The Road to Character

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DAVID BROOKS

David Brooks was born on August 11, 1961 in Toronto, Canada, then moved to New York City where he spent his childhood. His parents were both academics, his father teaching at NYU and his mother studying history at Columbia University. Although he was raised Jewish, Brooks rarely attended synagogue and hasn't since fully converted to any religion. His family moved to Pennsylvania where Brooks graduated High School in 1979. From there, he went to the University of Chicago to study history. After graduating, he became a police reporter in Chicago, where witnessing crime led him into more conservative political views. He then accepted an internship writing reviews for *The National Review* and got a taste of high-class life. After his internship ended, he wrote reviews for *The Washington Times* and then was hired by *The Wall Street Journal* as editor of the book review section. He published his first book in 2000, a social commentary called *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*. It received considerable acclaim and got him noticed by the *New York Times*. He began writing for the *Times* in 2003, filling an important role as a conservative commentator who could nonetheless understand the liberal point of view. Brooks has appeared as a guest lecturer at Duke University and Yale University, is a commentator on NPR and the PBS News Hour and continues to write for the *Times*. He currently lives in Maryland.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

David Brooks's work mostly focuses on modern culture and the societal shifts that have occurred from 1900 to the present. For instance, in his first book *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*, he examines the makeup of the modern-day upper class and classifies it as a combination of the liberal idealism of the 1960s and the self-interest of the 1980s. In *The Road to Character*, he outlines the major cultural shift from moral realism to moral romanticism that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s after the hardships of the Great Depression and World War II. He critiques modern-day culture for its self-interested, individualistic approach, arguing that people have disregarded the need for community and stopped pursuing moral improvement as a primary goal in their lives.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

David Brooks in part modeled *The Road to Character* on *Plutarch's Lives*, a collection of 48 biographies of famous Greek and Roman men written around the early 2nd century. Like *The Road to Character*, *Plutarch's Lives* arranges biographies so as to highlight the moral attributes of famous characters. Brooks was also influenced by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's book *The Lonely Man of Faith* from which he got the concept of the Adam I and Adam II sides of human nature. David Brooks's other works also contain similar themes to those in *The Road to Character*. For instance, his book *The Social Animal* explores the theme of character and what motivates a person to build it. *The Road to Character* can also be put in the same category as *The Closing of the American Mind* by Allan Bloom. This bestselling book, published in 1987, criticizes the moral relativism that Bloom argues has taken over society and prevented the access of genuine truth. Other contemporary writers who've tackled questions of character-building through overcoming obstacles, albeit from a popular psychology perspective that arguably emphasizes Brooks's Adam I more than Adam II, include Angela Duckworth in *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (2016) and Charles Duhigg in *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (2012).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Road to Character
- **When Written:** 2015
- **Where Written:** Maryland, United States
- **When Published:** 2015
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Social/Political Commentary, Biography
- **Antagonist:** Adam I
- **Point of View:** Third person, occasionally first

EXTRA CREDIT

Friends with Opposite Views. Between 2001 and 2020, David Brooks held a political analysis and commentary hour called *Brooks & Shields* on the PBS News Hour with counterpart Mark Shields. Although Mark Shields was an avid liberal and David Brooks a moderate conservative, the two were good friends and engaged in respectful discussion throughout all their years on the show. For many people, this stood out as a rare instance of civil agreement during politically charged times.

Presidential Character. On an episode of the PBS News Hour during the 2020 presidential campaigns, Brooks speculated that presidential candidate Donald Trump might be a sociopath.

PLOT SUMMARY

David Brooks suggests that there are two sides of human nature. The first side, which he calls **Adam I**, values the "resume virtues" that enable a person to climb the ladder of success. The second side, **Adam II**, has the "eulogy virtues" that are the strengths of character they've gained from triumphing over their weaknesses. Brooks claims that, without an Adam II side, a person leads a meaningless life that eventually falls to pieces. Every person is born with both talents and flaws, and the true success in life is to overcome one's weaknesses.

Brooks describes a radio program episode aired just after the Allied victory in World War II. He is struck by the host's humility in the face of this big victory. In contrast, he says, a football player today will make a show of their self-applause when they achieve something as mundane as scoring a touchdown. Brooks believes this contrast reflects a major shift that occurred in society around the late 1940s. People used to believe in humility and self-renunciation, but now they believe in self-celebration. In this shift to self-love, people lost the ability to build character and to articulate moral dilemmas.

Brooks recounts the biographies of many historical figures who all descended into humility before rising up strengthened. Frances Perkins, after witnessing the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, sacrifices everything to fight for the cause of workers' rights. She illustrates how one can lead a meaningful life by surrendering their ego and responding to their vocation. Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower, while president of the United States, built a character fit for leadership and warned against the dangers of unchecked power. At the heart of his philosophy of power is the belief that man is a problem to himself, and that power can easily corrupt him if he does not apply self-restraint. Like Frances Perkins, Dorothy Day answered the call of religion and spent her life working in charity houses to help the poor. Her life is an example of how a person shapes themselves through suffering, rather than through happiness. George Marshall was an impressive military figure who kept his personal self extremely private. Because he had to build such an impressive character to be worthy of his great aims, few people knew him intimately.

Black civil rights leaders Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin protected themselves from becoming morally corrupt by advocating for non-violent protest. Like Eisenhower, they believed everyone becomes corrupt when they have too much power, and so they practiced self-discipline in their protests to keep themselves just. Mary Anne Evans a.k.a. George Eliot was a morally ardent but narcissistic young woman before she met her husband, George Lewes; after marrying him, she went on to write profound moral novels, showing the power of love to make someone forget themselves and serve greater causes. Similarly, the ancient theologian Augustine was only able to forget his perverse desires when he accepted God's grace. Through his gratitude for God's unconditional love, Augustine was transformed into a person who could willingly return God's love. Samuel Johnson used the method of honest self-examination in his writing in order to grapple with his tormented nature. He is an example of how human beings are born with both good and bad qualities, and how they can overcome their demons through self-confrontation.

Brooks contrasts the quarterbacks Johnny Unitas and Joe Namath to show the stark cultural shift from moral realism to moral romanticism. Unitas was understated and selfless, whereas Namath was flashy and boastful. Each historical figure in *The Road to Character* is a moral realist: they believed they were flawed, and out of their weaknesses they built great character. Moral romanticists like Joe Namath, on the other hand, turned modern society into a meritocracy—a fast-paced, competitive society of individuals who only focus on success and who've surpassed the need for community.

In conclusion, Brooks hopes to turn society's attention back to Adam II. If people focused on their inner character, their inner values would come into harmony with their external behavior, and they would experience moral joy.

CHARACTERS

David Brooks David Brooks is the author of *The Road to Character*. In this work, he critiques the moral inarticulateness of modern-day society. He wrote this book in part to restore his own inner life and character, finding himself a victim of the competitive, fast-paced environment of the present day. A political and social critic, he comments throughout the work on the societal shift from moral realism to moral romanticism and finally to the meritocracy, outlining the decline these shifts caused in people's ability to build character. Through biographies of historical figures whom he admires, he lays out a time-tested approach to building character. The overall goal of his work is to turn society's attention away from **Adam I**, the external, career-oriented side of human nature, and back to **Adam II**, the inner side of human nature that values morality and character.

Frances Perkins Frances Perkins was a workers' rights activist in the first half of the 20th century and a member of the Roosevelt administration. Brooks regards her as an example of the power of vocation in a person's life. Perkins grew up in Maine in a traditional, unsentimental Yankee family. They taught Perkins to be honest and conservative in her personal life, but active in her community. Although she was a bad student, she studied at Mt. Holyoke College. After graduation, she went to work at the Hull House, a community dedicated to acts of service that improve life for all. Her community service work didn't become a vocation until she witnessed the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911. This fire, caused by horrible

working conditions, made Perkins morally indignant. She felt that the world was asking something of her and that she'd found her calling. She went to Albany to lobby for workers' rights, doing whatever it took to win the respect of the callous politicians there. She married a man whose mental health and financial affairs later fell apart. Their marriage was unhappy, and their only daughter was badly-behaved and distant from her mother. Perkins kept her personal life very private but once admitted that her own poor intimacy skills were the ruin of her family. She ended up working for Franklin Roosevelt who appointed her first as Industrial Commissioner and later as secretary of labor. She agreed to these appointments on the condition that he make certain changes in workers' rights. She served Roosevelt until he died, falling quietly into the background as her personal life became more and more scandalous. After Roosevelt's death, Perkins taught at Cornell and wrote a biography of Roosevelt, but not one of herself. Perkins's self-discipline was the downfall of her personal life, but it made her an excellent public servant. She devoted herself to her vocation of workers' rights, sacrificing all that was personally dear to her.

Franklin Roosevelt – Franklin Roosevelt was the president in the stories of Frances Perkins, George Marshall, and Philip Randolph and either enabled or thwarted the changes that they respectively tried to make. When Frances Perkins first made his acquaintance, she was unimpressed, but she saw that after Roosevelt contracted polio, he became humbler and more willing to accept help than before. Although Roosevelt was loyal to Perkins and insisted on having her by his side while he was president, he was too afraid of soiling his reputation to defend her when the public heard of her personal scandals. Roosevelt wasn't fond of George Marshall but gave him the position of chief of staff of the U.S. Army when a mutual friend recommended that he do so. Later on, he thwarted Marshall's dream of being overall commander of the invasion of France in World War II; he asked Marshall if he wanted the position, and Marshall replied that the president should do as he saw fit. Roosevelt then denied Marshall the position. When Philip Randolph was planning his march on Washington to protest racial discrimination in the workplace, Roosevelt personally tried to negotiate with him, saying he'd call employers and make them hire Black workers. When Randolph still refused to call off the march, Roosevelt at last consented to pass a bill mandating that employers hire Blacks.

Viktor Frankl – David Brooks introduces Viktor Frankl halfway through Frances Perkins's story to provide an example of someone who didn't ask things of life, but rather responded to what life was asking of him. Viktor Frankl was a writer interned in a concentration camp during World War II. While there, he helped other prisoners cope with the horrendous circumstances by telling them that life still expected things of them. In this way, he preached that one can't control the circumstances that make them suffer, but they can control their response to the suffering. This supports Brooks's claim that a person doesn't choose their life, but rather builds their character through the way they respond to their circumstances.

Ida Stover Eisenhower – Ida Stover Eisenhower was the mother of Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower. She had a tragic upbringing that left her orphaned and forced to strike out on her own. She met David Eisenhower, whose cold and stubborn temper was the opposite of her warm and optimistic one. They raised five boys together, moving from Kansas to Texas and back again as they struggled with poverty. All her boys revered Ida. Although the atmosphere at home was strict, Ida instilled in the boys a love of education and surrounded them with her warm personality. She forbade excess entertainment, wanting to encourage moderation for fear that without this skill, her boys would easily slip into sinful behavior. After losing a baby, she became more deeply religious but maintained her fun-loving nature. Once, when Dwight flew into a rage at being denied permission to go trick-or-treating and his father punished him harshly, Ida went to his room and told him that the greatest thing a person can do is conquer their own soul. Dwight always remembered this moment.

Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower – Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower was the son of Ida Stover Eisenhower and became the 34th president of the United States. Eisenhower was a man of contradictions: for example, he was not personally religious but believed that religion was good for society. Also, he suffered from bad health and a fiery temper, but outwardly displayed confidence and serenity. After graduating from West Point in 1915, he was not given orders to enter combat until 1918, just as World War I was ending. First, he went to work in the Infantry Brigade alongside General Fox Connor, whose soft-spoken manner he admired. In contrast, Dwight then worked alongside General MacArthur, whose theatrical and pompous manner disgusted him. Nevertheless, Dwight bore stoically with MacArthur, believing that if he could work for a man he hated, he could overcome anything in himself. His loyalty to MacArthur also taught him that war was a serious duty, not a glorious exploit. Dwight eventually became a talented yet self-effacing wartime commander. For instance, in the event of the D-Day invasion failing, he'd planned to send a national message that put all the blame on his own shoulders. According to Brooks, one of Dwight's greatest qualities was that he could masterfully create a second self; he believed it was not who he was from birth, but who he'd built himself to be that was important. Another of his great qualities was moderation. In his 1961 speech when Kennedy succeeded him as president, Eisenhower cautioned against the dangers of unchecked power and extreme changes. He urged the country to make change cautiously and gradually, and not to indiscriminately destroy what was old in favor of the new. Eisenhower held this

philosophy of leadership because he believed man was "a problem to himself"—in other words, that people naturally indulge their worst impulses and must exercise self-restraint throughout life.

Dorothy Day – Dorothy Day was a Catholic convert who spent her life caring for the poor and suffering. When she was a child, she lived through the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and believed it was evidence of God's powerful presence. As she grew up, she became fascinated with sex but rebuked herself for her longings. This became a theme of her young adult life. She quit college and headed to New York City where she led a promiscuous lifestyle, hanging out in bars and with drug addicts. At one point, she became pregnant and aborted her child, later trying to commit suicide with the gas pipe in her apartment. She was arrested twice, once for feminist activism and another time for associating with a prostitution house. She was ashamed of her dissolute lifestyle and felt lost, not having found her vocation yet. She married a man named Forster Batterham and secluded herself with him as if to purify herself through love. Yet this still didn't satisfy her. When her daughter Tamar was born, she found that she felt incredibly grateful but didn't know whom to thank. However, her daughter's birth soon gave her a calling to join the Catholic Church. She began a torturous process of conversion, criticizing herself the whole way. Her religiosity distanced her from her scientific-minded husband. During the Great Depression, she began a newspaper called *The Catholic Worker* and opened soup kitchens and hospitality houses that served and tended to the poor and down-and-out. The work was extremely grueling, but she did it until the end of her life because she was not a person who sought happiness, but one who sought to form herself through suffering. She was part of the Peace Movement of the late 1960s, but in an unusual way, standing against capitalism and the promotion of the individual. She was an example of someone who surrendered her individuality in order to serve a higher cause. Although her life wasn't completely happy, she felt immense gratitude for God's presence at the end of her life.

George Marshall – George Marshall held countless positions in the U.S. Army and was known for his impressive character and leadership. He was born in Uniontown, Pennsylvania in 1880. Marshall was embarrassed when his father's coal business collapsed, sinking the family into poverty. He also learned at a young age that his family thought he would amount to nothing because he didn't do well in school. Instead of defeating him, this made him resolved to prove everyone who doubted him wrong. Later, Marshall attended the Virginia Military Institute. When he was hazed by upperclassmen, he kept his self-control and held to a code of silence that earned his classmates' trust. He was suspicious of emotion because he believed it robbed a person of their agency. Also, he never kept a diary for fear this would make him self-involved. After Military School, he boldly walked into the White House to ask for an appointment in the army. Once in the army, he rose in rank very slowly, always working for others and taking whatever positions were given to him. Like Frances Perkins, Marshall kept his private and public lives separate. He was extremely devoted to his wife Lily and was devastated when she died. However, his reticence in general led him to have very few friends. Marshall sacrificed his dream job of overall commander in World War II when Franklin Roosevelt asked him if he wanted it, and Marshall refused to say yes. In this way, he was always obedient to the institution he served and never put his desires before the desires of his higher-ups. Marshall tried to retire after the war but was appointed the ambassador of China at the last minute. Marshall's character bore resemblance to traditional Greek heroes—what Brooks describes as magnanimous and great-souled. Although he sacrificed the chance to be known intimately by many people, he accomplished great feats through the controlled exercise of power.

Philip Randolph – Philip Randolph was a prominent Black civil rights leader in the early 1900s. Randolph grew up in the midst of debasing racism but transcended it through his moral conduct and dignity. He worked to organize scattered groups of people into unions that could enact change. His main goal was to bring as many people as possible into consensus with one another. He did this by limiting his own personal opinions, aware that the power of his position as a civil rights leader could potentially corrupt him. He put his own freedom on the line by organizing ex-slaves into workers' unions during a time when union activity was cause for arrest. Randolph was uncompromising. When Franklin Roosevelt called him into the White House to negotiate with him to call off his planned civil rights march on Washington, Randolph refused to back down until Roosevelt passed a bill mandating that Blacks be hired in the workplace. After the war, he worked alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bayard Rustin to fight broadly against racial injustice. He was what Brooks calls a biblical realist who believed that aggressive tactics were necessary to restrain people's sinful and self-justifying behavior. However, he also advocated for non-violent protest, believing that through non-violence, protestors provoke the unjust to blatantly expose their villainy for all to see. The idea was also to keep himself from becoming corrupt in the process of fighting against corruption.

Bayard Rustin – Bayard Rustin was an influential civil rights activist who worked alongside Philip Randolph. He grew up in West Chester, Pennsylvania, but eventually moved to New York where people would be more accepting of his homosexuality. He was a pacifist and a non-violent protestor, believing that these methods would not only help him fight injustice, but would also help him combat his own inner weaknesses. He fought racial injustice in daily, non-violent ways, such as sitting in the white sections of city buses. Instead of letting himself be drafted, he decided to go to jail, where he

revealed his intense sexuality and lack of self-control. He was often angry, reckless, and arrogant. On many occasions, he sexually pursued other inmates in a relentless craze. From outside the prison, the leaders of Rustin's civil rights groups were disappointed in him, saying his conduct destroyed the sacredness of true love and justice. Rustin tried to fix this destructiveness in himself by beginning a long-term relationship, but this failed, and he was sent to jail again for a public sex act. After his second release, he participated in the civil rights movement from the background. He was influential to Martin Luther King, Jr., helping him write many of his speeches. He also convinced Randolph to renew his plan for a march on Washington and then organized the march for him. Rustin's struggle against his personal vices made the philosophy of non-violence extremely important to him: he used it as a means to discipline himself. Ultimately, he attained a measure of personal peace and committed to a relationship with one man.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the most prominent advocate and speaker on behalf of Black civil rights in the 1950s and '60s. He appeared alongside Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin in their non-violent racial injustice protests. He delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech at the March on Washington organized by Randolph and Rustin. Like them, King was a biblical realist who believed that, given people's innate sinfulness, more than education was needed to eradicate racist policies. This meant that he took an aggressive but non-violent approach to activism: he believed that non-violence would coerce the unjust to perform blatant acts of racial hatred, thereby exposing their villainy. Also, like Randolph and Rustin, King believed in staying vigilant against his own potential for becoming corrupt throughout his activism.

Mary Anne Evans/George Eliot – Mary Anne Evans lived during the Victorian era in England and published famous novels, such as *Middlemarch*, under the pseudonym of George Eliot. When she was a child, she was very self-centered. She had intense moral aspirations, but they were too lofty to be of any real good. First, she was passionately religious, and later became passionately *against* religion. She believed that morality could fill the void in the absence of religion, but she had no idea how to go about achieving this. Even as a young woman, she could not quiet her desires and her need for attention. She fell for men constantly, turning husbands away from their wives, and competing with other mistresses for the same man. She loved the idea of loving and being loved but had no experience of true commitment or selfless love. When she met George Lewes, however, everything changed. She became calm, stable, and committed. He encouraged her to write novels, which she did, finally channeling her intense moral ardor into stories involving characters who made moral improvements in their everyday lives and relationships. Her life demonstrated that each person has a chance to make small moral improvements in their daily lives and in mundane situations, such as in a marriage or in a friendship. Brooks suggests that without the stabilizing love of her husband, Eliot would not have let go of her need for attention and would therefore never have poured her energies into writing life-changing novels.

George Lewes – George Lewes was the devoted husband of Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot). He was a freelance journalist who believed, along with Eliot, that morality could take the place of a religion that some were beginning to reject on the grounds of logic. He grounded and deepened George Eliot's life, encouraging her to write and to publish her work. He was a source of joy, comfort, and support throughout her life and career, sacrificing his personal aims so that he could uplift her talents.

Augustine – Augustine was born near the end of the Roman Empire and is known for his long and torturous road to Christianity. His mother, Monica, ardently wanted him to be a Christian, but in his early life, he followed his earthly desires instead. He was a well-educated public figure who steadily climbed in the highest political circles of the time. However, he was unhappy. He felt that his work was empty and meaningless and that answering his desires was not satisfying him. However, although he knew his desires were leading him to unhappiness, he could not stop following them. This made him despair of the division within human nature that causes a person to follow their perverse desires even though they know they shouldn't. Augustine believed God existed, and that he should renounce his desires in order to serve God's will, but he couldn't make himself do this. It was not until he had a powerful experience in a garden one day, in which a voice compelled him to open his Bible to a certain page and read, that he finally gave up his desires. His path towards belief had had many stops; first, he had examined himself to see why he couldn't be happy. In doing so, he'd realized how vast the human mind was. He was then humbled by this realization and felt small in comparison to God. Then, he had accepted God's grace which showered him with unconditional love: God had already justified his existence and absolved his sins. After accepting God's grace, he was flooded with gratitude. Finally, this gratitude left Augustine full of energy for returning God's love. After his conversion, he spent his life writing and preaching, feeling that now that his attention was turned to God, the material world no longer claimed his loyalty.

Monica – Monica was the mother to Augustine. She was possessively involved in his life, intervening in his decisions about whom to marry and where to live. She spent much of her life in despair that her son was not a Christian. When Augustine converted, she was overjoyed, and the two went on to live together in a spiritual community where they discussed and practiced their faith. Near the end of her life, she and Augustine experienced a profound moment in which they sensed that everything around them had been silenced and that they were

unified, facing outward towards God. When Monica passed away, Augustine remembered her as an advocate of pure faith standing against the rational and materialistic worldview of the times.

Samuel Johnson – Samuel Johnson was an English freelance writer in the early 1700s who wrote essays, articles, speeches, and compiled a dictionary. He suffered from tuberculosis as a child. The illness and the poorly conducted treatments he received for it left him blind in one eye, deaf in one ear, and gruesomely scarred. He was sloppy and had strange compulsive tics, leading many of the townspeople to believe he was insane. He hung around in bars and went on adventures for the purpose of testing his knowledge through experience. He wrote for a newspaper that published mock speeches of politicians; his speeches were so eloquent that many people believed they were the politicians' actual speeches. Often, Johnson wrote as a means to grapple with the demons of jealousy, guilt, and fear that tormented him. He believed that good and bad could not be easily separated, and that only paradoxes accurately captured the complexity of life. Eventually, he signed a contract to make his own dictionary, which he filled with hundreds of illustrative quotes. This made him financially stable, but he still favored the raucous pub life where he could socialize with all kinds of people. At the end of his life, he was not at peace the way Michel de Montaigne was; unlike Montaigne, he didn't accept himself but rather relentlessly fought with himself. His work, which is known for making shrewd observations about human vice, helped lift him out of his own divided nature.

Michel de Montaigne – Michel de Montaigne was a famous French essayist whose honest self-examination can be compared to that of Samuel Johnson. Unlike Johnson, Montaigne had a wealthy, comfortable upbringing. At first, he believed he wanted to pursue a political life, but could not escape the feeling that he was living wrongly in some essential way. This made him depressed, and he set about to understand his depression through writing. He examined himself honestly and in solitude, hoping to understand human nature generally as a result. In his essays, he openly admitted to his faults, often in a cheerful, humorous tone. His easy-going nature and low expectations didn't appeal to everyone; some people thought he was nihilistic and didn't strive for any higher good. His self-examination led to self-acceptance, whereas Samuel Johnson passionately confronted himself, aiming for high moral good.

Johnny Unitas – Johnny Unitas was a quarterback who grew up in a culture of self-effacement half a generation before another famous quarterback, Joe Namath. David Brooks contrasts Unitas with Namath to show the glaring difference between an old culture and a new culture that began around the 1960s. Unitas represents an old culture in which people were reserved in manner and hard on themselves. Unitas approached football as if he were an honest worker doing an honest job. He'd often blame himself for his teams' mistakes, and he never bragged about his own greatness. Moreover, his lifestyle wasn't part of his fame. He dressed simply and kept his personal life private. For Brooks, he represents the culture of moral realism.

Joe Namath – Joe Namath was a quarterback who grew up half a generation after Johnny Unitas in a culture of self-involvement, or moral romanticism. He was famous not only for his skill as a quarterback but also for his extravagant lifestyle. He was confident, glamorous, and entertaining. He'd brag about himself with ease, saying how his philosophy of life was to follow his desires. Throughout his career, he never committed to one person or to anything of depth. He represents what David Brooks calls the culture of the "Big Me," in which society promotes the individual, encourages people to trust their feelings, and pursues empty external things. Brooks contrasts Namath's conduct with Johnny Unitas's conduct in order to show how the culture of moral romanticism stands out from the old culture of moral realism.

TERMS

Character – Throughout *The Road to Character*, **David Brooks** asserts that character is not something a person is born with, but something a person builds. A person builds character through struggling against adversity and their personal weaknesses. With every triumph over weakness comes not primarily happiness, but increased strength of character. In order to build character, a person must acknowledge that they have weaknesses as well as talents so that they can confront these weaknesses and overcome them. Therefore, someone who builds character is a moral realist, believing that human nature is both good and evil. All the exemplars in *The Road to Character* are chosen by David Brooks because they share the trait of character-building. Each highlighted figure began with a vulnerability that they transcended over the course of their lives, building a remarkable strength through the struggle.

Meritocracy – Simply put, a meritocracy is a form of government in which people with skills and merits hold power. In *The Road to Character*, **David Brooks** calls present-day society a "meritocracy" because it subscribes to moral romanticism. Moral romanticism first instilled in people the belief that human beings are inherently talented and good and that their skills should therefore be trusted, nurtured, and utilized. Brooks states that these beliefs went too far, leading society to become a fast-paced, highly competitive meritocracy. In this meritocracy, everyone is encouraged to make themselves stand out as much as possible, and so people focus only on their external skills and neglect their internal lives altogether. In other words, the meritocratic society nurtures the external Adam I side of human nature rather than the internal Adam II side. Brooks says that the meritocracy is

emotive: people put their feelings first, and so they believe that their feelings constitute morality. Also, meritocracy is relativistic: since there are no objective moral precepts, no one can find common ground with others in moral debates. Lastly, since everyone in a meritocracy believes that their feelings are inherently right, everyone becomes self-sufficient and stops looking to others for moral guidance and support. As a result, community disintegrates, and society becomes individualistic.

Moral Realism – Moral realism is **David Brooks**'s term for the belief that human nature is both good and evil. This view of human nature contrasts with that of the moral romanticists who believe that human nature is inherently good and trustworthy. Since they hold that human beings have both weaknesses and strengths, moral realists do not trust themselves to the degree that moral romanticists tend to do. Rather, they are hard on themselves. They confront their weaknesses, believing that through self-sacrifice and service, they will become stronger. Moral realists adhere to objective moral principles, which means that they trust an external, objective order of good while distrusting their internal impulses. Despite their somewhat negative view of human nature, moral realists have the ability to build character whereas moral romanticists are less equipped to do so. Character is built through struggle and through gaining triumph over one's weaknesses; moral realists are able to build character because they acknowledge their weaknesses and challenge themselves to overcome them.

Moral Romanticism – Moral romanticism is the view of morality that overtook moral realism after the Great Depression and World War II. Eager for positivity and hope after decades of hardship, society adopted a line of positive thinking that urged people to trust their desires and think of themselves as inherently good. This eventually led to a full-blown meritocracy in which society downplayed the need for community, believing that each individual should follow their own moral code based on their personal feelings.

Vocation – A vocation is a strong sense of calling that propels a person toward a certain job or occupation. In *The Road to Character*, **David Brooks** contrasts vocation with career. A career is something a person chooses, whereas a vocation is something a person is called to do. When a person has a vocation, they are not asking themselves what they want out of life but are rather responding to what life and circumstances are asking of *them*. Almost all the exemplars in *The Road to Character* have vocations in some form, but **Frances Perkins** is the clearest example: she sacrificed everything she had to serve the cause of workers' rights, feeling that this cause was calling her.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SELF-RENUNCIATION VS. SELF-LOVE

In *The Road to Character*, David Brooks challenges modern culture's approach to character. Early in the book, he describes listening to a radio program that aired a few days after the Allied victory in World War II. Struck by the host's humility in the face of victory, Brooks couldn't help comparing the program's tone to the excessive self-praise in modern culture. To explain this contrast, Brooks suggests that there are two competing moral cultures within American culture: the first, older culture was one of moral realists who believed in self-renunciation and the flawed nature of human beings. The second was a culture of moral romanticists who, after the Great Depression and World War II, were so eager for happiness that they began to view humans as inherently good and worthy of self-love. Though Brooks admits that the latter view was beneficial for some social justice movements, he cautions against the excesses of moral romanticism: when taken too far, it turns into a meritocracy in which people focus only on external success and overlook the need for community. On the other hand, though moral realism had drawbacks, it encouraged people to battle their weaknesses and put community before personal desire. Through his concept of contrasting moral cultures, Brooks argues that a culture of self-renunciation is ultimately more beneficial to the self than a culture of self-love.

The culture of moral realism, or self-renunciation, is based on the idea that human nature is inherently untrustworthy. Moral realists held that human beings were likely to do bad things if they did not confront and restrain themselves. They believed that "character is built in the struggle against [one's] own weaknesses," suggesting that they were constantly aware of their own flaws. Moreover, moral realists did not believe they could complete themselves. Knowing that "no person can achieve self-mastery on his or her own," the moral realists sought the support of friends, family, tradition, or God in their endeavor to build character. This shows that they believed in the incompleteness of human nature, but believed they could become complete through dedication to things outside themselves. In general, the moral realists were defined by humility. Since they believed in their own flaws, they resisted self-praise, pride, and extroversion. Therefore, moral realism involved a low opinion of human nature and was characterized by self-renunciation.

In contrast to moral realism, the culture of moral romanticism emerged out of society's need to feel positive about the self. While the culture of moral realism held that human nature was a combination of both good and bad impulses, with a constant need to restrain the bad, the culture of moral romanticism held that human nature was inherently good. This led to maxims like "trust yourself," "believe in yourself," and "follow your dreams." Moreover, moral romanticism reversed moral realism's belief that the self was untrustworthy. Instead, moral romanticism held that the external world was untrustworthy, while the inner self was inherently trustworthy. This empowered the individual to create their own worldview and to try to thrive without support from others. Lastly, moral romanticism released people from moral obligations. Since it instructed people to believe in their feelings instead of relying on external structures to guide their feelings, individuals came to use their feelings as moral guides. According to Brooks, this allowed people to justify all their actions and caused people to spend little time on moral improvement.

Despite moral romanticism's seeming positivity, Brooks argues that it actually leads people into habits that are damaging to the self. First of all, moral romanticism causes people to focus entirely on external success as opposed to inner character. Since it is founded on the belief that each person has natural talents, people came to view "the self as a resource to be cultivated," and not as an inner life to be developed. Furthermore, because moral romanticism holds that a person's desires are "oracles of what is right and true," each person became their own guide. Therefore, individuals overcame the need for others to help them get on the right moral path (or so they believed). In this way, moral romanticism leads to isolation and lack of community. Lastly, Brooks argues that moral romanticism makes people morally inarticulate. Because everyone believes that their feelings guide them to what is right, everyone focuses on what they *want* to do, rather than what they *should* do—placing internal desires above objective morality. Ultimately, then, people find themselves unable to even conceive of moral standards outside themselves. Therefore, moral romanticism turns society into a meritocracy—a state in which people disregard questions of morality altogether. This leads people to view themselves and others simply as products of their external achievements. This is damaging because it neglects the internal, moral side of human nature, leaving people partially satisfied, at best.

Through contrasting moral realism and moral romanticism, Brooks identifies what, in his view, is truly beneficial for the self. On the surface, a culture of love seems better for the self than a culture of self-renunciation, but Brooks argues that this is actually not the case. Throughout *The Road to Character*, he develops the argument that what challenges, limits, and restrains the self paradoxically ends up developing the self's worth. In contrast, the habits of self-expression and of validating one's feelings only undermine self-development and, in the process, destroy the bonds that hold together a community. Only through moral realism's understanding that people are imperfect and in need of outside help does a person open themselves to the possibility of becoming great.

INNER LIFE, EXTERNAL LIFE, AND CHARACTER

From the outset of *The Road to Character*, David Brooks proposes that there are two sides to human nature: he calls the first side "**Adam I**," a person's external, career-oriented side. He calls the second side "**Adam II**," the internal side of a person that develops character traits such as humility. Adam I believes people are born with talents they should maximize, while Adam II believes a person contains both strengths and weaknesses, and that a person builds character through confronting their faults. Adam I holds that individual achievement leads to reward, while Adam II follows the inverse logic that one must surrender themselves to find themselves. Therefore—having different aims and different logics—the two sides seem to be completely at odds. However, Brooks contends that nurturing Adam II does *not* compromise Adam I. Rather, when one nurtures inner character, they experience "moments of catharsis when outer ambition comes into balance with inner aspiration." In other words, when a person develops Adam II, their two sides end up harmonizing. Through the paradox of human nature's two "Adams," Brooks argues that by developing inner character, a person doesn't just balance out their external side but overcomes the inner-outer distinction altogether.

Brooks distinguishes two opposite sides of human nature, "Adam I" and "Adam II." Roughly speaking, these sides constitute a person's inner life and outer life. Adam I encompasses a person's external virtues and successes, such as their career, accomplishments, and assets, while Adam II encompasses their inner virtues of character, such as their humility and kindness. Furthermore, these two sides hold different views of human nature: while Adam I believes in the inherent talents of a person, Adam II believes that human nature is flawed as well as endowed with gifts. This causes Adam I to seek success through maximizing strengths, while Adam II seeks character through triumphing over weaknesses. Lastly, these two sides follow different logics: Adam I's logic is that through the expression of one's unique gifts, external things are achieved, and a person climbs "up the ladder of success." By contrast, Adam II holds a paradoxical logic that a person must sacrifice a life of desire in order to attain what is truly of worth—constant moral improvement. This person succeeds in triumphing over themselves and building character.

When a person focuses on their Adam I side, they damage the Adam II side of their nature. If a person only develops Adam I, they become a "shrewd animal" who turns everything into a

game. Since they hold that external success is everything, they become adept at cultivating skills they can use to compete for superiority in their career but lose sight of what gives their life an actual meaning from within. Furthermore, the Adam I person denies themselves deep relationships. Because they are so focused on the traits that make a good impression in the career world, they judge other people based on ability as opposed to worth. Their community crumbles because they believe in their own talents and don't think they need support from others. Ultimately, because of their superficial focus, a person who is just an Adam I is not who they really want to be. A "humiliating gap opens up between [their] actual self and [their] desired self," meaning that they live a life of partial satisfaction in which the self they actually want is always out of reach. Therefore, a person can never be satisfied through their Adam I nature.

However, if a person focuses on their Adam II nature, they achieve satisfaction by integrating inner character with outward action. First of all, "only Adam II can experience deep satisfaction," because it knows that the happiness Adam I aims at is insufficient. Adam II goes deeper than happiness by striving for "moral joy": the conquering of one's weaknesses in order to lead a moral life. Also, Adam II is all-encompassing of a person, whereas Adam I is not. When one does not focus on their Adam II side by building their character, "not only [their] inner life but also [their] external life will eventually fall to pieces." This suggests that Adam II and Adam I are not of equal importance to a person's true character, but rather that Adam II actually supports Adam I's success from within. Ultimately, through cultivating one's Adam II nature, a person attains harmony between their inner and outer selves. When a person sacrifices the personal happiness that Adam I thirsts after and instead dedicates themselves to being a good person, they experience "the joy of having their values in deep harmony with their behavior." For instance, it was through sacrificing her comfort and happiness that Frances Perkins dedicated her life to fighting for workers' rights—something she was morally passionate about. In doing so, she became—outwardly and inwardly—her true self. Therefore, cultivating one's Adam II nature has the deeply satisfying effect of erasing the inner-outer distinction within them.

Although it at first seems that Adam I and Adam II equally divide human nature, Brooks shows that Adam II is in fact more essential to human nature. He gives evidence to this by showing that if a person simply focused on their Adam II, not only would their external nature take care of itself, but they would cease to be divided in nature at all. This suggests that the Adam I side of human nature was originally just the external consequence of one's inner character. In recognizing it as external and separating it off from the inner life, people exacerbated the inner-outer distinction and strived for satisfaction insufficiently through the Adam I side alone. The solution to this insufficient satisfaction, Brooks claims, is not to balance out Adam I and Adam II, but instead to focus solely on one's inner character.

VICE, VIRTUE, AND SELF-CONFRONTATION

The exemplars in David Brooks's *The Road to Character* tackle "life's essential problem," which the author describes in the words of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "the line separating good and evil passes [...] right through the human heart." Thus, Brooks's work rests on this idea that human nature contains both vice and virtue. This dualism leads the book's exemplars to believe that in order to become good, people must battle their natural sins and weaknesses. Not only does this battle build inner character, the dualism between vice and virtue also shapes people's approaches to greater causes. For instance, civil rights activists Randolph and Rustin justify their strategies against racial injustice by maintaining that they *themselves* are liable to vice; they practice nonviolence, in part, so that power doesn't corrupt their own moral character. Similarly, Eisenhower warned against the dangers of unchecked power, urging the nation to take a moderate approach to change. At the heart of his philosophy of power is the belief that man is "a problem to himself" and liable to become corrupt in the absence of self-restraint. Through his exemplars' battles with their own potential for corruption, Brooks argues that it is only through confronting personal vice that a person can effectively fight societal vices, too.

Early on, Brooks establishes that human nature contains both virtue and vice. This dual nature shows itself as "some perversity" that causes people to put the things that they love in the wrong order of importance. Although Brooks claims that every person knows deep down that the love of one's family is more important than the love of money, for example, people perversely put the love of money first. In these moments, a person gives in to the vice of weakness by not making the virtuous choice. Because it's human nature to choose vice over virtue, then, good character is not "innate or automatic." Rather, good character requires the constant, daily effort of resisting one's weaknesses. Significantly, the constant effort to be more moral each day results in lasting change. Each phase of struggle against one's weakness leaves "a residue on such a person's soul" and "reshape[s] their inner core," giving them clarity, confidence, and stability. Therefore, the process of ongoing struggle against one's vices is the only action that creates enduring good.

As well as achieving inner goodness, the confrontation of one's weakness is essential for achieving external good. In their civil rights activism, Randolph and Rustin knew they could end up being corrupted by whatever power they attained. For instance, they could become hard-hearted as their hatred for their enemies increased. This potential for corruption justified

their actions. Their self-suspicion caused them to use nonviolent tactics to fight injustice, thereby preventing themselves from giving in to the violence and hatred they knew they themselves were capable of. Moreover, their self-disciplined, nonviolent protests achieved the most effective social change. Through peaceful protest, they provoked their aggressors to expose *their* unjust violence in lashing out against the nonviolent. In this way, the constant confrontation of their own weakness allowed Randolph and Rustin to affect lasting change in society.

Similarly, because Eisenhower believed that human beings are corrupted by power, his political philosophy advocated for a modest and limited use of power. Understanding that he was born with both virtues and vices, Eisenhower built a character over time that was well-suited to his political aims. He maintained an outward simplicity that helped him appeal to the average American by making him seem like someone they could relate to. In so doing, he protected himself from being corrupted by wielding superiority over his people, holding himself to a standard of humility and compassion. Not only that, but he also advocated for a moderate political approach. He warned against the "national ruin" that would arise from unchecked power and advocated for prudence and humility. Like the nation's founders, he feared the rash changes that society would make if people did not restrain themselves. All in all, Eisenhower's political philosophy was shaped by his understanding that "man is a problem to himself"—the understanding that human nature is liable to be bad if left unrestricted. This understanding caused him to adopt the strategy of self-restraint in both his character-building and in his political policies, believing that freely exercised power would unleash human nature's natural vice.

Although Eisenhower, Randolph, and Rustin were each in positions of power, their stories suggest that self-restraint effects more change than power can. These exemplars knew from personal experience that they were flawed, and that they had to actively hold back the bad parts of their nature to be good. This self-confrontation of their own potential sinfulness caused them to stand constant guard against the vice within themselves, therefore suiting them to be just people of power.

VOCATION AND SACRIFICE

Many of the historical figures in David Brooks's *The Road to Character* didn't choose the course of their own lives. When Frances Perkins witnessed the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, she was horrified by the working conditions that caused the atrocity. From that point on, her life ceased to be just about her. The fight for workers' rights became her vocation, which Brooks defines as the job a person is *called* to do, not the job they *choose* to do; the person with a calling "[doesn't] create [their] life; [they] are summoned by life." Similarly, religion called so strongly to Dorothy Day that "she preferred the church to her own will," suggesting that one sacrifices even their own desires in order to pursue their calling. The idea of vocation can also sustain a person's will to live. Frankl, a writer interned in a concentration camp during the Holocaust, kept other inmates from committing suicide by telling them that life still expected things of them—that is, that life "summoned" them. Through such examples, Brooks argues that answering a calling doesn't annihilate the self, but is the surest way to *find* oneself and live a meaningful life.

Brooks shows that Frances Perkins's vocation replaced her own ego as the core of her life. She was appalled by the horrible working conditions that caused the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, taking the lives of so many workers. This "moral indignation" was so strong that she forgot her own wants and devoted herself to fighting for workers' rights, proving that a cause greater than herself was calling to her in this moment. To serve this calling, Perkins compromised her happiness. She went wherever she could affect the most change, even consenting to work with corrupt politicians who only listened to her when she behaved like a mother figure. She dressed in matronly clothing and allowed her colleagues to call her "Mother Perkins," showing that she was willing to stifle her youth and femininity for the sake of making change. Also, she compromised intimacy and warmth in her relationships with her husband and daughter in her fight for workers' rights. She hewed to a strict philosophy of privacy, keeping her personal emotions out of her work so as to be as productive as possible. As a result, her husband's mental health unraveled, and her daughter's messy life never took shape. Perkins herself confessed in her diary: "I am the cause of others' nervous collapse, my husband, my daughter." Despite the sacrifices it entailed, this calling transformed the way Perkins approached life. Instead of asking herself what she wanted, she started responding to what the world needed of her. Perkins's experience thus demonstrates how one's vocation can become the central structure of their life, replacing their wants and even their happiness.

Similarly, Dorothy Day's calling demanded that she give up what she'd previously found meaningful. She made several attempts to fill the emptiness in her life. For instance, she hoped that secluding herself with a lover would fulfill her lack of purpose. However, devoting herself to her romantic partner Forster Batterham did not satisfy her. Next, she thought that motherhood might answer her needs. But despite her immense feeling of gratitude at her first daughter's birth, this was only the beginning of her calling. Indeed, her daughter's birth showed her that she still had "no outlet for her faith." Finally, she poured her faith into the outlet of the Catholic Church, and in so doing, she fatefully distanced herself from her husband and daughter. In other words, she gave up the things she'd previously chosen in hopes of fulfilling her purpose. This suggests that sometimes, one's calling requires them to give up even good and meaningful parts of life in pursuit of a larger

purpose.

In another light, the idea of a vocation sustains a person's will to live in the most degrading circumstances. Viktor Frankl's life in a concentration camp was completely contrary to what he'd planned for himself. Subjected to torture and made to work grueling and demeaning jobs, nothing in his life was what he'd wanted. In order to survive this, Frankl took up the idea of a vocation: his life was expecting things from *him*, not the other way around. Frankl took this philosophy and used it to control his inner response to the suffering he could not control. Despite the degrading treatment he received, he fortified his own integrity against it instead of succumbing to it. Furthermore, Frankl saved the lives of countless fellow prisoners, preventing them from potentially committing suicide by sharing the idea of a vocation with them. He told them that although they couldn't expect anything out of life, life nonetheless expected something out of them; it expected them to endure their hardships and keep their minds on goodness and love in the midst of forces that tried to destroy these things. In this way, when a person has nothing else, the concept of a vocation can sustain them.

Although a vocation seems to require the sacrifice of one's happiness and their individual will, it actually constitutes the core of a person's purpose in life. This is because the concept of a vocation transforms the meaning of life from the pursuit of one's desires to the sacrifice of oneself in the service of a higher cause. From this perspective, none of Brooks's exemplars would have attained a meaningful life if they weren't called by vocations. When Perkins and Day lost everything, and when Frankl had nothing, their vocations afforded them strength of character and meaningful lives, nonetheless.

LOVE, TRANSFORMATION, AND SERVICE

In *The Road to Character*, David Brooks outlines a process for developing one's character, but he is careful to mention that this road can't be traveled solely through one's own efforts. In the story of the ancient theologian Augustine, for instance, Augustine could only overcome his sins by becoming humbly dependent on God's grace. Through this transformative process, he first accepted God's love, then was so grateful for it that he forgot his own desires and dedicated himself to returning this love. In another example, love was a grounding force for writer George Eliot. Before meeting George Lewes, she was narcissistic, and her ideals were too lofty for her to achieve concrete moral good. Love provided Eliot a commitment that quieted her self-centered passion and gave her a concrete opportunity to do good in the world. After her marriage, she was inspired to write morally powerful novels. Brooks suggests that in stories like Augustine's and Eliot's, love "impels people to service," overcoming self-interest and drawing them into something greater than themselves. In this way, Brooks argues that love, by requiring a person to forget the self, uniquely suits them to serve others.

God's grace—or love—made Augustine forget himself and conquer his desires so that, in turn, he could reflect God's love in his own actions. Augustine didn't have to earn God's grace as one has to earn a reward. He concluded that "the way to inner joy is not through agency and action, it's through surrender and receptivity to God." He gave up his previous habit of climbing upward in society, suggesting that once a person gives up the notion that they can earn love through success, they can accept that God already loves them apart from their efforts. After accepting that he was loved, Augustine desired to reciprocate the love. Brooks explains that "once [a person] accepts the fact that [they] are accepted, there is a great desire to go meet this love and reciprocate the gift." Before he had accepted God's grace, Augustine had always returned to his own desires, but now he renounced them altogether and focused on returning God's gift. This process of reciprocal love produced "an inner transformation" in Augustine that reordered what he loved. Before accepting God's love, Augustine was organizing his life around his wants such that "other people [were] objects for the satisfaction of [his desires]." He was constantly "shedding sacrificial commitments in favor of status and success," even ending his marriage for this reason at one point. In accepting God's grace, however, Augustine accepted "unmerited love." Therefore, in returning God's unconditional love, Augustine's own love became unconditional, committal, and unconcerned with personal gain. He found that he wasn't resisting his old desires for fame, money, and sex because he no longer desired those things.

Not only did love make George Eliot forget her own ego, but it also stabilized her and enabled her to serve others through her writing. When she was a young woman, she had lofty moral ideals but lacked the "steady capacity to initiate action and drive her own life." She fell for countless men, but in these romances she "loved her own love." Her youthful attachments were narcissistic and therefore weren't strong enough to direct her attention away from herself. However, when she eloped with George Lewes, her passion became concrete and outwardly directed. Her love for him was "the renunciation of all other possibilities for the sake of one choice." This commitment to one person channeled her passions in one direction and put an end to her restless self-love. Once they were married, George Lewes encouraged Eliot to write. He suggested she write realistic novels with characters involved in everyday problems. She went on to become a famous novelist, showing that love led her into a more productive way of life that benefited others.

Through the stories of both Augustine and Eliot, Brooks explains that love impels a person to service. First, love is not just a feeling, but results in daily acts of care. For George Eliot, marriage itself became an opportunity for doing concrete good.

In her novels, she expressed how people "thrive when they work within the rooted spot." Most of her novels follow characters who struggle to ward off the evils of miscommunication in their marriages and families. Love, by humbling and stabilizing George Eliot, taught her how to perform actual good in the world—good that's also reflected in her characters' values. Similarly, love was the missing piece of the puzzle for Augustine's transformation. Although he knew that he *should* follow God, he did not actually do so until he accepted God's love. Brooks explains that "only love impels action." Knowledge, in other words, was not enough to transform Augustine. He needed love, which made him forget himself, feel immense gratitude, and focus his energies on something larger than himself. Brooks explains that "the ultimate conquest of the self is not won by self-discipline, or an awful battle within the self. It is won by going out of the self." Both Augustine and Eliot attempted to battle with their own desires, but ultimately, love was the only thing that made them overcome themselves. Therefore, the will to serve is not obtained through self-confrontation but through love, because love causes one to forget themselves.

Love transformed both George Eliot and Augustine and equipped each for service, but in different ways. Augustine's dependence on God's love humbled him but then exalted him as he raised himself to the lofty heights of returning the love of God. Eliot's love also humbled her, causing her to forget her restless narcissism, but it then grounded her to concrete and human opportunities for doing good. Although Augustine was raised upwards in spiritual faith and Eliot was grounded in concrete virtue, both were completed through love stories. Love engaged each in a commitment so they could serve something larger than themselves.

HAPPINESS VS. MORAL JOY

Some of the biographies in David Brooks's *The Road to Character* end on surprisingly sad notes. Frances Perkins's restraint and righteousness made her effective in her political vocation but cold in her relationships with her husband and daughter. Ultimately, "her public vocation never completely compensated for her private solitude," suggesting that the calling that gave her so much character was insufficient to fully sustain her well-being. In another example, George Marshall surrendered his vulnerability so as to be a figure worthy of his lofty aims. This left him with few true friends, implying that in order to be great, one must sacrifice some of their happiness. Taking this to an extreme, Dorothy Day shaped her life's purpose around suffering. Up until the end of her life, she worked tirelessly to serve the poor in her charity houses and distanced herself from her loved ones in her intense pursuit of faith. These examples support Brooks's point that human beings should seek lives "not of pleasure, but of purpose." That being said, Brooks also states in the first chapter that "the ultimate joys are moral joys." Through stories of suffering, Brooks redefines the true meaning of happiness by contrasting the pleasure of having everything one wants with the moral joy of making sacrifices for a higher purpose.

Although Frances Perkins devotedly served a great cause, her personal life was incomplete. Fighting for workers' rights was such a strong calling for Perkins that it transcended her own life. It involved "throwing [herself] into a historical process," suggesting that she had to completely disregard her personal life for the sake of a much greater cause. Moreover, Perkins was best suited for public campaign, not for private life, and therefore she did not "receive love well, or give it, or display vulnerability." This distanced her from her husband and daughter. She believed so strongly that the government should serve the poor rather than interfere in matters of privacy that she herself became incapable of intimacy in her private life. However, for Perkins, there was no other option. Ever since she'd found her calling, she ceased to perform actions in life because they produced good for herself. Instead, she performed deeds because they were "intrinsically good." Therefore, personal happiness was not the central goal of her life.

Similarly, George Marshall's great leadership depended on the sacrifice of happiness. Marshall had an institutional mindset which caused him to "submerge his ego" in something greater than himself. Since being part of the army—an institution that transcended time—defined who he was, Marshall could not define his own life. Rather, he approached his life like it was "a debt to be repaid." Moreover, Marshall sacrificed vulnerability and intimacy in order to be a good leader. Because he had to sacrifice companionship to be a great leader, there was "a residual sadness in him," suggesting that being a great person is an inherently unhappy position. However, it was only through these sacrifices that Marshall rose to the level of a hero. According to Brooks, the person who fortifies their personal happiness is "less consequential than one who enters the public arena." Therefore, Marshall believed that greatness was more desirable than a satisfactory personal life.

In the story of Dorothy Day, Brooks asserts that a person's purpose in life is formed through suffering rather than through happiness. Dorothy Day always desired to be near people who were suffering and to suffer along with them. She spent her life working in charity houses serving the poor and sick even though the work was relentless, tiring, and profane. She sought out "suffering as a road to depth," suggesting that it is not happiness that fulfills a person but struggle. To support Day's view, Brooks points out that although most people desire happiness, they are formed through suffering. For instance, when parents have lost a child, they come out of their suffering with the desire to support other suffering parents who've lost children. In this way, suffering does not lead to happiness but rather to the development of strong character and the desire to

be of use to the world. Furthermore, while happiness often teaches a person to believe they deserve what they have, suffering causes a person to feel gratitude for all they receive that they don't deserve. Therefore, suffering uniquely causes a person to value their life more than happiness does.

Although it seems that Perkins, Marshall, and Day all experienced suffering, Brooks shows that they each had something more valuable than happiness. Instead of having everything they wanted, they had lives in which they served others, changed the world, and alleviated others' suffering. Moreover, they each achieved great moral character. Their stories show that the "moral joy" that Brooks claims accompanies great character has nothing to do with self-satisfaction and everything to do with being part of something greater than the self.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

ADAM I

In *The Road to Character*, "Adam I" represents the external, success-driven side of human nature. Brooks initially connects Adam I with what he calls "the resume virtues"—the skills a person would put on their resume to help them get a job, such as "confidence" or "leadership." Brooks argues that nurturing the Adam I side of one's nature is not enough to completely fulfill them. When one only focuses on their Adam I, they become "a shrewd animal," someone who approaches life like it is a competition for success. Furthermore, since Adam I focuses only on maximizing their own abilities, they view other people in terms of their abilities rather than their worth.

Brooks also uses "Adam I" to show the major shift that occurred in society from self-renunciation to moral romanticism and self-love. Because Adam I aims for superiority in the external world, they focus only on nurturing their strengths. Therefore, Adam I believes that human beings are born with natural talents that they should maximize. This contrasts against the **Adam II** side of human nature—the side that believes that the confrontation of one's weaknesses leads to a deep inner life.

Ultimately, Adam I is meant to "bow down" before Adam II. Therefore, Adam I also represents the part of human nature that Brooks suggests a person be willing to surrender so they can attain greater character. Adam I is all about external gain—getting a good job, being successful—and Brooks's claim is that a person should ultimately value such material things much less than higher goods like internal growth.

ADAM II

"Adam II" represents the internal, character-building side of human nature. Brooks associates Adam II with a person's "eulogy virtues"—their qualities of character such as "humility" or "generosity." Adam II is after moral joy and triumph over personal flaws rather than the external happiness **Adam I** seeks. Because it seeks self-victory over weakness, Adam II approaches life with a paradoxical logic: a person must surrender themselves in order to find themselves, and triumph over their weaknesses in order to become strong.

In modern society, Adam II represents a culture that has been left behind. Adam II holds to the old moral realist view that human nature is both flawed and gifted, and that character does not come to one naturally but instead is built over time through the constant effort of confronting oneself. Modern culture has left behind this notion and therefore has become inarticulate about morality and the inner life. Brooks's aim is to turn society's attention back to Adam II.

Ultimately, Adam II represents the solution of a person's struggle between inner and outer aims. If a person only focuses on their Adam I side, their inner life dries up, and they remain only partially satisfied. However, when one focuses on their Adam II side, both their internal and their external goals come into harmony. Therefore, Adam II is a symbol for the point of view a person should adopt in order to become the best version of themselves.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *The Road to Character* published in 2016.

Introduction: Adam II Quotes

❝ To nurture your Adam I career, it makes sense to cultivate your strengths. To nurture your Adam II moral core, it is necessary to confront your weaknesses.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: xii

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs in Brooks's introduction, in which he lays out the divide in human nature between Adam I's "resume virtues" and Adam II's "eulogy virtues." This quote shows how Adam I and Adam II have opposite ways of reasoning through life: Adam I reasons straightforwardly, believing that through the output of a person's strengths, they will advance their way forward in their career. Adam II reasons in an inverse and seemingly paradoxical way. Roughly speaking, Adam II believes that a person has to give up things in order to receive. Therefore, Adam II confronts their weaknesses and makes sacrifices in order to achieve an inner development of character.

This quote shows how divided human nature truly is: having two different aims that are pursued in different ways, it seems that there is little possibility of harmony in human life. This divide is centered around the fact that a human being has both an exterior and an interior, and the exterior and interior have different needs, desires, and visions for life. A human being has both a career and an inner life, and so, from the beginning, they face the challenge of satisfying both.

❝ Without a rigorous focus on the Adam II side of our nature, it is easy to slip into a self-satisfied moral mediocrity […] A humiliating gap opens up between your actual self and your desired self.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: xv

Explanation and Analysis

Brooks believes that society needs to spend more time focusing on the Adam II side of human nature. The "desired self" is one's Adam II nature—their "eulogy virtues" and their inner core of value. In the absence of a focus on this Adam II side, a person's "actual self" ceases to align with their "desired self." The gap between the desired self and the actual self widens more or less depending on how much a person is focusing on their Adam II core values.

This quote reveals that focusing on the Adam II side of human nature has the power to do away with the divide between people's external and internal aims. Ideally, one's "desired self" is synonymous with their "actual self," but Brooks claims that this can only happen if one puts Adam II before Adam I. A person can effectively build their life from the inside outward, establishing inner character first, which will then translate naturally into their outward behavior. Human nature is only divided in the first place because society started focusing only on Adam I and the external self, failing to realize that the external self cannot be fulfilled on its own and does not have the power to fulfill the inner self along with it. Thus, Brooks believes that inner harmony is only possible when the external self is viewed as a byproduct of the cultivation of the internal self.

Chapter 1: The Shift Quotes

❝ Character is not innate or automatic. You have to build it with effort and artistry.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower , George Marshall

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

As Brooks explains character-building, he emphasizes the "building" aspect of the process. Character doesn't consist of the talents and attributes a person starts out with in the beginning of their life. Rather, it is whatever a person has built themselves to be *beyond* what they started out with. Brooks emphasizes that "effort" and "artistry" are important to the process of character-building. Effort is involved because character is built through confronting one's weaknesses, sacrificing one's desires, and examining one's imperfections. Artistry is involved because a person must have a vision of greatness that they aspire to emulate. When they first emulate this vision, it becomes an artificial self, but over time it becomes an authentic and *artistic* self: a beautiful self that is built carefully and patiently.

Many of the exemplars in Brooks's biographies undertake this process of character-building. Dwight Eisenhower, for instance, had an "artistic self": He had reckless habits and a bad temper, but he concealed these under a calm, confident self. Over time, this artificial self became his true self. Similarly, George Marshall revered and emulated heroes. Although for a long time he was stuck serving others in the army and was not a hero himself, he ultimately became a great leader worthy of being called a hero. In both stories, these men restrained the worst parts of their natures with effort, and they crafted strong characters through artistry.

Only Adam II can experience deep satisfaction. Adam I aims for happiness, but Adam II knows that happiness is insufficient. The ultimate joys are moral joys.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Dorothy Day , Augustine

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

This quote redefines what it means to lead a satisfied human life. Brooks contrasts "deep satisfaction" with "happiness," revealing that happiness is a lighter form of joy than deep satisfaction. Whereas happiness is defined by the external successes that Adam I achieves, deep satisfaction is defined by Adam II's internal achievements. Although happiness is personal, because it is achieved by following one's desires, it is not very fulfilling because it does not deeply affect the personal self the way deep satisfaction does.

Furthermore, Brooks claims that "the ultimate joys are moral joys." He also seems to be contrasting the word "joy" with the word "happiness," making the latter seem weak by comparison. Throughout *The Road to Character*, the historical figures Brooks discusses find joy in a variety of ways, and always after a life of struggle. For instance, Dorothy Day felt an immeasurable gratitude at the end of her life. In another example, Augustine felt the joy of God's unconditional and reciprocal love after a torturous life of fighting against his desires.

Brooks concludes each biography on a sad note, recounting all the personal happiness that these people sacrificed throughout their lives. However, mixed into these accounts are also indications of a deep joy that the people felt in having their values aligned with a purpose larger than themselves. Joy came to these people precisely *because* they sacrificed happiness. Therefore, Brooks claim is that there is something deeper than happiness that human beings strive for: moral joy.

Chapter 2: The Summoned Self Quotes

In [Frances Perkins's] method, you don't ask, What do I want from life? You ask a different set of questions: What does life want from me? What are my circumstances calling me to do? In this scheme of things we don't create our lives; we are summoned by life.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Frances Perkins, Viktor Frankl

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after Brooks explains how Frances Perkins found her vocation when she witnessed the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, which was caused by the horrible factory conditions and resulted in the deaths of countless workers. When Perkins witnessed this event, the way she approached life changed. She reversed every question she had been asking: for instance, instead of asking herself what she wanted life to give her, she asked what life wanted her to give it. This change in her thinking was caused because she witnessed something outside herself that was so shocking and made her so morally indignant that she knew workers' rights was a cause far more important than herself. The outside event of the fire jolted her out of herself and set her on track to serve the needs of the world rather than to make the world serve her needs.

The approach of asking what life is asking of a person is what Brooks calls following one's vocation. This shift in thinking did not require conscious effort on Perkins's part. Instead, she was "summoned" by life so that she served the cause of workers' rights without question from that moment onward. Therefore, this mode of thinking sustained Perkins's purpose for her entire life. Similarly, the concept of a vocation sustains the will to live. Viktor Frankl, a writer interned in a concentration camp during the Holocaust, used the vocation mode of thinking to fortify his inner strength against the suffering his life was causing him. In this way, this reverse approach to life can be a survival technique that equips a person for even the harshest circumstances.

One sees this in people with a vocation—a certain rapt expression, a hungry desire to perform a dance or run an organization to its utmost perfection. They feel the joy of having their values in deep harmony with their behavior.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

As Brooks explains what a vocation is, he describes people with vocations as being energetic, passionate, and hardworking. These people stop at nothing to perform their vocation's tasks to the best of their ability. These people also have a sense of harmony and balance about them. Nothing about them is reserved, almost as if their inner values are made manifest in their work.

The language of "harmony" resembles what happens when a person focuses on the Adam II side of their nature. When one focuses on their inner life, their outer behavior comes into harmony with it, erasing the distinction altogether. Therefore, it seems that having a vocation is instrumental to character-building. A vocation requires a person to sacrifice their ego for the sake of a cause greater than themselves, and this automatically does part of the work of character-building. In character-building, a person confronts their weaknesses and restrains the bad parts of their nature in order to be moral (kind, compassionate, loyal, and so on). They deny themselves and their desires in order to subscribe to a standard of virtue. Therefore, acts of kindness, service, and compassion could be followed in the same way that a vocation is followed.

❝ Perkins didn't so much choose her life. She responded to the call of a felt necessity. A person who embraces a calling doesn't take a direct route to self-fulfillment. She is willing to surrender the things that are most dear, and by seeking to forget herself and submerge herself she finds a purpose that defines and fulfills herself. Such vocations almost always involve tasks that transcend a lifetime.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Frances Perkins

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

This quote concludes Brooks's retelling of Frances Perkins's life. This passage makes Perkins's life sound like a tragedy full of sacrifice and surrender. However, Brooks changes the connotation of words such as "surrender" and "sacrifice" from negative to positive. In his introduction, he established that a person builds character through sacrificing their desires or through surrendering themselves to a cause. His claim in this passage is that Frances Perkins defined and found herself by losing herself. She would not have been able to do the great things she did if she had not surrendered herself wholly to the cause of workers' rights.

This passage stresses that the things Perkins did in her life transcended her lifetime. This makes it seem as though she sacrificed a happy life for one that would be remembered in history. Therefore, Brooks is suggesting that participating in a universal cause that transcends her lifetime and caused her to go down in history was far more satisfying than personal happiness would have been for her. In this way, a person has to think about their own self-fulfillment and satisfaction in life as larger than themselves, and as something they themselves might not even feel in their lifetime. Much of what is satisfactory about Perkins's life was satisfactory through the eyes of others and in retrospect.

Chapter 3: Self-Conquest Quotes

❝ People become solid, stable, and worthy of self-respect because they have defeated or at least struggled with their own demons. If you take away the concept of sin, then you take away the thing the good person struggles against.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Ida Stover Eisenhower, Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears near the beginning of Brooks's telling of Dwight Eisenhower's story, when he is describing the way Ida Stover Eisenhower (Eisenhower's mother) raised her boys. This quote is part of Brooks's redefinition of the word "sin." In modern times, society has largely done away with the word "sin," because it encourages people to think badly of themselves and be hard on themselves for their mistakes. However, Brooks explains that sin is a very important concept because, without it, there is no real good. Sin acts as a hard surface that the good person can push themselves off of in the opposite direction, toward the good.

The concept of sin also allows for a person to gain self-respect. In the same way that respect from others is gained by accomplishing something in society that other people admire, self-respect is gained by accomplishing something within the self. Without the concept of sin, there would be

nothing to overcome in one's self, and one's goodness would be a given, not an accomplishment. Therefore, sin is a useful concept because it accentuates by comparison what is good, and it allows good to be an achievement one can make and respect in oneself.

Eisenhower [...] held that artifice is man's nature. We start out with raw material, some good, some bad, and this nature has to be pruned, girdled, formed, repressed, molded, and often restrained, rather than paraded in public. A personality is a product of cultivation. The true self is what you have built from your nature, not just what your nature started out with.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears halfway through Brooks's retelling of Dwight Eisenhower's life story. This is his description of Dwight's life philosophy, which views human beings as bundles of building materials when they are born. They are not yet anything: not only have they not been built yet, but they are a bundle of imperfect materials, some good and some bad. The process of growing up and of building character therefore involves first sorting through one's materials, assessing what's there, and deciding what is good, what is bad, and what could be made better. Once they've assessed themselves in this way, a person can set to building their character, repressing what is bad in them, nurturing what is good, and transforming what can be transformed. Over time, their character slowly comes together as one builds a house or sculpts a sculpture.

According to this philosophy, not even one's personality is complete from the beginning. Often, people think of personality as whatever is most natural within a person—their unique essence. However, Brooks claims that personality is also the product of construction. When a person carefully assesses themselves and the elements of their nature, they can set to work forging their personality. This personality will contain elements of the nature a person has always had, but those traits will be shaped in a certain way through their efforts.

Like the nation's founders, [Eisenhower] built his politics on distrust of what people might do if they have unchecked power [...] [He] felt in his bones that man is a problem to himself.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Brooks describes the contrast between Dwight Eisenhower's exit speech as president and John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech. This quote expresses Eisenhower's philosophy of power, at the root of which is the moral realist notion that human nature contains both strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, he distrusted unchecked power because he believed that when a person is given full freedom of power, their natural vice is unleashed and encouraged.

Eisenhower could "feel in his bones" that people were a problem to themselves because his childhood taught him this. He grew up poor in a harsh, rural environment, where every mistake and lapse of self-restraint would increase the hardships that were already present. From this experience, Eisenhower knew that human beings have a tendency to make their own lives worse. Therefore, he cautioned the whole country against rash decisions and excessive confidence because he knew that, if left unrestrained, people's natural vice would eventually destroy their current state of safety.

Eisenhower's philosophy of power was traditional compared to the newer philosophy that Kennedy expressed in his speech. In contrast to Eisenhower, Kennedy emphasized the boundless opportunities he would open and encouraged the people to be proud of their nation and confident in the changes they wanted to make. In other words, Kennedy's philosophy of power reflected the mantras of the moral romanticists who preached positive thinking about human nature, urging people to trust themselves, believe in themselves, and follow their desires. On the other hand, Eisenhower's moral realist speech falls into line with the vision that the founders originally had for the U.S., which was based on the idea that human nature needs to be restrained and power exercised cautiously.

Chapter 4: Struggle Quotes

❝ [Dorothy Day] was incapable of living life on the surface only—for pleasures, success, even for service—but needed a deep and total commitment to something holy.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Dorothy Day

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears early on in Brooks's retelling of Dorothy Day's life, when she has not yet found her calling and feels lost, restless, and unfulfilled. This quote expresses a need that Dorothy Day had from a very young age. When she experienced an earthquake as a child, she was convinced that the tumult was proof of God's forceful and impersonal presence. This presence was so impressive that she prayed and went to church as a child even though no one else in her family was religious. She used her sense of God's realm of pure spirituality to criticize herself when she experienced rushes of sexual desire as a young girl. She aspired to something holy, pure, and unsensual.

However, although she believed in God's presence, it took her a long time to commit to it. When she left college for New York, she abandoned religion altogether and threw herself into activism and socialism. However, she quickly became discouraged by futile human efforts and realized that human beings could accomplish nothing without faith. It was not until her daughter was born that God's presence came back to her, this time in the form of something beyond the human will that she could thank for the wonder of her daughter's birth.

All in all, Dorothy Day was never satisfied with anything that did not involve a "deep commitment to something holy." Every other activity—activism, romantic love, charity, hospital work—was empty and futile in her eyes without faith. When she recommitted to faith as an adult, her "surface" life came together. She continued to serve the poor and participate in activism but with a reinvigorated sense of purpose and gratitude.

❝ Suffering becomes a fearful gift, very different from that other gift, happiness, conventionally defined. The latter brings pleasure, but the former cultivates character.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Dorothy Day

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears near the end of Dorothy Day's story, when Brooks is explaining that Day formed herself through struggle and suffering. He suggests that even while suffering is unpleasant and "fearful," it is actually a gift. Furthermore, when compared with another gift, happiness, suffering is actually the superior gift. This is because suffering has the unique ability to transform a person. This can be seen in the contrast between the words "brings" and "cultivates." "Brings" as an action depicts a gift that is given easily to a person from the outside and doesn't affect their character in a deep way. Brooks suggests that happiness is this kind of gift. On the other hand, "cultivates" connotes something that slowly forges change in a person and gradually reveals itself as a gift. Brooks suggests that suffering is this kind of gift, and that it can change a person because it first makes one descend into the depths of their own pain. From there, a person heals and transforms as they struggle to find a way to rise out of their pain. Because suffering touches a person deeper than happiness does, it can change them.

Just before this quote, Brooks is careful to point out that suffering is destructive if is not attached to a higher meaning. Therefore, suffering is "a fearful gift" because it can either result in devastation or in character-building. However, Brooks still suggests that suffering is preferable to happiness because character is preferable to pleasure. This suggests that the central joy in a human life is in seeing oneself change and grow, not in the acquisition of easy pleasures.

Chapter 5: Self-Mastery Quotes

❝ The customs of [an] institution structure the soul, making it easier to be good. They guide behavior gentle along certain time-tested lines. By practicing the customs of an institution, we are not alone; we are admitted into a community that transcends time.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), George Marshall

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears near the beginning of Brooks's story of George Marshall, whom Brooks describes as someone who had an "institutional mindset." Brooks suggests that in order for a person to define who they are, they should look to the institutions that surround them and submit to one. A preexisting institution acts as a timeless template through which a person can structure themselves and their life. Using its guidelines, a person is less likely to become adrift, because the guidelines have existed long before they have and have given meaningful shape to many people's lives.

Brooks also sees an institution as a community that transcends the boundaries of a human life. This suggests that even someone like Marshall— who sacrificed his openness for friendship in order to serve his institution (the U.S. Army) like a hero—was not alone, because he was part of the great, historical community of his institution. This further suggests that when a person seeks happiness and community, they can sometimes find it in something that transcends human life.

The power of an institution to "structure the soul" is similar to the power of a vocation to structure a person's life; it reverses one's thinking just like a vocation does. Instead of viewing the world as a blank slate on which one can conjure their own plans and dreams, Brooks suggests that a person should look to the institutions the world has already provided them and structure themselves through commitment to one.

❝ The magnanimous leader does not have a normal set of social relations. There is a residual sadness to him, as there is in many grandly ambitious people who surrender companionship for the sake of their lofty goals. He can never allow himself to be silly or simply happy and free. He is like marble.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), George Marshall

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears near Brooks's conclusion of George Marshall's life story, when he takes stock of Marshall's sacrifices and accomplishments. Brooks suggests that there was a "residual sadness" in George Marshall and in all great people. George Marshall had to sacrifice warmth and openness in order to be a "magnanimous leader." Interestingly, "magnanimous" means generous and forgiving, suggesting that, in some sense, Marshall *was* warm and friendly. However, "magnanimous" is often used to refer to someone's generous attitude toward their enemies or toward those lower than themselves. In this way, Marshall was warm and kind in a broad sense, bestowing generosity generally on people. He was able to do this only by elevating himself above everyone else and becoming personally inaccessible. Therefore, in order to be greatly kind and generous, Marshall had to sacrifice the possibility of individual kindness and generosity in the form of friendships.

Brooks says that the magnanimous leader is "like marble." This suggests that such a leader is less of a human being and more of a timeless hero and symbol. The magnanimous leader goes down in history and makes great changes in the world. And in order to do so, they must sacrifice some of their fundamental human desires.

Chapter 6: Dignity Quotes

❝ The non-violent path is an ironic path: the weak can triumph by enduring suffering; the oppressed must not fight back if they hope to defeat their oppressor; those on the side of justice can be corrupted by their own righteousness.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Philip Randolph , Bayard Rustin , Martin Luther King, Jr.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in the story of Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, when Brooks is describing their nonviolent approach to civil rights activism. Brooks explains that the nonviolent approach is "ironic," or paradoxical. Brooks claims that the weak can triumph by enduring suffering. This is because an oppressed person remains on the right side of justice when they resist succumbing to the same violent tactics that their oppressors use to oppress and attack them. In other words, Rustin in a sense triumphed over racists when he let himself be brutally beaten by policemen for sitting in the white section of a city bus. This is because, in remaining passive, he exposed his oppressors' blatant aggression and fortified his own innocence. Brooks

also claims that those on the side of justice can be corrupted by their own righteousness. This is because every person is in danger of being corrupted by power and moral superiority. Therefore, even those in the right must guard against becoming corrupt by holding themselves to a code of nonviolence.

The paradoxical language of this quote resembles the paradoxical language used to describe Adam II's method of character-building. Adam II uses a method of self-repression in order to build moral character in the same way that civil rights activists restrained themselves through a nonviolent approach and thereby maintain their moral righteousness.

❝ Social sin requires a hammering down of the door by people who are simultaneously aware they are unworthy to be so daring. This is a philosophy of power, a philosophy of power for people who combine extreme conviction with extreme self-skepticism.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Philip Randolph , Bayard Rustin , Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower

Related Themes:

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Brooks sums up Bayard Rustin and Philip Randolph's "philosophy of power." Brooks explains that Randolph and Rustin would not have been so successful in their activism if they had not felt simultaneously that they were "unworthy" of daring to fight for it. On the one hand, they had "extreme conviction," and on the other, they had "extreme self-skepticism." This combination was essential for their task. They could not simply be self-critical and self-restrained, because the cause of civil rights required aggression. Black Americans during this time were oppressed and abused, and so Randolph and Rustin had to be extremely convicted in the civil rights movement. At the same time, they knew they were capable of becoming corrupt just like their oppressors. Therefore, in order to wage a true and indiscriminate war against injustice, Randolph and Rustin had to combine self-confidence with self-renunciation.

Randolph and Rustin's "philosophy of power" has similarities and differences with Eisenhower's philosophy of power. Both philosophies hold that humans are liable to become corrupt if not restrained. However, Randolph and Rustin's philosophy is unique in that they needed some of the self-confidence that Eisenhower warned against in his speech. This is because the civil rights movement was a response to blatant acts of injustice that needed to be aggressively and immediately opposed.

Chapter 7: Love Quotes

❝ This moment was Eliot's agency moment, the moment when she began the process by which she would stop being blown about by her voids and begin to live according to her own inner criteria, gradually developing a passionate and steady capacity to initiate action and drive her own life.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Mary Anne Evans/George Eliot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears just after Brooks has told of George Eliot's love for Herbert Spencer—a love that started her on the process of driving her own life. Before this "agency moment," Eliot had been "blown about by her own voids." This illustrates a situation in which a person's internal emptiness causes them to become a victim of external forces. George Eliot wanted love because she thought that it would fulfill her, but she didn't really know what kind of love she wanted. This created a void in her. As a result, she moved restlessly from one romantic interest to another, trying to find the thing she was missing. In this way, the void of love in her caused her to subject herself to all kinds of relationships that ended in nothing but scandal.

However, when Eliot wrote to Herbert Spencer to confess her love for him, she began to show her agency. She had a vision of the kind of love she wanted from Spencer as well as the kind of love she wanted to give him, and she expressed this to him in writing. This action combined conviction with vulnerability—instead of simply running around after shallow romantic interests, Eliot was now starting to develop an "inner criteria" and her own definition of what she wanted from love. Through Eliot's trials and her slow development of agency, Brooks explains that a person's inner criteria gives them control over their own lives.

Love impels people to service. If love starts with a downward motion, burrowing into the vulnerability of the self, exposing nakedness, it ends with an active upward motion. It arouses great energy and desire to serve.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Mary Anne Evans/George Eliot , George Lewes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after George Eliot has fallen in love with George Lewes and Brooks is explaining the power of love to lead one into a life of service. Love causes a person to go through the downward-upward motions of uncovering themselves and then leaving themselves in order to serve another. Brooks explains that love's first task is to open a person up and reveal all that their nature contains. This exposure of the self reveals the person's vulnerabilities and destroys their illusion that they are in control of themselves. Although the process starts with this downward motion, it does not end with a person hiding within themselves. Rather, in exposing everything, love prepares a person to move upward out of themselves to serve someone outside of them. This is because once everything in the self is revealed, all of one's self-illusions are shattered, and one becomes confident enough to leave one's self behind in service of someone else.

Many of the characters in *The Road to Character* go through a downward-upward motion through the course of their stories. Whether they go downward by sacrificing their happiness, surrendering to a vocation, falling in love, or becoming greatly humbled by faith, each character descends into self-renunciation before rising up stronger and more fit for their commitments. As Brooks mentioned in the introduction to *The Road to Character*, love is one of the effective ways of building character because it draws one out of the self.

For Eliot, holiness isn't in the next world but is embedded in a mundane thing like a marriage, which ties one down but gives one concrete and daily opportunities for self-sacrifice and service.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Mary Anne Evans/George Eliot , George Lewes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears at the end of the story of George Eliot, when Brooks is describing the belief system she expressed in her novels. This quote explains that holiness doesn't always refer to what comes from a heavenly otherworld. Eliot didn't believe in religion in a literal way—she could see too many holes in the story of Christ. She believed in God but not that he could manifest in the world or create any change in the real world. However, Eliot was also extremely idealistic and had a passion for moral excellence. Therefore, she adopted the belief that morality could replace religion as a holy power on Earth. She realized that moral improvement could be made in daily acts of service. As a result, relationships became the field for moral improvement in her eyes.

The transformative force in Eliot's life was the love of a human being: her husband, George Lewes. Therefore, her transformation was a stabilization on Earth rather than an elevation to a higher realm. Despite the mundanity of her love, it still caused Eliot to look outside of herself and become less narcissistic. In this way, she was equipped to serve another in daily ways. Through Eliot's story, Brooks refines the meaning of "holiness": it means opportunity for self-sacrifice and service, whether this is found in a mundane thing such as a marriage or in an otherworldly, spiritual realm.

Chapter 8: Ordered Love Quotes

If you think you can organize your own salvation you are magnifying the very sin that keeps you from it. To believe that you can be captain of your own life is to suffer the sin of pride.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Augustine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears halfway through Augustine's journey toward conversion to Christianity. Augustine realized that pride was at the root of his belief that he could attain his own transformation. Pride kept Augustine attached to his earthly desires and his external success. Brooks explains that pride is one's belief that they can attain self-worth and happiness through their outward accomplishments. In this

way, Augustine believed that he could *accomplish* his salvation in the same way that he accomplished things in his public life. In actuality, Augustine had to relinquish the idea of agency altogether. He had to accept the fact that God loved him unconditionally—that he could not earn God's love through accomplishments. In the light of God's unearned love, Augustine would abandon the notion that his external success had any value. Along with this, the concept of pride disappeared altogether, since God loved him unconditionally regardless of his achievements.

At the end of *The Road to Character*, Brooks notes in the summary of his points that pride is the central human vice. This is because pride provides people with the idea that they can attain self-worth through success. This skews humanity's view of what makes life truly valuable. They believe it is happiness, but really it is purpose. Purpose comes from finding meaning in something larger than oneself—a vocation, an institution, God—and therefore requires relinquishing the idea that one can define and guide themselves. In a life of purpose, pride has no meaning, because what a person does is not for themselves.

❝ Knowledge is not enough for tranquility and goodness, because it doesn't contain the motivation to be good. Only love impels action.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Augustine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes near the end of the story of Augustine and explains that love was instrumental in his transformation into a man of active faith. Before Augustine accepted God's unconditional love in the form of grace, he *knew* all he needed to know to make him religious, but he still couldn't embody God's will or practice faith actively. Augustine knew everything he needed to know; he had knowledge of his inherent sin and his divided human nature. He had knowledge of the vastness of the human mind and his own insignificance in comparison to the infinite forces of sin and virtue within him. He knew enough to believe in God, and to know that he was unhappy following his earthly desires. Nonetheless, he still followed his desires, afraid to close himself off from his own agency.

However, when Augustine was in the garden, he submitted to a will outside of his own when he obeyed the outside voice that told him to open the Bible. He accepted God's grace—unmerited love—realizing that all his worldly deeds were insignificant, because God loved him unconditionally. This realization caused Augustine to forget his will altogether, because his will was only good for attaining external success and driving his own desires, all of which were now insignificant. Having quieted his will, Augustine is opened up to return God's love, renouncing his old earthly desires. In this way, it was only unconditional love that motivated Augustine to actively serve God. Knowledge resulted in passive belief, whereas love resulted in a transformation. This supports Brooks's point that self-mastery can be accomplished not only through a self-battle, but also through love.

Chapter 9: Self-Examination Quotes

❝ Johnson tried to lift people up to emulate heroes. Montaigne feared that those who try to rise above what is realistically human end up sinking into the subhuman.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Samuel Johnson , Michel de Montaigne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in the middle of the story of Samuel Johnson, when Brooks is comparing him to the essayist Michel de Montaigne. Although Johnson and Montaigne were both essayists who honestly examined their own minds through writing, they had a different overall messages. Johnson's life began in poverty and illness. From a very young age he realized that his nature was imperfect—he was deeply flawed and tormented by mental demons. In contrast, Montaigne was born into comfortable circumstances, had many opportunities available to him, and had a naturally gentle, genial nature. Johnson's self-examination was a strategy for bettering his bad nature, a method of self-confrontation and recording honest observations in the hopes of developing a coherent point of view in the absence of a coherent soul. On the other hand, Montaigne's self-examination came as the result of feeling that he was living incorrectly even in the midst of his comfortable life. Therefore, Montaigne lowered his own expectations so as to achieve peace, whereas Johnson had high expectations for himself that elevated him above his nature.

Johnson's arc of low-to-high fits better with Brooks's vision of character-building than Montaigne's high-to-low arc does. Johnson always strove to be better than he was, whereas Montaigne aimed to expect less of himself so as to experience less disappointment. Montaigne was happier, but Johnson had greater character by Brooks's standards. Johnson's courage in the face of suffering and his high moral demands are in keeping with Brooks's claim that a person is formed through suffering and can transcend to greater heights by confronting their weaknesses.

❝ Johnson stands now as an example of human wisdom. From his scattered youth, his diverse faculties cohered into a single faculty—a mode of seeing and judging the world that was as much emotional as intellectual.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Samuel Johnson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears near the end of Samuel Johnson's story, when Brooks is describing how Johnson gave coherence to his nature through writing. Johnson is the embodiment of "life's essential problem": that the line between good and evil is something that's within every person rather than something external. He was a tormented mixture of good and bad traits and lived a restless life in which he was constantly plagued by his own mental demons. Through writing, Johnson was able to give coherence to his incoherent self. He developed a point of view the consistency of which redeemed his inconsistent nature. His "diverse faculties"—his scattered emotions and attributes—became a "single faculty." This shows that a person with a scattered nature can synthesize themselves by turning their gaze on their own nature and developing the perspective of self-confrontation.

Brooks explains that Johnson's point of view was "as much emotional as intellectual." Johnson's emotionality in his writing was the result of his honest self-examination. He confronted and questioned his own nature directly, without an intermediary. This meant that his observations always remained human and sympathetic.

Chapter 10: The Big Me Quotes

❝ The realists believed in cultivation, civilization, and artifice; the romanticists believed in nature, the individual, and sincerity.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Brooks is distinguishing between moral realism and moral romanticism and pointing out society's shift from the former to the latter. While the moral realists believed in cultivation, the moral romanticists believed in nature. In other words, the moral romanticists believed that human nature wasn't naturally good, and therefore that a person's goodness could only be developed over time. On the other hand, the moral romanticists believed that human nature *is* naturally good, and therefore that goodness exists naturally and doesn't need to be cultivated.

The moral realists believed in civilization, while the moral romanticists believed in the individual. In other words, the realists believed that community was essential for the moral betterment of everyone. This is because they viewed human nature as imperfect and in need of outside support. On the other hand, the romanticists believed that the individual is perfect and therefore self-sufficient.

Furthermore, the moral realists believed in artifice, whereas the moral romanticists believed in sincerity. In other words, the moral realists believed that a person's character is best expressed as an artifice—as something they've built. This is because they viewed human nature as inherently flawed, and artifice as a way of developing a character better than one's flawed true nature. On the other hand, the moral romanticists believed in sincerity. Since they held that human nature is wholly good and trustworthy, they felt that one's best character was expressed through nothing else but sincerity.

In general, the moral realists believed in progress, and the idea that a person must always make themselves better than what they currently are. On the other hand, the moral romanticists believed in authenticity; since every person is inherently perfect, all they need is the freedom to express themselves.

> If you believe that the ultimate oracle is the True Self inside, then of course you become emotivist—you make moral judgements on the basis of feelings that burble up. Of course you become a relativist. One True Self has no basis to judge or argue with another True Self. Of course you become an individualist, since the ultimate arbiter is the authentic self within and not any community standard or external horizon of significance without.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

Brooks is listing the effects that moral romanticism, brought to the level of a meritocracy, have on society. Brooks uses three important words in this quote: "emotivist," "relativist," and "individualist." These three words explain how moral romanticism damages morality. Morality is firstly damaged because people come to associate their feelings with moral questions. This is because the concept of self-repression has disappeared, along with the idea that morality is something a person can only adhere to if they restrain themselves. Therefore, morality has become emotivist, or associated more with what people *feel* is moral than with objective moral standards.

Secondly, morality has become relativist. Since moral romanticism encourages each person to be unique and self-expressive, the habit of conforming to something outside of oneself—a community, an institution, a vocation—has been lost. No one can communicate with each other about moral problems because everyone's moral problems are unique, having come from their subjective feelings.

Lastly, morality has become individualist in a meritocracy. The person in a society of full-blown moral romanticism believes that they can master themselves. Since they believe they are naturally perfect, they don't need to look outside themselves for moral guidance or a moral standard. As a result, communities—religions, institutions, traditions—start to crumble. These three effects of a meritocracy—emotivism, relativism, and individualism—all show how morality as an objective concept disappears without the moral realist notions that human nature is flawed, and that one should confront themselves in various ways to reach virtue.

> Eventually [humble people] achieve moments of catharsis when outer ambition comes into balance with inner aspiration, when there is a unity of effort between Adam I and Adam II, when there is that ultimate tranquility and that feeling of flow—when moral nature and external skills are united in one defining effort.

Related Characters: David Brooks (speaker), Frances Perkins, Dorothy Day , George Marshall

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 270

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears just before the end of *The Road to Character*, when Brooks is describing the wonderful feeling of harmony that redeems the person who has struggled on the road to character. Throughout his book, Brooks noted how much sacrifice historical figures (like Frances Perkins, Dorothy Day, and George Marshall) had to make in order to do great things. He even claims at several points that suffering is more desirable than happiness, because suffering builds character. However, Brooks suggests in this quote that the "ultimate tranquility" and the "feeling of flow" redeem the sufferer from their pain. What he is describing is a feeling of peace and harmony with oneself that is far more satisfying than happiness.

At the beginning of *The Road to Character*, Brooks separated human nature into two sides: Adam I, the external, career-oriented side, and Adam II, the internal, moral side. He illustrated a conflict between these two sides and the fracture caused in human satisfaction by the nurturing of only Adam I. In this way, he began his book with a depiction of the torturous division in human nature, and the struggle of trying to fulfill oneself. He concludes his book with an illustration of the feeling that comes to a person when they are humble all their lives; the main recommendation that Brooks makes is that people humble themselves in the face of their divided and struggling nature. This humility is ultimately rewarded not with happiness (that is only what a person's external nature wants) but with peace and reconciliation *between* the two sides of a person's nature. The acute feeling of division can be redeemed by an overwhelming feeling of harmony when one leads a life of humility.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION: ADAM II

David Brooks distinguishes between two types of virtues: "resume virtues" and "eulogy virtues." Resume virtues help a person succeed in their career and in the external world. Eulogy virtues are aspects of a person's inner character, such as kindness and honesty—the traits about a person that are likely to get referenced in a eulogy at their funeral. To depict the difference between these types of virtues, Brooks adopts a concept from Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik: every person has two natures, **Adam I** and **Adam II**. Adam I is career-oriented and has the resume virtues, while Adam II is internally moral and embodies the eulogy virtues. Adam I wants to "conquer the world," while Adam II wants to "serve the world."

According to Brooks, humans are in a state of conflict between two kinds of desires, and also between their external and internal natures. These conflicts set people up to need balance and resolution. Throughout the book, Brooks addresses the different conflicts and the things that resolve them. The conflicts throughout the book are between a person and their own self: Adam I and Adam II, as two opposing sides of human nature, fight for control of the person.

Brooks demonstrates that the two Adams have different ways of reasoning. **Adam I** reasons economically, maximizing their strengths in order to succeed. **Adam II**, however, reasons morally. He surrenders himself to something outside himself to gain inner strength. Adam I's success leads to excessive pride. Adam II's efforts lead to humility. Adam I champions their strengths while Adam II conquers their weaknesses.

In describing the logic of the two sides to human nature, Brooks sheds light on why Adam II is often neglected. Adam I's logic is straightforward and rational: in maximizing one's strengths, a person receives external gain. Adam II's logic, by contrast, is counterintuitive: when a person makes a sacrifice, they receive something greater in return.

Brooks claims that current society only nurtures **Adam I**. Today's society encourages self-advertisement and the pursuit of success, and this turns people into "shrewd animal[s]." Adam I's focus on career leaves people with a sense of meaninglessness, and without the inner strength to survive hardships or be dependable. Brooks claims that when one doesn't build inner character and nurture their **Adam II**, their external success will eventually crumble as well.

Brooks reveals that Adam II is the core of what makes a person worthy of success. A person who only nurtures Adam I becomes no better than an animal, suggesting that they make decisions based on their own instincts and needs. In contrast, an Adam II person becomes well-rounded, unifying their inner and outer lives with purpose.

Brooks states that his book will be about **Adam II** and people who have built strong inner character. He explains that he himself was drawn to a life of inflating himself and his strengths for the sake of success. As a result, he felt a sense of "moral mediocrity." When one doesn't rigorously nurture their Adam II side, they forgive themselves for all their self-interested success as long as they aren't directly hurting anyone. But the person who does this ignores their Adam II side, and a gap opens between their "actual self" and their "desired self."

Brooks explains that, deep down, everyone knows they are really Adam II, because being moral is an innate part of a human being's nature. Even Brooks felt morally inadequate when he followed the societal norms that promoted Adam I. People following these norms don't feel like themselves because they are trying to build their lives from the outside, leaving their inside empty.

Brooks outlines the direction of his book. First, he will describe the way culture used to be—promoting humility and the confrontation of one's limitations—before it shifted to self-interest. Next, he will outline the process of character-building by exploring the life journeys of a number of people, because he believes that example is the best teacher and that "the heart cannot be taught in the classroom." He will focus these essays on people we remember not because of their accomplishments, but because of who they were. Finally, he'll sum up his themes.

Brooks explains that he will use biographies to reintroduce character-building to his audience. In doing this, he proves one of his own points, which is that people who acknowledge their own flaws and who wish to confront them and build character always look to things outside them to help themselves. This is because they want to improve their flawed selves by holding themselves to external, objective moral standards.

Brooks then describes the people who seem to possess character. They have inner balance and are strong in the face of hardship, they make others feel good, and they perform acts of self-sacrifice and never promote themselves. These people have gone through struggle to become mature. They attack "life's essential problem," which is that a line between good and evil runs through the center of the human heart. The people who've confronted this problem sacrifice success to deepen the soul. In them, **Adam I** "bows down" to **Adam II.**

People who have character are sometimes hard to notice because they are reserved, self-effacing, and make others feel good about themselves. These people behave this way because they are aware that the essential truth of life is that they are not perfect, but rather a mix of good and evil. Brooks suggests that people who know this are remarkable in an understated way.

CHAPTER 1: THE SHIFT

Brooks remembers a time when his local NPR station rebroadcasted an episode from a show called *Command Performance* for World War II troops. The episode they replayed was first aired the day after V-Day, when the war in Europe ended with the U.S. and the Allies as the victors. Brooks was struck by the episode's humble and gracious tone. Despite the fact that the episode was addressing one of the most important and valiant military victories in history, no one was boasting about it. Instinctively, the program hosts all resisted claiming moral superiority.

In order to make the point that people used to be humbler, Brooks described the humility American spokespeople showed after one of the greatest triumphs in the country's history. At this time (the mid-1940s), some belief or tradition in society made people instinctively more grateful and humble whenever they accomplished something.

In contrast, Brooks remembers the football game he watched right after listening to the V-Day episode. One of the players, after making a good play, pranced around the field congratulating himself. The excessive self-love of the football player compared to the humility of the World War II heroes made Brooks recognize the major shift that has taken place from self-effacement to self-promotion in society.

Brooks highlights how surprising the old habit of humility is by comparing it to how people react to accomplishments in the present day. Now, people make huge displays of self-celebration over the most trivial successes. Thus, Brooks concludes that a major cultural shift that must have occurred.

Brooks says that in the culture before this shift, people were generally more "skeptical of their desires" and more willing to combat their flaws. Overall, society was less promotional. For instance, only one political figure published a memoir during Eisenhower's time in office, whereas 12 did during Reagan's term. Also, when George H. W. Bush was running for office, he resisted the modern pressure to use "I" in his speeches because he was raised in a time when self-promotion was disapproved of.

All kinds of trends reveal this shift from humility to self-praise; even the way people refer to themselves and the importance people place on their own lives has changed. Instead of thinking of oneself as part of a collective, people now think of themselves as "I's." And instead of focusing on global issues and other people's suffering, people want to tell their own stories.

Brooks analyzes data to illustrate the cultural shift from humility to the "Big Me." Psychologists have noted an increase in narcissism among adolescents. Also, over time, achieving fame has been increasingly ranked as more important than any other ambition. From TV to religion, the message has changed from self-sacrifice to self-love: Disney movies teach self-trust, the Girl Scouts urge girls to put themselves at center stage, and religions insist that God made everyone special.

Brooks finds evidence of the shift everywhere he looks. Even in traditional institutions that usually don't change along with culture, such as religion, the message has changed from humility to self-love. This shows that the shift has been so pervasive as to affect the institutions that supposedly focus on boosting people's morality, character, and inner life.

Brooks returns to the episode of *Command Performance*, the humility of which he found "haunting" and beautiful because it made the speakers on the show gracious and comforting. Brooks comments that humility is intellectually remarkable because it leads to wisdom—the dignity of owning one's ignorance and "the role [one] plays in a larger story." Lastly, humility is morally impressive: it actively resists vices, such as pride, and works to build character.

Brooks stresses how truly impressive humility is. It is difficult to be humble because it requires accepting one's limitations. It also requires one to constantly stand guard against their vices. Moreover, even though humility is a process of self-resistance, it results in a graceful, effortless outward demeanor. Therefore, humility has a transforming effect on a person.

Brooks points out that today, many people use "the journey" as a metaphor for life, viewing themselves climbing "the ladder of success" on a journey through the external world. People tend to view all accomplishments—even ones that are purposeful and make a difference—as external gains.

When people think about progressing through life, they tend to think about gaining more and more things. They measure their progress through how much they've gained, calling life a "journey," rather than focusing on improving their inner character.

In contrast, humble people use the metaphor of self-confrontation. They view themselves as "deeply divided," talented and flawed. They know that if they don't confront their weaknesses, they'll let down an essential part of themselves. For these people, self-confrontation of their flaws is more important than the ladder of success and is the "central drama of life." They desire to become strong where they are weak.

When humble people think about progressing through life, they think about the progress they make in their own selves. Therefore, although they also use the "journey" metaphor, the "ladder of success" is an inner *ladder, and they ascend it gradually by triumphing over their own flaws.*

Essentially, the problem is people's tendency to be self-centered, Brooks claims. Brooks quotes a passage from a David Foster Wallace speech which claims that it is impossible not to view oneself as the "center of the universe." Brooks claims that this self-centeredness leads to vices such as pride and manipulativeness. It leads people to constantly rank themselves superior in comparison to others.

Putting oneself first actually damages a person because it exacerbates their vices. In this way, self-love does not lead to a complete, worthy, and strong self but rather to a sinful, weak self. This addresses Brooks's claim that character is built by first denying the self the things it wants.

Brooks explains that people mistakenly put the things they love in the wrong order, putting less valuable objects of love above more valuable objects of love— putting love of money over love of family, for instance. Although everyone likely knows deep down which loves are most important, many people disorder them. Someone who betrays a friend's secret at a dinner party is foolishly putting their love of popularity above their love of friendship.

Brooks claims that it is a common mistake to put the things we value less above the things we value more. In making this claim, he suggests that everyone knows deep down what is right. Morality is a blueprint in every human being, but because people naturally have weaknesses, they stray from following the moral blueprint.

Brooks says that the humble, moral realist understands that everyone is made of "crooked timber." Given that everyone is flawed, character doesn't emerge from one's talents or achievements, but out of one's struggle against their flaws. This is shown in personal stories in which people are jubilant when they overcome a weakness and dejected when they succumb to one.

Since everyone is born flawed, there is no way a person can be good by simply being themselves. They can only be good by confronting the flaws they started out with, molding their character over time into something that is good. Through this idea, Brooks suggests that Adam I's logic does not work, because Adam I assumes that people are inherently good and deserving of success.

Brooks mentions a friend who lies awake before bed thinking regretfully of his hard-heartedness with people who needed him that day. After recounting all his "sins," he plans for how to avoid the same sins the next day. Brooks claims that everyone has this responsibility to become more moral each day. People like his friend understand that character is not innate, but that it is built through hard work. One's success—one's **Adam I**—depends on one's **Adam II**.

According to Brooks, the act of molding one's character into something good is not a change that can happen overnight. Besides actually accomplishing the change, it is more important to give oneself the goal of being a little bit better every day. In doing so, a person will make small moral improvements that will slowly improve their overall character.

Brooks notes that, although the words "fight" and "struggle" apply to one's confrontation with their weaknesses, the building of character is not always war-like in the usual sense. Often, character is built through love and pleasure. Through devotion to a person or cause, one learns to emulate good qualities, serve those they love, and desire better things.

Character-building can happen through loving something good. Alongside biographies that tell of people who achieved character with an inner struggle, Brooks will also tell love stories in which people learned to forget themselves and then find their true selves through love.

Brooks admits that no one can build character without help. Confronting and defeating one's vices is too difficult a task to undertake without support, whether from family, friends, exemplars, traditions, or God. Everyone needs advice, inspiration, and encouragement in order to build their character.

Help from outside structures helps a person when they are trying to improve their character. Because people are born with flaws, following the a role model or tradition's guidelines helps guide them in the right direction.

Brooks claims that, in the struggle for character, it doesn't matter where a person works or whether they are upper- or middle-class. All that matters is whether they are willing to participate good-naturedly in "the moral struggle" against themselves. While **Adam I** only achieves success by conquering others, **Adam II** builds character by conquering the self.

If one follows Adam I's logic, their progress will be reflected in their social standing because it depends on how much they've gained than materially. But building character will not be reflected in one's social position: since Adam II's progress is in the self, it defies all material circumstances and can be undertaken in spite of one's social position.

Brooks notes that every exemplar he will discuss in the following biographical essays "had to go down to go up." In order to see who they really were, they had to lower themselves in humility. They "quiet[ed] the self," and suddenly they could see things clearly and accept what was around them. Having quieted the self, they found themselves supported in ways they could not imagine beforehand.

Character-building is a never-ending process because it is about achieving strength that a person did not start out with. Therefore, all the exemplars Brooks writes about go through an up-and-down process that ultimately leaves them higher than they started out. They had to shed the nature they were born with (a mixture of good and bad) before they can develop a better character.

Brooks goes on to say that after humbling oneself, a person finds new joy, new loves, and new callings. They are transformed. Going through the process of humility endows a person with self-respect. Self-respect is not gained by being better than others, but by being better than one's past self. Self-respect develops through inner victories as opposed to external ones.

Life is still a journey for the person who undertakes character-building. However, their journey involves self-competition in which they constantly improve themselves. This results in self-respect rather than in the public respect that the Adam I person achieves.

Brooks states his belief that the old formula for character building shouldn't have been given up. People don't know how to build character anymore, and modern society has become superficial. It is a fallacy to claim that nurturing one's **Adam I** side is profoundly satisfying because Adam I is constantly desiring more. On the other hand, one's **Adam II** side *can* achieve satisfaction because it knows that moral joys are true joys. Brooks's goal is to help people relearn the tradition of building character.

Brooks wants society to relearn how to build character because only through this process is a person truly happy. Therefore, his book is ultimately not about preparing people to make a difference in the world or to be a great leader—rather, it is about improving people's well-being. Brooks suggests that in today's society, without the knowledge of how to build character, people are unsatisfied.

CHAPTER 2: THE SUMMONED SELF

Brooks introduces Frances Perkins, who was an advocate for ending child labor in the early 1900s. In 1911, Perkins witnessed the famous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City. She stood in front of the burning building and watched workers crowd around the windows. People trapped in the building, including child laborers, started to jump out the windows. Some helped one another, some shouted last words. The firefighters' nets were not enough to break their falls, and everyone who jumped died.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was such an appalling thing to witness that it ultimately changed Frances Perkins's life. It was an event that showed her the extreme ramifications of poor worker's conditions that she had previously only had an inkling of, as employees were forced to choose how they would die.

The fire began when cotton scraps caught on fire. The factory manager was so busy trying to put out the fire that he didn't call for the factory to evacuate immediately. Even when evacuation began, many workers took the time to punch their timecards. Also, many exits had been blocked to prevent workers from leaving easily on normal days, so as to forcibly maximize productivity. People on the top floors began to crowd into the elevators. Everyone had to make frantic decisions, pushing others aside and hurling themselves at any possible exit to safety.

Many of the factory's conditions contributed to the tragedy of the fire. Extremely flammable scraps of cotton were lying about, and the workers were so intent on punching their timecards (probably because they got paid so little that every penny counted) that they didn't evacuate in time. Moreover, the workers had essentially been locked inside the factory, so they had trouble evacuating. In this sense, the factory manager's hyper-focus on Adam I (productivity and external success) doomed his employees.

The Triangle Shirtwaist fire created an uproar. Even before it happened, workers had organized strikes against the factory's unsafe conditions. After the fire, people protested the cruel employers and laws that allowed such harsh conditions to exist. While Frances Perkins had already been an advocate against child labor, now her "moral indignation" was at such a level that she forgot about her ego and fully devoted herself to fighting for the broader cause of workers' rights for the rest of her life. Her career became a vocation.

The Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire exposed the true nature of factory working conditions to the public, and the workers' rights movement turned into a full-blown cause. Whereas before, Frances Perkins and others had idly fought for workers' rights because it seemed like a good thing to do, this tragedy created more fervent devotion to this cause.

Brooks shifts to modern times and comments that, nowadays, our culture almost exclusively encourages people to follow their dreams and trust their feelings. Life is followed like a business plan in which a person defines a purpose and then comes up with a strategy for achieving that purpose. This way of life defines purpose as beginning and ending with the self.

Frances Perkins and many others followed the cause of workers' rights and thought about oppressed employees' feelings to guide their own paths. Today, however, Brooks suggests that people just follow their own dreams and feelings.

However, Brooks points out that Frances Perkins found purpose in a different way. Instead of asking herself what she wanted, she asked herself what the world wanted of her. By this way of thinking, a person does not create their life; they are "summoned by life," and their life is formed around circumstances rather than beginning in the self. Every person is brought into a world that has needs for them to respond to.

Frances Perkins had a unique method for finding her purpose in life. Instead of looking inward, she looked outward and asked herself how she could be of use to the world. Since the world is larger than the individual, Brooks suggests that a person should serve the needs of the world they are born into, rather than their own personal needs.

Brooks further describes this sort of calling by referring to Viktor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl was captured by the Nazis and imprisoned in a concentration camp without family or friends. Although this life was completely opposed to what his dream life would've been, he realized that his character would be shaped by how he responded internally to his circumstances. He couldn't expect anything or control his suffering, but he could control his inner response to suffering.

The way Perkins found her purpose in life was a through a vocation—something that called to her. In extreme circumstances such as Frankl's, this method for finding a purpose in life can sustain a person's will to survive. Even when one doesn't get the life they wanted, they still can give themselves purpose by rising to the challenge of what life is asking them to endure.

Frankl helped other prisoners endure, urging them to think of something they loved even in the midst of a horrific imprisonment meant to destroy their hope, humanity, and ability to love. He assured suicidal prisoners that life still expected things from them. In adversity, Brooks comments, everyone has the opportunity to justify their inner strength.

Rising to life's call justifies a person's inner strength because it shows that even when a person has nothing that they want, they still have an inner meaning and strength for living. This is evidenced by the fact that Frankl used to concept of a vocation to keep prisoners from committing suicide.

Brooks distinguishes a vocation from a career. A vocation is not chosen, and it doesn't necessarily advance you in the career world. Rather, a vocation is "a calling." People are devoted to their vocations for higher reasons than utility and benefit. Furthermore, a vocation is not about achieving happiness or satisfying one's desires. Instead, a vocation is about molding oneself to the job put before them.

A career is a means through which one advances themselves to higher rungs of success. A vocation also involves a process, but it is an internal one: a person transforms themselves to meet the needs of the vocation that is calling to them. This may or may not involve external advancement.

However, Brooks maintains that people with vocations are usually happy. He makes a distinction between serving one's community and serving one's work. If one wholly serves the work at hand, they will benefit the community more richly as a result. These people will have the joy of their values being deeply aligned with their actions.

Although a person with a vocation might not attain the external objects of happiness that a person with a career does, they will receive the joy of feeling an inner balance. This begins with not caring about external success: a person with a vocation ignores how the community perceives them and instead focuses entirely on their work. And, as a result, the person will be more satisfied than if they had simply chased success, because they'll find that their actions align with their moral blueprint.

Brooks now tells Frances Perkins's life story, beginning with her traditional Yankee upbringing in Maine. She was raised to be frugal, earnest, and honest. This attitude reflected the old culture of New England: New Englanders were unsentimental and aware of their sinfulness. They believed that God showed love through correcting their flaws, encouraging them to become strong where they had been weak. They combined social conservatism with political liberalism, being traditional in their private lives and compassionate and active in their communities.

Frances Perkins's upbringing reflects the values of the old culture of humility that Brooks defined through the radio episode following World War II. Perkins's family was humble, self-renouncing, and hard on themselves. This attitude reflected their belief that human nature is flawed. Therefore, Perkins was raised in a tradition of humility that practiced character-building and focused on the Adam II side of human nature.

Perkins never got great grades. However, she went to Mt. Holyoke College, which was different then than most colleges are today. Today, teachers cultivate talents, but back then, education was rigorous and uncompromising. For instance, Perkins was urged to major in her weakest subject in order to test her fortitude. Old Mt. Holyoke taught students that those who pursue struggle are happier than those who don't.

Perkins was not perfect from the beginning of her life, but rather had distinct flaws. She had to be molded into a good, hard-working student because she did not have a natural aptitude to be this way. This shows that she built her character through discipline rather than through maximizing her talents, again aligning Perkins more with Adam II than Adam I.

Mt. Holyoke cautioned against mere acts of compassion and insisted instead that acts of service are duties. It employed women in service jobs and taught them courage, character, and heroism. This was during a time when the Christian Church was responding to industrialization by asserting that sin is not just individual, but that there are sinful social structures and institutions. Therefore, a Christian life should be one of sacrificial service.

Mt. Holyoke's philosophy of community service is based on the understanding that even charitable work can be done selfishly. The college did not want their students to do community service so as to absolve themselves and make themselves feel good. Instead, it wanted the students to do community service because it improves the world.

Mt. Holyoke pushed Perkins down so she could "push herself upward." This taught her to be heroic. After graduating, she worked at the Hull House, a community founded by Jane Addams that brought the rich and poor together in a community that performed acts of service to improve life generally.

Mt. Holyoke's technique of pushing Perkins down so she could push herself up ensured that she didn't coast by on her natural talents. Instead, she had to develop inner strength to endure a rigorous and unforgiving education.

Today, one performs community service to satisfy their inner moral questions. Instead of teaching students how to build character, institutions these days simply assign community service. Consequently, moral questions are turned into questions of external resources. Jane Addams knew, however, that mere compassion accomplishes nothing and leads to self-satisfaction. At the Hull House, the social workers were practical and humble, letting the poor determine their own lives and become self-reliant.

Community service is often used as an easy way to feel like one is doing good. However, if people just participate in community service on the surface, going through the motions and donating to causes, they are not really changed. Only when a person sacrifices their own desire for glory can they really serve the someone else's needs.

Jane Addams observed that many people graduated college and fell into dull, cynical lives. In college, students think of society and how they can serve it, but when they graduate, they resort to marriage and individual aims. Therefore, she made the Hull House a place where the rich and poor alike could commit to noble aims. From the Hull House, Perkins went on to do courageous acts of service, "like a missionary."

When people leave college, they no longer have a community surrounding them, so they often resort to thinking only of themselves. Jane Addams' idea with the Hull House was to create a community for people of all walks of life that was devoted broadly to improving life.

Perkins left behind everything and went to lobby for workers' rights in Albany, New York. In order to effect change, she worked with callous politicians. She suppressed her sexuality and identity in order to be respected as a mother-like figure in political circles. She worked tirelessly to reduce the work week to 54 hours, finally accepting a partial triumph: a bill that reduced work week hours in most industries.

In order to affect change, Perkins was willing to do things that compromised her own self. She didn't care if she was disrespected as a woman in political circles as long as she was able to make a difference. This shows how she cared about her vocation than about her own self.

Perkins married Paul Wilson, a progressive political figure. In her letters to Wilson, Perkins was warm and romantic, but outwardly she was reserved and practical about their marriage. Their relationship slowly fell apart. Wilson had an affair, and Perkins felt stifled in work and spirit. They lost their first baby. Although personally devastated by this, Perkins threw her energies into a foundation supporting mothers and infants. Meanwhile, Wilson lost their money in a poor investment and suffered severe mental illness.

This sad description of Perkins's personal life shows that a person's effectiveness in their work or toward causes does not always translate into their personal happiness. In fact, Perkins even felt that her marriage stifled her ability to be spirited in her work. The real work of Perkins's life was not reflected in her personal relationships but in tasks greater than herself.

In response to these hardships in her personal life, Perkins was stoic. She concealed her private life from the public, believing that personal emotions are too complex and nuanced to be exposed. Brooks defines reticence and exposure as two opposing parties, with different views about proper social behavior. The exposure party believes that anything secret is suspect, while the reticent party, like Perkins, believes that intricate emotions, when taken out of the context of intimacy, are "trampled."

Perkins's privacy was probably an asset in her work. Unphased by emotional problems, she was able to fearlessly fight for her causes. In the same way that she didn't allow insults to her femininity stop her from enacting change, she held to a code of stoicism so that her emotions didn't derail her. Her work was about making practical improvements to life.

Brooks shows that Perkins's reticence had drawbacks. Her private life was unhappy. Her daughter Susanna, in response to her mother's aloofness, was badly behaved and unsuccessful, and Perkins had to support her financially throughout her life. Perkins feared that both her husband's and daughter's collapses were somehow her fault. This goes to show that Perkins's public vocation was never quite enough to make up for her private solitude.

Since Perkins's work was about making practical improvements to life, she was not well-versed in the language of emotions and intimate relationships. Therefore, her personal life was made up of a series of failed relationships. Her vocation was so beyond herself that it never provided her full happiness.

Eventually, Perkins was appointed to the Industrial Commission—the governmental body that regulated workers' conditions—by Al Smith, governor of New York. Here, she was in a man's world, bravely engaging in disputes between labor organizations. When describing her own life, she mostly used "one" instead of "I," suggesting that her actions weren't hers but were what any person with a vocation would do.

By using "one" instead of "I," Perkins suggests that people with vocations think in a universal way. They don't think about what they personally desire, but rather they think of themselves as an instrument for a universal wish. This shows that one's vocation is much greater than oneself.

Perkins ended up working with Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Initially, she was unimpressed by him, but when he returned after contracting polio, she found him humbled. He was physically changed, too. During one of his speeches, several women rose to obscure Roosevelt's awkward descent from the podium. Perkins admired his willingness to accept the help.

Perkins grew to like Roosevelt better the more hardships he faced and the humbler he became through them. This suggests that a person becomes more admirable the more they learn to accept their own weaknesses.

When Roosevelt was elected governor of New York, he employed Perkins as Industrial Commissioner. At first, she told him she didn't feel qualified, but he insisted on having her. She proved to be an excellent administrator but an even more excellent judge of morality in the law.

Perkins initial refusal of Roosevelt's job offer shows that she did not have an excessively high opinion of herself. She did her work because it was her duty, not because she thought she was the best.

When Roosevelt became president, he appointed Perkins as secretary of labor. She agreed on the condition that he work to enact certain social policies, such as unemployment relief and social security. She stayed with Roosevelt throughout his entire presidency and was integral to creating the New Deal. She established the nation's first minimum wage law and procured jobs for women whose husbands were drafted in World War II.

Perkins made a great deal of change in the field of workers' rights not by striking out on her own, but by working loyally with someone superior to her and forging gradual change through them. She always worked with other politicians so that the changes she made were lasting and written in law.

Perkins was the author of *The Roosevelt I Knew*, the most detailed biography of Roosevelt to date. She noted his quality of accepting mistakes in his judgment and taking small steps toward change. He was more of an "instrument than an engineer." While working with him, she handled his changes of mind by asking him to confirm his decisions many times so as to cement them in the president's own mind.

The fact that Perkins wrote an autobiography of Roosevelt but no memoir of herself suggests that she was Brooks's definition of wise: she accepted the fact that she didn't know everything and instead admired the examples of greatness she found outside herself. Her privacy and self-renunciation allowed her to be a great moral judge of others.

Roosevelt didn't always support Perkins against the dislike the rest of the Cabinet felt toward her. Her privacy made her unpopular with the press. Many times, she tried to resign, but Roosevelt convinced her not to. When she shielded Harry Bridges, a man suspected of Communist activities and later confirmed to be a Communist agent, she herself was accused of being a Communist and a Russian Jew. Roosevelt was too afraid of ruining his reputation to defend her.

This passage again shows that Perkins life was not entirely happy. However, it also shows that she didn't care about things like reputation, and always stood up for what she believed in, no matter what people would think of her. She continued to maintain her attitude that she was nothing special, trying to resign multiple times.

All this time, Perkins held on to her New England integrity, refusing to destroy the "inner core" that made her capable of such good deeds. In reality, it was all she could do to hold herself together. She took to praying at a local convent whenever she could. She asked herself whether a good deed is done for the poor or for God. She concluded that it must be done for God, because only then is it intrinsically good.

Perkins's conclusion that a good deed must be done for God shows that she remained wary of good deeds that were actually self-involved. In doing a good deed for the poor, one might expect immense gratitude or a material reward in return—but if one does something for God, one can't have these expectations.

In 1939, Perkins appeared before court for her shielding of Bridges and defended herself against brutal accusations. She was cleared, but her reputation was ruined for good. She continued to serve Roosevelt quietly. When he died, she wrote his biography instead of her own memoir. She taught at Cornell and lived in the Telluride House with fraternity boys, taking simple delight in their youthfulness.

Perkins wrote a biography of Roosevelt even though he hadn't always been loyal to her, refusing to defend her when her reputation was in danger. This shows that, on principle, Perkins wasn't self-involved. She always did more for others than she did for herself.

Perkins destroyed papers so that biographers couldn't document her in the future. She died in 1965 at 85, alone in the hospital. Looking at her college yearbook photo, Brooks expresses that it is hard to believe how much hardship this "small, cute, almost mousy" lady survived. It is also hard to believe how much she accomplished. She sacrificed her identity to serve causes and remained steadfast throughout adversity.

Perkins took her principle of selflessness to the extreme, making sure no one else could even tell the story of her life. Looking at her young photo is shocking because what she accomplished in her life was so immense that it far surpassed what her appearance indicated she was capable of. She also sacrificed all the youthfulness she had in the photo in order to make change in demeaning political circles.

Perkins was energetic in activism and traditional in morality. Her self-discipline diminished her personal life. However, this helped her completely devote herself to her vocation and lead "a summoned life." She didn't choose her life. Rather, she answered a calling, sacrificing all things dear to her to follow it. Her activities transcended her lifetime. Therefore, she had to commit herself to a "historical process."

Perkins devoted herself to a "historical process," which means she was arguably more an agent of historical change than she was a person with a well-rounded life. She sacrificed many of the things that fulfill a human being's personal life and instead did things that made her go down in history. In this sense, she chose heroism over happiness.

CHAPTER 3: SELF-CONQUEST

Brooks introduces Ida Stover Eisenhower—mother of Dwight D. Eisenhower, or "Ike"—born in 1862 in Virginia. Her upbringing was filled with tragedies: Union soldiers invaded her home looking for her brothers, and both her parents died before she was 12. She went to work as a cook for a host family. Ida's ambition to improve herself caused her to leave her hosts, get a job, and enroll in high school—something girls usually didn't do in those days. She received an inheritance of $1,000 which she used to buy a piano and enroll in college, where she studied music.

In the midst of circumstances that couldn't provide Ida with anything, she struggled to get everything she had. The fact that she spent her inheritance on enrolling in college and a piano illustrates the two sides of her nature and her most important values. She valued education and would be strict in educating her sons, but she also had a warm, fun-loving personality.

While in college, she met David Eisenhower, whose temperament was the opposite of hers. She was warm and optimistic, but David was stubborn and cold. However, the two married and stayed together for life. After marriage, Ida became strict in her faith but remained fun-loving and kind. Her husband opened a store, which soon failed. They moved to Texas where Dwight was born, but soon they were so poor that David's family had to come to their rescue. Eventually David was offered a job, and they moved to Abilene, Kansas.

On the surface, Ida and David don't seem well-suited. They had different personalities, and David was a bad businessman, meaning that he couldn't adequately support his wife and children. However, Brooks emphasizes their loyalty to each other through the hardships of poverty and uprooting the family. He also emphasizes that Ida's faith grew stronger, as if to fortify her against the difficulties that they faced.

Ida raised five boys, all of whom worshipped her and grew up to be successful. There was little fun or affection in the house growing up. However, the boys were raised with Ida's commitment to education and her warm personality. Abilene was a part of the "Bible Belt," where Victorian morality was strictly enforced. The boys grew up in an 833 square foot house and endured many rural hardships, including infection and injury.

The household atmosphere Ida created for her boys was strict, but in such a way that love wasn't absent from it. Although she had demands of them, she also surrounded them with warmth. Their poverty and dangerous environment meant that the boys weren't sheltered or coddled—instead, they had to develop inner strength to survive.

When Ida lost a son, she became more personally religious. The harshness of the Eisenhowers' life made them used to disaster being right around the corner. This instilled a moral discipline them. They despised anything that makes life more dangerous, and so they practiced self-restraint. Growing up in this environment, steady habits and work ethic were more important for Dwight Eisenhower than education.

The more hardships Ida and the family faced, the more disciplined they became. In their environment of poverty and natural disaster, they understood that self-discipline would prevent injury, homelessness, and even death. For the same reason, Dwight understood that work ethic was more important than education because, in his environment, it would bolster him against poverty.

When Dwight Eisenhower was 10, his parents told him he couldn't go trick-or-treating with his brothers on Halloween. Dwight flew into a rage, ran into the yard, and beat at an apple tree. His father whipped him and sent him to bed. Later, Ida sat with him and quoted from the Bible: "He that conquereth his own soul is greater than he who taketh a whole city." This was a defining moment for Eisenhower, teaching him that humans are divided in nature, flawed and gifted, and that the central endeavor in life is to build character.

The Bible passage that Ida quotes to Dwight instills in him the idea that internal battles are more important in life than external ones. This recalls the Adam I and Adam II distinction: Adam I would focus on conquering the world, hoping to achieve external success. However, Adam II would conquer their own soul, hoping to triumph over their own weaknesses. Early on, Ida's words direct Dwight toward the endeavor of building inner character.

Brooks claims that the word "sin" has lost its power in today's society. Society abandoned the concept because it no longer believed human nature was depraved. Also, "sin" was too often used to attack pleasure and enjoyment. Brooks claims that "sin" is an indispensable word—like "vocation"—that needs to be redefined so it can be used again.

The word "sin" has lost power because, in general, society has become less religious and more positive about human nature over the past 100 years. These days, sin has the connotation of a horrible transgression against goodness and God, but Brooks hopes to redefine it in the context of character-building.

Brooks claims that the word "sin" is essential because it reminds people that life is a moral affair involving moral choices. When society replaces "sin" with words like "error," it becomes more difficult for people to talk about and make moral choices. "Sin" is also important because it is communal, not individual. Everyone is connected through common sins, such as greed or disloyalty. Also, "sin" is a true part of human nature; everyone has flaws and perverse desires.

Brooks suggests that without the word "sin," people are too forgiving of themselves. They can't talk about moral dilemmas because they don't think anything is a moral dilemma. Rather, people refer to their flaws only as outward errors and mistakes, and not as deep-rooted weaknesses in their nature that they should confront.

Brooks asserts that "sin" is not demonic. Rather, it is a perversity in human nature that causes us to favor something of lower value over what is of higher value. Repeated sin turns into "loyalty to a lower love." Small sins slowly accumulate into larger ones. Without the concept of "sin," there is no concept of character-building. Sin provides the adversity that the good person fights against to become stronger.

Brooks's redefinition of sin doesn't have anything to do with the devil or with Hell. Rather, it denotes a universal perversion in human nature that causes people to not behave as well as they should. When one has this concept of sin, they have something to fight against. Without it, there is nothing to combat in one's character and therefore nothing to gain from this struggle.

In Abilene, where the Eisenhowers lived, everyone was wary of sin because it could lead to life-threatening disasters. People in places as rugged as Abilene knew about the different kinds of sins, what damage they caused, and what cured them. This vocabulary of sin was a practical tool that helped them lead moral lives.

For the Eisenhowers, the concept of sin was practical first and moral second. Avoiding sin helped them avoid danger and hardship, and as a consequence, they also led more moral lives.

Ida forbade things that would tempt her children to backslide into sin. She was loving and allowed her kids freedom in many ways, but she demanded small, habitual acts of self-repression. Today, people tend to distrust anything that represses their impulses. Back then, however, people distrusted their impulses. Ida advocated for "steadiness over time," making a habit out of good actions so that they become natural. She had her children perform small acts of self-control. Manual labor also instilled this in her boys.

Ida was a moral realists who believed that people's impulses are untrustworthy. Therefore, she advocated for self-repression made a habit. Her mantra "steadiness over time" expressed her belief that people are born with the tendency to sin, but that through a habit of self-repression, one can achieve steady resistance against sinfulness.

David Eisenhower's discipline was cruel and joyless. He never did anything fun with his boys. In contrast, Ida was good-natured, understanding that it is impossible to be self-controlled all the time. She taught her boys that love builds character. When one focuses their love on something high—such as one's country, children, or a good cause—they'll do anything to see that thing thrive. Therefore, through love and self-sacrifice, one can avoid sin and perform good deeds.

Although both Ida and David were strict, they were strict in very different ways. Ida was hard on her boys because she loved them and wanted them to be the best version of themselves. In this way, love can play a role in discipline. When a person loves another, they want them to thrive, which requires urging them to build character rather than forgiving all of their flaws and encouraging bad behavior.

Dwight Eisenhower believed religion is good for society but wasn't religious himself. He was rebellious, wild, and known to have a bad temper. His conduct was divided. He experienced painful throat infections from excessive drinking and smoking, as well as insomnia and anxiety, but put on a front of confident ease. He determined to always have an attitude of cheerful certainty. He strategically dismissed his emotions so as to maintain his confident front. He was not an "authentic man" but lived under "artificial restraints."

Dwight had distinct outer and inner selves. His inner self was undisciplined: he drove himself to illness through his wild lifestyle and couldn't control his temper. But he combatted this with "artificial restraints," putting on an outward air that was different from his inner self. In other words, he resisted his bad qualities rather than indulging them. This started with him being "inauthentic": pretending to be someone he was not so as to build better habits.

Dwight went to West Point Military Academy in 1911. He graduated in 1915 and, in 1918, was given orders to enter combat just as World War I ended. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel, and then his career slowed as the army's role in the U.S. diminished following the war. At 40, he was the least accomplished of his brothers. Nevertheless, he devoted himself to his position as staff officer, learning to submit to a team. He carried around a humbling poem in his pocket that said, "There is no Indispensable Man!"

Dwight's early years in the army were disappointing because he didn't get what he wanted. But instead of feeling wronged by his lack of success in the army, he humbled himself and further immersed himself in the army, serving those higher than him and existing as part of a team. In doing so, he taught himself to believe the line "There is no Indispensable Man!" He knew he wasn't special and didn't deserve unique treatment, and this made him a patient and devoted member of the army.

In 1922, Dwight was ordered to Panama where he met General Fox Connor in the 20th Infantry Brigade. Connor was a serious, soft-spoken man whom Dwight deeply admired. He renewed Dwight's studious nature and love of the classics. While in the brigade, Dwight witnessed the training of a horse named Blackie, which inspires him to believe that every flawed person can transform into something great. As if seeing this in Dwight, Connor arranged for him to go to Command and General Staff School in Kansas.

Although Dwight did not believe he was inherently special, he believed that he could transform into someone great. He likely saw himself reflected in the horse Blackie's transformation through training into a powerful army horse. He believed that through training and discipline, he could overcome his flaws and build personal greatness.

After graduating, Dwight was appointed as General Douglas MacArthur's personal assistant. MacArthur, unlike Connor, was theatrical and pompous. Dwight tried to leave MacArthur's service, but MacArthur insisted that Dwight's work with him was important. Although Dwight hated MacArthur, he was always respectful to him. Dwight was loyal and humble, submitting himself and his perspectives to those of MacArthur. This taught Dwight to look at war as a matter of heroic duty, not as a glorious exploit.

While in the army, Dwight served both a general he admired and a general he disliked. This taught him to do his job not because he enjoyed it, but because it was his duty. He believed he could learn more about himself by working for someone he didn't like, as this forced him to renounce his opinions and desires and fortify his sense of duty to the army.

Dwight became a masterful wartime commander. He put aside his own irritations to maintain alliances and always gave credit for victories to his subordinates rather than to himself. In the event of failing the invasion on D-Day, Dwight planned to send the message that the blame lay entirely on his shoulders.

Dwight was a selfless wartime commander: he put aside personal grudges so that he could sustain important alliances and always took the blame for any failing. Through this approach, he showed that he cared more about the army's larger goals than about himself.

However, Dwight's self-restraint had its drawbacks. According to Brooks, he was not creative or visionary. He was oblivious to civil rights movements and abstract ideas. He repressed his emotions to the point of being cold to people he should have been compassionate to.

Dwight's selflessness made him good at logistics but bad at social matters. He disregarded his personal feelings so as to collaborate well in army matters, but this left him oblivious to more emotional social movements.

The grown-up Dwight Eisenhower had two excellent traits: first, he could masterfully create a second self. Today, society believes that the true self is whatever is most natural and unhindered. Dwight, however, believed that "artifice is man's nature." He believed his true self was what he'd built, not what he'd started with. He was always willing to be someone he wasn't in his career, often making himself simple in order to conceal his true designs. This simplicity was insincere, but it was strategic and a work of art.

In the modern day, it is generally seen as negative to have a second self or a divided self, because people tend to think this means a person is disingenuous and deceptive. However, Brooks sees it as a positive attribute of Dwight's character, because it indicated that Dwight believed human beings could make themselves great and reform their flaws and sins. He developed an artificial self that was better than his natural self.

Dwight Eisenhower's second remarkable quality was his moderation. Brooks asserts that moderation does not mean levelheadedness. Rather, moderation comes from a person being aware of conflict and aware that things don't always fit neatly together. Politics, philosophy, and personality are fraught with tension and paradoxes. A person who experiences two intense and opposing drives employs moderation to make use of both. The moderate person finds balance between opposing things and can be strong in opposing ways. To demonstrate this, Brooks gives the image of a person shifting their weight to steady a rocking boat.

Dwight's moderation served the purpose of creating the most consensus between opposing views. Rather than consenting wholeheartedly to one viewpoint, he would moderately support many viewpoints so as to uphold the best points of each. He made change gradually and cautiously, not wanting to disregard the positives of traditional viewpoints. In other words, Dwight's moderation was about keeping the peace between contentious views.

The moderate person knows they can't lead entirely pure lives, devoted to one value. They can, however, regulate their character and recognize the merits in opposing perspectives in themselves and things around them. In a world that is always pitting one thing against another, the moderate person only hopes to be balanced in the moment. They are passionate but realistic, approaching problems with caution.

Dwight's moderation and his embrace of opposing viewpoints was a reflection of his opinion of himself, as he knew his own nature was comprised of contradictions. In order to maintain steadiness in himself, he took a moderate approach, being lenient with himself but also demanding.

On January 20, 1961, Dwight Eisenhower was succeeded by President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy's inaugural speech confidently described a cultural shift in which a "new endeavor" and a "new world of law" would begin. Days before, however, Dwight gave a speech that upheld the state of things that was fading away. Kennedy talked of new possibilities, but Dwight had cautioned against excessive confidence.

Dwight's political and personal philosophies were starkly different from those of President Kennedy, who succeeded him. This recalls the cultural shift from humility and moderation to self-trust and confidence that Brooks noted earlier in the book. Dwight was a moral realist, while Kennedy was a moral romanticist.

Throughout Dwight's speech, he talked of moderation. He urged the nation to strike balances—between private economy and public economy, for instance—and to guard against quick fixes. Particularly, he warned against the ruin that comes from unchecked power. He distrusted unchecked power, believing that it is better to uphold what one has inherited than to destroy the old and create something new. Dwight was a man who led a life of self-restraint because he believed man was "a problem to himself."

Dwight was afraid of what Americans would do if they had unchecked power. He believed man was "a problem to himself," meaning that people would slip into bad behavior and make hasty decisions if they did not restrain themselves. His beliefs support the idea that only through restraint can a person be great—unrestrained, they embody the bad parts of human nature.

CHAPTER 4: STRUGGLE

On April 18, 1906, Dorothy Day got ready for bed in Oakland, California. She said her prayers, believing, even at such a young age, in an "immanent spiritual world." Suddenly, the earth started shaking. Day was convinced that the earthquake was God visiting her as a tremendous and impersonal force. The city was in ruins after the earthquake, but the Bay Area banded together "as though in Christian solidarity," according to Day. Day had an ideal nature and longed for some kind of spiritual heroism and a transcendent purpose.

The 1906 San Francisco earthquake was an important event for Dorothy Day because to her, it was evidence of the real presence of God in her life. She felt that this presence was powerful and universal, and that God had no care for her as an individual. She never forgot this sensation of God's presence, and it would become the one thing she'd be eternally grateful for all her life.

Day's father lost his job due to the earthquake and the family moved to Chicago. Her father was gloomy and distrustful, and her mother verged on a nervous breakdown, making the household a dull and unaffectionate place. Day went to church and prayed in the evenings, even though her family wasn't religious. Growing up, she became fascinated with sex and experienced thrilling surges of longing. She was critical of herself for these feelings, not wanting to engage in the sensual when God is wholly spiritual. She showed her "hunger to be pure," her intense self-criticism, and her preference for suffering over simple pleasure.

Dorothy Day was divided from a young age between her desire for sensual pleasure and her desire for spiritual purity. Because she criticized herself so harshly for her desires, she showed herself to be someone who pursued the path of struggle and suffering to the simple path of happiness. What she wanted more than anything was the commitment to something pure, but it would take her a long time to achieve this state because of her inherent weaknesses.

Day attended the University of Illinois, where she was a half-hearted student. She abandoned religion and joined the Socialist Party, wanting to wage war against society. When she was 18, she tired of college and moved to New York City. During her first lonely months there, she noticed the poverty around her and became indignant. She developed a love for the poor and desired to be with those who are suffering. Eventually, she got a job with a radical paper called *The Call*, where she wrote articles about labor unrest.

Day had a hard time committing to any one way of life; all she knew was that she wanted to help people who were suffering. Her feeling when she saw the poverty in New York was similar to the moral indignation Frances Perkins felt when she witnessed the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire. However, Day was still searching for her calling.

Despite this activism, most of her battles were internal. She became an avid reader of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. In those days, people believed literature contained wisdom. (Today, Brooks notes, people use cognitive science rather than literature to understand their minds and feelings.) Day also led a wild life, spending her time in bars. She witnessed one of her friends die from a drug overdose. She left much of her dissolute life out of her memoirs, seemingly ashamed of it.

Outwardly, Day was devoted to activism, but she was unhappy because her inner life was in a state of unrest. She was unable to lead a life she was fully proud of, which is evidenced by her omitting her debauched lifestyle from her memoirs. She wanted to be someone that her actual self wasn't, which is the feeling that plagues those who are only Adam I.

In 1918, Day volunteered at King's County Hospital during a deadly worldwide flu epidemic. She worked 12-hour days in disciplined conditions. During this time, she became pregnant. Her romantic partner suggested she get an abortion, and she agreed. Later, she attempted suicide with a gas pipe in her apartment. She left the hospital job because it made her numb to suffering, and she had no time to write.

These events in Day's life reveal that she was completely lost; in both her work and her personal life, she couldn't find anything to commit to. She nearly ended her own life, which shows that she couldn't find a purpose that would sustain her will to live.

During this time, Day was arrested twice. The first time, she spent 30 days in jail for participating in suffragette protests outside the White House. While in jail, she became depressed about the futility of human effort and began to understand that activism fails without faith. The second time Day was arrested, she was found visiting a friend who lived in a brothel and was assumed to be a prostitute. She criticized herself for her promiscuous lifestyle, accusing herself of pride. In actuality, she was lonely and hungry for spirituality.

Day's arrests were what made her hopeless about human efforts in the form of activism. She realized that surface-level activism was empty and futile. Her feeling was similar to that of Frances Perkins before she witnessed the fire and found her vocation: without a cause that calls one to submit wholly to it, one will always feel that their actions are self-serving and ineffective.

Day still hadn't found her vocation. She needed a calling that involved self-surrender and commitment to something pure. She tried to find this in writing: she published a book but was later ashamed of it and unsatisfied. Next, she believed romantic love would satisfy her: she fell in love with Forster Batterham, and they lived together on Staten Island. Although they fought over fundamental matters—Forster being a very scientific thinker—Day still loved him deeply. They secluded themselves from the world as if to create a place where their love could be pure.

Dorothy Day tried to fill the void in herself consciously, committing herself to different things, first to writing and then to romantic love. Her commitment to romantic love seemed to stabilize her and put an end to her reckless lifestyle. In this way, Day's commitment to Forster Batterham changed her, but she didn't undergo a complete transformation. Perhaps this is because she tried to choose what could fulfill her, and one can't choose their vocation the way one chooses a career.

But this seclusion was not enough for Day. She wanted a child even though Forster didn't, and, in 1925, became pregnant. While pregnant, she wrote of her experiences, since very few accounts of pregnancy from the female perspective existed. Day was enraptured when her daughter Tamar was born. Without someone to thank for the gift of her daughter, she began to feel God's immanent presence again. She surrendered to the belief that there is something beyond her will that gives meaning to life. Her child's birth gave her a calling.

Not completely satisfied by love, Day wanted to have a baby. The birth of her daughter partially provided Day with her calling by bringing her back to recognizing God's presence. She felt a sense of gratitude for her daughter's birth that required that she thank God for the gift in the absence of anyone else to thank. This goes to show that Day did not choose what fulfilled her, even though her daughter helped her find it.

Then, Day turned to the Catholic Church. Although her religious feelings didn't require a denomination, she wanted to join a community of sufferers. She saw that the Catholic Church provided structure for many poor families. Day's religiosity expressed itself like Saint Teresa's: she fears her own sinfulness, feels ecstasy in God's presence, and ardently desires to help the poor.

Day resembles Saint Teresa, a Spanish noblewoman in the 1500s who was called to join the convent of the Catholic Church. Like Saint Teresa, Day immersed herself in the community of religion and expressed her faith in a deep desire to make sacrifices to help the poor.

When Day chose religion, her relationship with Forster suffered. His views were too skeptical and scientific to understand her faith. Enraged by her new spirituality, he thought she was mentally disturbed. Despite this, Day still loved him passionately. In fact, it was her love for him that turned her to faith. Her love of him opened her up to other kinds of love.

Although Forster's love was instrumental in Day's arrival at faith, her new religiosity ruined their relationship, as Day's love of God was greater than her love of Forster. This distanced her from him, especially because Forster didn't understand her faithfulness and couldn't join with her in the love of God.

Day's conversion to Christianity was unpleasant. She criticized herself at every stage, sometimes feeling like her spirituality came from self-satisfaction. For her, becoming faithful was a process of self-conflict. Often, people tend to think that religion makes life easier. In contrast, Day found it "complex, rigorous, and torturous." She established a strict religious routine which created a spiritual center in her.

Conversion was difficult for Day because it involved self-restraint, which makes the process resemble character-building. Like character-building, conversion was not the straightforward process of following one's desires; it was a rigorous, torturous process of self-denial.

In 1933, during the height of the Great Depression, Day started the newspaper *The Catholic Worker*. Its goal was to create a society, through Catholic teaching, in which people find it easy to be good. The newspaper also hosted a soup kitchen and hospitality houses. Day believed that "separation was sin," so with *The Catholic Worker*, she combined inner thought and activism. As well as Catholicism, the newspaper championed personalism: the belief that every person is obligated to look after others.

The philosophy behind Day's newspaper came out the realization she had after being arrested that activism is empty and meaningless without a core of faith. Therefore, she kept up a conversation about faith and the inner life in her newspaper while opening charity venues on the side. This brought outer action and inner values into harmony—something that happens when one builds their life from the inside, nurturing their Adam II.

Day worked for *The Catholic Worker* and its soup kitchen for the rest of her life. The work was endless and menial. Often, one thinks of a saint as someone who lives in an ethereal world. In reality, however, they often live more earthly, practical lives than everyone else. Day described her day as "a mixture of the sacred and the profane, cooking meals, book-keeping, writing inspirational messages, etc."

Although Day led a spiritual life, it was still dirty, menial, and hard. It is a common misconception that saints live outside the human realm—instead, they combine spirituality with dedication to worldly deeds. This description of Day's life resembles Brooks's description of a person who has character and inner strength: their life appears normal and plain, but they subtly uplift others.

Day was not naturally social, but she forced herself to be with people. She worked with people who had mental illnesses or who suffered from alcoholism and drug addiction. While working, she carried a notebook in which she wrote a mixture of personal and work-related entries. In order to resist self-righteousness, she tried not to desire gratitude from those she served.

Like Dwight Eisenhower, Day built a self that was better than some of her natural impulses by resisting her tendency to be self-centered and introverted. In this sense, although she was not naturally built for a life of sacrificial service, she taught herself to excel at it.

For most people, happiness is the goal of life. However, people always remember moments of suffering that formed them rather than moments of happiness. Day "[sought] out suffering as a road to depth." She avoided simple pleasures and sought out opportunities for moral heroism. When it isn't connected to a larger purpose, suffering is damaging and leads to despair. However, when connected to a larger design and in solidarity with others, suffering is ennobling and transformative.

Day chose suffering because through it, she developed deep character. She could have aimed for happiness in her life, giving into the pleasures she desired, but if she had done this she wouldn't have discovered the true depths of her strength and heroism. Times of suffering are more memorable, because through them a person learns the strength they're capable of.

First, suffering draws a person deep into themselves. Pain reveals depth in a person that they didn't know they had. It opens up buried places of pain and gives the sufferer the feeling that they are getting under the superficial to the fundamental. Suffering also reveals one's limitations, removing one's illusion that they can master themselves. Furthermore, suffering teaches gratitude: it humbles a person so that they feel indebted to what they've received from life.

In general, suffering reveals a person's true depth and their true nature as a complex person who cannot hope to master themselves alone. Suffering also makes good things stand out by contrast, so that a person is much more grateful for the things they have than they were previously.

In times of suffering, Brooks suggests, a person starts to hear their calling. They can't control their pain, but they can control how they respond to their pain. The sufferer learns that the cure for pain isn't pleasure but holiness: pain can't be removed, but it can be transformed into something sacred, redeemed by making a self-sacrificial act in service of suffering at large. A person recovers from suffering not by healing but by transforming. Usually, they throw themselves more wholly into the commitments that originally caused their suffering. In so doing, the sufferer cultivates character, not pleasure.

Significantly, suffering is another condition that can cause a person to find their calling. Like the case of Frankl, the concentration camp survivor who preached the meaning of vocation to prisoners, suffering causes a person to transform the way they think. Instead of going after what they think they deserve, the sufferer can train their inner selves to endure the suffering, coming out with a stronger character.

Dorothy Day became renowned for being a living example of Catholic teachings. She carried out the teaching that all human beings are one family made up of individuals endowed with equal dignity. She published *The Long Loneliness* in 1952. She continued to work and was distant from her loved ones, none of whom understood her faith. Day felt this was a price she paid for her calling. She was even distant from her daughter and often felt she was a bad mother.

Day's life had a paradox: she believed in the Catholic teaching that all human beings are one family, but she distanced herself from her own family and wasn't a good mother. Like Frances Perkins, Day was better at serving universal good than she was at serving personal, particular good. This compromised her personal life, but her goals were far greater than herself.

Day debated giving up *The Catholic Worker* because the work was so difficult. However, she decided to stay and built up communities around the newspaper which provided her a sense of family. Day's work carried out the vision of life as seen through the Christian gospels; it addressed everyone's brokenness, not just that of the poor. She embraced poverty in solidarity with the suffering to be close to God. Day experienced internal suffering and loneliness, but her outward life displayed community and joy.

In living in such close proximity to the poor and their suffering, Day was living out the Christian principle that every person is broken on the inside, no matter what their external life looks like. This is also the principle of moral realists and of Adam II. Unlike moral romanticists, Day did not exist in an individualistic point of view but united herself with the whole world.

In 1960, Day had been living with a woman named Nanette for 30 years. Nanette was struck with cancer, and Forster came back to help Day tend to her. Day was an excellent caregiver, taking care of practical matters and not frustrating her suffering patient with insensitive silver linings. Forster, however, couldn't bear the situation. Day suffered for Nanette, and Forster's self-pity made her angry. Nanette died peacefully on January 8, 1960.

By the end of her life, Day had become an adept caregiver. She knew how to take care of people in a way that no one else did. Although she used to antisocial and self-involved, she grew through a torturous process of self-sacrifice and devotion to become a selfless caregiver whose main goal was to provide for others.

Dorothy was part of the peace movement of the late 1960s, but not in the way many others were. While they preached freedom and individuality, she preached obedience and self-surrender. She disagreed with the movement's attempt to create community outside the Church and advocated for the necessary structure of Catholicism. The movement celebrated natural human behavior, but Day believed humanity is naturally corrupt and needs to be corrected through self-repression.

During the 60s, many people advocated for peace by advocating for personal freedom, liberation of personal desires, and self-expression. But Day believed that peace was achieved by submitting oneself to a community. She represents the old culture of moral realism that was overtaken by moral romanticists' philosophy of self-love in the 60s.

According to Brooks, Day stood for a truer counterculture than most "counterculturalists" in those days. She stood against capitalism and the values of Woodstock, both of which promoted the liberation of the individual, urging people to value life based on self-gratification. Day's life is an example of self-surrender. Although she didn't achieve total peace, she developed an inner structure and felt gratitude. After a life of hard work and self-criticism, she felt nothing but thankfulness for the Lord's constant presence in her mind.

Although counter-culturalists claimed to stand against capitalism, Brooks believes that they actually stood alongside it, since both capitalism and the counter-culturalists promoted individuality. Day had a tortured life, but she felt nothing but gratitude at the end of her life. This suggests that the less one has and the harder they strive to be better than their flawed natures, the more thankful they will be for being alive.

CHAPTER 5: SELF-MASTERY

George Catlett Marshall was born in Uniontown, Pennsylvania in 1880. His father, successful in the coal business, was cold and reserved at home, where he acted as master of the house. When his father lost all his hard-earned money in a failed investment, the family was disgraced. Marshall was not a brilliant student and humiliated himself in academic settings, so resorted to mischief-making instead. When his brother went to Virginia Military Institute, Marshall wanted to go too, but his brother tried to stop him. Realizing his family was embarrassed by him, Marshall determined to prove them wrong. Marshall's success wasn't due to a particular talent, but to the effort and self-discipline he put in to prove himself in the face of doubt.

Marshall's early life was defined by humiliation. He was humiliated by his father's poor choices that led his family into disgrace, and he was also an embarrassment to his family because of how bad he was in school. Therefore, his ambition came from the desire to prove to himself and to others that he was not an embarrassment and was capable of great things. In other words, Adam II's logic was what led Marshall to success. Adam I's logic would have been insufficient because he had no natural talents to express, but he had the opportunity to build character.

Marshall arrives at VMI (Virginia Military Institute) in 1897. He admired its principles of chivalry, emotional self-control, and honor. VMI taught Marshall to revere heroes and ideals. In recent times, Brooks observes, heroes have been disregarded. In Marshall's time, however, people believed that one struggles to be moral not because of a weakness in their character, but because they lack a good role model or ideal. They believed that admiration for a hero motivates a person to be good. Marshall developed the desire to become as perfect as possible.

Marshall believed that even a person with lots of weaknesses could make themselves better by aspiring toward an ideal or emulating a hero. This supports Brooks's claim that no one can hope to completely master themselves on their own. Instead, everyone needs help from an outside source, whether it be a tradition, God, family, or heroes. This belief leads to the community-oriented mindset that many moral realists have.

Just before arriving at VMI, Marshall contracted typhoid fever. He showed up late and sickly-looking, leading the other cadets to ridicule him. At one point, they cruelly hazed Marshall, forcing him to balance naked over a loaded gun. He slipped, and the gun fired, wounding his ear. Such hazing was against the rules at VMI, but Marshall kept silent about it, protecting the offenders and therefore earning their respect. Similarly, Marshall kept silent about an arm injury he sustained playing football, letting his arm uncomfortably heal over a two-year period.

Marshall did not indulge in his personal offense, enduring all attacks against him. Although this behavior might at first seem cowardly, and like an enabling of bad behavior, it actually proved to Marshall's attackers that their behavior was uncalled for. Like a non-violent protest, Marshall's complacency revealed the other cadets' aggression and led them to respect him.

Today, Brooks says, people are not as intent on artificial appearances; they focus on relaxing and being natural instead. Marshall and his military fellows at VMI, however, believed that great people are "made, not born." Through action and control, virtues are ingrained in a person. As a consequence, emotion and action are separated. Emotion is seen as suspect because it robs a person of their agency, and therefore it is controlled, like a fire.

Marshall did not want to relax his self-restraint because he saw this as something that would actually take away his agency rather than enhance it. He viewed his emotions not as good, true things, but as factors within him that compromised his strength of character. Like Dwight Eisenhower, Marshall believed in building himself.

Marshall didn't keep a diary because he was afraid it would make him think too much of himself. He never wrote an autobiography. VMI's main lesson to him was how to exercise controlled power. Power exaggerates one's vices, whereas self-restraint checks them. Marshall developed an austerity and an ordered mind that Brooks thinks is impressive in someone so young.

Like Dwight Eisenhower, Marshall feared unchecked power. Knowing that his nature contained vices, Marshall didn't want to adopt a mode of unrestrained behavior that would unleash these vices.

Marshall went to the White House to ask for an appointment in the U.S. Army. Disregarding a White House usher who told him he needed an appointment to see the President, Marshall snuck into the Oval Office to ask President McKinley for a position. He then took the entrance exam and was received in 1902.

This action shows a combination of boldness and respect: Marshall boldly disrespected the White House's policies, but in doing so, he revealed how strongly he respected the United States Army. He followed his own path but at the same time devoted himself to the highest institutions.

Marshall rose in the army slowly, assisting those higher up than him. He was so good at logistics that by age 39, he had never held combat commands. However, he slowly acquired skills and held countless positions. He surrendered his ego to those he worked for, even if he disagreed with them, and never had a moment of significant moral failure.

Marshall rose slowly in the army not by arrogantly controlling others with his views, but by assisting others and showing his devotion to the institution. Although he surrendered his ego, he was rewarded with a perfect track record of moral behavior and was therefore trusted with greater power and status.

During World War I, Marshall was assistant to the chief of staff of the American Expeditionary Force. He worked on the frontlines, jumping in and out of trenches checking on soldiers and supplies. When on base, he managed logistics for next steps. In 1917, Marshall's unit was visited by a General John Pershing, senior U.S. commander in the war. Pershing admonished Marshall's unit for their poor form. Marshall stood up for his unit, but Pershing brushed him off and started to leave. Brashly, Marshall stopped Pershing from leaving with a hand on his arm and proceeded to admonish him for his own failures. This action could've cost Marshall his career, but Pershing hired Marshall and became Marshall's mentor.

Similar to his barging into the White House to ask for a position in the army, Marshall's standing up to Pershing showed both boldness and deep devotion. Although he was in one sense disrespecting a superior, he was proving his loyalty to the army's values in doing do. In other words, Marshall chose to be devoted to the highest institutions and values, and he was willing to disrespect anything that threatened those values. In addition, standing up to Pershing resulted in a mentorship between the two men.

Although he wanted to be promoted to the position of commanding men in battle, Marshall accepted his new position and left his unit to join Pershing and General Staff in Chaumont. He was sad to leave the troops in his unit. Six days after his departure, nearly all those troops died in a counterattack.

Although Marshall stood up to Pershing, he also decided to serve him. Marshall accepted virtually every position he was asked to fill, suggesting that he viewed his work as a duty, not as a personal pleasure or choice.

Nowadays, Brooks argues, a person with an institutional mindset is rare. People today distrust institutions and aim to put the individual first, assuming that the richest life is the one of individual fulfillment. As a result, institutions have deteriorated. The institutionalist, like Marshall, believes that society is the primary reality, and that society is made up of institutions handed down through generations. One isn't born into an open field, but into a field of institutions. One should commit themselves to an institution, and the customs of that institution will structure them and involve them in a community that transcends time.

Marshall did not face reality as if it was an "open field" through which he could create his own dream life based on his desires. Instead, he saw that reality was comprised of institutions that transcended his existence. He believed a person defined themselves by committing to an institution. Like Frances Perkins, Marshall participated in an institution that transcended himself and required the sacrifice of his personal will.

The institutionalist reveres those who came before. The rules of a profession or institution are deeply embedded in the people who practice them. For instance, a teacher who commits to nurturing her students is a true teacher. Institutional rules are life-shaping. A person's purpose in society defines who they are. In committing to a profession or institution, one quiets their ego and secures a meaningful place in the world.

An institution helps a person devote to their work as a person devotes to a vocation; when one commits to an institution, they choose to embody rules that transcend their lifetime. Brooks suggests that a person is defined not by expressing what is within them, but by molding themselves to what already exists.

Marshall kept his private life separate from his public life. His home was a haven set apart from work. Marshall married Elizabeth Coles, known as Lily. He felt very grateful to her for choosing him, and he cared for her devotedly. Before long, he discovered she had a thyroid condition that weakened her heart, making her incapable of intense activity or childbearing. This only strengthened Marshall's devotion to her.

Like Frances Perkins, Marshall was private about his personal life. Unlike her, however, he was devoted to his personal relationships. He did not have an excessively high opinion of himself, and so he was grateful that his wife chose him, leading him to care for her faithfully.

In 1927, at age 53, Lily's heart condition took a turn for the worse. She was hospitalized and began to recover, but just before being released, she passed away while writing a note to her mother. Marshall was teaching classes at the War College when he got a call with the news. Lily had been Marshall's only confidante, and her death devastated him. This tragedy changed him, making him more compassionate, open, and lenient.

It seems that Marshall was able to be so untouchable in his outward life because he had one person at home—his wife—with whom he could be vulnerable. After her death, Marshall became more willing to be compassionate and open. Instead of closing himself completely, he opened up more to the world. This illustrates Brooks's point that suffering is a transformative experience.

Marshall was a private man: while his manner toward close friends was funny and confiding, his manner to the public was polite and reserved. Like Frances Perkins, he believed the sphere of intimacy should only be opened gradually to people who've shown their loyalty. However, Marshall's formality prevented him from making friends.

Despite his ability to be open with people he was close with; Marshall was not good at making new friends. He approached everyone with an attitude of formality because he was so serious about his work. This is another example of how serving others and devoting oneself to a vocation don't necessarily facilitate happiness.

Marshall was asked to lead the Infantry School Program in Fort Benning, Georgia. Although traditional in manner, he took a modern approach to teaching. The traditional lesson plans falsely taught students that officers always know where the enemy is and what they're doing. To do away with this deception, Marshall sent his students into the field without maps. He taught them how to know *when* to make a decision, not just *what* decision to make. Despite making these reforms, Marshall was still not promoted.

Marshall's modern lesson plans resemble the philosophy of a vocation. Instead of teaching his students what do in the field, Marshall taught them how to be ready to respond to the moment. He sent them out into the field unprepared, which trained them to respond with what they had in themselves to problems that came up. This is similar to how a suffering person can rise to the challenge of what life is expecting of them, thereby proving their inner strength.

In 1939, Franklin Roosevelt was looking for a new chief of staff, the top position in the U.S. Army. Marshall was a contender for the position. He didn't campaign, and Roosevelt was not personally fond of him. Nevertheless, a mutual friend of Roosevelt's and Marshall's advocated for him, and Marshall was given the position.

Roosevelt was not fond of Marshall even though Marshall was a respectable member of the U.S. Army. This illustrates Brooks's point that great people are not always well-liked or well-known—in fact, oftentimes they are great because *no one can fully know them.*

World War II began, and Marshall was forced to weed out incompetent people from the army. The ruthless job of ending countless people's careers wearied him. Marshall falls in the category of the untheatrical generals of World War II. He was a precise organizer and dressed simply. During this time, he gained a widespread reputation for his "immense integrity."

Although Marshall was untheatrical and was performing the unglorified task of letting soldiers go, he was known for his "immense integrity." This shows that one's character is not always reflected in dramatic, flashy deeds. Rather, a person's character is reflected in how they carry themselves, and this shines through their work in a subtler way.

The Allies were preparing for Operation Overlord, the invasion of France, and they had no overall commander. Marshall secretly wanted the job, and many told him he should have it. Even Eisenhower, whom Roosevelt visited to consult in 1943, thought Marshall should have the position. However, Roosevelt wanted Marshall nearby in Washington. Also, Marshall's lack of warmth might not be helpful for forging alliances.

Marshall's lack of outward warmth made it difficult for his superiors to see how he'd be a good overall commander. It seems that Roosevelt doubted him because he did not personally like Marshall and found him to be unfriendly and therefore untrustworthy. This is a case of someone being judged by their personality and not by their character.

On December 6, 1943, Roosevelt called Marshall into his office and asked him if he would like the position of overall commander. Marshall told Roosevelt to do whatever he thought best. Marshall's refusal to say "yes" caused Roosevelt to defer to his own feelings, keep Marshall in Washington, and make Eisenhower commander instead. This crushed Marshall, but he didn't show it. Even when Eisenhower returned to Washington in glory after the war was over, Marshall beamed with pride.

Marshall's strict code of self-renunciation and restraint lost him the position that he wanted more than anything. He refused to indulge his desires by saying yes to Roosevelt's request; he would rather be obedient to the institution than follow his own desires. This moment in Roosevelt's office is an extreme example of sacrificing one's desires in order maintain character. The fact that Marshall was proud of Eisenhower's success in the position Marshall himself wanted shows how successfully he quieted his own ego and prioritized the good of the nation above all else.

After the war, Marshall tried to retire. In 1945 he was released from duty, and he and his second wife, Katherine, prepared to settle in Virginia. Soon after their arrival in their new home, Marshall received a call with the news that the U.S. ambassador of China had just resigned—would Marshall take his place? Marshall reluctantly accepted. After this, the president asked him to serve as Secretary of State, and he accepted. In this position, he enacted the European Recovery Plan. He served many other positions after this.

Marshall never ceased to accept any job that was asked of him, even when he was old and wanted to retire. This proves that Marshall did not serve in the army because we wanted to or because he enjoyed it, but because he viewed it as a duty. He accepted any position because he knew his character was defined by the institution he submitted himself to.

There are some people who feel indebted for the blessing of being alive, and Marshall was one of them. Marshall was very much shaped by classical Greek and Roman traditions; he was noble and "great-souled." The great-souled leader sacrifices normal social relations because they are called upon to perform a great service to people. They enter politics and war because these are the only arenas competitive and consequential enough to do great things in. The great-souled leader may sometimes be unkind or cold, but they achieve excellence through exercising great power—a different kind of happiness.

Marshall believed that he was indebted to the institutions he was a part of, and therefore his whole life was colored by gratitude. Brooks claims that Marshall's excellence at exercising power was a unique kind of happiness; Marshall did heroic things in some of the biggest arenas in the world, and this made him memorable and consequential. His "happiness" was the nation's or history's happiness rather than his own personal happiness.

In 1958, Marshall was hospitalized due to a cyst on his face. After the operation to remove it, he continued to weaken until he was comatose. Condolences came from famous people all over the world, including Winston Churchill and Mao Tse-tung. He died on October 16, 1959, just before he turned 80. He was given the simple burial he had requested, with only close friends and family present, and no eulogy.

Marshall was very well-known by the time of his death, but he made sure that he would be given a very simple funeral. The absence of a eulogy at his funeral is interesting because Marshall certainly had what Brooks would call the "eulogy virtues." However, his eulogy virtues included modesty and self-renunciation, so he didn't want praise in the form of a eulogy.

CHAPTER 6: DIGNITY

Black civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph was born in 1899 in Jacksonville, Florida. His father was a minister, butcher, and tailor, and his mother was a seamstress. The family was poor but respectable. In the face of degrading racism, their sophisticated conduct rose above their material poverty. Randolph was schooled by two white teachers who had come South to educate underprivileged Black children.

Randolph's family rose above their material circumstances by focusing on their inner lives and their moral character. Randolph was also educated above his material circumstances; from an early age, he learned to care about inner virtue and education more than money and material things.

Instead of being a product of his circumstances, Randolph transcended his circumstances with his moral conduct. Through his dignity, he elevated himself above the conditions around him. He spoke in a lyrical voice and had an antiquated vocabulary; he always practiced morality and self-mastery. Even when he became famous, he resisted self-exposure and the accumulation of money, believing that those things corrupt a person. His incorruptibility and dignity made him impossible to degrade and humiliate. He became a model for civil rights leaders.

Randolph's story resembles the way Frankl fortified his inner self so as not to be degraded by the torture he received in the concentration camp. Similarly, Randolph developed an inner dignity that elevated him above the racism surrounding him. Both men controlled their responses to suffering, elevating themselves above it rather than letting themselves be degraded by it.

Randolph attacked the problems of organizing imperfect people into groups to enact change, and amassing power without becoming corrupted by it. Throughout his civil rights activism, Randolph was suspicious of his own sinfulness. He knew that he himself could do wrong even while fighting for justice. He worked to reconcile passion with patience and authority with leniency. He was "public-spirited," which does not just mean he rallied protests; rather, he limited his own passions and opinions so as to bring as many diverse people as possible together. He was politically radical while personally traditional.

Randolph was a moral realist because he knew that he had the potential to become corrupt even though he was on the right side of justice. His philosophy of activism resembles Eisenhower's philosophy of power in that he feared unchecked power and advocated for moderation. Like Eisenhower, his main goal was to bring people together in agreement, and he did this by tempering his own views.

Randolph moved to Harlem in April 1911, a month after the Triangle Factory fire. He dabbled in theater and briefly went to City College, where he first read Karl Marx. He opposed U.S. involvement in World War I and Marcus Garvey's "Back-to-Africa" idea, which proposed that Black people should leave racist conditions in the U.S. and return to Africa. By 1920, Randolph had started half a dozen labor unions.

Randolph wanted to make real change in the nation. He advocated for peace in opposing U.S. entry into World War II, but at the same time he opposed Garvey's passive solution to racism. He set to work putting together labor unions, trying to integrate newly freed slaves into society.

Randolph helped unionize formerly enslaved people who'd been hired by a railway company because the company thought they'd be a docile labor force. The workers didn't side with Randolph in his critique of capitalism, so he founded their union on the fight for dignity instead. During a time when one could lose their job for participating in a union, this was dangerous work. Slowly the union grew to 7,000 members. However, when the Great Depression hit, membership fell to 700, and Randolph himself fell into severe poverty.

Randolph wanted to support formerly enslaved people by helping them get what they envisioned for themselves, rather than by imposing his vision on them. This shows self-renunciation and the surrender to a cause more important than himself. He helped unionize formerly enslaved people, encouraging them to dignify themselves above mistreatment in the same way Frankl encouraged his fellow prisoners.

The Black community turned against Randolph's union because they found it too aggressive. In 1933, Roosevelt was elected, and labor laws changed. However, white employers couldn't accept that to make change, they would have to cooperate with Black workers. Finally, the work month was reduced from 400 to 240 hours. Randolph was now the most famous Black organizer in the U.S.

Randolph came to realize, through the black community's complaints, that aggression wasn't working as a strategy for change. He patiently stuck with the Black community, shaping his vision so as to agree with theirs. He slowly worked toward lasting changes, such as the reduction of the work week.


In the 1940s, with the onset of World War II, the Black community was met with another injustice: labor companies building wartime infrastructure weren't hiring Black people. In response, Randolph issued a protest march on the Washington Mall. This shocked Roosevelt, and he called Randolph into the White House. Roosevelt offered to call a few employers and tell them to hire Black people, but Randolph wanted more than this; he wanted an executive order mandating that Black people be hired. After a long stalemate, an executive order was finally issued banning discrimination in defense industries.

Randolph refused to accept Roosevelt's unofficial promise of change, instead persuading Roosevelt to make an actual law protecting the rights of Black people in the work place through an aggressive yet nonviolent tactic. He threatened the March on Washington, which forced Roosevelt to see that his own refusal to pass the bill would be an unjust act. Randolph therefore provoked justice out of someone reluctant to give it.

After the war, Randolph fought for labor rights more broadly. He struggled to focus his energies on a single cause. The admiration he received for his moral integrity and charisma hindered the achievement of his goals. However, he contributed significantly to the civil rights model when, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, he advocated for non-violent resistance. He founded the League of Non-Violent Civil Disobedience Against Military Segregation and suggested restaurant sit-ins and peaceful protests. This non-violent approach required discipline and self-renunciation.

Randolph went on to advocate for a nonviolent approach to activism. The nonviolent tactic required the same self-discipline that is required in character-building. In being nonviolent, Randolph understood that he himself contained vices and was liable to become corrupt. Therefore, he used nonviolence to discipline himself and to check his own vices of anger and arrogance. In this sense, nonviolence is a tactic that protects against one's own corruption while also opposing outside corruption.

Randolph and Bayard Rustin influenced each other during this time. Rustin was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania and was raised by his grandparents. His grandmother taught him to be dignified and self-controlled. She ran a Bible Group which emphasized the Book of Exodus and the Jewish experience in understanding Black liberation. Rustin went to Wilberforce College, where he came out as gay. After college, he moved to New York, where people were more accepting of homosexuality.

Bayard Rustin had a similar upbringing to Randolph's. Rustin was also taught to be dignified and to thereby hold himself above other people's poor treatment of him. Rustin would go on to struggle more than Randolph did to suppress his own vices. This possibly came from the fact that Rustin, being both Black and gay, had an even harder time finding acceptance than Randolph did.

In Harlem, Rustin volunteered to join Randolph's March on Washington before it was cancelled. He joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a Christian pacifist organization. He chose pacifism as a way to achieve both social change and inner growth. Achieving inner virtue means suppressing one's rage, so Rustin took up a non-violent approach in his activism. In his twenties, Rustin became well-known in civil rights and pacifist circles. Once, he sat in the white section of a bus and then remained passive while the police beat him for his misdemeanor.

Like Randolph, Rustin embraced the nonviolent approach to activism because he wanted to achieve inner growth as well as societal change. This required subjecting himself to horrible violence. He didn't even resist or defend himself when police beat him for passively sitting in the white section of the bus. However, in remaining passive, he showed how cruel the police's actions were by comparison.

In 1943, Rustin was drafted. Instead of cooperating, he decided to go to jail. While in jail, he protested against racial segregation in the prison, sitting down in the white section of the cafeteria and stationing himself in the Whites Only section of the cell block. Whenever he was caught and beaten for this, he would maintain a calm pose of non-resistance.

Rustin religiously maintained his nonviolence by refusing to fight in World War II. Once in jail, he continued his protests and his stance of nonviolence. Rustin sacrificed his personal freedom and physical safety to participate in these protests.

Although he was a hero, Rustin sometimes succumbed to rage, recklessness, and arrogance. He was promiscuous in his sexual life, pursuing partners with a disturbing doggedness. In jail, he performed sexual acts on other inmates. This behavior disappointed the civil rights community because it undermined his reputation as a disciplined leader. The leader of FOR admonished him, saying that promiscuity destroyed deep love. Rustin eventually admitted to his failures.

Despite his self-renunciation when it came to violence, Rustin could not control his sexual impulses or his arrogance. Although his behavior was arguably a response to the various forms of oppression he faced in his life, his uncontrolled behavior was actually damaging his cause because it diminished people's trust in him.

While on leave from jail, Rustin ran into a fellow activist, Helen Winnemore, who confessed her love for him. Although he refused her, Rustin was touched by her selfless love, regarding it as "a sign from God" that pointed him toward the light. He rekindled a relationship with a long-term lover, hoping this would protect him against looseness. When he was released from jail, he performed many nonviolent acts of protest. As his fame grew, however, his promiscuous tendencies reawakened. He was imprisoned again for a public sex act, and his reputation never recovered.

The gesture of unconditional love from Helen Winnemore started to get Rustin on the right track; it made him feel drawn toward God's unconditional love. Rustin then tried to guard against his uncontrolled vices by committing to a relationship. However, he had still not achieved inner balance or control over his desires, and without that stable core, he couldn't succeed in getting his life together.

From this point on, Rustin stayed involved in the civil rights movement from the background. He mentored Martin Luther King, Jr., in his speeches and tactics. This raised suspicion in pastors and congressmen who threatened to disband King and Rustin's friendship, believing that the two were having a sexual affair. Randolph was Rustin's strongest ally. When Randolph admitted his disappointment that the March on Washington never took place, Rustin suggested they organize a "mass descent" on the capital.

After his second imprisonment, Rustin tried yet another approach. He decided to participate in the civil rights movement from the background, supporting others to be the face of the movement. In developing this mode of privacy, he was able to be of great use to Randolph and Dr. King, which resembles how Frances Perkins renounced her private life in order to serve Roosevelt.

At first, civil rights organizations were skeptical about the march, not wanting to set themselves back by making those in power unwilling to help them. This attitude reveals that there were two civil rights movements: the first was mostly centered in the north among educated people. It proposed that society progressively becomes more knowledgeable and that, through appealing to reason, everyone will eventually see the injustice of racism. This camp was optimistic, believing that through conversation, everyone would come to see the goodness of human nature.

This camp of civil rights activists shares its assumptions about human nature with the moral romanticists. Both groups believe that human nature is inherently good. The moral romanticists believed that if human beings expressed their natural selves they would lead successful, happy lives. Similarly, these particular civil rights activists believed that humans weren't fundamentally racist but only confused, and that through appealing to people's true nature, justice would again conquer injustice.

The other camp were "biblical realists": they believed that humans are sinners by nature, and that in the world, the just often suffer while the unjust prosper. These people believe that the unjust will rationalize their injustice. They also believe that the just can become corrupt through trying to gain power, turning a selfless movement into fuel for their own vanity. The optimist group worships Man, believing that humans are naturally compassionate. The biblical realists worship God, believing that man is a natural sinner.

The biblical realists are very similar to the moral realists, as they both believe that human nature is inherently flawed and sinful. Therefore, the biblical realists did not try to appeal to people's true nature. Instead, they believed that everyone was corrupt, and that the best way to fight for justice was to expose and confront injustice everywhere, even within themselves.

Randolph, King, and Rustin were biblical realists. They knew that those who defended segregation could not be convinced to do otherwise, and that civil rights activists themselves could not rely on their own goodwill for fear of perverting their cause into something self-serving. The only way forward was to surrender to the cause at the cost of their own happiness. As a result, biblical realists were more aggressive generally: they didn't believe change could be made through education alone. Change could only come through relentless pressure.

An activist who is a biblical realist does not fight for the civil rights cause in order to attain their own happiness. Although they are against oppression, they must sacrifice their hopes for personal happiness in order to do this. Furthermore, the biblical realists did not believe in education as a tactic for change. As a result, they adopted aggressive, physical action and demonstration.

That being said, the biblical realists were nonviolent, and their nonviolence coerced the unjust into performing blatant acts of injustice against their wills. In so doing, nonviolent protestors aggressively exposed the villainy of their enemies. Throughout their nonviolent protests, Rustin, King, and Randolph stood guard against their own corruptibility. They knew they were in danger of becoming arrogant and making poor moral choices as they gained more power. Rustin in particular, who'd struggled with personal vices, recognized nonviolence as a means for not only affecting social change but also one's own discipline.

Although biblical realists had an aggressive approach in comparison to the gentle approach of appealing to people's true nature, they were also defined by nonviolence. Through nonviolence, Rustin, Randolph, and King remained on the offense of the fight without corrupting themselves.

Brooks claims that the nonviolent approach is ironic: the weak succeed by suffering, the oppressed defeat the oppressor by not fighting back, and the just can be corrupted by their own justness. This ironic logic is the logic of those who see humans as a problem unto themselves, and human behavior as incomprehensible. It is important to fight injustice, but whatever power is gained in the process will corrupt even the just person. But if the strategy involves self-doubt, some victory is possible.

Nonviolence follows the same paradoxical logic that Adam II follows: in sacrificing oneself and confronting one's flaws, a person builds character. Similarly, in repressing one's rage and potential for vice by sticking to nonviolent protest, a protester magnifies the rightness of their cause; they keep their cause and the people fighting for it virtuous. Therefore, whatever they accomplish is a true moral victory.

Rustin and Randolph rallied supporters for a real March on Washington. The violent protests in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, in which police brutally set dogs on girls and hurled teenagers into walls, brought everyone over to Rustin and Randolph's side. Randolph directed the march and Rustin served as deputy, organizing a Black police force to guard the marchers and resist clashes with non-violent tactics. A segregationist senator attempted to thwart the plans by railing against Rustin's homosexuality, but this had the opposite effect of causing civil rights figures to support Rustin.

Rustin and Randolph's moderate and nonviolent approach helped bring more people over to their side. Anyone who opposed them had to oppose them unjustly, because Randolph and Rustin weren't doing anything that harmed other people. As more and more people became disgusted with racial violence—like police officers brutally suppressing innocent Black teenagers—more and more people backed Randolph and Rustin. This shows that nonviolence had the effect of unifying people against all expressions of violence.

On the day of the March on Washington, Rustin and Randolph both spoke, and King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Randolph wept after the march when Rustin told him it looked like his dream had come true. Rustin spent the rest of his life fighting to end apartheid in South Africa and continuing to defend civil rights movements. He found personal peace in a long-term relationship with one man.

Randolph and Rustin were part of the March on Washington that went down in history. The march was the culmination of their tireless, patient efforts to combat injustice in the most moral way possible. Their feeling when the March was over was one of gratitude, showing that it was a truly moral achievement that arose from their patience and self-surrender.

The story of Randolph and Rustin demonstrates how imperfect people exercise power in a corrupt world. They both held the worldview that human nature contains innate sin. In their different ways, they built inner structures to control their impulses. They knew that the only people who could change the world were those who aggressively fought for change while at the same time understanding that they are unworthy of doing so. This philosophy of power combines conviction with self-criticism.

Brooks suggests that Randolph and Rustin were able to change society because *they believed they weren't worthy of doing so. In upholding an attitude of self-doubt, they guarded themselves against sin and thereby increased the justness of the cause they were fighting for. If they had believed they were perfect, they would have succumbed to the same vices they were opposing in their enemies.*

CHAPTER 7: LOVE

Mary Anne Evans, whose pen name was George Eliot, was born on November 22, 1819 in Warwickshire, England. Her home was situated between rural farmlands and grimy new coal mines. Her father, whom Mary Anne loved, grew to be a successful land agent. Her mother suffered from ill health and sent her children to boarding school so as not to strain her condition. In response to the lack of her mother's affection, Mary Anne became needy for love and was afraid of being abandoned. She followed her brother around incessantly and begged him to play. When he got older, he abandoned her for other interests, and Mary Anne was devastated.

Situated between farmland and ugly new industrial views, Mary Anne Evans was born during a time when a more scientific worldview was competing with religion's validity. Mary Anne's childhood was defined by her need for attention and love. Her relationship with her brother showed that, from an early age, she desired human love and attention rather than an otherworldly spirituality. This became a signature part of her moral philosophy later in life, as she searched for love and moral improvement through other people rather than focusing on her inner self.

In 1835, her mother fell ill and Mary Anne, 16, came home from school to care for her. When her mother died, Mary Anne stayed home to supervise the house. Later on, Mary Anne would write in her famous novel *Middlemarch* that many women experience a crisis of vocation; their yearning to be heroic makes them want more than what any outlet can give them.

Mary Anne had difficulty finding a vocation because she lived during a time when most women were limited to domestic work. This delayed her from finding her true purpose for a long time. She wanted more than what most women could hope for in the mid-19th century, and she had no examples around her of women with vocations.

Mary Anne had moral fervor, and it took a religious form in her youth. During this time, scientific advancement threatened Christianity's validity. Everywhere, people were doubting God's existence. In response, some people clung more fiercely to religious precepts, while others looked for ways to reinterpret religion. Mary Anne adhered to Christianity's strictest aspects, denying herself music and fiction. She wanted to lead a life of martyrdom, but her self-renunciation was artificial and narcissistic.

At first, Mary Anne's intense passion prevented her from seeing the logical holes in religion. Her passion was seeking an outlet, and she first poured it into a traditional expression of religion. She was using religion's strict traditions to make herself feel like a martyr, but really she only had herself in mind. She wanted to feel *like a martyr, but she wasn't one. Like Dorothy Day, narcissism was a sign that Mary Anne had not yet found her vocation.*

Mary Anne's intelligence kept her from getting stuck in this artificial religion. She started reading poetry and learning Greek and German. A book by Charles Hennell called *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* persuaded her that there is no evidence to prove that Jesus was divinely born. Mary Anne then met Hennell's sister and her husband Charles Bray, who happened to live nearby, and they all became friends. Bray believed that God made the world but is not active in it, and that it is up to man to discover God's rules and improve the world accordingly. Therefore, he believed in social reform.

Mary Anne's intelligence eventually led her to see the logical holes in religion. Although a cold, scientific view of the world would also not become her vocation, her disavowal of religion was an important step in her realizing her true commitments. Eventually, she would advocate for worldly morality and familial love to replace the gaping hole left by religion. Her extreme religiosity and then her extreme agnosticism would eventually temper into something in between.

Mary Anne still believed in God, but she renounced Christian teachings. She loved life and didn't want to believe the human world is subordinated to a more perfect one. Instead, she wanted to make moral choices and live virtuously. She told her father she wouldn't attend church anymore. He warned her about the isolation she would face if she abandoned religion; she would be ostracized, and no one would marry her. She argued that it would be hypocritical to attend church since she didn't believe.

Mary Anne felt that Christian teachings were debasing the beauty of human life, and she didn't want to ignore the good that she saw around her in the human world. She stopped going to church because it tried to instill the notion that a realm more heavenly than Earth existed, but this decision required the sacrifice of her relationships and reputation.

Mary Anne even told her father she was willing to leave his home because she didn't want her lack of faith to continue hurting him. This shows her bravery, her desire to strengthen her character, and her passion for living according to the truth. Eventually, she and her father reconciled, agreeing that he would respect her agnosticism if she continued to attend church.

Mary Anne was courageous about the sacrifices required for her pursuit of character. However, her reconciliation with her father is important because it showed Mary Anne's desire for morality in interpersonal relationships rather than in grand gestures.

In making this compromise, Mary Anne acknowledged some of her self-indulgence in the feud. She regretted the feud, knowing she took secret delight in creating a scandal. She concluded it was her moral duty to moderate her impulses so as to protect society's feelings. She was brave and radical but grew to also respect conventions. She believed society was held together by small restraints on personal impulses, and that destroying these restraints would be selfish. From this point on, she cloaked her radicalism in respectability.

Mary Anne's reconciliation with her father also showed her that narcissism had played a huge role in her rebellious decisions. She started to develop the idea that she needed to control herself in order to make the moral changes she wanted to see in society. She cared about relationships too much to sacrifice them for her own grand, abstract visions.

Although she is intellectually mature, Mary Anne was a bit of an emotional mess. She was notorious for falling in love with everyone she met. She would engage in intense conversation with someone, mistake it for romantic love, and hope that the other's love would fill some void in her. Her romantic pursuits always failed. She was not conventionally pretty, and the men she was interested in were usually married or otherwise unavailable. She would go to stay with friends, become intimately attached to the father of the household, and then be made to leave in disgrace.

Mary Anne's romantic restlessness shows that she was looking for something she did not know the nature of. She was looking for love but, not knowing what it felt like to actually love someone, she interpreted every sign of interest from another person as a sign of love. She looked for love from others without stopping to assess if she truly loved those she engaged with, and in this way she was passionate but unstable.

Once, Mary Anne went to live with John Chapman, an editor, and his wife and mistress. Drama ensued as the women competed for Chapman. Eventually, the mistress and wife banded together against Mary Anne, and she left among whispers of scandal. Some say the absence of motherly affection in Mary Anne made her desperate for love. However, her desire for love also had narcissism in it: she loved her own love and flights of passion. As of yet, she had no one to attach her passion to and give it shape.

Brooks suggests that Mary Anne's romantic restlessness was the result of narcissism, as she chased after the way lust made her feel. This resembles how Dorothy Day chased after solutions to her restlessness but was never able to fulfill herself through her own will. Similarly, Frances Perkins didn't choose what she wanted from life—rather, an external event drew her to a certain way of life. This, Brooks implies, is what Mary Anne needed.

In 1852, when she was 32, Mary Anne fell in love with philosopher Herbert Spencer. She wrote him a letter in which she pleaded for his love and also asserted her own for him. This letter signified that she was maturing and taking charge of her life. Although Spencer rejected her, she was beginning to live by her own inner criteria. She became steadier in her passion.

When Mary Anne wrote to Spencer, she showed confidence, determination, and a readiness to commit to something. In the way that Helen Winnemore's confession of love started to steady Rustin, Mary Anne's own steady declaration of love for another was the beginning of her transition into stability and personal fulfillment.

This was an "agency moment" for Mary Anne. The agency moment can happen at any age, or never, in a person's life. Sometimes, a person is so blown about by things outside of their control that they lose faith in their own agency. They don't believe they can take control of their lives. Agency develops in a person after great effort. In order to have agency, one must have a deeply engraved inner criteria that guides their action.

Without having an inner goal, Mary Anne was a victim to outside forces. Brooks describes agency as something that works from the inside out: once a person has inner criteria, they can attain what it is they want. But if they try to attain what they want in order to fulfill their inner criteria, they will always feel that they have no control in their life.

Mary Anne's emotional agency came to fruition when she fell in love with George Lewes. Lewes had a chaotic and poor upbringing. He educated himself in Europe, then returned to London to make a living as a freelance journalist. He is described in mixed terms as an unreliable writer, an adventurer, and a freethinker. He was notoriously ugly. He married a woman named Agnes who later had an affair. By the time he met Mary Anne, he and Agnes were separated.

Brooks characterizes George Lewes as unremarkable to most people. This helps to conceal his and Mary Anne's love story, making it a mystery to everyone except them why they were in love. It also shows that one sees something much deeper than the external when they fall in love.

Lewes and Mary Anne met in a bookstore on October 6, 1851. At first, she was not impressed with him, but over time, his geniality and wit grew on her. The full story of how they fell in love is unknown, but Lewes was gradually rising in Mary Anne's estimation. They were interested in the same books and ideas. They both believed that love and morality fill the void left by a religion neither could really believe in anymore.

The way Mary Anne fell in love with George Lewes was very different from the way she fell in love with the men before him: she slowly and gradually grew to love Lewes. They shared the unique belief that morality could replace religion, which Lewes would later encourage her to illustrate in her novels.

Since the events of Mary Anne and Lewes's love story are unknown, Brooks tells the story of Isaiah Berlin and Anna Akhmatova, which he thinks is similar. Akhmatova was a pre-revolutionary poet who'd been prevented from publishing by the Soviets. Her husband had been executed in 1921 and her son imprisoned in 1938. Berlin was visiting Leningrad in 1945 and was introduced to Akhmatova by a friend. They sat on opposite sides of the room and shared life stories, talked about favorite authors, bared their souls, and confessed their loneliness. It was 11 o'clock the next day before they parted. Berlin flung himself into bed and said to himself that he was in love.

Brooks compares Mary Anne and Lewes's love story to another intellectual and emotional love story. Berlin and Akhmatova fell in love by discussing their favorite authors and confessing their deepest hopes and dreams. In being totally emotionally vulnerable with each other, they developed a connection. Connecting this way required their honesty and fearlessness. Significantly, their love wasn't physical—rather, it was a passionate meeting of the minds.

Berlin and Akhmatova's night together represents the ideal communication, shared by two people who believe in the moral, emotional, and existential wisdom found in books, culture, and art. Their communication was one in which intellectual compatibility turned into an emotional connection. Their communion was spiritual, intellectual, and emotional, combining friendship and love. Like them, Mary Anne and Lewes experienced love as a moral force.

Brooks explains that Berlin and Akhmatova's intellectual connection turned into an emotional connection. This suggests that when a person meets someone who is their intellectual equal, that person is also their emotional equal. For Mary Anne and Lewes, love was a "moral force" because they connected over their values and the truths they believed in.

According to Brooks, love reorients the soul. First, it humbles a person and reminds them that they aren't in control of anything, even themselves. Love invades a person little by little, rearranging their energies, desires, and focuses. Love is also a surrender. It makes a person give up their illusions of self-mastery and become vulnerable. It turns a person away from their self-love and makes them love another. A person in love seeks fusion with another and finds that happiness is in someone outside of themselves. Love removes the difference between giving and receiving. A lover isn't altruistic, because what they give is a piece of themselves.

Brooks breaks down the transformative process of love. He emphasizes that since love comes unannounced and unbidden to a person, it takes them out of themselves and their illusions. Love completes a person desire to be serving because, when one is in love, the distinction between giving and receiving disappears. In becoming one with another person, one gives to the other naturally. This is similar to how a person might sacrifice their happiness to become one with their vocation.


Secondly, love endows a person with a poetic temperament. Without love, a person lives like **Adam I** with a utilitarian logic. With love, however, a person experiences feelings they can't explain. A person in love surrenders to its power without calculating what they'll lose. Also, a person never falls in love with someone who is useful to them. Rather, they fall in love with whomever stands out to them and is harmonious with them. Moreover, people in love don't choose each other as a means for happiness.

Brooks explains how love causes a person to understand Adam II's language, which might initially seem paradoxical and counterintuitive. Since love makes a person do things without calculating cost or hoping to gain anything in return, they realize what Adam II means by the mysterious claim that sacrifice brings reward.

Love opens a person to spiritual awareness. Their love makes them feel that they are glimpsing a "wordless mystery beyond the human plane." More practically, love opens a person up to more love. Ultimately, love motivates people to serve others. The person in love engages in selfless and daily acts of care. Sometimes, the passionate period of someone's relationship engraves such a strong commitment in a person that they naturally offer love without asking for a return. Lewes loved Mary Anne in this way; he celebrated, nurtured, and lifted her above himself.

Brooks explains that love is not a closed circuit. When a person is in love, there is no limit to their desire to care for and serve others. Brooks also explains that love makes a deep impression on a person's inner self, steadying them and giving them the "inner criteria" that allows them to go through life selflessly giving to others. Love is such a complete gift that once a person receives it, they can give for the rest of their lives.

Mary Anne and Lewes's decision to be together was life-altering. In society's eyes, their relationship was adultery because Lewes was technically married. By 1853, Mary Anne realized that Lewes was her soul mate. She'd been reading Feuerbach, whose ideas convinced her that marriage is not a legal arrangement but a moral arrangement. In this vein, she knew her relationship with Lewes was of a higher order than his marriage with his estranged wife. On July 20, 1854, Mary Anne and Lewes got on a ship for Europe and began their life together as a married couple. Their decision was an act of bravery and commitment.

Mary Anne believed her marriage was a moral rather than a legal arrangement because her and Lewes's values were so deeply aligned. Their moral marriage stood out from his legal marriage as something deeper and more-character-altering. A legal marriage can be seen as part of Adam I's journey of success, whereas a moral marriage can be seen as part of Adam II's journey toward moral character.

Mary Anne and Lewes's marriage fulfilled both of their lives. In London, however, Mary Anne was known as a homewrecker, and her family and friends disowned her. Despite this, the couple lived as traditional man and wife. Society's reaction to their marriage helped them see society's true colors. Ultimately, their love was worth the cost: they were exclusive, committed, and devoted to one another. For Mary Anne's part, she could now approach life with confidence.

Mary Anne and Lewes had to sacrifice societal conformity and their reputations in order to be together. However, through these sacrifices, they realized that society too heavily emphasized the external. Mary Anne also gained great confidence after her sacrifices.

Lewes encouraged Mary Anne to write fiction. She hadn't yet tried her hand at plots and dialogue, but she already had a talent for characterization. She started to write, showing Lewes her work at night. Lewes became her consultant, editor, and publisher. When she started publishing, she took the pseudonym George Eliot to hide her scandalous identity. When her true identity was discovered, Lewes protected her from the public by cutting out all criticism of her from the newspapers before they reached the masses.

Lewes gave Mary Anne the idea for an outlet for her moral fervor. He also provided all the means for being a writer that women were typically denied in Eliot's time. In this way, he facilitated her vocation: his love provided her with ideas, means, and encouragement to channel her passion toward something useful for the world.

Although Eliot's masterpiece, *Middlemarch*, is mostly about unhappy marriages, Eliot and Lewes were happy together. However, they were not content with life as a whole: they both suffered from depression and illness and were restlessly compelled to improve themselves morally. As Eliot matured, her writing took on the fits of passion that she'd grown out of. She felt deeply and thought acutely, so she had to suffer through writing each book, bearing them like children.

George Eliot channeled her restless passion into her writing. Now that she had a stable relationship, she was able to address the problems she herself had had before she'd met her husband. She wrote about unhappy marriages and relationships as if she now understood what was wrong with her pursuit of men before finding love. In this way, she used her own happy life to shed light on unhappy situations.

Eliot's books weren't written for the purpose of making a point. Rather, they create worlds for readers to experience; she wrote about the everyday world and ordinary people. Her novels seem to suggest that a person thrives when they work within present reality or attend to a particular person, and not when they filter what is immediate through lofty or abstract ideas. After her self-centered childhood, she shows amazing sympathy in her novels. She writes about lack of sympathy and lack of communication as the worst moral flaws.

Eliot also critiqued her past narcissism and loftiness with her novels. Her marriage showed her all that had been lacking from her previous self—sympathy, practicality, and communication with others. In this way, love caused her to step out of herself so she could see what was making her so unsatisfied before. Her novels explain that a person does the most good when they focus on whatever is right in front of them.

Eliot doesn't believe in big, transformational change but in small, gradual change. She believes progress happens subtly through daily effort. Many of her monumental characters, such as *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea, have an ardent moral drive. Over time, they realize their goals are unrealistic and learn to focus their attention on small moral improvements instead. Eliot believes holiness isn't otherworldly, but that it's in the world at hand. Therefore, one has daily opportunities for self-sacrifice and service.

Eliot's characters show how people slowly develop over time. Her own moral transformation happened gradually as she descended from the height of lofty, self-centered ideals into the real world of relationships and small improvements. Her marriage was something that grounded her and opened her eyes to the daily opportunities for service.

Eliot's own life is a testimony of a person realizing that their moral ambitions are self-centered and lofty. She learned she could do good in the particular and mundane, such as in her marriage. The most significant event in her life was her relationship with George Lewes: it deepened and steadied her.

Eliot and Lewes's relationship illustrates Brooks's point that character can be built through love alternatively to self-confrontation. Love brought Eliot out of herself so she could forget her lofty ideals and ground herself in the real world where there was possibility for moral improvement.

CHAPTER 8: ORDERED LOVE

Augustine was born near the end of the Roman Empire in the year 354 in a town called Thagaste in what is present-day Algeria. Society at the time of his birth was a chaotic mix of Roman paganism and African Christianity. His father was an upper-middle-class town counselor with no spiritual drive who hoped his son would be successful. His mother, Monica, was both a devout religious follower and a strong-willed individual. She managed the household, her husband, and her son's material and spiritual life.

Augustine grew up torn between spirituality and external success. His father was unfaithful and was concerned with public and political reputation, while his mother, Monica, was intensely Christian. Also, the Roman Empire at the time of his birth was divided between religion and paganism. This made it so that, from the outset, Augustine had no clear direction.

Monica's control over Augustine was domineering and possessive. When Augustine was 28, he tried to escape her grasp by sneaking to Europe on a boat with his mistress and son. His mother followed him, "stalk[ing] his soul." Although she stifled him, he couldn't make himself dismiss her. He was proud of her fierce love, and they shared profound moments of spiritual communion.

As Augustine grew up, he pursued earthly things. However, he kept his mother's presence in his life, showing that he still felt the pressure of spirituality. He allowed her to "stalk" him with her spiritual persuasions, which suggests that he felt torn between spirituality and a life of external success and pleasure.

Augustine was a sickly child but a brilliant student. Growing up, he was caught between the tension of two classical ideals: Hellenism and Hebraism. The Hellenistic mindset wants to see everything as it really is, exploring the world's excellence with a playful spirit. Hebraism, on the other hand, focuses on a higher truth and immortal order and is uneasy in a world believed to be full of sin. Augustine lived under the rule of semidivine emperors and studied in the greatest schools. He grew up desiring posterity.

The tension between Hellenism and Hebraism was a tension between earthly pleasure and divine order. The tension raised the question of whether life should be lived among earthly things, or whether one should reject earthly things for a higher order. Augustine was ruled by "semidivine emperors," which suggests that his public life was also caught somewhere between faith and atheism.

Augustine went to study at Carthage when he was 17. While there, he found himself assaulted by temptation and lust. He had never loved a person but was constantly in love with the prospect of *being* loved. His soul was divided: he desired shallow pleasures, but also disapproved of these desires. Despite his turmoil, he was an excellent student and eventually got a job in Milan, the center of power. He got married and was committed to his wife.

Augustine's soul was divided in the same way that Brooks suggests a person becomes divided when they only focus on the Adam I side of their nature. In both cases, a gap opens between one's desired self and one's actual self. Augustine's desired self was one that resisted shallow pleasures. His actual self was one that pursued shallow pleasures anyway.

While he was young, Augustine followed the Manichees' philosophy. The Manichaeans believed the world is divided into a Kingdom of Light and a Kingdom of Darkness. In their worldview, good constantly battles with evil, and, in the process, light gets mixed up with darkness. In other words, a pure soul is trapped inside a corrupted mortal body. Therefore, human beings aren't responsible for sin. Instead, the Kingdom of Darkness is to blame for the evil in the world.

Earlier in the book, Brooks explained how "sin" is a necessary word for describing the process of character-building that improves life. He explained that sin should be seen as a fundamental part of human nature. This differs from the Manichaean philosophy because in Brooks's philosophy, humans are responsible for their sins. In the Manichaean philosophy in which good is trapped inside evil, human beings don't have to take the blame for their sins.

Outwardly, Augustine had a perfect life, but internally he was unhappy and fragmented. He felt his words were "empty lies." His feeling was similar to the fear of "missing out." People with this fear are hungry to seize every experience and feel every feeling. This causes them to make partial commitments and spread themselves thin. When one organizes their life around their desires, everything becomes an object to them. Lust, for instance, is a void that a person hopes to fill with sex. But they never succeed in filling it because they refuse to commit themselves fully to the other person.

Augustine was living a wholly Adam I life, which left him feeling empty inside. He followed Adam I's utilitarian logic in which everything became an object to advance him in life. He attempted to fill his voids with things from the outside because he didn't understand that surrendering to something would give shape to his sense of self. He felt that his words were "empty lies" because there wasn't the harmony between his inner values and his outer behavior that comes with a deep commitment to something.

Augustine eventually felt his marriage was based on lust. However, when his mother convinced him to leave his wife for a higher-class woman, he was devastated. He'd sacrificed a commitment for the sake of social status. Then, he observed a smiling beggar on the streets one day and realized that this man, who had nothing, was happier than he was. Augustine now felt utterly alienated, wondering why he still followed desires that clearly weren't leading to happiness.

Augustine knew why he was unhappy but didn't do anything about it, which shows that a person's will is not always enough to change their life. Augustine's knowledge of the cause of his unhappiness was not enough to change his behavior, showing that he was going to need a force more powerful than knowledge to get him on the right track.

In response to this realization, Augustine looked inward. He started an almost scientific examination of his psyche. What he found was a vast and complex landscape full of light and darkness that constantly revealed new depths to itself. He realized that although people are born with great qualities, sin has corrupted and twisted their desires. Augustine himself desired fame and status, but these weren't making him happy. He wondered what kind of "creature" a human being was, unable to follow their own will. He realized people are problems to themselves.

Although Augustine still felt powerless when it came to controlling himself, the knowledge of his unhappiness did cause him to examine his own nature. Brooks explains later that this process of plunging into his own mind was the first step in Augustine's transformation into self-control. It showed him how vast and complex the human mind is and proved to him that human nature contains both good and evil.

In his memoir, *The Confessions*, Augustine uses a prank he pulled as a teenager to illustrate the fact that man is a problem to himself. One night, he and his friends stole some pears from an orchard. They weren't hungry, and the pears were nothing special; the boys simply lusted to steal. The mundane purposelessness of this crime now struck Augustine. A tendency toward the wrong things is central to human nature, and people commit such small perversities daily.

The stealing of the pears proves that human beings do bad things even when they have absolutely no need to. Since Augustine and his friends stole the pears without being hungry, or tempted by beauty, or revengeful, he knew that they stole them simply to steal them. This proved to him that at the base of human nature is a perversity that makes them sin for no reason.

When Augustine examined himself, he noticed that the human mind is infinite. He found both sinfulness and sensations of perfection within his mind. Augustine saw that a human life couldn't be understood through the individual, but only with reference to the universal things beyond them: the sin in them that comes from the past, and their longing for holiness that comes from above. A person can conceive of perfection but can't obtain it themselves.

Augustine's examination of his own mind showed him the true nature of human beings. He could see that the good and evil in his nature came from sources that had existed long before he had. He saw himself as a creature who had infinite streams of good and evil passing through him. These universal forces in him made him realize that he was not a unique, self-mastered individual but was part of a larger order.

Augustine set out to reform his life. First, he abandoned the Manichaean philosophy. Instead of viewing the good and evil in the world as black and white, he started to see that each virtue came with its own vice. For instance, self-confidence comes with pride. He could see that the Manicheans were prideful because they thought they'd figured everything out. Augustine wanted to live a truthful life, but he wasn't ready to give up his desires. He still thought that he was the master of his own life, and that he could undertake self-reform like a homework assignment.

Augustine refuted the Manichean philosophy of good trapped inside evil by noticing that virtue and vice always accompany each other. At this point, Augustine was weeding out true philosophies from false ones, but he was still far from being changed. What Augustine needed was not the truth and a solution, but rather a transformation. His own efforts were still not getting him there.

Over time, Augustine realized he couldn't reform himself. His biggest flaw was that he thought he was in control of his own life. His own mind and the world around him were too vast for him to understand. He realized that by thinking he could reform himself, he was exaggerating his biggest sin: believing he was his life's captain was committing the sin of pride.

Augustine had decided that virtue and vice always accompany each other. This led him to notice that his conviction that he could master himself was accompanied by the sin of pride. He realized that pride is the biggest sin because it keeps a person from recognizing their helplessness.

Often pride is a positive attribute found in someone who builds happiness around their accomplishments. Negatively, it is found in a boastful person. However, pride is also present in people with low self-esteem. The proud person tries to establish self-worth through success, which makes them dependent on other people. Therefore, they are always hurt and lonely. Augustine realized that one must give up the idea that they can solve their unhappiness through their own successes.

Augustine realized that the sin of pride is at the root of most unhappy people. Pride is the belief that happiness and self-worth come from success; therefore, pride is the driving factor of a person's Adam I nature. Trying to satisfy themselves through external success, they leave their inner self feeling utterly empty.

Augustine was plagued by the sensation that there was a better way to live. Through a sense of divine absence, he knew there must be a divine presence. In order to become less fragmented, he needed to eliminate some possibilities. However, he didn't want to give up his options and wants. So, he hung between a spiritual life he knew was true and a material life he wasn't willing to give up. He wouldn't obey himself.

Augustine knew that he was unhappy, and the lack of spirituality he felt is what told him that there must be the possibility of spirituality. However, he did not abandon his unspiritual life. This again shows that knowledge wasn't enough to transform Augustine into the spiritual state he had proof of.

One day, Augustine was in a garden with a friend, Alypius. Alypius was telling him stories about Egyptian monks who sacrificed everything to serve God. The story struck Augustine, and he started to reproach himself for believing in God but still stubbornly refusing to renounce his earthly desires and serve Him. He paced the garden as God's presence tempted him. However, his desires still tempted him, too.

This scene illustrates a battle in Augustine between the temptation of God and the temptation of his desires. All Augustine had to do was make a sacrifice of the desiring part of his nature in order to join God. This scene also reveals the distinction between believing in God and serving God: Augustine believed in God's existence but was still unmoved to sacrifice his own desires in order to serve Him.

Then, Augustine envisioned the ideal of self-control as a woman called Lady Continence. This woman offered him the pleasures of faith to replace the pleasures of the world. Augustine still wavered. He cast himself under a tree, weeping. Then he heard a voice outside himself urge him to open the Bible and read a certain passage. He opened it and read, "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh."

Augustine tried to replace his desire for earthly pleasures with a desire for spiritual pleasures. In other words, he tried to "reorder his loves," prioritizing higher loves (like the love of God) above lower loves (like the love of material things). However, he still could not manage this himself. When he was called by a voice, he went to the Bible, moved by something other than his own will. There was a complete absence of his self-mastery in this moment.

Suddenly, Augustine felt light flooding into his heart. He felt his will turn away from worldly desires, renouncing them happily and turning to Christ. He ran to Monica to tell her of his transformation, and she was overjoyed. What happened to Augustine in the garden was not a conversion. Rather, it was an elevation in which he rose above his earthly pleasures to higher ones.

This lack of self-mastery and going to the Bible outside of his own was transformative. Augustine didn't realize some new truth or make a conscious sacrifice; rather, he was suddenly filled with light and elevated. He did not need to learn something; he only needed to rise up to what he knew.

Augustine's elevation was a renunciation of the idea of self-cultivation. He realized that **Adam I**'s philosophy—that a hard-working person can create their own life—is ineffective; one doesn't achieve inner joy through agency but through surrendering to God. God has already given a person the rules He wants them to live by and has already justified each person's existence. Also, Jesus has already stood trial for everyone's sins.

Adam I is career-oriented and therefore believes that they achieve satisfaction through their own successes. In surrendering to God, Augustine instead followed Adam II's philosophy that surrendering oneself to something larger than oneself defines a person's character. This is also similar to the institutional mindset, which holds that a person defines who they are by committing to an institution that transcends their lifetime.

For most of his young adulthood, Augustine climbed upward, moving into more prestigious circles. He discovered, however, that a sublime life is low and humble rather than high and exalted. One should approach everything from below, serving instead of mastering. A person's worldly success means little because the Earth is only a stop for the soul on the way to a final destination. Augustine didn't think lowly of human nature, but he believed that human beings weren't capable of reorganizing their desires on their own without submitting to God's will.

Before the garden scene, Augustine followed Adam I's "journey" up the ladder of success. After surrendering to God's will in the garden, Augustine subscribed to the humble person's "journey" of self-sacrifice and service. Augustine realized what little value Adam I's success has when compared to the infinite "final destination" shown to him by God. In recognizing this higher realm, Augustine was finally able to renounce his earthly desires.

Augustine believed a person's life would be terrible if they got what they deserved. God gives a person grace, which is much *more* than they deserve. Grace is a gift that cannot be earned—in order to receive it, one has to stop believing that they can earn it. People are used to thinking they are loved *because* they are this or that good thing. However, God's grace, like passionate love, is unconditionally given.

Brooks emphasizes that God's grace is unconditional love. If God's love were conditional, human beings would live believing that they could earn it through worldly success or good conduct. The fact that God's love can't be earned reveals to a person that their successes and marks of individuality are of no value.

As people rise up to receive God's gift of grace, they transform, and their desires sort themselves out. They achieve self-conquest, but not through a battle of self-discipline. Rather, they achieve it through leaving the self and doing whatever they can to return God's love. After this process, a person feels realigned, and their old desires cease to excite them.

Augustine's form of self-mastery was not a self-battle but a self-forgetting. When Augustine rose to receive God's unconditional love, he transformed into a person of unconditional worth. As a result, he stopped desiring material things and started to return God's love.

Augustine offered a new theory of motivation. His process started with self-examination, then acceptance of God's existence. Next, one is humbled, then they adopt a posture of surrender and empty themselves. This opens them to God's grace. Then follows gratitude and a desire to return God's love. Finally, vast energies are awakened in them. As they become dependent on God, they become more motivated.

Augustine's theory of motivation is founded on dependency, not agency. People often think motivation comes from the idea that a person can achieve anything they want through their own effort. However, Augustine's story shows that humility gives a person the boundless energy to serve.

Augustine's life after his conversion wasn't easy. After his initial flood of optimism, he had to live with the knowledge of his sin. In all his writings, he reminds readers they are not the centers of their own lives and praises a vastness that surpasses the human world. He finished a term teaching lessons he no longer believed in, then left for the village of Cassiciacum with his mother, his son, and some friends, where they engaged in communal spiritual contemplations.

Although self-control was not what caused his conversion, Augustine had to engage in constant self-control afterwards. He became so aware of worldly sin and the illusion of success that he could not remain in his old life. He left the public sphere to write and engage in spiritual contemplation, showing that he put all his energies toward returning God's love.


Augustine's group went back to Africa. On the way, they stopped in Ostia, where he and Monica had a profound conversation. Together, they experienced a hush taking over them by degrees, silencing the world, their desires, and even their praises of God. It was a moment of elevation in which the world grows silent. They were lost in joy, unified in their outward love of God. Monica expressed that her only desire had been satisfied: her son found Christianity.

Monica and Augustine's moment of "hush" resembles Augustine's elevation in the garden, except they were together in the elevation. Everything restless—the world around them, their bodily desires, and even the desire to praise God—was silenced in contemplation of God. This suggests that in devoting oneself to something higher than oneself, a person can escape their earthly desires and experience inner peace.

Augustine's story shows that the proper course toward healing is outward. For instance, one can only achieve inner peace if they forget themselves by focusing on something larger than they are. Also, knowledge isn't enough to motivate one to be good. Only love of God impelled Augustine to active faith.

Augustine's first attempt to heal himself by plunging into his own mind and sorting out its complexities did not heal him. He had to forget himself completely and act under God's will in order for him to "quiet the self."

A few days after her profound conversation with Augustine, Monica died. Augustine was overcome with grief. But the next day, he found solace in weeping for her in God's sight. In his writing, Augustine uses Monica as an example of ardent faith set against worldly ambition and rational thought. He spent the rest of his life preaching and writing. His life took an "advance-retreat-advance" arc in which he descended to submission in order to rise to great height.

Even Augustine's grief found solace in God. Like the person with an institutional mindset, the faithful person is never alone, even when they have no friends of family. This is because they have committed themselves to something that transcends them—either an institution's customs or God's will—and this makes up for the sacrifices they made to join with that larger thing.

CHAPTER 9: SELF-EXAMINATION

Brooks introduces Samuel Johnson, born in Lichfield, England in 1709. Johnson's father was a poor bookseller. Johnson contracted tuberculosis as a baby, which left him blind in one eye, deaf in one ear, and gave him smallpox that scarred his face. In an attempt to treat him, doctors cut into his neck glands. The operation went wrong, leaving him physically monstrous with bad scars. In defiance of his physical disabilities, he refused help from others. He also resisted self-indulgence, a trait he felt sick people were prone to.

Samuel Johnson's poor health and rough physical appearance led him to be hard on himself from a very young age. He was prematurely aware of "life's essential problem"—that human nature was a mix of good and bad qualities—as he could feel his own tendencies toward self-indulgence and self-involved misery due to his bad health. Early on, he also displayed his determination to conquer his own demons, refusing help from others.

Johnson was given a strict, classical education in a school that used physical punishment to discipline its students. All in all, however, he mostly educated himself. He read voraciously through all his father's books and committed hundreds of passages and authors to memory. At 19, his mother inherited a small amount of money to pay for him to attend Oxford for a year. While there, he was rebellious and lazy, but was recognized as having a brilliant mind.

Johnson was smart, but not in a way that cooperated with educational institutions. He was his own worst enemy when it came to his education, as he was lazy and unfocused. However, his brilliant mind shone through his bad nature. Knowing he'd only have one year at Oxford also fortified his determination to find his own way to virtue through his intelligence and his writing.

While at Oxford, Johnson became a Christian. He read a book by William Law that made him warier of self-indulgence and convinced him that worldly things don't satisfy the heart. Knowing that he was smart, he focused on the parable of talents from the Bible and believed that God was strictly watching him to make sure he made use of his abilities.

Johnson put even more faith in his intelligence when he subscribed to Christianity's belief that worldly things are unsatisfactory. Johnson wanted to confront and escape his bad nature, and he would go on to use writing to attack his vices.

After one year at Oxford, Johnson returned to Lichfield with no money left. He fell into depression. He appalled everyone because he couldn't control his body motions, and he had tics and compulsive behaviors. He was so ugly and his behavior so obscene that many people thought he was the village idiot. He tried to teach, but his students didn't respect him. To many people's confusion, he married a beautiful woman, Elizabeth Porter, who seemed to understand his inner virtue.

Johnson is an example of how a person's true virtues transcend their outward appearance. To everyone in town, Johnson appeared to be insane, but in reality, he was shrewdly intelligence and extremely intent on grappling with his divided nature. Johnson could not teach because his students did not respect a man who appeared insane, leaving Johnson once again with writing as his only savior.


In 1737, Johnson moved to London and settled on Grub Street. He scraped by as freelance journalist, writing for anyone and on any subject. In 1738, the House of Commons passed a law that forbade magazines to publish parliamentary speeches. Johnson wrote and published fictionalized speeches that let the public know what was going on in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. The speeches were so eloquent that even the original speakers didn't protest to them, and often they were misquoted as the speaker's own words.

Striking out on his own, Johnson became a freelance writer, writing others' projects rather than his own. Because of this, his success as a writer happened under a disguise—he wrote the parliamentary speeches so well that everyone thought they were original. This concealed Johnson's true excellence as a writer from the public eye for a while.

Johnson was living an unstable life that depended on whatever flashed through his mind. He had neither steady work nor family. He feared his imagination which confronted him with the demons of jealousy, self-hatred, and false hope. He fought these demons violently. When he wrote, he produced huge amounts of work, but was never proud of any of it. But through writing, he constructed a coherent worldview that gave his character stability and wholeness.

The point of view Johnson constructed in his writing was his only stable attribute. Otherwise, he was in the chaotic state of living day by day. The coherence he constructed through writing resembles the outward nature that Eisenhower built through artifice. These examples suggest that sometimes, a person actually becomes a better version of themselves by constructing an artificial self than they do by expressing their true nature.

Johnson was part of a community of artists and thinkers who practiced an intellectual form of heroism and studied the great works of the Western canon. He hung out in taverns. In conversation, he would often switch sides in a debate to emphasize the controversy. Similarly, his writing had a conversational style, alternating between point and counterpoint.

Rather than solving controversy, Johnson liked to emphasize it. In this way, Johnson undertook true examinations of things. Rather than proclaiming his views on a matter, he looked at both sides and argued through to a true conclusion.

Johnson was a dualist, which means he believed paradoxes and contradictions captured life's true complexity. In whatever he wrote about, he always saw the good linked with the bad. He pursued knowledge through life experience and tested his observations in reality. For instance, when he heard someone drowned in a certain spot in the river, he jumped in to see if he could survive.

Like many of Brooks's exemplars, Johnson didn't believe the world was black and white; rather, he believed virtue and vice go hand in hand, even within the human soul. Johnson tested truths through his own experiences, showing that he only consented to objective truths and wouldn't believe anything without evidence.

Johnson didn't believe that politics or social change could solve human problems. He also wasn't a huge believer in science and let his mind roam over many interests instead of devoting himself to one logical system. He believed that each individual had their own particular complexity and dignity. To him, the biggest human problems were moral problems.

Johnson's distrust of politics, social reform, and science reveal his determination to figure out his own problems by himself. From a young age. he was unwilling to accept help from others, believing that moral problems were each person's individual responsibility.

Today, literature is understood in aesthetic terms, but Johnson saw literature as a force for moral improvement. Although he wrote for money, he strove for the ideal of honest writing. He thought lowly of human nature but was sympathetic to it. Instead of hoping to cure his vices, he learned to live with them instead and tried to relieve the pain they caused.

Johnson believed so fully in "life's essential problem" (that human nature is both good and evil) that he didn't seek for cures. Like Frankl, he knew he couldn't cure his personal suffering, so he decided to bravely confront it and learn to live with it.


Johnson was known for his shrewd observations about human vice. In his moral essays, he examined pain, and in so doing, removed some of its power. He observed that many vices lead to their own extinction, but that sorrow only leads to more sorrow. He suggested activity as a defense against sorrow. His writing was geared toward planning strategies for confronting one's weakness. For instance, he used pride to prevent himself from envying someone else.

Johnson tried to demystify many human vices through writing. He would uncover the nature of a vice, and in so doing, destroy some of its power over the human being. Johnson's method shows that through self-examination, a person can understand the nature of their own vices, reduce the pain of them, and learn to live with them.

Johnson used rigorous self-examination to transform his life. The essayist Michel de Montaigne was also intent on finding his way toward self-understanding and moral virtue but did it in a different way. Montaigne was raised by a wealthy, loving family on an estate near Bordeaux. His home life was comfortable, but his public servant role was difficult as he attempted to mediate the religious civil wars going on at the time. He planned to study Roman historians and write works on high policy.

Michel de Montaigne's childhood was starkly different from Johnson's. Montaigne was raised comfortably with many possibilities open to him and without the burden of poverty. He also had a naturally genial nature, unlike Johnson. Although both men examined themselves honestly through writing, their different upbringings gave them slightly different approaches.

Over time, Montaigne grew to believe he was living life wrong in some essential way. When he retired, he discovered his mind was fragmented, skipping from one thought to the next in an erratic manner. He grew depressed and set out to examine his suffering in writing. He realized how hard it was to control one's mind or body and decided most suffering came from people's inability to grasp their inner complexity. He used writing as a means for self-integration.

Johnson started low in life and tried to raise himself higher. Montaigne, on the other hand, started high and lowered himself because he felt he was living in a wrong way. While Johnson started out with the knowledge that human nature is incomprehensibly complex, Montaigne came to this realization through examining his suffering.

Johnson observed things outside himself, gaining self-awareness indirectly. Montaigne, on the other hand, examined himself, hoping to arrive at the true nature of all human beings generally. He constantly revised his manuscripts, giving the impression that his project was easy. In reality, it was an original and intense attempt at self-revelation and honesty. He undertook this project of self-knowledge in privacy, hoping to gain self-respect rather than approval from the public.

Montaigne's project of self-examination was very original; he directly and honestly examined his mind without any intermediary. Like Adam II, he sought self-respect rather than the public approval that Adam I seeks. In this way, Montaigne was concerned with building his own character, not with fame.

Montaigne ended his career because he felt the need to cultivate inner depth and self-respect. His cheerful attitude about his faults charms readers; he admits to all his drawbacks and never gets defensive about them. He discovers that the things people strive for are actually fragile and finite. In his writing, he never claims to be right about anything.

Montaigne rejected the career path that the Adam I side of human nature follows. In so doing, he rid himself of the sin of pride. No longer caring whether he obtained external success, he was able to openly accept his faults and his lack of knowledge.

One day, Montaigne was injured in a horse collision. When he was being carried inside, he tore at his clothes in agony. Once inside, however, he rested and enjoyed the "sweetness" of letting himself go. He realized that no one has to learn how to die, they have only to let nature do it for them. This attitude is reflected in his writing, which always has a calm tone, never giving in to either jubilance or despair.

Montaigne addressed the fear of death by realizing that it could become painless if one simply "let themselves go" to nature. The "sweetness" in letting go is similar to the peace Augustine felt when he surrendered to the will of God. In Montaigne's view, a person's own human nature is the force they should submit to.

Brooks notes that people who are passionate and demand a lot of themselves don't like Montaigne. They think his attitude is nihilistic, disliking that he avoids conflict, has few aspirations, and is emotionally distant. In his writing, he proposes that low expectations lead to happiness. However, he has a higher vision of good which is based on friendship. Friendship, for Montaigne, with its way of holding all things in common, is at the peak of a perfect society.

Montaigne was not passionate and driven like the other characters Brooks tells of. He was not the type to avidly fight for a cause or devote himself to an institution. This is because, in examining human frailty, he decided not to hold himself to higher standards but rather to lower the standards to his level.

Both Montaigne and Johnson were humanists: they used literature to heroically discover the great truths of the human mind. However, Johnson's approach is about struggle and stern self-demand, while Montaigne's is about self-acceptance and geniality. Montaigne was a calming presence while Johnson roused people into moral ardor. Brooks expresses that he admires Johnson over Montaigne because, coming from suffering, Johnson had to work harder to mold himself than Montaigne, who was naturally genial.

Montaigne's lack of passion set him apart from Johnson, even though the two writers had the same approach of honest self-examination. Johnson is more in line with the other exemplars in The Road to Character, *in that he started from suffering and struggled to hold himself to high moral standards. He is a testament to Brooks's notion that a person builds their character from the raw material of their nature.*

In 1746, Johnson signed a contract to put together an English dictionary. He combed through thousands of books to find quotes that contained each definition. He threw himself into the tedious work as a way to calm himself. All in all, he defined 42,000 words and gave 116,000 illustrative quotes. Meanwhile, his wife, whom he called Tetty, fell ill and passed away.

Johnson's dictionary forced him to be patient, hard-working, and studious, unlike how he was during his one year at Oxford. He enjoyed the tedious process because it had this character-building effect on him: it made him restrain the bad qualities in his nature.

The dictionary made Johnson famous and financially stable. He spent the rest of his life socializing with artists and thinkers such as Adam Smith and Edmund Burke. He even socialized with lords and high-class figures but mostly lived with the lower class, often taking indigent and oppressed people under his care. He also ghostwrote for other people, such as when he helped an old sailor near death write up his life's observations on sailing. He also wrote a biography of 378,000 words called *The Lives of Poets*.

Despite the dictionary's success, Johnson's life did not change much. He had become famous, but he still mostly ghostwrote and wrote biographies. This shows that Johnson was sympathetic and more interested in helping others and expressing what they had to say than he was in expressing himself. Similarly, Frances Perkins wrote a biography of Roosevelt but no memoir of herself.

Johnson never achieved peace like Montaigne did. He was plagued by despair and shame. However, he had great character, and was known as an excellent conversationalist. He developed a consistent point of view in which he turned his adolescent rebelliousness toward confronting his own faults. This self-combat redeemed him, and his brutally honest writing helped him confront his demons. For him, every experience was a chance to either degrade or improve himself.

Johnson was always in a state of turmoil. He had an unkempt nature, but he developed a great character nonetheless because he confronted himself and his vices tirelessly. This shows that no matter how bad a nature a person has, they can always redeem themselves through honest self-combat. Character, Brook's claims, is about self-confrontation rather than nature.

Before his death, Johnson recalled a time when his father asked him to man his bookstand in the market, and he had refused out of shame. He returned to the spot of the bookstand in his old age and rebuked himself for his shameful refusal. As his death approached, he increasingly feared damnation. He carried around a note reminding himself not to sin. Before dying, he asked to be taken off opium because he didn't want to meet God "in a state of idiocy."

Johnson was never happy—rather, he led a life of suffering, which Brooks earlier describes as a "fearful gift." This fearful gift put Johnson in a state of constant self-criticism and shame, which magnified his great character. In this way, his character came at the expense of his happiness.

Johnson is an example of human wisdom. From a chaotic childhood, he developed an integrated way of seeing and judging the world that was more emotional than it was intellectual. Although he was born one of the world's outcasts, he had a tremendous capacity for hard work and sympathy. He wrestled with himself honestly, saw through his motives and thoughts, and was sensitive to the world around him. When he died, the nation mourned the loss of someone irreplaceable.

Earlier in the book, Brooks described wisdom as knowing what it is one doesn't know. Johnson knew from a young age that he was flawed, and as a result, he was able to examine himself without bias or illusion. Although he was an outcast, he developed a way of "seeing and judging" that was entirely honest and wise.

CHAPTER 10: THE BIG ME

In the 1969 Super Bowl, the quarterbacks Johnny Unitas and Joe Namath faced each other from opposing teams. Both had grown up in Pennsylvania, but they came from different moral cultures. Unitas grew up in the old culture of self-effacement. He went to strict Catholic school that told the students they'd be failures. He dedicated himself to football. He was turned down by several colleges and teams before being called to join the Baltimore Colts.

Brooks uses Johnny Unitas and Joe Namath's face-off in the Superbowl to illustrate the shift in culture from an attitude of self-renunciation to an attitude of self-love. Johnny Unitas represents moral realism: his upbringing and education taught him to not to think too highly of himself and to devote himself seriously to football as a vocation.

Unitas slowly but steadily improved as a player and strengthened his teammates. He had a notoriously understated personality and looked like a boring salesman. He was serious about football and approached it like an honest worker doing an honest job. Even though he became well-known, he was unglamorous, never puffing himself up.

Unitas's attitude and appearance were also a reflection of an old culture. He was humble and reserved and always acted as a team player rather than a standout individual. These things all reflect the self-renunciation of the old moral philosophy.

Joe Namath, on the other hand, grew up half a generation later in a different moral culture. His personality was confident, extroverted, and entertaining. He was always the center of attention and wore flashy clothes. His life philosophy was to follow his desires. He was self-absorbed and proud of it and didn't seek commitments to anything. Instead, he embodied an ethos of "The Big Me."

Joe Namath's extroversion and flashy personality showed that he considered himself the center of the universe. He embraced the self-celebratory attitude that Brooks noticed in a modern-day quarterback that contrasted so starkly against the humility of the radio hosts during World War II.

Many people think the cultural shift from Unitas's humility to "The Big Me" was due to the self-expressiveness of the 1960s hippies. Brooks gives the true story: in biblical times, a tradition of moral realism taught that all humans are flawed. Moses and David, for instance, were biblical heroes with flaws. Augustine developed this by emphasizing the human need for grace. Then writers like Eliot and Montaigne emphasized the limits of human knowledge. Humans are limited in many ways: their reason is too limited to understand themselves, they are drawn perversely to vice, and they can't complete themselves alone.

The concept of moral realism—the self-renunciation philosophy—came initially from the Bible and was developed through subsequent thinkers and writers. This philosophy emphasized all the ways in which human beings are limited: they are not self-completing, they have a weakness for vice, and they can't understand themselves.

In the 18th century, moral romanticism emerged which emphasized human beings' inner goodness. While the moral realists distrusted the self and trusted society, the moral romanticists distrusted society and trusted the self. The two traditions lived side-by-side. Each character Brooks describes grew up in the 20th century with the vocabulary of moral realism. Then, in the late 1940s, moral realism collapsed. The hardships of the Great Depression and World War II caused people to look for a more positive philosophy of themselves.

Moral romanticism—the philosophy of self-love—emerged independent of the 1960s peace movement, contrary to what many people think. Moral romanticism did not take full hold until the Great Depression era, when the hardships became so intense that people could no longer bear moral realism's negative tone. This suggests that moral romanticism, although perhaps less fundamental than moral realism, has some benefits to boosting morale in hard times.

Books came out with the positive affirmation people wanted. Their philosophies proposed a new morality that involved loving oneself rather than suppressing oneself. *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale suggested that people banish negative thoughts and pep talk themselves to success; psychologists determined that the biggest psychological problem is that people don't love themselves enough.

Instead of moral realism's logic of self-renunciation, moral romanticism encouraged self-expression. Because people were thinking more positively about human nature, they started to crave happiness rather than character. This led to a more Adam I way of thinking—maximizing natural talents to gain happiness.

This cultural shift is a response to circumstances. The moral shift to self-love helped improve many social injustices such as the oppression of women. Katherine Meyer Graham was able to free herself from a life of subservience during this time. She was raised to be a perfect housewife and married a man who subtly demeaned her. After her husband committed suicide, she was elected president of the *Washington Post*. The new wave of self-love emboldened her to break from her oppressed role and become a powerful figure.

Brook's acknowledges that moral romanticism had its benefits, as it was instrumental in many civil rights movements. In the feminist movement, for example, the positive thinking of moral romanticism provided the necessary spark for freeing long oppressed people. In this way, Brook's suggests that moral romanticism is useful for jolting society into better behavior, but not for a long-term philosophy of morality.

The understanding of human nature was changed by the shift to the "Big Me." The shift led people to believe that everyone is perfect within and that one's desires are oracles for what is right and true. This means that morality is no longer found in external, objective goods. Rather, morality is determined by each unique individual. Therefore, sin is believed to exist outside the self, in society.

Moral romanticism changed society's conception of morality. Previously, moral realists' distrust of themselves meant that they put their trust in an external moral order. This made morality objective. With the arrival of moral romanticism, society started to distrust the external morality and trust internal, individual feelings. This destroyed morality's objectivity.

Advancements in technology alter moral culture in three ways: first, communication is so fast that it's harder to hear the quieter voices that come from a person's inner self, where their moral desires lie. Also, with technology, people construct environments that suit themselves, thereby putting themselves at the center of their universe. Lastly, technology divides a person, because they can present an external self that is different from their internal one.

Brook's claims that moral romanticism was exacerbated by technology. This is mostly because technology makes communications fast and vibrant, which isn't the language that a person's inner self speaks in. In this way, technology separated people from their internal selves and drew them into the loud, fast-paced external world.


The meritocracy, or the "Big Me" culture, supports self-aggrandizing behavior. It encourages individuals to make an impact, which leads to a competitive environment. This high-pressure meritocracy views the self as a resource to be cultivated. The sensational book by Dr. Seuss *Oh the Places You'll Go!* perfectly sums up this meritocracy. The main character is told he has amazing talents and is given total freedom to fulfill his desires. Also, the goals the boy pursues are external: fame and success.

The extreme of a culture of moral romanticism is a meritocracy. Brook's criticizes Dr. Seuss's Oh the Places You'll Go!, *a popular graduation gift, in order to show just how much moral romanticism is baked into modern society's mindset. The main character of this book longs for is external success that isn't related to inner character.*

This culture causes people to think a lot of themselves and their talents, which leads to a society that over-emphasizes work. This in its turn causes people to develop a utilitarian logic, viewing everything as an opportunity to advance their status. "Character" changes to mean resilience, confidence, tenacity—anything that makes them stand out. In order to achieve as much as possible, they will avoid any commitment that limits their time.

Brooks suggests that moral romanticism leads to a society that over-values career. Early on, he made a clear distinction between a vocation and a career: a vocation is work that essentially becomes a person's core self, in that they devote themselves to a cause that transcends themselves. A career, however, is the external success through which a person tries to gain self-worth.

Brooks believes that the shift to the "Big Me" culture went too far. It went from positivity to self-branding and finally overboard to a competitive meritocracy. The meritocracy focuses on **Adam I** but neglects **Adam II**, which leaves people imbalanced, without fulfillment of the soul. The meritocracy tells a person *how* to get to the top, using status to tell them they are doing right. But it doesn't teach them to ask *why*, and so they never learn to point their lives in a meaningful direction.

Although moral romanticism's initial positivity was beneficial, it ultimately damaged society by turning it into a meritocracy. Brooks claims that a meritocracy widens the gap between the Adam I and Adam II sides of human nature, cutting off people's desired selves from their actual selves. Although people know better how to get success now, they have no idea why *they are living.*

In one example, the meritocracy has corrupted the bond of parenthood in two ways: firstly, children now receive such excessive praise that they develop lofty aspirations. Secondly, children's talents are groomed and honed. Although children these days are showered in love, it is conditional love that steers them toward worldly success.

Children in meritocracies are loved conditionally, so that they feel they need to earn their parents' love. Although it looks as though children are loved more than ever, it is only because parents are showering them with gifts and praise because they want to prepare them for success.

Like parents in the 1950s, parents today still want their children to be obedient, but they have hidden this motive in the disguise of merit-based approval. When a parent praises their child for certain talents, the possibility of their disapproval lurks just out of sight. This puts enormous pressure on children, causing them to believe they are loved only if they earn it. Parents unconsciously view their children as projects they can engineer to produce desired results. Rather, parenthood should exist outside the meritocracy and be founded on unconditional love.

When children are loved conditionally, they always fear that love will be withdrawn if they aren't successful. In the story of Augustine, it was essential for him to understand that God's love was unconditional—that Augustine didn't have to do anything particular in life to earn it. This unmerited love gave Augustine the energy and courage to transcend the material world and develop a steady character outside of his societal role.

These shifts in culture have made people morally inarticulate. They have made society materialistic; statistics show that teenagers rank fame and wealth much higher than they used to in their goals. Also, they have made society individualistic. People believe the true answers are found in their perfect selves, leading them not to engage with others or seek their counsel. People are less empathetic and trusting. Statistics show a general increase in words such as "self" and a decrease in words such as "community."

Brooks suggests that in general, moral romanticism causes community to disintegrate. Since people trust themselves rather than the society around them, the basis for connecting with others disappears. Each individual becomes a unique bundle of feelings leading their own moral paths based on these unique feelings. Because people are encouraged to trust themselves, no one looks to others for moral guidance.

Adam II's moral dictionary has shrunk, leaving people at a loss for how to articulate moral problems. For instance, when asked in an interview to share a moral quandary he'd faced recently, a teenager shared a time when he didn't have enough money to pay the parking meter. When a person believes they create their own worldview, they become emotivist—making moral judgements based on feelings. They also become relativist, having no basis on which to judge morality with another individual. Lastly, they become individualist, believing they are moral arbiters.

Since people no longer rely on community as heavily, morality ceases to have a communal or objective meaning. Morality has become subjective—moral problems are synonymous with individual emotions. Therefore, morality as a word starts to lose meaning. For the moral realists, morality was a standard they held themselves to. Now that no one tries to be better than their natural self, the standard starts to disappear altogether.

Leo Tolstoy's novel *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is the story of a successful man who one day takes a fall and ends up on his deathbed. Although he has led a seemingly happy life with a good job and reputation, he suddenly doubts that his life has been satisfactory at all. His marriage was rushed and ended up cold, and he'd been too focused on money. He'd had impulses to act against convention but ignored them.

Ivan Ilyich is in the state of dissatisfaction that happens when there's a gap between one's desired self and their actual self. This happened because to Ivan because he spent his life focusing on his external success—the Adam I side of his nature. Therefore, his inner core—his Adam II—remained out of reach his whole life.

Tolstoy paints the dramatically unhappy picture of a man without an inner life. Many people are like the character Ivan, living along with social conventions that insufficiently fulfill them. Therefore, part of the answer is to stand against the society that promotes only the **Adam I** side of human nature.

Brook's encourages people to rebel against the status quo that emphasizes the external life. Although in many cases conformity can define a person's character, in a meritocracy, conformity shrivels the inner life.

Each society creates its own "moral ecology"—a set of norms, habits, and moral demands—in response to the problems of the moment. In the last several decades, the moral ecology has been built around **Adam I** only, leading to a narcissistic society. To restore balance between our Adam I and **Adam II** natures, we must go back to what we've left behind and ask the important questions, such as: How should I orient my life? How do I mold my nature so as to be better?

Brook's is not trying to turn back time—he recognizes that a "moral ecology" is always an appropriate response to certain societal problems. However, he believes that the current moral ecology of excessive moral romanticism is creating its own set of problems which demand a new moral ecology along the lines of moral realism.

Brooks sums up his themes in 15 points. *1.* Human beings seek lives of purpose, not lives of pleasure. *2.* The road to character starts with the understanding that human beings are flawed creatures. *3.* Human beings are divided, both flawed and "splendidly endowed." *4.* Humility is human nature's greatest virtue. *5.* Pride is human nature's biggest vice.

Each one of Brooks's points is illustrated by at least one of his exemplars. Each biography was a tale of sacrifice and formative suffering, proving that humans prefer purpose to happiness. Samuel Johnson's nature—tormented with bad feelings yet intelligent—proved that human nature is flawed and endowed. Moreover, several of the examples support Brooks's belief that humility is the greatest human virtue—humility caused each character to devote their lives to something larger than themselves and thereby find themselves. Augustine, meanwhile, shows that pride is the central human vice: it was at the root of his obsession with external success as a delusional path to self-worth and at the root of his illusion that he could master himself.

6. The struggle against vice and toward virtue is the central "drama" of human life. *7.* Character is not natural but is built through the process of self-confrontation. *8.* The things that lead us off course are short-term, such as lust and vanity, while the things that constitute character are long-term, such as courage and humility.

Dorothy Day proved that the purpose of life is to struggle toward virtue at the expense of simple pleasure. Eisenhower and Marshall were prime examples of people who built artificial second selves that were better than their natural selves. In this way, they built character.

9. No person achieves self-mastery without help from outside, such as from community, God, or tradition. *10.* People are saved by grace—an unconditional love that gives a person gratitude and the desire to serve back. *11.* To defeat weakness, one must quiet the self. *12.* Wisdom is not knowledge but rather knowing how to behave when one knows nothing.

Augustine and George Eliot showed that love and community help a person forget their own desires, master themselves, and serve others. Unconditional love saved and steadied both of them. Montaigne and Samuel Johnson were able to honestly and objectively examine themselves by accepting the fact that their own minds were vast and incomprehensible.

13. Every good life is organized around a vocation, a calling. *14.* The best leaders work gradually and incrementally to effect change. *15.* The person who struggles against their weaknesses becomes mature and centered.

Frances Perkins shaped her entire life and character around her vocation—the cause of workers' rights. Randolph, Rustin, and Eisenhower knew that in order to effect societal change, they had to restrain their own potential for vice and act moderately.

The people in *The Road to Character* followed different roads to character. Even though they subscribed to moral realism, they approached it in different ways. They all had one similarity, however: they all started out with a vulnerability that took them a lifetime to transcend. Ultimately, they were each redeemed by that weakness. From their struggle, each built a great strength.

Brooks made his collection of biographies as varied as possible to show that there are many roads to character. In general, Brooks wanted to show that character is something that people build, not something they're born with. A common thread is that each character had a vice or weakness that they repressed and a strength they built in its place.

Brooks leaves the reader with the good news that it is okay to be flawed, since everyone is. Everyone sins and stumbles through life. However, one attains self-understanding through humility, and one attains wholeness through struggle. Everyone is unified by their common sin, and everyone must rely on their community to help them confront their weaknesses.

The flawed person reaches toward goals that are beyond the individual scope. They fail, find dignity in failing, and rise to the challenge again with new strength. Over a lifetime of building character, outer ambition comes into balance with inner aspiration, and a person achieves a "flow," their moral nature and external skills uniting toward the same end. With this feeling comes joy, a hushed, peaceful feeling of knowing why they are here in this life.

The Road to Character *is also meant to make people feel less alone. It comforts the reader with the knowledge that even great people struggled with vice. In putting together a collection of life stories, Brooks provides a community to assist readers who want to build character.*

Brooks concludes The Road to Character *with a description of the "flow" or "hush" that a person feels when their inner values are at last in line with their outer behavior. This "hush" or sense of peace is present at the end of each biography, even if it is accompanied by sacrifice and pain. For instance, Dorothy Day experienced immense gratitude, while Augustine experienced peace. Ultimately, then, Brooks suggests that building inner character, rather than chasing external success, is what will fulfill people and give them purpose.*

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