloses that one’s cares lie at the core of one’s being. Thus, as Heidegger puts it, “Dasein, in the very basis of its Being, is care.”19

Because acting courageously puts one’s existence at stake, it binds one’s fundamental cares to that same stake. As courage reveals “the stuff one is made of,” it reveals what one cares about fundamentally. To illustrate this point, Heidegger recounts an ancient fable:

Once when “Care” was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully took up a piece and began to shape it. While she was meditating on what she had made, Jupiter came by. “Care” asked him to give it spirit, and this he gladly granted. But when she wanted her name to be bestowed upon it, he forbade this, and demanded that it be given his name instead. While “Care” and Jupiter were disputing, Earth arose and desired that her own name be conferred to the crea-
ture, since she had furnished it with part of her body. They asked Saturn to be their arbiter, and he made the following decision, which seemed a just one: “Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you shall receive that spirit at its death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since ‘Care’ first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is now a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called ‘homo,’ for it is made out of humus (earth).”

The fable is significant because it speaks of a primordial understanding of the relationship between human beings and Care. First, it demonstrates that human being owes its very shape and existence to Care. Second, it demonstrates that the human belongs to Care “as long as it lives.” That is, between birth and death, his basic existential structure is given by Care. Third, it speaks a familiar language; humans are composed of body (earth) and spirit. In other words, humans have their empirical being and a way of being that transcends the empirical. But most importantly the myth demonstrates that it is Care that joins these two ways of being. As Heidegger puts it, “In care this entity has the ‘source’ of its Being . . . [and] the entity is not released from this source but is held fast, dominated by it through and through as long as this entity ‘is in the world.’” Thus, when we will, wish, or have an urge for a care, something about the way we exist in the world is revealed. When, however, one acts courageously—when one risks physical being for the sake of a care—one discloses the care that most accords with one’s existential structure. In revealing fundamental cares, courage also reveals the basic structure of existence.

Saying that the basic structure of human existence is care brings to mind an important school of feminist psychology. In In a Different Voice, Carol Gilligan argues that human beings per se are not defined by care—rather, this distinction falls to women. It is women, Gilligan argues, who “not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care.” Men, on the other hand, tend to “focus on individuation and individual achievement.” When this focus “extends into adulthood . . . maturity is equated with personal autonomy,
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[and] concern with relationships appears as a weakness of women rather than as a human strength.”23 In short, Gilligan argues that women function in their daily lives by a different ethic—an “ethic of care.”24 This ethic of care—also known as feminist ethics—stands in contrast to the ethic more natural to men, which Gilligan refers to as justice ethics.25 The capacity to make objective, rational judgments about right and wrong predicates this ethical system. It relies on the actor’s ability to extract himself imaginatively from his context before making moral choices. For example, one should not dwell on one’s situation when making moral choices; instead, one ought to behave as though wearing “a veil of ignorance,” to borrow an expression of John Rawls.26 Such a “veil” ensures that one’s own interests, one’s own particular relationships, do not becloud one’s rational, universalist, ethical reasoning. In other words, justice ethics is a deontological moral system revolving around universal categories, such as “human being” and “rights.” It is a “masculine” ethics that stands in contrast to the feminine ethic of care revolving around the local and the particular, such as “my friends” and “my family.” With the ethics of care, then, humans are not viewed as separate, physical beings engaging in endless “conflict over life and property that can be solved by logical deduction.”27 Instead, actors in any moral dilemma are “arrayed not as opponents in a contest of rights but as members of a network of relationships on whose continuation they all depend.”28 To extract oneself from this network is tantamount to denying the very basis of one’s existence because to be human in a meaningful way is to exist in a world of relationships. The ethics of care is thus predicated on a “relational ontology,”29 meaning that our existence is bound up in our relations with others. The contrast, then, is between “a self defined through separation and a self delineated through connection.”30

How these selves come to light further highlights the distinction between the two ethics. Just as justice ethics insists on reason and logical deductions to resolve conflict, self-understanding comes from the same source. The ethic therefore depends on a certain level of intellectual virtue that develops as people emerge from childhood. Care ethics, on the other hand, is instinctive and intuitive. As Gilligan points out, the good of a life filled with connections and rela-
tionships (colloquially known as friends and family) is something women “know” all along. They understand very early on that a life “favoring the separateness of the individual self over connection to others, and leaning toward an autonomous life of work than toward the interdependence of love and care,” makes a life “out of balance.”

Men, she tells us, recognize the importance of intimacy, relationships, and care as well, but not until midlife—“something women have known from the beginning . . . [but] because that knowledge in women has been considered ‘intuitive’ or ‘instinctive,’ a function of anatomy coupled with destiny, psychologists have neglected to describe its development.”

A certain irony thus comes to light. Courage, when regarded through the traditional empirical lens, tells us who is manly and who is unmanly. It tells us how one man separates himself from other men. Harvey Mansfield, for instance, defines manliness as “confidence in the face of risk.” Manliness and courage, it seems, go hand in hand. Courage, he tells us, reveals basic differences between the sexes: how they speak, how they assert themselves as individuals, how they regard territoriality, and how they make distinctions in general. Regarded through the existential lens, however, courage reveals humans, both men and women, as caring creatures. By examining courage through an existential lens, we are not being exclusionary on the basis of sex. In fact, in revealing fundamental cares, courage envelopes both the feminine and masculine. A point of convergence is revealed, where humans in general can be regarded as creatures intuitively and instinctively concerned with things transcending their empirical, rational selves. As the following chapters demonstrate, courage, examined through the existential lens, reveals a close kinship between relational ontologies and meaningful existence. It reveals both men and women as creatures defined by care; it reveals a “manly” world of caring and self-overcoming and, at the same time, a womanly world of courage.

The importance of courage in the study of political order should be coming to light. To construct general principles about the world of politics, we need a decent understanding of human existence. By looking at courage we are able to gain an understanding of how and what actors are at bottom because, when people are willing to
risk life and limb, they disclose their fundamental cares. Such a disclosure reveals the shape and limits of their very being. It reveals the boundaries of their lived world that cannot be crossed without disruption of that simple and ever-so-rationally organized hierarchy of human goods. It reveals the threshold beyond which self-preservation ceases to be their first law of nature. Courage trumps not only the preference for self-preservation but the preference for other-preservation as well. It is as likely to result in the killing of others as in the destruction of one’s own existence. And this holds for men and women alike. The importance of courage in our political life is manifest: courage sheds light on why people are willing to kill or be killed.

Communities of Care

Courage reveals cares, and these cares point beyond the empirical self. As such, they are necessarily bound up with other human beings. To borrow again from the ethics of care, courage is part of a relational ontology. To say this, however, is also to say that a courageous act cannot be performed in isolation. It pertains only to human action because it can neither recognize itself nor be recognized on its own. It cannot exist independent of human beings. There is, for example, no Platonic eidos of courage. Though we speak of transcendence, we speak only of finite transcendence. Thus courage exists only as it pertains to human action. It is humans who determine which actions are courageous; therefore, there is actually no such thing as courage—there are only courageous actions and courageous people. Insofar as courageous actions need to be recognized as such by other human beings, and insofar as courage points beyond the courageous actor, it is impossible for an individual to designate himself as courageous. This determination needs to come from without. An individual can be considered courageous only within the context of the community in which he acts. Courage, as part of a relational ontology, depends on a plurality of human beings.

The problem with this understanding of courage is that there is no universal agreement on what constitutes courage. For example, let us invoke—although it is something of a cliché—the image of
the modern soldier throwing himself on a grenade to save, say, his buddies or a room full of schoolchildren. Few images better evoke care and the other-directedness of courage. Yet if we imagine the same soldier throwing himself on the same grenade to save, say, a muffin, there will be much less agreement as to whether the action is courageous. Even more vividly, if nobody or nothing at all is in the room (not even the muffin), either to bear witness or to be preserved by the action, the act simply cannot be called courageous. More likely, it will be considered foolish. After all, what kind of person throws himself on a grenade for no reason? Yet the physical act is identical: a man throws his body over an exploding grenade. The difference is not merely that self-preservation ceases to be his fundamental care but that in the latter example the courageous action has no meaning. Throwing oneself on a grenade for the sake of nothing is meaningless. In the former example, broad agreement that the action had some meaning is possible; some general agreement can be found that the end for the sake of which the soldier threw himself on the grenade was meaningful. What this means, then, is that the fundamental care revealed by the soldier’s courage coincides with that of the people witnessing the action. Courage reveals the fundamental care of the courageous actor, but for it to be considered courage it must participate in a community of shared fundamental cares. If a consensus on a definition of courage is reached, then courage reveals communities of care.

Yet even as it is part of a relational ontology and even as it reveals fundamental cares and communities of care, courage is not something we choose. Take, for example, the soldier throwing himself on the grenade—it is unlikely that the action involved choice. In such situations, one reacts intuitively or instinctually. Choice indicates a decision based on principle, logical deduction, and rationality about acting courageously. One does not choose to act courageously in a given situation. Instead, one musters courage. Although acting rationally might itself require courage, courageous actions emerge from beneath the liminality of reason. There is, then, no reason to consider communities of care to be chosen, or even open to a rational accounting. Like courage, their source lies beneath the liminality of reason.
Modes of Articulation

These communities of care point to another aspect of political life that courage reveals: the mode by which we establish and maintain these relationships. Normally, human beings are thought to create and to perpetuate their communities around their capacity to speak a shared language. In this case, speech functions as the joints of the relational world. Speaking, or being articulate, is therefore a mode of articulation. Usually when we say someone is articulate we mean one is well-spoken, that one has the capacity to give words to thoughts. *Articulate* also means that one can express thoughts in a succession of coherently connected words expressing a larger idea. To be articulate is to have the capacity to fit things together into a coherent whole. It is to unite by forming a joint or joints. If, however, we regard the basis of community to be shared cares rather than a shared capacity for speech, then a path is opened to exploring alternative ways of envisioning these cares. Community need not depend on words to be articulated. We need not be articulate to be articulated. We need not be logical to be relational.

Thus, whereas most visions of political order resort to reason as the basis of community, courage reveals other modes. For example, social contract theory depends heavily on reason as the mode of articulation. Much the same can be said in modern democratic theory, which is predicated on the principle that rational, discursive association will, or at least ought to, form the bedrock of political communities. Yet if we think carefully about social contract theory, there is a hint of something other than speech in play. When social contract theories suggest that humans can find themselves implicitly, or tacitly, in a contract, there is an admission that we can be jointed together without words, articulated without reason, connected without *logoi*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as will become clear in the chapter on moral courage, suggests that communities of care are articulated by emotions and feelings, such as pity and compassion. Feelings, as opposed to reason, are not amenable to rational explication. They are, quite literally, illogical; they are mysterious, discerned by intuition and instinct. Hence, when we look at our political communi-
ties through the lens of courage we can more readily observe the contours and nuances of human relations formed by modes of articulation other than the discursive.

Order of Engagement

There are as many kinds of cares as the human imagination permits. If we can imagine something, we can care about it. There are, however, finite fundamental cares. Few of us can imagine a long list of things for the sake of which we would risk life and limb. In fact, as fundamental cares go, it is possible to identify concretely a limited number. For instance, in our own liberal world the U.S. Marine Corps motto, “Death before dishonor,” does not sound completely foreign to us. While not a credo for everyone, it expresses an abiding fundamental care: honor. It is not by coincidence that this credo stems from a military culture because honor is usually associated with warriors and martially oriented cultures. As such, honor is closely related to a certain type of courage: martial courage. It might be convenient for politicians to believe that their soldiers fight for the sake of liberty or autonomy, for the sake of the king, for the fatherland, or for the sake of some other abstract principle. However, the fact of the matter is that once soldiers are in battle, what keeps them on the line, what prevents them from fleeing, what inspires them to march directly into harm’s way, what permits them to act heroically, is a fundamental care for honor. Of course, what exactly is meant by honor needs to be determined, and this is what the next chapter of this book explores.

The next chapter looks at martial courage as the ideal type of courage. It is ideal not in any Platonic sense but because when the idea of courage is invoked one typically envisions warriors in battle. A cursory glance at the literature pertaining to courage bears this out; the most usual and most worshipped type of courage is precisely the sort on display in war and battle. It is andreia, as the ancient Greeks called it, “manly courage.” It is the courage of the Homeric hero, the courage of David facing Goliath, the heroism of a soldier throwing himself (meaningfully) on a hand grenade, or the

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courage of the superheroes in our childhood comic books. These descriptions and portrayals of *andreia*, both by commentators and by the warriors themselves, reveal over and over not just a disdain for self-preservation but also an abiding care for honor. One need only think of the Spartan way of life as a paradigmatic example of this community of care.

It may, nevertheless, seem strange to refer to any type of courage as ideal. We have established, after all, that courage is defined by its context—that there is no universal agreement on what constitutes courage, empirically speaking. One is no more correct in holding Gandhi and his nonviolence as the paragon of courage than the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade. Courage, however, has not always been regarded so equivocally. In the Homeric world courage was the exclusive domain of warriors and was easily determined: Did the warrior stay in the fight with his brothers-in-arms, or did he turn and flee dishonorably for the sake of himself? It was a simple standard. The good man had the mettle to forgo his own safety (in battle) for the sake of others. In Sparta there was but one type of courage: martial courage. Only later, and this is the story unveiled in this book, have other types of courage been imagined.

Specifically, this book tells the story of how political courage, moral courage, and economic courage developed either in opposition or in supplement to martial courage. It is a story of how martial courage, with violence as its attendant mode of articulation, became inadequate for the imaginative reality of more differentiated human relations. It tells a story of other types of courage emerging in tandem with the development of different fundamental cares. At the same time, however, it tells the story of the abiding power of martial courage and the central place it holds in our political self-understanding. Though we may reject martiality and reject honor as the pivotal point of our shared meaningful existence, the traditional place of martial courage as the ideal type of courage is not easily jettisoned, culturally, logically, or imaginatively.

This said, the purpose of this book is not to hold martial courage up as the highest type of courage. Instead, this book provides a phenomenological starting point and basic hermeneutical language for recognizing and describing fundamental cares and modes of ar-
articulation that range beyond the modern, Western obsession with autonomy and rationally articulated communities. Thus, while the effort here is not to rank these different types of courage, readers themselves may rank the following types of courage, and this is to be expected. Because courage is bound up with fundamental cares, and because these fundamental cares are associated with different modes of articulation, it only stands to reason that one type of courage may be preferred to another.

Should the reader be predisposed to care about honor, she will quite naturally regard martial courage not just as a type but as the highest type. However, just as martial courage reveals a fundamental care for honor, it also uncovers violence as the attendant mode of articulation. In warrior cultures, where honor is the fundamental care, the joints between human beings are established and maintained by violence and the continuous threat of violence. This is a fairly obvious claim when we consider how combatants are connected to combatants on the other side of a battle line—adversaries establish and maintain a relationship through violence. Less obvious is the violence that articulates comrades in arms and the larger community of care. Often, especially in the liberal democratic West, we either ignore this fact or, acknowledging it, reject it out of hand as a decent mode of articulation. Communities revolving around honor are often hierarchical, and hierarchies are necessarily predicated on and maintained by violence or the threat of violence, a relationship Michel Foucault understood well.

Thus one can easily imagine a distaste for martial courage, honor, and violence. It is, however, more difficult to let go of the selflessness and transcendent character of martial courage. As such, one can easily imagine people having a taste for another type of courage explored in this book: political courage, moral courage, or economic courage. In fact, as has already been suggested, one can very easily imagine people with no taste for courage at all—and, accordingly, no taste for this book. In any case, the point in setting down these descriptions of courage is not to rank one as preferable to another. Instead, the task is to invoke courage as a revelatory phenomenon shedding light on radically different ways human beings can organize themselves in pursuit of a meaningful, shared existence.
Courage illuminates the meaningfulness in human action that contradicts our usual, liberal understanding of collective life. If the reader finds one of the types of courage preferable to another, then as much is revealed about the reader’s cares and political commitments as about courage. And I will consider the book a success, at least by this measure.

What follows, then, is an analysis of four different manifestations of courage, along with the fundamental cares and modes of articulation attending them. The study begins with a rather sympathetic presentation of martial courage in the ancient world. By invoking the Spartan case, it shows good reason for the enduring appeal of courage throughout human history. The Spartans epitomize both the possibility for unselfish citizenship and human transcendence and the incredible human capacity for violence and destruction. From the story of the Spartans, chapter 2 demonstrates that martial courage and honor are not merely artifacts of the ancient world—they still pertain in the modern world. Martial courage appeals because it can underwrite, if not beget, a type of citizenship and way of being together in the world that provides deep and meaningful relationships.

Chapter 3 begins with an earnest objection to martial courage by asking, If this is courage in its most traditional milieu and appearance, must we then accept that all of our relationships will be predicated on violence? If we esteem martial courage, must we always live under the threat of violent death? This chapter proceeds with the invocation of a moment in classical Athens where precisely these questions are asked. What emerges is a courage I refer to as political courage. In this vision of courage, epitomized by Plato’s Socrates, self-preservation is trumped by a fundamental care for justice. The long-standing model of Achillean courage and the Spartan love of honor are transmogrified into a completely new moral system—a moral system that opens the way to a novel form of political life. Associated with the displacement of honor by justice is the kernel of a new mode of articulation. Whereas martial courage joins people together with violence, political courage turns to discourse, which is to say, it turns to human reason. So in the case of political courage, discourse is brought to bear for the sake of justice.
Chapter 4 turns to the appearance of moral courage and heroism in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For Rousseau, as for other thinkers both before and after, courage has an enduring appeal. But for Rousseau, unlike the thinkers who developed the concept of political courage, the turn to reason and discourse is as problematic for human community as the reliance on violence in martial courage. Rousseau’s thought develops a different type of courage that reveals autonomy as the fundamental care. This is not to say that honor and justice are completely rejected as human goods. But Rousseau’s idea of courage points to a way of being in which human beings are not dependent on external forces for their happiness. And because Rousseau is highly suspicious of both reason and violence as acceptable modes of articulation, he turns to sentiment—specifically, to compassion—to connect human beings to one another. For Rousseau, because courage is not a rational capacity, it makes no sense to make it dependent on human reason; moral courage is like martial courage in that it resides on the subrational aspect of our humanity. Moral courage, then, brings compassion to bear for the sake of autonomy.

The appearance of economic courage and heroism in Alexis de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America is the focus of chapter 5. Whereas others seek to retain all that is good about the martial virtues but reject violence, Tocqueville sees a different possibility emerge in the American democratic milieu. Americans have not rejected martial courage and honor altogether; nor have they simply reformulated martial courage by, say, associating it with an alternative fundamental care and a more domestic mode of articulation. Instead, they have accomplished an amazing feat: they have managed to turn the very definition of courage on its head. Rather than claim that courage—be it martial, political, or moral—is by definition about selfless acts, they hold acts of self-aggrandizement in high esteem. Tocqueville observes that while greed and the love of gain have almost universally been condemned as vices, in America they adopt the color of courageous acts. Thus courage in the economic realm—risking life and limb for the sake of wealth—is an honorable pursuit in the democratic way of life. In economic courage, then, exchange is brought to bear for the sake of well-being.
The final chapter of this book considers how reflections on courage can contribute to a deeper understanding of our own political and social lives. In particular, it asks how this analysis of courage and the concomitant identification of very divergent fundamental cares can help us understand what we might otherwise dismiss as irrational behavior on the part of other human beings. It explores how the recognition of cares and associated behaviors that defy the usual understanding of *homo economicus* might help us understand other people and their willingness to risk life and limb for the sake of things we usually have great difficulty understanding. The reader will also be invited to consider how this interpretive approach can be brought to bear in situations that may not accord with the four manifestations of courage discussed within this book. For example, she will be asked to consider the possibility of kinds of courage and cares not explored in this book, such as existential courage, or caring fundamentally about God, joy, or even authenticity. Finally, should the reader have the heart to read to the end, she will be reminded that despite the usefulness of courage for our social scientific understanding of the political world, it remains a human virtue that can save us when our own reason fails us and our community.