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## A Critique of Aristotle: Countervoluntary Action and Moral Injury

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# **A CRITIQUE OF ARISTOTLE: COUNTERVOLUNTARY ACTION AND MORAL INJURY**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

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by  
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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1. Aristotle on Action and Character .....	4
Defining and Refining Action.....	4
Voluntary Action and Character Formation .....	9
Countervoluntary Action and Agent Regret .....	11
Chapter 2. Adjusting the Nicomachean Ethics to Moral Injury .....	16
Character: The Self and a Community .....	16
Moral Injury and Its Effects .....	25
Moral Injury Affects Character.....	31
Chapter 3. Countervoluntary Action and Luck .....	34
How Luck Permeates Action .....	34
From Luck to Moral Injury .....	38
Chapter 4. Objection: A Closer Inspection of the Role of Luck .....	47
Aristotle's Response .....	47
Nussbaum's Support .....	50
Response: The Fragility of the Voluntary .....	52
Bibliography .....	58
Vita .....	60

### **Abstract:**

“A Critique of Aristotle: Countervoluntary Action and Moral Injury,” is a critique of Aristotle’s view that countervoluntary action does not affect character. I argue that a countervoluntary action can affect character when said action leads to a moral injury. Throughout this critique I use military experiences of moral injury to bolster my argument. This critique focuses on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, and is directed at his *Nicomachean Ethics* specifically. The upshot of my critique is to not only argue that countervoluntary action affects character, but to spotlight specifically why it is character affecting. Essentially, my aim is to call attention to the phenomenon of moral injury, and examine why such a phenomenon cannot be ignored within a practical ethics.

## **Introduction:**

Agency, the ontological status of originating actions, and the psychological sense of ownership over said agent-contributed actions coincide to create an individual's character.

Aristotle says that it is one's voluntary actions which contribute to character formation; however, I will argue that countervoluntary actions contribute as well. For Aristotle a countervoluntary action is an action that is contrary to long-held values, but is nevertheless performed under less-than-ideal epistemic and pragmatic circumstances such that the agent would not have performed the action in other circumstances. Countervoluntary actions, then, raise questions as to whether the outcomes of such actions stem from our moral agency, and if so, do they directly contribute to our established character? Aristotle holds firm to the notion that character is developed through intentional and therefore voluntary action that is reinforced through habituation. In doing so, he would reject the notion that countervoluntary actions affect an individual's character. Acting against one's values does not necessarily mean that the actor is acting countervoluntarily. An agent may choose after deliberation to act in a manner that contradicts their explicitly held values, but this would not be considered a countervoluntary action.

In this thesis I examine cases where an agent acts (in Aristotle's definition) countervoluntarily against their moral values, and yet still internalizes said actions as their own. Essentially, I am claiming that Aristotle fails to make room for what is now called "moral injury." Jonathan Shay, a psychologist who first defined the term moral injury, defines it as a psychological wound that is caused by the violation of a person's moral or ethical values. Specifically, Shay observes that moral injury occurs when an agent has witnessed or participated

in actions that violate their sense of right and wrong.<sup>1</sup> In sum, I am claiming that what Aristotle calls countervoluntary action is in fact character forming. To defend this claim, I will consider actions which result in moral injury, and show how moral injury consequently affects character.<sup>2</sup>

I will first explain how, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle refines action from the voluntary and involuntary to the countervoluntary.<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> I will explore how Aristotle thinks voluntary action affects and solidifies character. After unpacking Aristotle's account of the countervoluntary, I will use military experiences as an example to argue that countervoluntary action can lead to moral injury. I will particularly focus upon extrinsic luck, and how it affects an agent's situation and subsequent actions. In this way extrinsic luck fogs the voluntariness of said affected actions. In *Moral Luck*, Bernard Williams defines extrinsic luck as, "the circumstances that are not of our own making."<sup>5</sup> Extrinsic luck concerns factors beyond our control, and in Aristotle's framework can transform an action from voluntary to countervoluntary. I will argue that despite such a transition within the voluntary an agent will nonetheless be affected. My argument will be further supported by writings on moral luck and moral injury (Bernard Williams, Jonathan Shay) which I will tie together with an analysis of military experiences (David Pierson, John Protevi). These ties will show that countervoluntary action affects

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<sup>1</sup> Shay, Jonathan. 1994. *Achilles in Vietnam*. Ontario: Macmillan Publishing Company, 22.

<sup>2</sup> This thesis uses real military experiences in order to clarify and bolster the critique against Aristotle which is being addressed. Aristotle's virtue ethics was meant to be a practical ethics, to evaluate it through its practical implementations seems necessary. For a full explanation for why this should be considered a valid approach to philosophy refer to the section "The Philosophical Perspective," in Nancy Sherman's book *Afterwar*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Broadie, Sarah. 1991. *Ethics with Aristotle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 126.

<sup>4</sup> The term Aristotle uses is *akousia* which translates to involuntary. However, Aristotle's use of this term 'involuntary' substantially differs from the commonly assumed meaning of 'involuntary.' When Aristotle calls an action 'involuntary' he does not mean something akin to a reflex. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I will follow Sarah Broadie's translation, and use the term 'countervoluntary' for the word *akousia*.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, Bernard. 1981. *Moral Luck*. New York City: Cambridge University Press., 39.

individual character despite not being wholly voluntary. In Chapter 4, I will provide possible objections to my argument. Nussbaum argues that Aristotle does adequately address luck. Thus, she concludes that Aristotle accounts for extrinsic luck within his ethics, but ultimately places greater emphasis upon factors within one's control. I, however, remain unconvinced that such a concession gives an accurate account for the impactful nature of a countervoluntary action. My critique of Aristotle will begin in chapter 2 where I will argue that actions which lead to moral injury affect character. In chapter 3, I will argue that actions which lead to moral injury are countervoluntary actions. Therefore, my critique of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is that countervoluntary actions which lead to moral injury affect character. Thus, my conclusion is that countervoluntary actions can affect character.

## Chapter 1. Aristotle on Action and Character

In this Chapter, I will show how character, for Aristotle, is established, fomented, and cemented by habitual action. To build a virtuous character an individual must consistently make virtuous decisions that lead to virtuous actions until they are habituated to the virtuous life.<sup>6</sup>

These virtuous actions in Aristotle's account must be voluntary, an agent must have in mind at the time of action a reason why they did the action—they must choose to perform the action for that reason. To achieve the well lived life an individual must actively and voluntarily habituate themselves towards the virtuous character for the sake of the virtuous. Voluntary action is then necessary to achieve *eudaimonia*, and an individual's ability to consistently act voluntarily is intrinsically tied to the obtainment of such a well lived life.<sup>7</sup> This view requires that voluntary action is possible not just occasionally, but that it is consistently possible.

### Defining and Refining Action

In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle divides action into the voluntary and the involuntary. He speaks in detail on action and specifies varieties of action because he places a heavy emphasis upon action. Aristotle is attempting to isolate voluntary action by stripping away what is *akousioi*. He does this to specify and prioritize a specific type of action which he considers to be strictly character shaping. Before delving into Aristotle's varieties of action it is important to explain how Aristotle conceptualizes action. For Aristotle, actions are evaluated and categorized by an agent's intentions as well as the outcomes which the agent is seeking to

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<sup>6</sup> Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 91.

<sup>7</sup> *Eudaimonia* is typically translated as happiness, but its concept is more in line with the notion of flourishing. For *eudaimonia* to be possible one must obtain a virtuous character. A character is obtained through the habituation of certain traits which Aristotle considers as virtuous.



achieve. An action comprises three key components: the agent, the action itself, and the end. The agent is the person performing the action, the individual responsible for the action and its outcomes. The action itself is the activity, and the end is the goal or intentions of said action. This end is the agent's intention behind the action being realized. An action for Aristotle is a more robust notion than the mere action itself, and it is this robustness that causes Aristotle to identify types of action. Since action is vital to character formation, I will address Aristotle's varieties of action in detail.

Aristotle's gold standard variation of action is voluntary action. Aristotle's account of voluntary action is based on rational choice and deliberation acted upon with a successful end, an outcome that matches the intention. An action is voluntary in cases which the individual is both the origin and the cause. Its ends are predictable.<sup>8</sup> Essentially a voluntary action is when the three components of action are in harmony. As Aristotle states,

the voluntary would seem to be that of which the originating principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action.<sup>9</sup>

Voluntary action entails a rationally justifiable choice. For a voluntary action to be designated as such the individual must comprehend all the circumstances involved within their decision. They must accurately assume the outcomes of such voluntary actions. Finally, they must voluntarily act upon their choice. Habituated action which forms a character, according to Aristotle, originates and develops from voluntary action. An example of a voluntary action is when an individual deliberates upon and decides to go for a run. The individual has a goal in mind, that of being a runner. Thus, in choosing to run, the individual has a clear end in mind, and voluntarily partakes in said specific action. The action is voluntary as the individual has chosen to run in

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<sup>8</sup> Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 124-5.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, 2009. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1111a22-24.

order to bring about an outcome which is predictable. Voluntarily running can be habituated into forming the individual into a runner. For Aristotle, voluntary action ties together an intention to act and those intentions being realized through said activity.

The other variety of action Aristotle addresses are actions that he calls ‘involuntary.’ Involuntary actions are actions that are performed without a sense of agency or ownership over said actions. An involuntary action is one where the action itself is divorced from the agent and the end, but is nevertheless enacted. For Aristotle, an involuntary action is one where all components of the action are out of one’s control. An example of this would be a reflex. A reflex is a physiological response that was enacted without the agent making a conscious decision. The agent did not have an intention to act, nor did they have control over the action itself. Not all actions are simply voluntary or involuntary. Following this insight, Aristotle further refines involuntary action into actions he called mixed as he viewed them to be a mix between voluntary and involuntary action.<sup>10</sup>

These mixed involuntary actions occur when one of the three components in Aristotle’s conception of action has become obscured. The agent, the action itself, or the end becomes obfuscated in terms of its involuntariness, but is nevertheless not voluntary. Mixed involuntary actions are not always deliberated upon, but they can be. They are actions which have been performed under less than ideal circumstances, and may result in unintended consequences. As Sherman states,

Compulsion, duress, ignorance of particulars, unforeseeable consequences all may conspire to limit ascriptions of responsibility...A fuller consideration of circumstances and motives may reveal, for example, that an agent, while making a voluntary choice with foreseen ill consequences, is none the less not

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<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a12.

fully culpable, for the choice was made under duress, ‘under conditions of a sort that overstrain human nature and no one would endure.’<sup>11 12</sup>

Mixed involuntary actions are actions performed under some form of compulsion which may result in foreseeable consequences. However, mixed involuntary actions may also occur *because* of unforeseeable circumstances which result in unforeseeable outcomes. In such cases the actions are still not wholly involuntary as there was a component in the action that remained voluntary.

For Aristotle, such unforeseeable consequences occur through one’s ignorance of the particulars involved within a given circumstance. Thus, it is possible for a voluntary action to become a mixed involuntary action. Aristotle states,

Now the man acts voluntarily; for the principle that moves the instrumental parts of the body in such actions is in him, and the things of which the moving principle is in a man himself are in his power to do or not to do. Such actions, therefore, are voluntary, but in the abstract perhaps involuntary; for no one would choose any such act in itself.<sup>13 14</sup>

For an action to qualify as voluntary all components of one’s actions must be voluntary.<sup>15</sup> An example of these mixed involuntary actions would be if one were compelled by a lion to “choose” to run. In such a situation, the agent, and the end of the action is voluntary, but the action itself was involuntary because the action itself was compelled by an external force. The action itself was forced under conditions of duress, and while the agent’s intentions as well as the agent themselves decided to run the action could not be considered wholly voluntary. Thus, said action has become mixed between the involuntary and voluntary. Another example of a mixed involuntary action would be if an agent deliberated upon, and rationally chose to run with an

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<sup>11</sup> Sherman, Nancy. 1989. *The Fabric of Character*, "Aristotle's Theory of Virtue". New York City: Oxford University Press,” 19.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110b25.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a14-19 (emphasis added).

<sup>14</sup> Ross’s translation to “in the abstract” is a bit outdated. A better term would be in a unqualified way involuntary, as in lacking the necessary qualities to be determined as such.

<sup>15</sup> Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 129.

intention to become a runner, but they were ignorant to the fact that they suffered from exercise-induced asthma. Had the individual been aware of the circumstances they would have never chosen to go for a run.<sup>16</sup> In this case the action itself was voluntary, but its consequences were involuntary. For Aristotle, the outcomes of one's intentions matter as much as the intentions themselves.

In Aristotle's conception mixed involuntary actions seem to be actions that are permeated by extrinsic and intrinsic luck. This influential luck is contributing a degree of unpredictability within action. Williams defines intrinsic luck as the circumstances into which a person is born, such as an individual born with exercise-induced asthma.<sup>17</sup> In the example of the initially voluntary runner the agent's actions were shown to be a mixed involuntary action, made so through intrinsic luck. Another example of a mixed involuntary action would be one of extrinsic luck, such as actions done by ignorance of the circumstances. As defined in the introduction extrinsic luck refers to circumstances outside of an agent's control; it is a matter of happenstance. These mixed involuntary actions then seem to be actions which have become permeated by luck, either intrinsic or extrinsic.

For Aristotle, a mixed involuntary action can be further separated into two subcategories: the countervoluntary action and the not-voluntary action. As stated in the introduction, a countervoluntary action is the subcategory of action upon which I am focusing my critique. For Aristotle the single but (in my view) significant attribute that qualifies a mixed involuntary action as countervoluntary is regret. Aristotle states,

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<sup>16</sup> This is also an example of intrinsic luck which Bernard Williams defines in *Moral Luck*, as related to factors such as genetic inheritance, natural talents, and physical attributes, which are not under our control.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck*, 39.

Everything that is done by reason of ignorance is *not* voluntary; it is only what produces pain and regret that is [countervoluntary]. For the man who has done something by reason of ignorance, and feels not the least vexation at his action, has not acted voluntarily, since he is not pained. Of people, then, who act by reason of ignorance he who regrets is thought [a countervoluntary] agent, and the man who does not regret may, since he is different, be called a not voluntary agent.<sup>18</sup>

Actions that are “voluntarily” performed in ignorance but are later, regretted are not fully voluntary actions. Aristotle considers such actions to be countervoluntary. They are specifically countervoluntary because if all the circumstances were to be revealed Aristotle concludes the agent would have never chosen to act. Therefore, such actions are to be regretted and pitied, but are not wholly voluntary, nor wholly involuntary. To continue the previous examples, the agent who decided to run, but was ignorant of their exercised-induced asthma acted (mixed) involuntarily. In this situation the runner was ignorant of the particulars involved in the action, and possibly would never had chosen to run if they had been aware of said particulars. Therefore, if the runner feels regret for their actions, then Aristotle would call this action countervoluntary. Aristotle says that actions that are similarly done out of ignorance, but are not regretted are called ‘not-voluntary’. An example of this would be if the runner did not regret their choice to run despite having learnt (through experience) about their asthma. The distinguishing factor that sets the countervoluntary action apart is regret. These various distinctions are important as Aristotle would consider only one form of action to be character shaping.

### **Voluntary Action and Character Formation**

For Aristotle only voluntary action affects character. All other types of action do not contribute. Implicit in voluntary action is *prohairesis* which directly affects how one’s character is shaped. As Nancy Sherman explains in her book *The Fabric of Character*,

Character coherence is fundamentally related to Aristotle’s notion of prohairesis or reasoned choice...Prohairesis choices are a subclass of merely

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<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110b18-22.

voluntary decisions. A prohairetic choice for Aristotle is supported by reasons for supposing action...literally, it means ‘choosing over’ or ‘choosing before’ i.e. preferring.<sup>19</sup>

*Prohairetic* choices are always voluntary, and as such they produce actions that are deliberated upon and rationally chosen. *Prohairesis*, which Sherman translates as ‘reasoned choice’ is indicative of a voluntary action, and is necessary to character formation. For Aristotle, character was not affected by external factors, but was rationally chosen by intentional actions. A character was comprised of certain virtues that were deliberately cultivated. This cultivation occurred over time through voluntary actions. These voluntary actions were habituated in order to shape and cement character. An individual’s character then was not an accident, but a choice.

Aristotle views character as stable; not something that is easily affected. This thought is made clear when Aristotle states in the *Rhetoric*,

Equity bid us...to consider not so much the action of the accused but the choice, and not this or that part of the account but the whole story; and to consider not what sort of a person an agent is now, but what sort of person he has been or is usually.<sup>20</sup>

Aristotle conceives character as shaped with rational and deliberated upon action that has been purposely habituated. Therefore, he would not consider an “outlier” like a countervoluntary action to be intrusive enough to shape character. He emphasizes that countervoluntary action is not only less frequent than voluntary action, but is unpredictable, and therefore not open for habituation. As François Raffoul emphasizes in, *The Origins of Responsibility*,

Aristotle thus grants a privilege to the voluntary, confirming the performative character of his analysis...Some actions seem to be mixed, almost undecidably voluntary and involuntary...Aristotle raises the possibility—for him, the

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<sup>19</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 79.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle. 2012. *Rhetoric*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1374b13-16.

threat—of the involuntary, his analysis always leans on the side of the voluntary.<sup>21</sup>

Aristotle acknowledges that action can be mixed, and specifically refines such actions further into countervoluntary and not-voluntary action. However, he clearly views voluntary action as the most influential and common form of action. Raffoul continues to explain that,

The bar is always raised higher for an act to finally qualify as involuntary...The goal is clearly to delineate the contours, apart from both necessity and fortune, of an area that would be under one's control, of what would be up to us.<sup>22</sup>

Raffoul is emphasizing that as Aristotle refines action, he nevertheless preferences voluntary action as such actions were *choiceworthy*.<sup>23 24</sup> Sherman comments that,

Aristotle's examples of deliberation do not adequately reveal the complexity of acting from character. When he talks about deliberation per se, he tends to focus on simple linear examples, where ends are isolated from each other.<sup>25</sup>

I think that Aristotle compartmentalizes and stratifies decisions as if they form in an anti-situational void instead of viewing decisions as reacting to information and events which have been permeated by intrinsic and extrinsic luck. By delineating the contours of action through “what is up to us” or what is influenced by luck, Aristotle sets up a character that is isolated from the experiences of being an acting and reacting agent.

### **Countervoluntary Action and Agent-Regret**

Aristotle privileges voluntary action and rejects the notion that a countervoluntary action affects character.<sup>26</sup> This privileging is a mistake which, according to Martha Nussbaum

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<sup>21</sup> Raffoul, Francois. 2010. *The Origins of Responsibility*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 41.

<sup>22</sup> Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*, 41.

<sup>23</sup> Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*, 41.

<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 76.

<sup>26</sup> Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*, 41.

in, *The Fragility of Goodness*, is highlighted in the story of Oedipus Rex. Oedipus has killed an old man. This murder is *hekousios*, voluntary. Oedipus decided to murder the old man because he was driven by his desire to remove the old man who was an obstacle on his journey. As Nussbaum states,

There is the right sort of conceptual connectedness among the contents of desire, belief, and resulting action.<sup>27</sup>

In murdering the old man however Oedipus has inadvertently committed patricide. The old man was Oedipus's father. Oedipus was ignorant of the particulars; had he known all the information, he would certainly not have committed the murder. As Nussbaum states,

There is no orexis for parricide... parricide is not the intentional object of any of Oedipus's orectic or cognitive activities.<sup>28 29</sup>

Aristotle would deem murdering one's father to be in general *akousioi*<sup>30</sup> as typically no individual would willingly murder their father. Oedipus's case is an example of a countervoluntary action. Oedipus made the decision to murder an old man, but in doing so unintentionally committed patricide. Upon learning the consequences of his actions Oedipus is consumed with anguish and regret. I argue that in this case Oedipus's life has been irreconcilably shaped by a countervoluntary action even more so than if the action were to have remained entirely voluntary. His voluntary decision to murder a man affirms Oedipus's character. However, the patricide Oedipus has committed inflicted a moral injury. Oedipus's murder was voluntary, and by Aristotle's views both character affirming and shaping. Had Oedipus known the identity of the old man he would have never chosen to murder. Oedipus regrets his action and

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<sup>27</sup> Nussbaum, Martha C. 1986. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 283.

<sup>28</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 283.

<sup>29</sup> Nussbaum translates orexis to 'desire.'

<sup>30</sup> Nussbaum translates *akousioi* to 'non-voluntary.'



was ignorant of the actual facts at play within the situation. Aristotle would say the murder was character shaping, but not the fact that the old man was Oedipus's father. Oedipus is to be pitied in that respect, but the actual circumstances were unforeseeable. Therefore, according to Aristotle's view the voluntary murder proceeded from Oedipus's character, but not necessarily the patricide. Oedipus is a murderer, but not a willing murderer of his father. Aristotle allows that voluntary action can transition into countervoluntary action. In such circumstances a voluntary action only remains voluntary as long as the ends *appear* to be in line with the outcomes. In other words, as long as no other extenuating circumstances or outcomes are revealed to be otherwise. Despite this revelation Aristotle still maintains that voluntary actions are more prevalent, as he considers most actions to be *choiceworthy*.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Aristotle seems to not only reject the notion that a countervoluntary action affects character, but also seems to ignore both intrinsic and extrinsic luck as prevalent factors.

Aristotle's rejection of countervoluntary action as significantly character forming is necessary, but ultimately problematic for his ethical framework. For Aristotle, voluntary action (if allowed to remain as such) serves to reinforce character. This reinforcement occurs within one's ability to habituate action. An individual can create a stable character through habitual voluntary action. Therefore, it is necessary for voluntary action to be frequently actionable. Countervoluntary actions by nature are not explicitly chosen, and as such they are not able to be habituated. Therefore, as countervoluntary actions are not chosen, nor voluntarily habituated, for Aristotle, they cannot be character shaping. Nevertheless, countervoluntary actions are problematic for Aristotle's notions of character formation. Countervoluntary actions are problematic as they destabilize an agent's sense of morality. Such actions cause an individual,

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<sup>31</sup> Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*, 41.

inadvertently, to behave contrary to their moral code which may be internalized despite limited agency. This destabilization creates a disconnect between an individual's sense of morality and their actions. This derailment, depending on severity, may be even more formative than habitual voluntary action as it causes a rift between an individual's established moral code and their actions. Actions for which pity or blame are ill equipped to reconcile.

In response to countervoluntary actions Aristotle mentions that praise or blame may be rightfully assigned to such actions. Sherman states that under such conditions Aristotle claims,

Here pardon is appropriate. In other cases, praise will be due to the agent who willingly endures what is shameful in order to avoid a more terrible outcome.<sup>32</sup>

This notion is fine, but fails to accurately address the intensity that such emotions will impress upon the individual experiencing the pity, blame, or praise. Aristotle acknowledges the existence and possibility of countervoluntary actions, and recognizes that they may result in unforeseen ends that were not within the actor's control, but assumes that the uncontrollable nature of the situation will bypass the actor's sense of fault or self. Human distress provides a moment of pity or blame on the actor's behalf, but for Aristotle will not contribute more to character than situations within an individual's control.<sup>33</sup> In this way, Aristotle should not discount the impactful nature of luck or its role in character formation.

In Aristotle's account, a countervoluntary action is an action that is obscured in terms of its voluntary and involuntariness. It is an action that despite this obscurity produces a sense of regret. By saying that the agent experiences regret for their action, Aristotle seems to be referring

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<sup>32</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 31.

to agent-regret. Agent-regret is further elaborated upon by Bernard Williams. For Williams agent-regret is a form of regret,

which a person can feel only towards his own past actions... the supposed possible difference is that one might have acted otherwise, and the focus of the regret is on that possibility...agent regret is by no means restricted to voluntary agency...[it is] something which cannot merely be eliminated by the consideration that it was not his fault. It may be still more so in cases where agency is fuller than in such an accident though still involuntary through ignorance.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of Oedipus, there seems to be this form of agent-regret occurring after he becomes aware of having committed patricide. I argue that it is exactly this agent-regret and community attributed pity in the 'in' voluntariness of the action, that directly influences and affects an individual's character by means of moral injury (moral injury will be further explored in Chapter 2). Oedipus was not merely shaped by the voluntary murder, but in the realization that he has now killed his father irrespective of whether he intended it or not. In Chapter 3, I will make this argument by showing that Aristotle's voluntary action does not make allowances for luck which inevitably converts such actions from the voluntary to the countervoluntary. In such circumstances the countervoluntary can lead to decisions that become morally injurious to the acting agent. These countervoluntary actions (made so through luck) result in a direct influence upon the agent's character. Such instances of countervoluntary actions will support my critique that countervoluntary action, contrary to Aristotle's view, can have a substantial affect upon character.

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<sup>34</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck*, 27-28.

## **Chapter 2. Adjusting the Nicomachean Ethics to Moral Injury**

In this chapter, I will examine the concept of moral injury. Through this examination I will explore how certain actions can lead to moral injury. Furthermore, I will explain how a moral injury can affect character. To accomplish this task, I will first refine Aristotle's concept of a character further by exploring the external factors involved in its formation. This exploration is important as Aristotle accepts that external factors such as friendship and community play a necessary role in not only developing one's character, but in obtaining *eudaimonia*. For Aristotle, voluntary action it seems is not the only factor necessary for character development. Therefore, I will explore how Aristotle thinks friendship as well as pity, blame, and praise contribute to an individual's character. I will also explore how self-induced emotions such as agent-regret share in this role as well. Aristotle intended the *Nicomachean Ethics* to be a practical ethics, as such character formation (as he lays out) should be achievable in the manner set forth in the text. I will therefore map Aristotle's notion of character formation through a military lens, as well as pull examples from military experiences in order to properly bolster my arguments. I make such comparisons as a military framework of character formation is as close a representation to Aristotle's framework can be. After making these comparisons I will argue that moral injury is character affecting by examining instances of moral injury within military experience. Moral injury produces a sense of alienation from the self, a sense of alienation from one's community, and destroys the trust held in both. This destruction is character shaping. Therefore, moral injury affects character.

### **Character: The Self and a Community**

Aristotle breaks the concept of character down into two categories: moral character and intellectual character. Moral character is concerned with an individual's actions while intellectual

character is concerned with an individual's reasoning and judgement. Character, both moral and intellectual, is based on the notion that an individual's habits and dispositions are developed through repeated actions that are deliberated upon and voluntarily chosen. All these rational choices culminate to shape character. For Aristotle, this formation of character is necessary to achieve *eudaimonia*.

For Aristotle, character is developed through the repetition of virtuous actions which over time become ingrained. This habituation strengthens and develops character. To shape oneself into the virtuous character is to rationally *choose* virtuous actions. As Aristotle states,

Virtue is a character state concerned with choice, lying in the mean relative to us, being determined by reason and the way the person of practical wisdom would determine it.<sup>35</sup>

These character states are modes of affect, perception, and choice; therefore, the process does not begin with the choice, but with perception.<sup>36</sup> In order to identify and rationally choose action in the virtuous way the individual must first be able to recognize what is a virtuous activity as well as when to act. An individual must be able to perceive the correct action through the circumstances, and identify what is morally salient.<sup>37</sup> Character therefore consists not in the possession of virtue, but in virtuous activity. Drawing from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Nancy Sherman adequately summarizes Aristotle's notion of activity in her book, *The Fabric of Character*, when she says,

It will be established early on that it is not mere possession of excellence (*aretē*), but excellent activity (*energeia kat' aretē*), that will characterize the most complete good (1098a7, 1098aI6, 1099aI), that the best and most complete excellent activity (1099a16, 1102a5) will involve primarily the excellent activity (1099aI6, 1102a5) will involve primarily the excellences of

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<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107a1-2.

<sup>36</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 5.

character and intellect (1103a15), and that complete excellent activity will be to some extent dependent upon external factors (1099a32).<sup>38</sup>

Character is not only in the habituation of voluntary action, but in obtaining an understanding of how to shift through various circumstances to perceive the morally salient. Aristotle, however, admits that external factors will always play apart in virtuous activity.

Virtuous activity requires an individual to refine ends which are naturally obscured.

Aristotle states in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,

For we ourselves are somehow part causes of our states of character, and in being persons of a certain kind we posit the end to be so and so<sup>39</sup>

Aristotle is saying that an individual is not blindly brought to ends, but has control over those ends just as the individual has control over their character.<sup>40</sup> Therefore the ends of one's actions corresponds to one's character. The outcomes of action are predictable as well as a reflection of character as virtuous activity is not only voluntarily chosen, but rationally chosen through practical reason. As Sherman states,

The account takes the notions of a character and the choices that exhibit character—*prohaireseis*—as central. The idea is this: a character, for Aristotle, produces plans that express an overall unity of ends in a life. Such planning is carried out by the deliberative capacities and by a capacity to make reasoned choices, or *prohaireseis*. These choices involve the assessment of actions as they cohere within some overall system<sup>41</sup>

Virtuous activity must be rationally and voluntarily chosen; it is not mindless repetition. Virtuous activity involves rational choice guided by *phronesis*. Virtuous actions are not merely morally grounded, but must be grounded in reason. A character is not something possessed, but an activity, something an individual does. A character is also formed through reflections upon

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<sup>38</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1114b24.

<sup>40</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 58.

activity, and by the outcomes. Therefore, there is a connection between the activity and the product of those activities, the outcomes of action. Aristotle states that *prohairetic* action decides and acts on what is best and the most efficient.<sup>42</sup> Aristotle describes the virtue of justice in the following manner,

It is complete virtue in its fullest sense because it is the actual exercise of complete virtue. It is complete because he who possesses it can exercise his virtue not only in himself but towards another also; for many men can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but not in their relations to others... 'rule will show the man'; for a ruler is necessarily in relation to other men, and a member of a society. For this reason justice...is thought to be 'another's good', because it is related to another; for it does what is advantageous to another, either a ruler or a co-partner.<sup>43</sup>

This passage suggests that for Aristotle, justice, and by extension the other virtues, are not simply good as a product, but as a way for acting. Not only that but Aristotle emphasizes justice as the 'greatest of virtues' as it is an activity that not only involves the self but also the community. An action is chosen and acted upon with an external outcome in mind. It seems counterintuitive then that Aristotle would emphasize the value of the predictable outcomes of a voluntary action while de-emphasizing the outcomes of countervoluntary actions. Virtuous activity is not only for one's internal good, but for the external outcomes which can directly affect the self and community at large.

Community and connections with others are an important aspect in obtaining *eudaimonia*. For Aristotle, community and connections are essential external goods. As he says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,

Happiness requires in addition external goods; for it is impossible to or not easy to act finely without resources. For an individual performs many actions through the use of instruments, through friends, wealth, and political office. And the lack of other goods spoils one's happiness... For one would hardly be

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<sup>42</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 115.

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1129b30-1130a5.

happy if one were thoroughly ugly, or born of low birth, or solitary... even less so, if one's children or friends were thoroughly bad, or if they were good, but died.<sup>44</sup>

Aristotle seems to be suggesting that community and friendship are a necessary condition for *eudaimonia*. To obtain happiness it is not enough to consistently choose what is good; an individual needs to have community; they need to have connections and trust within a like-minded group. Aristotle continues on to say that companionship and community are the 'greatest and 'most necessary' to *eudaimonia*.<sup>45</sup> Aristotle states that,

if he were solitary, life would be hard for him; for by oneself it is not easy to be continuously active; but others and towards others it is easier. With others therefore his activity will be more continuous...A certain training in virtue arises also from the company of the good.<sup>46</sup>

Virtuous activity is sustained through companionship and connection with other members of the community, like minded individuals. Therefore, it is clear that Aristotle placed a heavy emphasis on society when it came to the ultimate outcomes of action as well as the formation of character.

One's community or rather society plays a crucial role in character development as it provides the context in which virtues are acquired and habituated. Social norms are the parameters set in which individuals cultivate virtuous habits, and are necessary for the obtainment of *eudaimonia*. Aristotle emphasizes deliberation as well as the dialectical in his ethics which shows the extent to which society is important to the outcome to be obtained from activity. As Sherman states,

Virtuous agents conceive of their well-being as including the well-being of others...the ends of life become shared, and similarly the resources for promoting it...there is no moment of self-sufficiency which marks full independence from others.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a31-b6, (emphasis added).

<sup>45</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b10, 1154a4.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170a5-12.

<sup>47</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 6.



Self-knowledge of one's character necessitates an external audience.<sup>48</sup> For Aristotle, the polis is *home* for virtuous activity. Community mirrors an individual's character back at them through the enforcement of societal endorsement or chastisement. As Aristotle states, "we can study a neighbor better than ourselves and his actions better than our own."<sup>49</sup> Self-knowledge for Aristotle seems to be aided in how individuals are better able to perceive and judge other's actions more clearly than their own. Individuals are thus able give praise or blame about other's actions. In doing so the other self mirrors its defects back at the judging self, and enables a deeper understanding of that self. Aristotle expands on this notion by saying,

The friendship of good persons is good, being increased by their companionship; and they are thought to become better too by their activities and by improving each other; for from each other they take the mold of characteristics they approve.<sup>50</sup>

This "mirroring" allows for a character to be further shaped by presenting to the individual their own defects. Not only that but it shows the individual being chastised where their deficiency lies. Community provides 'another self' that enhances practical wisdom and moral perception as well as allows for a fuller understanding of one's self and agency.<sup>51</sup> Since society acts as a necessary mirror in the shaping of character it seems only natural that the encouragement or chastisement produced from a communities perception of an action would play a vital role in Aristotle's philosophy.

For Aristotle, blame, shame, and praise are necessary for character formation as it shapes an individual's behavior and virtuous activity through the pressure placed upon the individual by the societal "tribunal." When an individual experiences shame and receives blame

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<sup>48</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 27.

<sup>49</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b33-35.

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1172a10-15.

<sup>51</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 142.

for their actions or receives praise they internalize that moral response and use it to further shape or affirm their perceived sense of self. Shame, blame, and praise therefore cultivate habits and motivate character development. Aristotle's emphasis on the 'another self' attributes to *eudaimonia* and virtuous activity a notion of shared living. Aristotle states in the *Rhetoric*,

Individuals feel shame whenever they have acts or deeds credited to them which bring some disrespect, whether the acts be their own, or those of their ancestors, or those of other persons to whom they bear some close relation.<sup>52</sup>

Aristotle is suggesting that shame does not necessarily have to stem from one's own actions as the other's actions can mirror one's own character traits and failings back at them. The actions of another may therefore be associated with one's own actions causing the individual to internalize a sense of shared shame. As Nancy Sherman states in her book *Afterwar*,

Philosophers call emotions such as guilt, shame, and resentment "reactive attitudes" that call self or others to account and that demand an appropriate response.<sup>53</sup>

These reactive attitudes such as guilt, shame, and resentment, as Sherman states are emphasized by society and the self as they serve as moral evaluators of action. These emotions demand a response, and a modification of character. As Sherman points out,

Aristotle invokes that image of a friend as "another self," a "mirror," not for narcissistic reflection, he insists, but for self-knowledge "when we wish to know our own characters...and direct study of ourselves" is near impossible... we are not empty vessels for others' aspirations, but we are aspirants who can't do without others' support, trust, and compassionate critique in articulating how to live well and then trying to live that life.<sup>54</sup>

Blame, shame, and praise seem to directly shape character through an individual's reaction from the reflection of the self within the mirrored image of the self from society, and the internalized

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<sup>52</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1385a1-3.

<sup>53</sup> Sherman, Nancy. 2015. *Afterwar*, "Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers". New York City: Oxford University Press, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 152.

parameters set forth. Voluntarily and rationally acting from deliberative and intentional moral judgment shapes character, but those voluntary actions being mirrored back at the self through the encouragement or chastisement of society also aids in this affirmation and shaping. For Aristotle, both habituated action and community is necessary to shift and guide a character to achieve *eudaimonia*. Aristotle states that pity, praise, or blame can be assigned to countervoluntary actions; therefore it seems strange that he cannot conceive of such actions having a very real affect in shaping character.

The critical connections between the self and one's connections to others when it comes to the habituation of virtuous actions in the shaping of character can be seen more clearly within the structure of the military, and in particular the Marine Corps. A cursory glance at any Marine Corps training book makes the connection between Aristotle's virtue ethics and the Marine's Warrior Ethos clear. Mirroring Aristotle's virtuous activity, for Marines, the ethos is not something possessed, but virtues that are cultivated and instilled through action to develop a Marine. In a military structure the Marine is a stand in for Aristotle's virtuous character; they are the optimal characters which facilitate "happiness." The Warrior Ethos is ingrained through habituation, and meant to guide every action. As the *Guidebook for Marines* (a guidebook given to all recruits in boot camp) states,

An ethical mindset in action in the operational environment is an absolute requirement. Knowing right from wrong and having a firm moral compass that guides your actions as a Marine cannot be developed in combat. It will be ingrained beforehand by leaders sustaining the foundation laid during recruit training, through realistic training, and by the commitment to excellence of every Marine. You do not inherit the ability to lead Marines. Neither is it issued. You acquire that ability.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Corps, Marine. 2014. *Guidebook for Marines*. Quantico: Marine Corps Association, 40.

The Marine Corps emphasizes that to truly embody the *esprit de corps*, to *be* a Marine, one must rationally choose to consistently act in a manner that habituates and shapes a person's character with "leadership traits." These specific traits will certainly be familiar to any Aristotle scholar. A Marine must actively acquire and embody: integrity, knowledge, courage, decisiveness, dependability, initiative, tact, justice, enthusiasm, bearing, endurance, unselfishness, loyalty, and judgment.<sup>56</sup> In doing so a Marine will be expected to be able to lead Marines and overcome any obstacles that the "Fog of War" can inflict.

Ethical conduct on the battlefield is a combat multiplier. As leaders, NCOs are responsible for making sure that their Marines understand the impact of ethical conduct on the mission of their unit and the Marine Corps. It is important to know that the battlefields may change, but our values will not...The success of the Marine Corps on the battlefields of today and the future will come as a result of the discipline and ethical conduct of the individual marine.<sup>57</sup>

In this ethical framework the development of the self is meant to expand out into the community as well. The Marine is meant to take these traits and embody them, as well as hold other Marines accountable for their own embodiment. All subsequent actions affect the community, and the community affects the individual. A failure in one's buddy is a failure within one's self. As Sherman states,

Marine ideals reinforce that familial and childhood world: *semper fidelis*—never leave a comrade behind, protect your own, be in charge, bring your troops home. The socialized ideals of the profession resonate with a protector culture of honor: to take care of those in your orbit.<sup>58</sup>

The socialization is meant to be all-transforming, and for many it is experienced as a new, chosen identity.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Marine Corps, *Guidebook for Marines*, 38-39.

<sup>57</sup> Marine Corps, *Guidebook for Marines*, 40.

<sup>58</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 63.

<sup>59</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 64.

The Marine ethos forms the Marine identity like Aristotle forms the virtuous character. The individual aims to embody character traits to achieve the ultimate “good” character, and in doing so they rationally chose to act in ways that form said traits. This character shaping does not conclude with the individual, but is sanded and polished through a community of similar characters. These Marine “buddies,” brothers, and sisters, or friends as Aristotle would call them, interact, learn, and are affected by each other’s actions. They mirror characteristics; they show each other where the other is lacking, and they endorse or chastise various actions all in an effort to achieve the model character. Sherman calls the Marine ethos a “model of zero-defect perfectionism.”<sup>60</sup> Just as with Aristotle, the military wants to say that a character is shaped through consistent and deliberate choices that can not only withstand extrinsic and intrinsic luck, but will continue to endure despite a moral injury.

### **Moral Injury and Its Effects**

In this section I will explore the concept of moral injury further in order to gain a clearer grasp on the stakes being addressed. I argue that actions which lead to moral injury affect character. Sherman defines moral injury in the following manner,

It refers to experiences of serious inner conflict arising from what one takes to be grievous moral transgressions that can overwhelm one’s sense of goodness and humanity. The sense of transgression can arise from (real or apparent) transgressive commissions and omissions perpetrated by oneself or others, or from bearing witness to the intense human suffering and detritus that is a part of the grotesquerie of war and its aftermath. In some cases, moral injury has less to do with specific (real or apparent) transgressive acts that with a generalized sense of falling short of moral and normative standards befitting good persons and good soldiers.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 69.

<sup>61</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 8.

In other words, moral injury describes the harm inflicted by actions or inactions that can occur when an individual perceives or believes that they have violated their ethical code. It often occurs when individuals experience events that challenge their deeply held values. The consequences of moral injury are feelings of agent-regret, shame, and betrayal, and may invoke feelings of pity, praise, or blame from others. Moral injury may also result in a loss of trust in oneself and others. Moral injury occurs not from experiencing traumatic events, but in the actions or inactions we choose to take during those traumatic events. As Williamson, Stevelink, Greenberg, and Fear state,

Whereas PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] is a mental disorder that may occur after exposure to traumatic events, moral injury is a term used to describe the psychological distress that results from actions or inactions that violate an individual's moral or ethical code.<sup>62</sup>

Actions or inactions which violate an agent's moral code seem to cause, in the inflicted individual, an intense sense of accountability for the events occurring despite having questionable agency or responsibility for the occurrences. In such circumstances it is like Grossman explains,

It is as though every enemy dead is a human being he has killed, and every friendly dead is a comrade for whom he was responsible. With every effort to reconcile these two responsibilities, more guilt is added to the horror.<sup>63</sup>

As discussed previously in this chapter, Aristotle highlights how important connections and community are to people. Williams suggests intrinsic and extrinsic luck permeates an agent's choices, and opens the individual up to agent-regret, especially when those actions involved

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<sup>62</sup> Williamson, V., S.A.M Stevelink, N. Greenberg, and N.T. Fear. 2018. "Measuring Moral Injury: Psychometric Properties of the Moral Injury Events Scale in Two Military Samples". *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Grossman, Dave. 2009. *On Killing*. New York City: Little, Brown and Company, 74.

others within one's community. War in particular seems to create the kind of event that produces dual responsibilities. Combatants feel conflicting connections towards both their enemies and their comrades. They feel guilty for killing enemy combatants, and they feel shame for failing to protect their brothers and sisters in arms. In the Fog of War it is impossible to account for all the particulars involved in a single action. Certain actions it seems particularly lead to moral injuries. In the complex and often conflicting responsibilities that individuals face in morally occluded environments moral injury arises from the confusion.

Moral injury affects character as it breaks down an individual's trust in themselves, others, and institutions. When an individual is morally injured their sense of right and wrong becomes fundamentally challenged or even completely violated. This sense of betrayal can be present even if the individual could not have rationally been considered responsible. In such situations the injured individual will struggle to reconcile their actions or the actions of others with their own moral values, leading to feelings of betrayal, disillusionment, and distrust. As Cheong and French state,

Moral injury is corrosive to trust because it undermines a person's trust in him or herself, in others, and in institutions. Moral injury is the product of the realization that one has violated one's own moral code, or that one's moral expectations of others or of an institution have been violated. This realization leads to feelings of betrayal, anger, disillusionment, and a loss of faith in one's own moral compass, in others' moral judgment, and in institutional leaders who condoned, overlooked, or failed to prevent moral transgressions.<sup>64</sup>

Any event that causes an individual to distrust themselves, to distrust their previously ascribed sense of self, will have a ripple effect from their own identity to the identity of the institutions that shaped and affirmed a specific moral code. This ripple effect will naturally lead to an

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<sup>64</sup> Cheong, P., and S.E. French. 2019. "'Moral Injury and the Challenge of Building Trust in Military Institutions'." *Journal of Military Ethics*, 107.

erosion of trust, agent-regret, and shame. Moral injury dissolves trust within one's self and community.

When distrust is fomented within the self an individual may become alienated from their very identity. Hannah Arendt quotes Socrates and further expounds upon his idea by saying,

The self is the only person from whom I cannot depart, whom I cannot leave, with whom I am welded together. Therefore "it is much better to be in disagreement with the whole world than being one to be in disagreement with myself."<sup>65</sup>

Arendt seems to be expressing that it is fundamentally harmful to be alienated from oneself.

Arendt highlights the importance and connection between the self and one's self, and emphasizes that it is possible to be in disagreement with the self. As Adam Smith elaborates,

When I endeavor to examine my own conduct, when I endeavor to pass sentence upon it, and either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that... I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of.<sup>66</sup>

When Aristotle states that certain actions may have pity, blame, or praise attributed to them he does not seem to analyze the effects such chastisements will have upon an individual's sense of self. Aristotle acknowledges that agent-regret is a necessary component of certain actions, but fails to address the severity involved in such a feeling especially in regards to the self. This phenomenon of alienation from the self seems to be what happens when an individual experiences a moral injury. When an individual acts in a manner that they regret or reject as in accordance with their moral codes (whether coerced or ignorant of particulars) a schism can develop. Such actions cause discord to occur within one's self. Arendt is interpreting Socrates, and explaining that the self is the only individual from whom one cannot depart. An example

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<sup>65</sup> Arendt, Hannah. 2005. *The Promise of Politics*. New York City: Random House Inc, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 69.



Arendt gives highlights how an individual can become separated from the self, but also seems to suggest that murder is an action that fundamentally causes this type of self-alienation.

Since even when you are alone you are not altogether alone, you yourself can and must testify to your own reality...the reason why you should not kill, even under conditions where nobody will see you, is that you cannot possibly want to be together with a murderer. By committing murder you would deliver yourself to the company of a murderer as long as you live.<sup>67</sup>

One is inextricably linked to their self. Thus, being in disagreement with oneself is a deep and fundamental form of alienation, since it involves a rupture within that relationship. Moral injury causes such a discord as it is a violation of one's own moral code that causes a schism within one's character. In *Afterwar*, Sherman examines moral injury through the actions of two Marines, Captain Mantz and Sergeant Lalo. She argues that specific actions lead to moral injury. These instances of moral injury affected these Marine's characters by destroying the trust within not only their self, but in their community as well. Sherman explains,

Josh Mantz experiences moral anguish, in part, because he feels he transgressed and fell short. He wasn't all he thought he should be as a commander...Lalo Panyagua digs into himself: "You shouldn't have let him leave the vehicle without reminding him to secure the area. You lost your Marine."<sup>68</sup>

Within Mantz's and Lalo's shaming and blaming there is a sense of agent-regret that is leading to a schism between their established character and specific actions. These Marines were subjected to circumstances which no one could reasonably respond or react. Extrinsic luck permeated their entire scope of comprehension. As Sherman continues to say,

Whether he [Lalo], in fact, says it out loud or just feels it, he's sanctioning himself, and hard. And he is demanding that he respond by accepting the

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<sup>67</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 18.

rebuke, or proving to himself that he was somehow mistaken and doesn't deserve it.<sup>69</sup>

When an individual becomes morally injured from their own actions, they experience a separation within themselves.

Moral injury is not contained within a schism within the self, but radiates out to one's community creating a sense of alienation from one's community as well. Hanna Arendt's larger argument in *The Promise of Politics* helps to express this assertion. In her book, Arendt highlights that political action requires individuals to engage in the world with a sense of responsibility and judgment. This engagement maintains a connection between the individual and their community which instills a sense of coherence in one's character. Thus, if an individual is alienated from themselves, they will also be alienated from their community. Returning to her example of murder, Arendt states,

a murderer is not only condemned to the permanent company of his own murderous self, but he will see all other people in the image of his own action. He will live in a world of potential murderers.<sup>70</sup>

Certain actions or events are able to create a profound sense of isolation and alienation within the self and others. Arendt's notion that 'he will see all other people in the image of his own action' seems to reflect Aristotle's assertion that friendship and community can be seen and used as a mirror of the self. Aristotle placed an immense amount of weight on the importance of friendship and community within the development of an individual's character, but failed to appreciate the magnitude that such a connection can have. He fails to appreciate the influence of affect, and the realities intrinsic within the "pain of human conscience," and even more so when that pain is

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<sup>69</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 23.

reflected through a community or a peer.<sup>71</sup> The Marines have this same mentality of community, and thus suffer from this same form of alienation when inflicted with moral injury. Speaking about Marine Sergeant Lalo, Sherman states,

At least in the case of his care for his troops, he subscribes to a version of strict liability. In tort law, strict liability is imposed without finding a fault for the damages or proof of negligence. In his court, Lalo is, of course, plaintiff and defendant. And he is a fairly merciless plaintiff. *He sees now what he couldn't fully see then, and holds himself to the retrospective assessment.*<sup>72</sup>

Sherman has touched on a fascinating point specifically when considering Aristotle's views on actions. In some actions, one's agency and sense of ownership over said actions are at best mechanically maintained, but the knowledge of the particulars which oversee the actions outcomes are limited. Limiting external factors like extrinsic and intrinsic luck, in Aristotle's perspective, lead to actions that are not fully voluntary. Thus, the outcomes of such obscured actions do not coincide with the ends, such actions would produce pity, but would not be rationally internalized within the self or one's character. However, in such cases, individuals still seem to hold themselves accountable, retrospectively. They still internalize their actions as their own even if their "agency" and knowledge of the particulars was obscured. This internalization is particularly true when it comes to events that affect not only themselves, but the people to whom they either hold themselves accountable or maintain a peer relationship.

### **Moral Injury Affects Character**

Moral injury has a profound impact upon character. It can affect trust in one's self and one's community. Moral injury hinders an individual's ability to engage with the world in a meaningful and effective way. Actions which lead to moral injury produce a sense of agent-

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<sup>71</sup> Grossman, *On Killing*, 95.

<sup>72</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 69 (emphasis added).

regret that can wreck a character by instilling a sense of distrust. Not only that but, the shame felt from such actions can rob one of their sense of worth. As Sherman states,

shame can tear a self into pieces, to the point that one loses sound judgment about who one is and who one can be.<sup>73</sup>

When individuals act in a manner they perceive to be contrary to their held values, even if they are acting through coercion or ignorance, it can lead to feelings of agent-regret and shame. By failing to address moral injury such feelings are allowed to fester. In the same way that the virtues can be habituated, negative emotions can become habituated which will also shape an individual's character. Affect can be habituated as well as virtuous activity, and just as in virtuous activity, affect influences future behavior thereby shaping character. According to Sherman, just four years after Captain Josh Mantz's actions resulted in moral injury, Mantz emotionally crashed under the strain. His character, the character he had carefully formed through adherence to the Marine Corps Ethos was permanently affected. Considering his experiences Captain Mantz concludes,

It's the moral injury over time that really kills people...Soldiers lose their identity. They don't understand who they are anymore...Most people don't appreciate the awful weight of that moral injury.<sup>74</sup>

Aristotle's notion of character rests upon the idea that virtues and vices are acquired through habituation. For Aristotle, voluntary and rationally deliberated upon actions shape character, and said character in turn shapes our actions. Aristotle expands this notion out from the self to include external relationships such as friendship and community.

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<sup>73</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 161.

<sup>74</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 7.

When individuals are confronted with incomprehensible circumstances which challenge where the lines of 'what is in our control, and what is not,' a schism between rational and self-accountability can appear. This schism creates a sense of moral confusion and uncertainty; it inflicts a moral injury. A moral injury can erode an individual's ability to consistently participate in virtuous activity. It can have a significant impact upon character as moral injury disrupts habituation, and alienates self from self, self from community. Moral injury can cause, within the individual, a crisis of self, and further inhibit one's ability to form meaningful relationships (both of which are vital aspects within Aristotle's notion of character habituation). A moral injury is inflicted when one's actions contribute to outcomes that the agent would consider as against their moral code. Moral injury affects character by instilling a sense of distrust within one's self and within one's community. In doing so, moral injury affects character. Therefore, actions which lead to moral injury affect character. What actions then specifically lead to moral injury?

## **Chapter 3. Countervoluntary Action and Luck**

### **How Luck Permeates Action**

In chapter 2, I argued that actions which lead to moral injury affect character. Chapter 3 will now examine which actions can lead to moral injury. An obvious answer would be voluntary actions. Individuals have been known to act voluntarily against their own morals even with a full understanding of the outcome, but would this lead to a moral injury? As explored in chapter 1, Aristotle thinks that only voluntary actions affect character. Therefore, Aristotle would have to conclude that only voluntary actions would lead to moral injury since a moral injury does affect character. I will argue in this chapter that actions which lead to moral injury are countervoluntary actions. To argue this assertion, I will first revisit how an action gets classified as a countervoluntary action. I will highlight how a countervoluntary action becomes countervoluntary when one's actions are revealed to be counter through the permeation of extrinsic and intrinsic luck. Next, I will give examples of countervoluntary actions, and explain how they become so through luck. Finally, through such examples I will argue that countervoluntary actions lead to moral injury.

Countervoluntary actions are actions performed under less-than-ideal circumstances. In particular, countervoluntary actions are actions performed out of one's ignorance of the particulars, particulars being unforeseeable or unknown circumstances. The actions once performed are classified as such as the agent in committing the actions feels regret. Quoting Aristotle, and then providing a further explanation Sherman states,

‘such acts are voluntary, though perhaps, considered in an unqualified way, apart from these conditions, they are [countervoluntary]; for no one would choose any action of this sort for itself’ (1110a18). Equally, attention to circumstances will require accidents to be distinguished from errors of judgement in so far as the latter may be cases of negligent ignorance, the

former due to ill consequences an agent could not reasonably have been expected to foresee.<sup>75</sup>

Aristotle accepts that there can be ill consequences which are directly caused by the acting agent. Despite being caused, however, these consequences would have been impossible to be perceived or prevented. Bad luck may affect the consequences, but not an agent's character as Aristotle considers such instances of luck to be out of the agent's control. Therefore, these ill consequences, although pitiable, are nevertheless not character forming. The acting agent is worthy of pity, but their character will remain intact. Aristotle then, does not account for the psychological effects such ill consequences will have upon the acting agent even if the damage inflicted was unforeseeable. Extrinsic and intrinsic luck blurs the lines Aristotle has placed between voluntary and countervoluntary action, but despite this lessening of the voluntary a countervoluntary action will lead to moral injury.

Voluntary action, as Aristotle defines, leaves no room for extrinsic and intrinsic luck as luck has no concern for reason. As Nussbaum describes in her book, *The Fragility of Goodness*, luck does not involve an individual's agency, as agency is not random or uncaused. Nussbaum states that luck is "what just happens to him [the agent], as opposed to what he does or makes."<sup>76</sup> It is important to emphasize that luck is concerned with happenstance, and its effects are not brought on through decision whether rational or ignorant. Luck permeates all action as the unpredictable factor. Aristotle asserts that voluntary action is necessarily a rational choice where the individual must be aware of the *particular circumstances* involved. This view of voluntary action does not lend itself to the unpredictable; it does not lend itself to luck. This ignorance of

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<sup>75</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 19.

<sup>76</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 3.

luck's particular permeation within action begins to pose a problem for a system of ethics based on habitual and voluntary action.

Voluntary action in Aristotle's ethics is immanent. Since voluntary action is necessary for character development, complete agency must be necessary as well. Aristotle assumes that voluntary action is more actionable than luck would imply. This assumption is obvious when he insists that voluntary action is the only classification of action that affects character. Aristotle states that,

everything that depends on the action of nature is by nature as good as it can be... To entrust to fortune what is greatest and most noble would be a very defective arrangement.<sup>77</sup>

Aristotle does not want to leave consistent action in the hands of *fortune*. As luck both extrinsic and intrinsic saps control, and upends Aristotle's assertion that character is entirely 'up to us.' In *Afterwar*, Sherman describes an event which occurred to Captain Mantz, and in doing so she highlights the effects luck has upon one's circumstances and actions.

Mantz was guiding his troops near the Shiite rebel stronghold of Sadr City when a sniper fired a round of bullets that penetrated [SSgt] Harper's left arm, severing his aorta. The hot molten round fused with Harper's armor plate, forming a projectile the size of a human fist that ricocheted into [Mantz's] upper right thigh, severing his femoral artery. Injured and dazed, Mantz administered first aid on Harper...A young medic arrived and immediately went to work on Mantz, not Harper, probably because an aortal wound is less viable than a femoral wound.<sup>78</sup>

Both Mantz and Harper died that day, however, Mantz would come back to life only to rejoin his unit five months later. Mantz was lucky, but is racked with agent-regret. Sherman says,

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<sup>77</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b14-25.

<sup>78</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 8.



[Mantz] having luck, miraculous luck...and yet [is] experiencing that good luck as an awful betrayal of his buddy.<sup>79</sup>

Captain Mantz was in command of that platoon on patrol. Mantz deliberated and decided upon the best way to patrol that area. He chose the formation, spacing, and route of the individuals under his command. Who the sniper hit or where the sniper hid, however, was not a factor for which Mantz could control. He did not fire the sniper rifle, and he could not choose whom the medic decided to treat. Through all the intentional decisions individuals make, extrinsic luck creeps into the various circumstances with no regard for what is good or reasonable. The story of Captain Mantz was an example of “good luck,” but Sherman also speaks on bad luck like in the case of John Prior whose turret gun misfired and took the life of his “buddy.” Although completely exonerated by his command, Prior suffers from agent-regret. He cannot escape the thought, “I killed him.” Aristotle accepts that extrinsic luck permeates action, but such luck is uncontrollable and unpredictable in nature as it is not ‘up to us.’ As such he does not want to account for luck within his notions of virtuous activity. For Aristotle, Captain Mantz and Prior are deserving of pity, but they did not “pull the trigger.” Luck was out of their control. Therefore, the outcomes stemming from such luck should not lead to a moral injury.

Aristotle places responsibility firmly on the individual to consistently act and develop virtuous characteristics. If *eudaimonia* can only be achieved by the virtuous, which can only be established through habitual and voluntary action, then the individual must be able to maintain agency over their actions. If Aristotle allowed for luck to continuously permeate action, it would derail his views on ethical obtainment. As Aristotle states,

The end, then, being what we want, and the things contributing to the end being what we deliberate about and choose, actions concerning the latter will

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<sup>79</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 8.

be according choice and voluntary. Now the activity of the virtues is concerned with these. Therefore virtue also is in our own power.<sup>80</sup>

Aristotle views humans as rational agents who are capable of voluntary action. Thus, they are responsible for their actions, and ultimately their characters. Aristotle places significant value upon voluntary action to solely shape character, while ignoring how luck easily derails the ends of such voluntary choices. As long as there are unforeseen details in all decisions, as long as there are unpredictable factors, and outcomes affected by happenstance; is Aristotle's fully voluntary character obtainable? Aristotle's notion of voluntariness being the sole classification of action that forms a character relies on voluntary action being consistently performable. Such a notion relies upon the consequences of those actions to be consistently predictable. In doing so Aristotle imposes a considerable amount of responsibility on the individual to either not be affected when luck happens or predict such factors well enough to avoid the unpredictable all together. Such an imposition seems problematic at best.

### **From Luck to Moral Injury**

To show how extrinsic and intrinsic luck affect the outcomes of an individual's actions and converts said actions from voluntary to countervoluntary, I will describe the phenomena known as the Fog of War. Such instances of countervoluntary actions in military experiences will exemplify how said actions can lead to moral injury. I use military experiences to highlight how presumed voluntary actions are actually countervoluntary actions when extrinsic luck is revealed to have been involved. I will then argue that these countervoluntary actions lead to moral injury. The Fog of War is a concept which shows how luck should be taken into account

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<sup>80</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1113b3-7.

when discussing action as all actions are performed in circumstances that contain a multitude of external factors.

The Fog of War is a compelling concept as the effects luck has upon decision, and the subsequent development of the individual, are both common and visceral knowledge within the military. So much so that the military has a term for this occurrence. The military has long acknowledged luck as both unavoidable and devastating. ‘Fog of War’ is a term first coined by Carl von Clausewitz, and is used to describe the uncertainty within military operations; it is used to describe an inescapable lack of clarity which permeates all decisions. The military has long understood that it is impossible to comprehend all the factors involved within a single choice. They understand that no matter how certain the intelligence, there is always room for circumstances to go awry. The Fog of War is frequently used to impress upon military members the pressure which war as well as military life will inflict upon an individual’s moral and psychological well-being. It acknowledges the inherent uncertainty within all decisions made while operating under the duress of war.<sup>81</sup> The military emphasizes how happenstance is part of every decision, and stresses its formative nature. Through all action luck is inescapably intertwined with choice.

The Fog of War is a well-known example of how decisions are consistently muddled with luck; it is the understanding that countervoluntary action can inflict a moral injury. This assertion is best explained, however, through the lens of veterans. Veterans who can attest to how moral injury can be inflicted by a countervoluntary action. Jonathan Shay, a psychiatrist who studies American combat veterans, has transcribed in his book, *Achilles in Vietnam*, a veteran’s story which illustrates such a phenomenon.

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<sup>81</sup>Clausewitz, Carl von. 1984. *On War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, book 1.

Now, there was a LURP [Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol] team from the First Brigade off of Highway One, that looked over the South China Sea. There was a bay there... Now, they saw boats come in. And they suspected, now, uh-the word came down [that] they were unloading weapons off them. Three boats.

At that time we moved. It was about ten o'clock at night. We moved down, across Highway One along the beach line, and it took us [until] about three or four o'clock in the morning to get on line while these people are unloading their boats. And we opened up on them-[expletive].

And the [expletive] firepower was unreal, the firepower that we put into them boats. It was just a constant, constant firepower. It seemed like no one ever ran out of ammo.

Daylight came [long pause], and we found out we killed a lot of fishermen and kids.

What got us thoroughly [expletive] confused is, at that time you turn to the team and you say to the team, "Don't worry about it. Everything's [expletive] fine." Because that's what you're getting from upstairs.

The [expletive] colonel says, "Don't worry about it. We'll take care of it. Y'know, uh, "We got body count!" "We have body count!" So it starts working on your head.

So you know in your heart it's wrong, but at the time, here's your superiors telling you that it was okay. So, I mean, that's okay then, right?

So we packed up and we moved out.

They wanted to give us a [expletive] Unit Citation\_ them [expletive] maggots.

A lot of medals came down from it. The lieutenants got medals, and I know the colonel got his [expletive] medal. And they would have award ceremonies, y'know, I'd be standing like a [expletive] jerk and they'd be handing out [expletive] medals for killing civilians.<sup>82</sup>

There are three levels of acting agents in this story. There is the LRRP team, the "higher ups," and the intelligence gatherers, but a single theme which permeates all their combined actions and decisions is luck.<sup>83</sup> The LRRP team, as with Oedipus, performed a voluntary action to engage the opposition at the docks based on the rational choice and desire to believe in the authority of the "higher ups." The LRRP team did not intend the targets to be civilians. If they had not been ignorant of the targets, they would have been given the

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<sup>82</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 4.

<sup>83</sup> In, *Achilles in Vietnam*, Shay spells 'LURP' the way a Marine phonetically pronounces the term. This term is an acronym, and although pronounced as 'LURP' it would nonetheless still be spelled in terms of its acronym.

opportunity to instead deny the order. Orders are only required to be followed if they are lawful; members of the military are compelled to deny an order they deem to be unlawful. With every order that is given the individual must make a rational decision as to whether the order is lawful or unlawful. Ordering a team to engage an enemy target is a lawful order; ordering a team to engage innocents is unlawful, and it is required by military law to be denied. Therefore, the team made the rational decision based on the intelligence provided and voluntarily acted upon the order given from “higher ups”, but as the dawn approached it revealed a countervoluntary action soaked in regret, pain, and carnage.

The “higher ups” made a voluntary action to utilize their LRRP team to engage enemy targets on the docks. This decision was determined through intelligence gathering. As with the LRRP team, the “higher ups” pursued in a voluntary action to order the engagement of enemy targets, not civilians. However, the targets ended up being civilians. The “higher ups” were led astray by their intelligence sources. They were unable to account for the unaccountable factors within the situation, but a decision had to be made. Once properly briefed of the aftermath, it becomes clear that their actions were in fact *akousioi*.<sup>84</sup>

In this situation extrinsic luck permeated all three levels of actions in the form of the intelligence gathered. All the following actions proceeded based on the intelligence gathered, the intelligence that enemy targets are working on a specific dock on a specific day. This intelligence forwarded and affected the preceding actions which killed innocent civilians. The LRRP team

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<sup>84</sup> Not only were “the higher ups” actions *akousioi*, but they were also not-voluntary. This breakdown occurs because the “higher ups” orders were given out of ignorance of the particulars however there does not seem to be any regret involved. This occurrence of not-voluntary action can be delineated as such from the subsequent praise and awards distributed to the individual’s involved. Awards which seem to further sever the LRRP team’s conduct with their established moral code.

chose to follow orders. They had no control over the intelligence gathered. They had no way to predict the information's veracity, but acted within the parameters of the specific situation. In doing so the LRRP team murdered civilians, and not their intended targets. With each order that comes down the team must act based on the judgement of lawfulness; each time they are lucky when the intelligence is correct. Every voluntary action which is deliberated upon and chosen, comes with a certain amount of "fog," and with each action the risks of moral injury varies. In this way Aristotle's voluntary action appears to be quite fragile in the face of the unpredictable. With such stakes that war creates each time the LRRP team acts they are lucky when their actions do not result in a moral injury. Social betrayal or even informational betrayal can easily undermine one's humanity, let alone their character. As Nussbaum declares,

Annihilation of convention by another's acts can destroy...stable character... It can, quite simply, produce bestiality, the utter loss of human relatedness.<sup>85</sup>

Luck, that the information at hand is correct and complete has everything to do with how decisions on the battlefield, and in everyday life are made. Such catastrophic luck may result in unforeseen circumstances that can cause a rift between one's conduct and their ethical code.

Aristotle was very aware of the impact one's community can have upon an individual's character development, and as such recognized that one's decisions and actions affect the activity of others (as discussed in chapter 2). The fact that humans are part of a community only intensifies the situations which allow for a countervoluntary action to inflict a moral injury. Sherman's retelling of Marine Sergeant Eduardo "Lalo" Panyagua is helpful to expressing how such countervoluntary actions can lead to moral injury. Lalo was on a vehicle patrol with his

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<sup>85</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 417.

Marines when one of his Corporals within the patrol desperately “had to go.” The Corporal jumped out of the vehicle, and the Marine was blown up by an IED.

Lalo heard the blast, called his corpsman, and rushed to the hut. The unit was under heavy mortar attack, and though a medevac helicopter was in the area, it couldn’t land... “He was my Marine...I was holding his hand, his body—his legs were somewhere else. And then it looked like he just faded away...When he died, I finally put him on a bird ride”...Lalo gave the order: “Alright, he’s on a bird. Move on.”<sup>86</sup>

Lalo is barely culpable if at all for the death of his Marine. Lalo did not stop his Marine leaving the vehicle. The Corporal chose to jump out of the vehicle, and did not reinforce the area. Lalo sees this situation differently. He was in charge. He could have stopped the Corporal. He should have reminded him to reinforce the area. He should have pushed harder for the “bird” to land. Had Lalo known the particulars of the entire situation he believes he could have prevented the death of his Marine. Lalo had to have allowed his Marine to “go” at some point. Had Lalo known the particulars involved in every voluntary action, the outcome for Lalo and his Corporal would have been predictable. Lalo voluntarily allowed his Corporal to leave; he did not *intend* for him to die, and yet his sense of agent-regret is palpable. For Lalo, the end and the outcome were involuntary. This action, Lalo’s actions which lead him to not stop his Marine were countervoluntary. As Sherman states,

in his psychic reality, he sees only his missing causal agency—what he let happen on his watch. He doesn’t see the inflated sense of control he inserts in constructing this picture of volitional and morally responsible agency.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 62.

<sup>87</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 63.

Aristotle contends that countervoluntary actions are to be assigned pity or praise, but such feelings ring hollow when compared to the actual experiences and injuries which occur from such actions.

As discussed in chapter 2, Captain Mantz and Sergeant Lalo were inflicted by a moral injury which affected their ability to trust in not only themselves but their communities as well. The moral injury they experienced from their actions affected their characters; it affected their lives, and led them to question their sense of self. Shay, in *Achilles in Vietnam*, argued that the LRRP team suffered from moral injury, and I have shown that the actions which led to that moral injury were countervoluntary.<sup>88</sup> These examples and experiences perfectly embody the realities of the Fog of War; as well as the role extrinsic luck plays over decision in general. They emphasize that no matter how researched or assured an individual is over the facts involved within making a decision, there are always factors for which we cannot account. Voluntary action remains voluntary only if it is allowed to remain voluntary by expected ends, and without too much research into any other particulars involved. Aristotle does not claim that “the virtuous life” will be “conflict free,” and does not reject the notion that luck has some interaction with action. As Sherman states,

Aristotle’s claim that the virtues are in principle consistent needs to be distinguished from the claim that the virtuous life is conflict-free. The fact that the virtues ‘may be’ in principle consistent does not preclude the possibility of contingent conflicts.<sup>89</sup>

This issue that Aristotle fails to recognize is the connection between a countervoluntary action and moral injury. Aristotle underestimates the very quality that makes an action countervoluntary, regret. He fails to acknowledge that even stable characters can be dislodged by

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<sup>88</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 4-6.

<sup>89</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 104.



a countervoluntary action. In Aristotle's ethics there seems to be a heavy privilege for the "controllable" and "consistent" with little regard for the uncontrollable. Individuals are only made aware of luck when it results in their actions being "countervoluntary." By examining moral injury, it is clear that the agent-regret necessary for an action to be countervoluntary is far more affecting than Aristotle asserts.

Although either praise or pity can be applied to the countervoluntary, the pain from agent-regret has the most affecting outcomes, in that it leads to a moral injury. Countervoluntary actions lead to moral injury which actively impedes positive character development. Aristotle fails to properly acknowledge such injuries. He assumes that pity or sympathy can be soothing enough to negate the ramifications wrought from happenstance as it contradicts his assertion that only voluntary actions affect character. He discounts countervoluntary action, and thus discounts agent-regret. In doing so Aristotle does not give much credence to extrinsic and intrinsic luck. Pity does not save the moral integrity of an individual who has acted contrarily to their senses of right and wrong. Even if the individual could not have reasonably foreseen such outcomes there is no denying that the action occurred through their own volition, and more so because they *chose* to act. Even if an individual's actions were countervoluntary, their character will still be affected as countervoluntary actions lead to moral injury.

Countervoluntary action leads to moral injury. Moral injury is the injury to an individual's values and moral consciousness which results from a moral transgression. It occurs when an individual has been coerced, manipulated, or has unintentionally acted in a manner contrary to their moral code. Moral injury is corrosive to character; it can result in, if not permanent, then lingering psychological and moral damage.<sup>90</sup> A virtuous person would not

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<sup>90</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 9.

voluntarily act in a manner that was not virtuous. A vicious person would not be morally injured by a countervoluntary action. Moral injury is an infliction which will affect character as it creates a severance between an individual's moral code and their conduct.

The flourishing and well lived life can be obtained only through the path of the virtuous. Becoming a virtuous person can only be achieved through acquiring a virtuous character, character that has been habituated through consistent and conscious action. However, this habituation assumes that voluntary action is consistently available. Luck permeates life and consequently every choice that an individual can choose. Catastrophic extrinsic luck can derail any action, and convert said action to the countervoluntary. By not properly acknowledging the influence of extrinsic luck, Aristotle proposes a level of control which seems to be fictional. By privileging only voluntary action in character formation Aristotle discounts countervoluntary action. Even within his own system he acknowledges the role of fortune both monetary and happenstance, but fails to attach the weight necessary to such circumstances. Extrinsic and intrinsic luck permeates action. When this permeation occurs an individual's actions could be classified as countervoluntary. Countervoluntary actions lead to moral injury, and moral injury affects character.

## Chapter 4. Objections: A Closer Inspection of the Role of Luck

### Aristotle's Response

I have argued in the above chapters that actions which lead to moral injury affect character, and that actions which lead to moral injury are countervoluntary actions. Therefore, I concluded that countervoluntary action leads to moral injury which affects character. Essentially, I argue that countervoluntary actions can affect character. This, however, could be interpreted as a critique of Aristotle. The critique I have laid against Aristotle thus far has been to argue that by not allowing for countervoluntary action to affect character Aristotle has failed to properly account for intrinsic and extrinsic luck within all voluntary actions. To this assertion, however, one could object. The objector could argue that Aristotle does in fact recognize the role of luck within voluntary actions. In fact, accounting for luck is partially why countervoluntary actions needed to be carved out and distinguished from voluntary actions at all. The objection to my critique would be that Aristotle emphasized in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that luck plays a role in determining the outcomes of actions, but nevertheless would maintain that such outcomes were beyond one's control. A second objection which could be raised is that in discussing character I am misrepresenting Aristotle's notion of character all together.

The distinction between voluntary and countervoluntary action is made particularly clear when Aristotle distinguishes between ignorance of the particulars and acting in ignorance. Aristotle states that,

now every wicked man is ignorant of what he ought to do and what he ought to abstain from... but the term [countervoluntary] tends to be used not if a man is ignorant of what is to his advantage—for it is not mistaken purpose that makes an action [countervoluntary]...but ignorance of particulars, of the circumstances of the action and the objects with which it is concerned. For it is

on these that both pity and pardon depend, since the person who is ignorant of any of these acts [countervoluntarily]<sup>91</sup>

To act with ignorance of the particulars is to act countervoluntarily; it is to act with ignorance of the particular external circumstances involved. Since voluntary actions, actions which contribute to character formation, are only concerned with what is *within our power*, what is outside of an individual's power such as extrinsic or intrinsic luck cannot be character affecting.<sup>92</sup> Aristotle does address actions that are compelled or guided through forces outside of one's control, but he maintains that it would not be right to call activity or the individual in such cases lucky or unlucky. Circumstances pertaining to and constraining an individual's actions may be affected by luck, but not the character itself.<sup>93</sup> Character is a stable set of traits which are rationally chosen and voluntarily performed through habituation. It cannot be easily dislodged. For Aristotle, "we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."<sup>94</sup> Therefore Aristotle argued that both extrinsic and intrinsic luck have been adequately addressed within action. The objector would also note that Aristotle addresses luck as an instrumental component for the achievement of *eudaimonia*, and therefore in some way luck contributes to the factors that surround an individual while they are shaping character.

Aristotle in fact does address the issue of luck, and considers a certain amount of it to be necessary for the obtainment of *eudaimonia*. He says that it is necessary to surround oneself or be surrounded by friendship and a certain amount of luck as an aid towards character habituation.<sup>95</sup> Aristotle states,

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<sup>91</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110b29-1111a3.

<sup>92</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a20-30.

<sup>93</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1111a4-15.

<sup>94</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b1-2.

<sup>95</sup> This notion was explored in chapter 2.

for there is required, as we said, not only complete virtue but also a complete life, since many changes occur in life, and all manner of chances, and the most prosperous may fall into great misfortunes in old age, as is told of Priam in the Trojan Cycle, and one who has experienced such chances and has ended wretchedly no one calls happy.<sup>96</sup>

Clearly Aristotle acknowledges that luck may impact an individual's circumstances and opportunities. Aristotle agrees that events happen through luck, and they can vary greatly in severity. Luck can sway an individual both towards a blessed life or one which can crush and maim the good.<sup>97</sup> Aristotle however believes that *eudaimonia* as well as an individual's character is not so easily influenced by external factors outside of one's control. This is clear when he states that,

we have assumed happiness to be something permanent and by no means easily changed, while a single man may suffer many turns of fortune's wheel. For clearly if we were to follow his fortunes, we should often call the same man happy and again wretched...but human life, as we said, needs these as well, while virtuous activities or their opposites are what determine happiness or the reverse.<sup>98</sup>

Aristotle's belief in the resilience of character is precisely why he does not think that an action which is countervoluntary is sufficient or impactful enough to be affective. Aristotle continues on to say that,

yet even in these [misfortunes] nobility shines through, when a man bears with resignation many great misfortunes, not through insensibility to pain but through nobility and greatness of soul. If activities are, as we said, what determines the character of life, no blessed man can become miserable.<sup>99</sup>

Aristotle argues that voluntary actions geared towards purposeful character development will overcome the external circumstances that one would encounter within a lifetime. He states,

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<sup>96</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100a3-8.

<sup>97</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b15-33.

<sup>98</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b1-10.

<sup>99</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b30-34.

Many events, however, are subject to fortune; some are minor, some major...if he [the agent] suffers many major misfortunes, they oppress and spoil his blessedness, since they involve pain and impede many activities...he will be shaken from it [happiness], though, by many serious misfortunes, and from these a return to happiness will take not short time. At best, it will take a long and complete length of time that includes great and fine successes.<sup>100</sup>

Aristotle is here acknowledging that misfortune or rather extrinsic and intrinsic luck does affect an individual. After many bouts of misfortune even the most stable and well established of characters will be affected, maybe even permanently. Therefore, Aristotle has not ignored intrinsic or extrinsic luck, and has in fact accurately accounted for it within the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Thus, the objector would ask: Does not this section of the text adequately account for the examples of moral injury I have described in the above chapters?

### **Nussbaum's Support**

In *The Fragility of Goodness*, Martha Nussbaum argues that Aristotle does in fact recognize the role of luck within all external circumstances. She argues that Aristotle in particular recognizes moral luck. She states that,

Aristotle is aware that the outcomes of our deliberations may be shaped in a crucial way by factors outside our control. Moral character is deeply affected by external circumstances, which may provide opportunities to act well or badly, or which may make it impossible to carry out our intentions.<sup>101</sup>

Therefore, Nussbaum is arguing that by Aristotle remarking upon the presence of external factors beyond one's control, Aristotle is in fact acknowledging that extrinsic and intrinsic luck can affect outcomes of actions decided upon by character. She further states that,

the voluntariness of an action depends not only on the absence of external compulsion, but also on the presence of certain internal conditions: knowledge

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<sup>100</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b23-1101a14.

<sup>101</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 44.

and desire. But luck can affect these conditions in various ways, so that even actions that are not externally compelled may still be involuntary.<sup>102</sup>

Nussbaum thus argues that Aristotle is giving extrinsic and intrinsic luck and the role it plays within the voluntariness of actions proper acknowledgment. She notes that Aristotle does not view luck as a determiner in the moral value of an action or one's character as Aristotle insists that character is ultimately determined through cultivated activity. Nevertheless, she believes that, "Aristotle acknowledges the role of luck in determining...the fragility of goods."<sup>103</sup>

Aristotle acknowledges that wealth, luck, friendships, and political surroundings are all influential in the pursuit of character habituation. However, he contends that voluntary action is ultimately how such characters are obtained. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle states,

In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; there are some things the lack of which takes the lustre from blessedness... happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity.<sup>104</sup>

Aristotle acknowledges fortune and community, but ultimately stresses that these factors are merely aides towards *eudaimonia*. Fortune and community are *instruments*, not prevailing and influential forces. Actions are more prominent and character forming. Nevertheless, Aristotle does acknowledge that *many* events of misfortune can have a major impact upon the individual.

Nussbaum would object to my assertions, and argue that Aristotle does in fact adequately address the role of luck in action. She states that

the Aristotelian approach suggests that our ethical categories do not carve up the world in a way that corresponds to these traditional views of justice. A person may be virtuous and yet be subject to calamity, while a person who is wicked may enjoy an untroubled life.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 87.

<sup>103</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 13.

<sup>104</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b1-9.

<sup>105</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 127.

For Nussbaum, Aristotle allows for luck to affect a person's moral character, even a virtuous character. For example, a person may act in a virtuous manner, and perform those actions consistently but may still be affected by unforeseen circumstances.

### **Response: The Fragility of the Voluntary and Character**

An objector such as Nussbaum might argue that I have done Aristotle a disservice by stating that in not considering countervoluntary action as character affecting, Aristotle does not adequately account for extrinsic and intrinsic luck. They would point to the texts that I have produced above, and claim that these are instances that clearly show that Aristotle does account for luck. Nussbaum would say that not only does he take luck into account, but he thinks it is instrumental in character formation. Aristotle accepts that luck can dislodge even the most stable of characters from *eudaimonia*. The second objection that can be raised against my argument is that I am misrepresenting Aristotle's notion of character all together, and in doing so my critique of his *Nicomachean Ethics* is invalid. For Aristotle, a character was stable and built upon habituated virtuous activity. His notions of character were very different to the notion of character on which Sherman wrote.

These two objections then need to be addressed. To the first objection, I will argue that Aristotle thought *many* misfortunes would affect an individual's *happiness*, while I argue that *one* countervoluntary action will affect an individual's *character*. To the second objection, I acknowledge that in the time between Aristotle writing the *Nicomachean Ethics* to this thesis being written, the notion of character has changed. However, the mere phenomena of moral injury having such an affect upon character hints that Aristotle's notion of character is insufficient. Not only that, but I will argue that even by Aristotle's notion of character a countervoluntary action that leads to moral injury would still be character affecting.



Bernard Williams discusses moral luck extensively in *Moral Luck*. Williams notes that actions are often affected by external factors which can affect the outcomes of certain actions, but more specifically luck can affect the choices which are even available. These factors not only affect the outcomes, but also affect our character. Williams states,

To insist on such a conception of rationality, moreover, would, apart from other kinds of absurdity, suggest a large falsehood: that we might, if we conducted ourselves from the unintentional aspects of our actions, relegating their costs to, so to speak, the insurance fund, and yet still retain our identity and character as agents.<sup>106</sup>

Williams is thus suggesting that there is more to an individual's character than just what is within one's power to control. Character is dynamic, and it would seem to Williams at least absurd to state that agents are able to fully separate volitional actions from the external factors surrounding those actions. An action which may seem voluntary, when examined properly could be seen to involve luck or flow from ignorance of certain particulars. Such voluntary actions only seem to come under scrutiny when the outcomes result in a form of agent-regret. Sherman in *Afterwar* states that

[individuals] control can't reach all mental recesses...the work of control and passivity always collaborates and colludes in life.<sup>107</sup>

When it comes to actions, and when control is specifically analyzed the concept becomes arguably quite hazy. It seems that intrinsic and extrinsic luck should not be easily dismissed when discussing character development. Williams states,

for the 'luck' of the agents relates to those elements which are essential to the outcome but lie outside their control.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck*, 29.

<sup>107</sup> Sherman, *Afterwar*, 17.

<sup>108</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck*, 30.

One's history as an agent is a web in which anything that is the product of the will is surrounded and held up and partly formed by things that are not.<sup>109</sup>

For Williams intrinsic and extrinsic luck significantly affects the voluntariness of our actions, luck may limit voluntary control through affecting various external and internal conditions. Character traits that influence and are influenced by deliberate actions not only stem from voluntary action, but also the environment to which one is exposed.

Aristotle acknowledging that luck plays an instrumental role in the obtainment of *eudaimonia* is not the same as thinking that luck affects character. When considering luck, Aristotle states that such occurrences are possible, but thinks that

the man who is *truly* good and wise...bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of *circumstances*, as a good general makes the best military use of the army at his command...the happy man can never become miserable<sup>110</sup>

I agree that Nussbaum is correct in arguing that Aristotle believes luck plays a role in life, and suggests that luck affects the *outcomes* of voluntary actions. Aristotle, however, is very clearly drawing a line that privileges voluntary action in character formation when he decides to carve out countervoluntary action. Aristotle is carving out countervoluntary actions because he does not think extrinsic or intrinsic luck can be attributed to or shape an individual's character. Luck is not within one's power, and to allow for character development to shape character is to acknowledge that in some cases a character can be substantially shaped by factors outside of human control. Luck not only affects the outcomes of voluntary action, but it also affects the voluntariness of action, producing that which is countervoluntary. As Aristotle says,

we identify the end with certain actions and activity; for thus it falls among goods of the soul and not among external goods.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck*, 29.

<sup>110</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1101a1-5. (emphasis added).

<sup>111</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098b19-21.

Although Aristotle accounts for luck and such uncontrollable factors, he regards them as merely instrumental. An individual's ability to achieve the well lived life is thus firmly left within human control. This control leaves an individual with sole responsibility for *eudaimonic* obtainment as Aristotle believes that *eudaimonia* is achievable through virtuous activity. Even when Aristotle acknowledges the presence of *fortune* in life, he underestimates its impactful nature.<sup>112</sup> As mentioned earlier in the chapter Aristotle states,

if he suffers *many major* misfortunes, they oppress and spoil his blessedness, since they involve pain and impede many activities<sup>113</sup>

However, in the next line Aristotle continues to say,

and yet, even here what is fine shines through, whenever someone bears many severe misfortunes with good temper, not because he feels no distress, but because he is noble and magnanimous.<sup>114</sup>

This passage clearly states that *many* misfortunes are required to destabilize happiness, but that the stable character will endure. While I argue that only *one* countervoluntary action can lead to a moral injury which will affect character.

The second objection which could be raised is that I am considering character not upon Aristotle's notions, but upon a contemporary notion. I am inclined to argue that a more dynamic notion of character which views character as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon would be a more accurate representation than Aristotle's notion.<sup>115</sup> I nevertheless still maintain that my critique remains salient even within Aristotle's limited notion of character. Character, *ethike*, or more specifically the virtues of character, are a stable set of traits which have been

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<sup>112</sup> Aristotle frequently refers to fortune which is translated to luck or happenstance.

<sup>113</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b29-30. (emphasis added.)

<sup>114</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b30-33.

<sup>115</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, Chapter 2.

rationally chosen and habituated. As Sherman states, “character, on Aristotle’s view, is the acquisition of states (*hexeis*) through habituation (*ethismos*).”<sup>116</sup> Character traits are developed through activity which has become purposefully habituated. Thus, the objection would be that Aristotle does not consider a countervoluntary action to affect character as said action was not performed from one’s character. Actions need to be performed through *prohairesis* in order to affect character. Thus, character is stable, and cannot be dislodged by one countervoluntary action. As an example, I will refer to the case of Sergeant Lalo. Sergeant Lalo acted countervoluntarily by allowing his Corporal to leave the vehicle. Aristotle would say that such an action was not character shaping because it did not originate from Lalo’s stable and rationally developed character. His actions were not voluntary; they were not *prohairesis*. Therefore, the end was not in line with the outcome, nor the agent’s character.

I however argue that this countervoluntary action led to a moral injury. Moral injury as discussed in chapter 2 creates a schism between one’s actions and their habituated virtues of character, *ethike*. This schism creates mistrust within one’s character, and causes the agent to question whether they have actually developed the specific virtue. From their countervoluntary actions, Sergeant Lalo and Captain Mantz were forced to question the virtues of character they had habituated. This distrust will further impair their trust to make future *prohairetic* decisions. Although the action itself and outcome was not in line with the end, Sergeant Lalo feels that he could and should have chosen differently or prevented the Corporal’s death. In doing so, Sergeant Lalo is not only now habituating the feelings from the moral injury, but he has now

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<sup>116</sup> Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 176.

questioned his ability for *prohairesis* which originated within a specific virtue (leadership). As an outcome of a moral injury, are *prohairetic* decisions even possible?

Lalo perceives a schism within his action and the *ethike* he had habituated. Thus, his ability for *prohairesis* in future actions and decisions will take such a moral injury into account. Sergeant Lalo will begin to choose and act in accordance with the moral injury that has taken place. Aristotle did not consider countervoluntary actions as character affecting because he did not consider moral injury. If moral injury is considered even Aristotle's narrow notion of character will still be affected. A moral injury causes a schism to occur between an agent's actions and their *ethike*, such consequences are simply what defines a moral injury. Moral injury affects trust in one's self which in turn affects trust in one's *prohairesis*. If countervoluntary actions lead to moral injury as I have argued throughout this critique, then it follows that such actions are character affecting even in Aristotle's limited notion of character.

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## **Vita:**

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