

DOES MANLY COURAGE EXIST?

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INTRODUCTION

If you are a man, you probably have been subjected to it throughout your life, I would imagine. I am referring to the societal summons for you to fulfill the obligations of your gender: “step up like a man,” “act like a man,” and a precursor when you were very young, “big boys don’t cry.” Me, I am especially taken with the injunction these days to “*Man Up*.” More economical than its predecessors, the call to “man up” pithily encapsulates the idea of manliness. For to be a man requires that you *do* something.¹ Perhaps your dear mother adores you as the apple of her eye, but, trust me, no one else—including (or is it especially?) your wife—takes her cue from Billy Joel’s schmaltzy serenade and loves you *just the way* you are.² (And who are you kidding? Not even your mom really feels that way.)

No. You, my poor bloke, are instead told to comply with the expectations of your community—*Man Up*. What does manning up entail, though? While its meaning, like that of many aphorisms, is imprecise, the injunction to man up when distilled to its essence is meant to prompt a man to comport himself with valor. For you are only urged as a matter of idiom to man up in situations of danger. Consider these examples: The rookie cop is solemnly tutored by the hardboiled veteran detectives that he must man up sooner or later and chase down suspects into dark alleys; the aging quarterback is reminded by his fans to man up and wait in the pocket for that ideal pass even as burly linemen charge to trounce on him; the nebbish assistant professor is urged by his exasperated wife to man up to his dean and ask why he was not promoted; the habitual drunk is chided by his brother to man up and face the fact that he is an alcoholic, and thus to confront a humiliating truth. As these examples suggest, men become men as a cultural matter only when they overcome some danger or risk, only when they have demonstrated courage.

The unstated but intimidating premise in these examples is that failure to man up will emasculate you as a coward. To conscript another epigram, albeit one more vulgar, you have to *prove your balls*; should you falter, you would

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¹ Anthropologist David Gilmore concludes that for many cultures “being a ‘real man’ or ‘true man’ [is] uncertain or precarious, a prize to be won or wrested through struggle” DAVID D. GILMORE, *MANHOOD IN THE MAKING: CULTURAL CONCEPTS OF MASCULINITY* 1 (1990).

² BILLY JOEL, *Just the Way You Are*, on *THE STRANGER* (Columbia 1977).

become the symbolic instantiation for the corresponding female pudenda.³ (Tellingly, there is no analogous admonishment for females to “woman up,” although there are familiar warnings for women to tamp down their masculinity, to cool their metaphoric balls, and to behave demurely, more “lady-like.”⁴) This is not, furthermore, an exclusively American phenomenon, as you probably surmised. The axiom that men must prove their courage has been embraced by cultures around the world, from nomadic Sub-Saharan tribes to sedentary suburbanites in places like Bowling Green, Kentucky.⁵

One can also consult older, more scholarly ruminations about the connection between manliness and courage. The etymological relationship between the two is instructive. Take the Latin root *vir*. It forms part of “virtue” which, as conscripted by Christianity, has come to represent traits modeled after Jesus, including humility and forgiveness.⁶ But *vir* has a meaning which predates Christianity. For the ancients *vir* was shorthand for “man.”⁷ Those words which derived from *vir* also referred to courage, including *virtus*, or in its Anglicized form, *virtue*.⁸ Consider how the mischievous philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, who, although living in a sixteenth-century Italy ruled in part by the Pope, subverted the Christian ideal of virtue.⁹ Exhorting his Italian prince to oust the invading Turks from Florence, Machiavelli quoted Petrarch, the great Italian poet, who wrote:

Virtue will take up arms against fury,
and make the battle short,
because the ancient valor in Italian hearts
is not yet dead.¹⁰

No olive branch of Christian forgiveness, Petrarch’s virtue is itching for a fight—and a fierce one at that, which will “make the battle short.”¹¹ Today, we find remnants of this older Roman association between *vir* and manliness in *virility* and *virulent* with their respective connotations of masculine spiritedness and potent destructiveness. Latin, incidentally, was not alone in making the equation between being a man and being brave. In ancient Greek, *andr-* meant adult man and formed *andreia*, which meant courage.¹² In Hebrew GEV(B)URA (courage) was derived from the root G-B(V)-R (man).¹³

³ For those seeking scholarly connections between manliness and courage, see John M. Kang, *The Burdens of Manliness*, 33 HARV. J.L. & GENDER 477, 486–95 (2010).

⁴ See, e.g., *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*, 490 U.S. 228, 235 (1989) (arguing that male partners in a top accounting firm denied partnership to a woman in part because she refused to heed warnings to behave more ladylike).

⁵ See Kang, *supra* note 3, at 488–91.

⁶ See BEING GOOD: CHRISTIAN VIRTUES FOR EVERYDAY LIFE 9 (Michael W. Austin & R. Douglas Geivett eds., 2012) (arguing that Christians should model themselves after God and emulate His humility and forgiveness).

⁷ Kang, *supra* note 3, at 487.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ See Harvey C. Mansfield, *Introduction to NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI, THE PRINCE* xvi (Harvey C. Mansfield trans., 2d ed. 1998).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 105.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Kang, *supra* note 3, at 487.

¹³ *Id.*

This is interesting stuff, I hear you murmur, but, well, . . . since this Essay appears in a law journal, . . . what does it have to do with . . . the *law*? A lot, actually. I have explored that connection between law and manliness in previous work.¹⁴ And, as much as I would enjoy surreptitiously rehashing it (although, I confess, there is a bit of rehashing in this Essay¹⁵) and receiving credit anew, I instead will invite the reader to peruse it elsewhere. Perhaps I may suffice for now to say that the expectation for men to behave with courage, or to suffer the ignominy of gender failure, permeates the government's justifications for a host of policies. Congress defends restricting the military draft to men based on the view that they are more courageous than women, a decision upheld by the Supreme Court.¹⁶ Military courts martial have only disciplined male soldiers for the formal offense of "cowardice," as though it were natural to expect courage from men, but not women.¹⁷ State criminal laws exploit men's fears by permitting the excuse of deadly self-defense only for, in the law's words, a "man of courage," not a "coward."¹⁸ A prestigious public mili-

¹⁴ See *id.* at 491–92.

¹⁵ Part I is derived from my article, *The Burdens of Manliness*. See *id.* at 500–07.

¹⁶ See *id.* at 496–500. The Supreme Court case at issue was *Rostker v. Goldberg*. See *Rostker v. Goldberg*, 453 U.S. 57, 59, 78–79 (1981). However, views may be changing. The Pentagon recently lifted the ban on women participating in combat. See Lolita C. Baldor, *Women in Combat: Leon Panetta Removes Military Ban, Opening Front-Line Positions*, HUFFINGTON POST (Jan. 23, 2013, 8:32 PM), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/23/women-in-combat_n_2535954.html.

¹⁷ Kang, *supra* note 3, at 495–96. During the Second World War there was only one instance of a soldier being formally executed by the American military for cowardice. See RICHARD HOLMES, *ACTS OF WAR: THE BEHAVIOR OF MEN IN BATTLE* 339 (1985). Nevertheless, other men have been issued less severe punishments, as shown below. The following are cases where the American military court found evidence of "cowardice" by male soldiers under Article 99: *United States v. Brewer*, 39 C.M.R. 388, 393 (A.B.R. 1968) (assigning punishment of hard labor for one year, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and reduction to the grade of Private E-1); *United States v. Gross*, 38 C.M.R. 408, 409, 412 (C.M.A. 1968) (affirming board of review's decision for punitive discharge plus hard labor for two years); *United States v. Williams*, 38 C.M.R. 156, 157, 161 (C.M.A. 1968) (affirming board of review's punishment for dishonorable discharge and confinement at hard labor for three years); *United States v. Richmond*, 11 C.M.R. 442, 442–44 (A.B.R. 1953) (affirming punishment of dishonorable discharge, total forfeiture, and confinement for six months); *United States v. Meirthew*, 11 C.M.R. 450, 451, 453–54 (A.B.R. 1953) (affirming punishment of dishonorable discharge, total forfeitures, and confinement at hard labor for three years); *United States v. Heistand*, 3 C.M.R. 209, 211 (A.B.R. 1952) (assigning punishment of dishonorable discharge, total forfeitures, and confinement at hard labor for fifteen years); *United States v. Mercer*, 2 C.M.R. 420, 423–24 (A.B.R. 1952) (assigning punishment of dishonorable discharge, total forfeitures of pay and allowances, and confinement at hard labor for twenty years); *United States v. Roberts*, 2 C.M.R. 462, 464 (A.B.R. 1952) (assigning punishment of dishonorable discharge, total forfeiture of pay and allowances, and confinement at hard labor for 15 years); *United States v. Soukup*, 2 C.M.R. 393, 395 (A.B.R. 1952) (assigning punishment of dishonorable discharge, total forfeitures, and confinement at hard labor for fifteen years); *United States v. Vineyard*, 2 C.M.R. 346, 348 (A.B.R. 1952) (assigning punishment of dishonorable discharge, total forfeitures of pay and allowances, and confinement at hard labor for fifteen years).

¹⁸ See, e.g., *Wheeler v. State*, 175 S.E. 540, 542 (Ga. 1934) ("To justify a homicide the fears of the slayer must be those of a reasonable man, one reasonably courageous, . . . and not those of a coward."); *Commonwealth v. Weinberg*, 120 A. 406, 407 (Pa. 1923) (holding that the claim of self-defense required a showing of imminent danger in the mind of an

tary academy denied admission to women because they were deemed to be lacking the courage which men allegedly possessed.¹⁹ Judicial opinions, even landmark ones, are not exempt; in cases whose facts would not seem to bear any manifest relationship to gender, judges seek purchase for their decisions by invoking the mantra that men must be brave.²⁰

I have argued in earlier work that such expectations, especially when enforced by the law, create intense stress for men to adhere to an ideal of manliness.²¹ Men are alleged to enjoy liberation and autonomy vis-à-vis women. However, men, shouldered with the expectation that they must fulfill their collective destiny as courageous beings, in actuality live with acute fear, and under some circumstances, relentless terror.²² Stated otherwise, what sometimes impels courage—that most manly of virtues—is the most embarrassing of feminine vices—cowardice.²³

I discuss this paradox in Part I, and I will follow with two more paradoxes of manly courage. In Part II, I will complicate the picture I draw in Part I. Courage is generally understood as the conscious overcoming of some known fear. However, Part II will show that courage (or what is taken for courage) is half in love with the terror. Instead of dreading the danger, men sometimes are drawn feverishly to it. The suffering that men endure in moments of danger is frequently mixed, Part II will suggest, with an exhilaration that gives rise to moments of extraordinary pleasure. Part III will complicate, further, the first two sets of arguments about courage. Courage is supposed to be conscious of some known risk (otherwise it is ignorance masquerading as valor), but Part III will suggest that courage, or its semblance, is most required in moments that afford virtually no time to assess the risk; the manliest of virtues is frequently occluded by its own impulses. In treating courage as the chief virtue of manliness, then, we often as not obscure manliness's meaning.

I. THE FIRST PARADOX: THE BURDENS OF MANLINESS

If men are expected to prove their manliness through acts of valor, there is no more vaunted arena than military combat. Hockey, boxing, football—they are all dangerous—but military combat exposes you to something qualitatively different than the danger of sport. War exposes you to unparalleled terror, to situations that call for unimaginable reserves of courage. Unlike football, military combat anticipates that you, a combat soldier, may suffer a violent death, or—perhaps just as wretched—grisly wounds that leave you pleading for your

“ordinarily courageous man”); *People v. Lennon*, 38 N.W. 871, 872 (Mich. 1888) (“[I]f a man kills . . . through mere cowardice, or under circumstances not warranted to induce in his mind a reasonable fear of injury, . . . the law of self-defense would not apply, and would not justify such an act.”). For commentary on these cases, see Kang, *supra* note 3, at 492–93.

¹⁹ See *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S. 515, 520, 524 (1996). For discussion about the case, see Kang, *supra* note 3, at 485–86.

²⁰ See, e.g., *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357, 375–77 (1927) (Brandeis, J., concurring) (arguing that the logic of free speech requires men to be courageous and to tolerate seemingly dangerous views). For commentary on *Whitney*, see Kang, *supra* note 3, at 493–94.

²¹ See Kang, *supra* note 3, at 500–07.

²² *Id.* at 500.

²³ *Id.* at 500–03.

death. There is also the corollary dread of having to bludgeon some anonymous chap, like yourself, who has a family and who never did you any personal harm.

Nevertheless, many men enlist for service, or when drafted, resist temptations to flee. A chief reason is that they are afraid of being outed as cowards, as gender failures.²⁴ Let Tim O'Brien, the novelist and the combat veteran, narrate. O'Brien, a brainy and sensitive college graduate, had been accepted for doctoral studies at Harvard.²⁵ Unfortunately for him, he was also drafted by the military to fight in Vietnam.²⁶ He did not want to go and, although moral objections to the war did stir him, O'Brien's main objection was fear—he was terrified of dying in combat.²⁷

But, as much as he was afraid of violent death, he was even more afraid of being denounced a coward—and hence being publicly unmanned—by his tightly knit Minnesota town.

My hometown was a conservative little spot on the prairie, a place where tradition counted, and it was easy to imagine people sitting around a table down at the old Gobbler Café on Main Street, coffee cups poised, the conversation slowly zeroing in on the young O'Brien kid, how the damned sissy had taken off for Canada.²⁸

So O'Brien reported for duty.²⁹ Once in Vietnam, O'Brien realized that his fear of emasculation was shared by others.

[The soldiers] carried [their] greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to. It was what had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor. They died so as not to die of embarrassment.³⁰

For O'Brien's battalion, "the object was not valor," but instead, "they were too frightened to be cowards."³¹

O'Brien was hardly the only one who felt compelled to fight in war because he was afraid of being mocked as a coward. Philip Caputo was another combat veteran of Vietnam.³² Unlike O'Brien, however, he was not drafted into the army.³³ Caputo was a gung-ho enlistee in the Marines.³⁴ Nonetheless, the same general impulse that spurred O'Brien also moved Caputo. The latter was gripped by a wrenching fear that he had to prove himself lest he suffer the shame of emasculation.

A nineteen-year-old living with his parents in a comfortable suburb of Chicago, Caputo bemoaned his lot as "depressing."³⁵ "I felt that my parents regarded me as an irresponsible boy who still needed their guidance" and "I

²⁴ *Id.* at 500–07.

²⁵ TIM O'BRIEN, *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED* 39 (First Mariner Books 2009) (1990).

²⁶ *Id.* at 38.

²⁷ *Id.* at 42.

²⁸ *Id.* at 42–43.

²⁹ *Id.* at 58.

³⁰ *Id.* at 20.

³¹ *Id.* at 21.

³² See PHILIP CAPUTO, *A RUMOR OF WAR* xiii (1996).

³³ *Id.* at 6.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.* at 7.

wanted to prove them wrong.”³⁶ Caputo’s motive for enlisting in the Marines was “one that has pushed young men into armies ever since armies were invented: I needed to prove something—my courage, my toughness, my manhood, call it whatever you like.”³⁷ Caputo, like the other enlistees in Officer Candidate School (OCS), was tormented physically and psychologically by his drill instructors, but his fear of torment could not submerge his more formidable fear that he would fail the Marines and be sent home, to suffer emasculation. “Nothing [the drill sergeant] could do could be as bad as having to return home and admit to my family that I had failed. It was not their criticism I dreaded, but the emasculating affection and understanding they would be sure to show me.”³⁸ Caputo continued: “I could hear my mother saying, ‘That’s all right, son. You didn’t belong in the Marines but here with us. It’s good to have you back. Your father needs help with the lawn.’”³⁹

In Caputo’s mind, failure to prove himself in the Marines amounted to a failure to become a man. Should he be booted by the Marines, he would be greeted at home by his *mother*, the most emasculating figure in a young man’s life, who would beckon him from harm, as she had done when he was a helpless infant. “You didn’t belong in the Marines but here with us,” she would try to console him.⁴⁰ Once home, Caputo, who could not hack it as a grown man, would be consigned to the same chores that he did as a seventh grade boy— “[y]our father needs help with the lawn.”⁴¹ If returning to the middle-class suburbs of Chicago represented physical safety for Caputo, it also represented his cultural death as a man. So desperately afraid was Caputo of not making the cut for the Marines that he was consumed by paranoia: “I was so terrified of being found wanting that I even avoided getting near the candidates who were borderline cases—the ‘marginals,’ as they were known”⁴²

To Caputo’s confession, I could also add were it not for spatial limitations, those of British troops in World War I⁴³ and American soldiers from the Civil War.⁴⁴ They too eschewed hackneyed celebrations of their courage. Instead, like Caputo and O’Brien, they attributed their seemingly valorous conduct to an irrepressible fear that they would unman themselves if they acted like cowards.⁴⁵ These soldiers, I have argued at length elsewhere, were saddled with the “burdens of manliness.”⁴⁶

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.* at 6.

³⁸ *Id.* at 10–11.

³⁹ *Id.* at 11.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ See Kang, *supra* note 3, at 502.

⁴⁴ See *id.* at 503–04.

⁴⁵ See *id.* at 502–04.

⁴⁶ See generally *id.* at 486–507. Nancy Dowd does a terrific job of mining different disciplines to show that one must suffer a host of burdens and fears in order to become an acceptable man. See NANCY E. DOWD, THE MAN QUESTION: MALE SUBORDINATION AND PRIVILEGE 7, 21, 28, 43–44, 58–60 (2010).

II. THE SECOND PARADOX: WHEN THE BURDENS ARE BLISSFUL

So far, I have suggested that what motivates male soldiers to do seemingly brave acts is, ironically, a relentless fear that they would be accused of being cowards. Thus, what passes for courage may very well be a sort of cowardice in drag. But, as this section will show, the anxiety of a combat soldier is one that is mixed incestuously with a partial love of the anxiety itself. What I have dubbed the *burdens* of manliness exist as more than a collection of repugnant obstacles whose negotiation yields nothing other than grimacing pain. These “burdens” also paradoxically are experienced by men, or at least some of them, as moments of matchless pleasure and gratification.

Let us turn to some firsthand narratives starting with that of Oliver Wendell Holmes. Before he became the famous justice, a college-aged Holmes enlisted as a young soldier in a Massachusetts regiment during the Civil War.⁴⁷ A member of a distinguished family in Boston, he could have easily dodged military service, but like Philip Caputo, he was eager to prove his manliness. Holmes, indeed, proved it, over and over, having been wounded thrice, one time nearly dying.⁴⁸

Looking back, a middle-aged Holmes, now a judge on the Massachusetts Supreme Court, reflected on his wartime experiences. He delivered a Memorial Day speech at Harvard before the graduating class of 1895.⁴⁹ Holmes did not sugarcoat the horrors of war. He asked the audience to imagine being a combat soldier, feeling “the burst of the spherical case-shot,” seeing “the shrieking fragments go tearing through your company,” and knowing “the next shot carries your fate.”⁵⁰ Imagine, too, Holmes said, fighting for twenty-four hours and witnessing in the morning “the dead and dying lay piled in a row six deep,” as “your foot slip[s] upon a dead man’s body.”⁵¹ Holmes had also told a different audience in an 1884 Memorial Day Speech that war was comprised of “freezing winter bivouacs” and “those dreadful summer marches where every faculty of the soul seemed to depart one after another, leaving only a dumb animal power to set the teeth and to persist,—a blind belief that somewhere and at last there was rest and water.”⁵²

Why do men like Holmes submit themselves to such ordeals? Holmes, at one point, appears to attribute his willingness to what I earlier called the burdens of manliness—the collective expectation that men fulfill their ideal as

⁴⁷ G. EDWARD WHITE, *JUSTICE OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES: LAW AND THE INNER SELF* 45 (1993).

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 3, 68.

⁴⁹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., *The Soldier’s Faith*, Address delivered on Memorial Day at a meeting called by the Graduating Class of Harvard University (May 30, 1895), in 3 *THE COLLECTED WORKS OF JUSTICE HOLMES: COMPLETE PUBLIC WRITINGS AND SELECTED JUDICIAL OPINIONS OF OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES* 486, 486 (Sheldon M. Novick ed., 1995) [hereinafter *Holmes, Soldier’s Faith*].

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 487–88.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 488.

⁵² Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., *Memorial Day*, Address delivered before John Sedgewick Post No. 4, Grand Army of the Republic at Keene, N.H. (May 30, 1884), in 3 *THE COLLECTED WORKS OF JUSTICE HOLMES: COMPLETE PUBLIC WRITINGS AND SELECTED JUDICIAL OPINIONS OF OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES*, *supra* note 49, at 462, 466 [hereinafter *Holmes, Memorial Day*].

courageous beings or face unmanly ridicule. “Who is there who would not like to be thought a gentleman?” Holmes asked.⁵³ “Yet,” he continued, “what has that name been built on but the soldier’s choice of honor rather than life?”⁵⁴ “To be a soldier,” Holmes said, “[is] to be ready to give one’s life rather than to suffer disgrace.”⁵⁵

For Holmes, however, there was more to being a man than having to shoulder the fearsome burdens of manliness. Being a man entailed the *thrill* of performing those ostensive burdens. “War, when you are at it,” Holmes observed, “is horrible and dull.”⁵⁶ “It is only when time has passed,” he explained, “that you see that its message was divine.”⁵⁷ For Holmes, war was divine in hindsight because it gave men an opportunity to raise themselves from the idiotic and easy pleasures of civilian life and to test their manliness to the fullest in the forum of mortal struggle.⁵⁸ Holmes bewailed that, men in civilian life, in “this snug, over-safe corner of the world,” spend their lives “revolting at discipline, loving flesh-pots, and denying that anything is worthy of reverence.”⁵⁹ The “joy of life is living,” and to live life to its fullest is “to put out all one’s powers as far as they will go; that the measure of power is obstacles overcome; to ride boldly at what is in front of you, be it fence or enemy; to pray, not for comfort, but for combat.”⁶⁰ Remarking about the soldiers of his generation, Holmes said, “[w]e have shared the incommunicable experience of war; we have felt, we still feel, the passion of life to its top.”⁶¹ That the Civil War soldiers who would face violent death were nothing but youths, generally in their twenties, was not to be lamented, thought Holmes.⁶² His generation of young men, on both the Northern and Southern sides, were called to give up the prime of their lives, but Holmes’s reaction is not spiked with regret or resentment. It is one of unvarnished gratitude for having received a “great good fortune”: “Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire. It was given to us to learn at the outset that life is a profound and passionate thing.”⁶³

By evading the experience of combat, the civilian absentees had missed a “great good fortune.” Neither money nor fame—the familiar ends of pursuit in civil society—could compare with a young man’s experience of combat, of having his young, callow heart “touched with fire.” To be touched with fire meant for Holmes that the young men who fought had their valor, and therefore their manhood, tested in the most excruciating terms. From this tribulation, Holmes and his fellow soldiers learned what it meant to embrace a passion to the fullest, to give everything that a man could muster for a moral cause and to receive in turn the greatest fulfillment of manliness. In his speech, Holmes fur-

⁵³ Holmes, *Soldier’s Faith*, *supra* note 49, at 487.

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 489.

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 490.

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.* at 487.

⁶³ Holmes, *Memorial Day*, *supra* note 52, at 467.

nishes an astonishing alternative to conventional Memorial Day speeches, which usually entreat the civilian audience to pay obligatory homage to the dead soldiers for their ultimate sacrifice. Holmes refuses even to solicit the public's pity on behalf of his fallen comrades.

He instead celebrates the soldiers, who, while young and vibrant, found in war the imperative to bring to bear everything that their souls could muster. "Our dead brothers still live for us, and bid us think of life, not death,—of life to which in their youth they lent the passion and glory of the spring."⁶⁴ Note how Holmes characterized the horrors of combat as a season of *birth*—"the passion and the glory of the spring," a surprising and evocative metaphor for something that is intuitively associated with death. Combat, even as it obliterated the innocence of young men, along with their lives, was also the manna which nourished the young men's yearning for "passion" and "glory."

In 1895, Holmes, now fifty-three, elaborated what he had said at the Memorial Day speech ten years prior. Worth quoting in its entirety is this block:

The ideals of the past for men have been drawn from war, as those for women have been drawn from motherhood. . . . I do not know the meaning of the universe. But in the midst of doubt, in the collapse of creeds, *there is one thing I do not doubt*, that no man who lives in the same world with most of us can doubt, and that is that the faith is true and adorable which leads a soldier to throw away his life in obedience to a blindly accepted duty, in a cause which he little understands, in a plan of campaign of which he has no notion, under tactics of which he does not see the use.⁶⁵

Holmes acknowledged his ignorance about life's ultimate ends ("I do not know the meaning of the universe."). But there is something that he finds to be "true" and "adorable"—the soldier's faith. What makes this faith so noble for Holmes is that it is tested under inconceivable stress. Required to kill, to die violently, to suffer a sadistic parade of wounds, dysentery, canon blasts, hunger, thirst, terror, and borderline insanity, the combat soldier in the Civil War had only the vaguest idea about the political motivations for the war and had almost no knowledge about the particular strategy in which he had been installed as a dispensable cog. Most men, Holmes seems to believe, could not marshal the courage to endure these things.

By contrast, asserts Holmes, a genuine soldier, and hence a genuine man in his own eyes, would "throw away his life in obedience to a blindly accepted duty." It is not necessary to win medals to obtain one's manliness. Rather, for Holmes, simply by doing one's job to the fullest, without complaint or question, makes one a fully-realized man. And for a man to die in battle, Holmes suggests, is therefore to have died as the highest ideal of his gender.

At one point in his speech, Holmes goes so far as to extol the soldier's sacrifice, his highest proof of manliness, as akin to a "miracle." "You know your own weakness and are modest; but you know that man has in him that unspeakable somewhat which makes him capable of miracle, able to lift himself by the might of his own soul, unaided, able to face annihilation for a blind belief."⁶⁶ The ignorance and confusion of a combat soldier in wartime cannot,

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ Holmes, *Soldier's Faith*, *supra* note 49, at 487 (emphasis added).

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 488.

in Holmes's view, impede the soldier's faith in himself, and as long as he has that, he will be the epitome of manliness. Indeed, without the challenges posed by ignorance and confusion, the soldier would have enjoyed the comfort of knowledge and clarity. He never would have had the chance to test his resolve, his manliness; accordingly, under Holmes's logic, wars are to be embraced, not dreaded. There is an ethereal and cold quality in Holmes's descriptions of war; he sketches a world of disembodied, faceless men immersed in abstract conflicts. In the excerpts that I quoted, Holmes does not speak of the camaraderie of soldiers. The journalist Sebastian Junger does at length, however. Junger spent fifteen months in 2007 and 2008 embedded with the 173rd Airborne in Afghanistan. A powerful reason why men are attracted to combat, Junger argues, was because they want to protect each other. Combat represents not merely horror but, for some of the soldiers, an opportunity to test their love for each other. Junger remarks that "[p]erfectly sane, good men have been drawn back to combat over and over again, and anyone interested in the idea of world peace would do well to know what they're looking for."⁶⁷ It was not killing per se but "the other side of the equation: protecting."⁶⁸ Based on his observations in Afghanistan, Junger comments: "The defense of the tribe is an insanely compelling idea, and once you've been exposed to it, there's almost nothing else you'd rather do. The only reason anyone was alive [at the base camp] was because every man up there was willing to die defending it."⁶⁹

Bear in mind: The collective defense Junger alludes to is not reducible to rational calculation. It was a test of the men's valor, to what extent they would sacrifice themselves for the next man in the battalion. And collective defense, at some point, became its own end: For the soldiers in the 173rd Airborne, "[c]ollective defense can be so compelling—so addictive, in fact—that eventually it becomes the rationale for why the group exists in the first place."⁷⁰ So intense was the soldiers' longing to defend others, Junger states, that "I think almost every man at [the base camp] secretly hoped the enemy would make a serious try at overrunning the place before the deployment came to an end."⁷¹

The paradoxical and symbiotic relationship between loathing and desire in manly courage is evident in Junger's observation: "It was everyone's worst nightmare but also the thing they hoped for most, some ultimate demonstration of the bond and fighting ability of the men."⁷² By being that which "they hoped for most" and an "ultimate demonstration" of both their collective "bond" and their individual "fighting ability," the defense of the battalion spoke to the same impressions that found their way into Holmes's speeches. In Afghanistan, like in battlefields of the American Civil War, young men's hearts were being "touched with fire" and being bestowed a "great good fortune" where they were learning that "life is a profound and passionate thing."

Some soldiers, intoxicated by the exhilaration of protecting their comrades, sought a return to combat. Junger reports:

⁶⁷ SEBASTIAN JUNGER, *WAR* 214 (2010).

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 215.

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

For sure there were guys who re-upped because something like that hadn't happened yet. After the men got back to [Italy], I asked Bobby Wilson [one of the soldiers] if he missed [combat].

"I'd take a helicopter there tomorrow," he said. Then, leaning in, a little softer: "Most of us would."⁷³

Wilson was not reenlisting because he feared that civilians would taunt him as a coward if he didn't. He wanted to taste again the passion of life that Holmes had extolled.

Other soldiers throughout history have given voice to the same desire. Samuel Hynes was a Marine fighter pilot in World War II who won a Distinguished Flying Cross and, later, became an English professor at Princeton. He writes without embarrassment that "[w]ar is a test—of courage, of manhood, of self—that they are anxious to pass; and it is a *romantic* one, beyond anything else that life is likely to offer them."⁷⁴ Like Junger and Holmes, Hynes also dissolves the boundary between dread and exhilaration, burdens and pleasures. For Hynes, war is a "test" that engenders "anxiety"; it is also more "romantic" than the dull safety of civilian life.

A fighter pilot whom Hynes quotes, this one an Englishman from World War I, concluded with bittersweetness at the end of the war:

So it was over. I confess to a feeling of anti-climax, even to a momentary sense of regret. . . . When you have been living a certain kind of life for four years, living as part of a single-minded and united effort, its sudden cessation leaves your roots in the air, baffled and, for the moment, disgruntled.⁷⁵

Like the soldiers in Junger's 173rd Airborne, this British soldier missed the exceptional feeling of purpose as he and his comrades manned together—"the single-minded and united effort"—to prove their collective mettle. At the conclusion of war, he felt an "anti-climax, even to a momentary sense of regret."⁷⁶ The words appear to rue what Holmes had called "the passion and glory of the spring" that bloomed in a young combat soldier.⁷⁷

Such sentiments are likewise expressed by another English pilot from World War I, Duncan Grinnell-Milne. Grinnell-Milne had logged over 2000 flying hours and was captured as a P.O.W. by the Germans, hardly the stuff of happy reminiscence. Nonetheless, he describes the end of the war—a war in which his side prevailed, mind you—with melancholy. "And with the final break-up of the squadron everything that had given zest to life seemed to have gone too."⁷⁸ *Zest to life*. Here again is language that echoes Holmes's remark that his comrades in the Civil War bade him think "of life to which in their youth they lent the passion and glory of the spring."⁷⁹

British Field Marshal Wavell is less interested in the existential meanings of a lone man's courage than the proven achievements of his nation's men, the valor that dwells in their racial stock. For Wavell, like the soldiers in Junger's

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ SAMUEL HYNES, *THE SOLDIERS' TALE: BEARING WITNESS TO MODERN WAR* 137 (1997).

⁷⁵ *Id.* at 99.

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ Holmes, *Memorial Day*, *supra* note 52, at 467.

⁷⁸ HYNES, *supra* note 74, at 100.

⁷⁹ Holmes, *Memorial Day*, *supra* note 52, at 467.

173rd Airborne, the war provides a blessed opportunity to prove their craft as professionals, and Wavell takes pride in the racialized courage exhibited by his Anglo-Saxon soldiers.

This war has shown, as others have before it, that the British make the best fighters in the world for irregular and independent enterprises. Our . . . commandos . . . have proved that where daring, initiative, and ingenuity are required in unusual conditions, . . . men can be found . . . from . . . fighting men of the British race.⁸⁰

Note how the burdens and the benefits of manliness are sort of merged in the passage. A man's burden of having to suffer violent death, and having to inflict it, is necessary to produce his daring, initiative, and ingenuity—qualities that make a man great. Men need the burden to derive the benefit, and the burden in its own right is not unwelcome, in Wavell's view.

Richard Hillary, an Oxford student and enlistee in the Royal Air Force, takes a more philosophical, less nationalistic, view than Wavell. Wavell celebrated the achievements of his troops; for him, the collective valor of the Anglo-Saxon is vindicated on the battlefield. Hillary, by contrast, takes solace in the morally austere terms of combat. What makes combat attractive to Hillary is its utter absence of conventional morality with its insistence on accommodation, civility, equal respect—democratic virtues that hobble the strong and protect the weak. In combat, Hillary reflects, the only moral measure of a man is his courage. Against the emasculating compromises of civil society, combat permits you to test yourself as a man in gloriously lucid terms. Hillary recounts shooting down a German fighter plane in World War II: “My first emotion was one of satisfaction . . . [a]nd then I had a feeling of the essential rightness of it all.”⁸¹ Hillary continues, “He was dead and I was alive; it could easily have been the other way round; and that would *somehow have been right too*.”⁸²

Hillary's narrative, like the others that I have excerpted in this section, suggests that courage, or what we know as courage, is also not uncommonly mixed with unparalleled excitement and joy, even as manly courage is supposed to do battle with morbid trepidation. In the subsequent section, I follow this paradox with a third and final one: When courage is most required, it is least likely to regard itself as such. Put in gendered terms, when men are most expected to man up, they are least likely to be able to take a gauge of the cultural import of what they do.

III. THE THIRD PARADOX: WHEN COURAGE HAS NO TIME—OR DESIRE— TO REGARD ITSELF AS COURAGE

Logic would seem to require courage to be contemplative. For courage, however defined, requires its possessor to *know* that what he does is dangerous and to know that danger in the correct proportion. Consider a familiar authority in *Webster's Dictionary*, which defines courage as the “mental or moral strength enabling one to venture, persevere, and withstand danger.”⁸³ Embedded in the definition is the assumption that courage, before it can “venture,

⁸⁰ HYNES, *supra* note 74, at 122.

⁸¹ *Id.* at 126.

⁸² *Id.* (emphasis added).

⁸³ WEBSTER'S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY 522 (1993).

persevere, and withstand” some danger, must first recognize the existence of that danger. Under this formulation, if you casually walk over a land mine thinking that it is some random bump in the road, you are not acting bravely; you are acting ignorantly and, if there was good cause for you to have known about the land mine, foolishly. William Tecumseh Sherman, the fierce Northern general in the Civil War, insists that a knowledge of danger is a prerequisite for courage: “I would define true courage to be a perfect sensibility of the measure of danger, and a mental willingness to incur it, rather than that insensibility to danger of which I have heard far more than I have seen.”⁸⁴

The thesis advanced by General Sherman and *Webster’s Dictionary*—that to be courageous you have to know that what you do is dangerous and know it to the correct degree—is examined famously, if rather briefly, by Plato. Written in 380 BC, Plato’s *Laches* involves a debate between Nicias and Laches about the meaning of courage. Socrates is asked by the two men to mediate their dispute, and during the arguments, Nicias remarks that “[t]here is a difference, to my way of thinking, between fearlessness and courage.”⁸⁵ “Do you imagine,” Nicias asks Laches, “that I should call little children courageous, which fear no dangers because they know none?”⁸⁶ Nicias continues, “I am of opinion that . . . rashness and boldness, and fearlessness, which has no forethought, are very common qualities possessed by many men, many women, many children, many animals.”⁸⁷ For Nicias, courageous actions must be “wise actions.”⁸⁸ Wise actions, in turn, must, by Nicias’s logic, involve “forethought”⁸⁹: Before someone is dubbed courageous, he must have thought meaningfully about the danger that he sought to overcome or endure.⁹⁰

There is one problem that immediately attends the account of courage on offer by Nicias, which is essentially the same as that wrought by *Webster’s Dictionary* and General Sherman. Nicias implies that courage is contingent on recognizing the danger and, hence, overcoming a fear of that danger, yet those circumstances in which soldiers are most required to prompt their courage do not afford opportunity for such deliberation. Therefore, we do not know what, if not courage, is impelling such outward daring.

Perhaps no contemporary writer has spent as much time pondering the version of courage forwarded by Nicias than has Tim O’Brien, whom you probably remember from the beginning of this Essay. Writing about his experiences as a combat soldier drafted in the Vietnam War, O’Brien subscribed to the view that courage—to be courage—required a sober understanding of the relevant risk. He ponders: “Was the cow, standing immobile and passive, more

⁸⁴ WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN, *SHERMAN: MEMOIRS OF GENERAL W. T. SHERMAN* 886 (1990).

⁸⁵ PLATO, *LACHES, OR COURAGE* 30 (Benjamin Jowett, trans., Forgotten Books 2008) (380 BC).

⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁸⁷ *Id.*

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *See id.*

⁹⁰ See the definition of courage in *WEBSTER’S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY*, *supra* note 83, at 522.

courageous than the Vietnamese boys who ran like rabbits from Alpha Company's barrage? Hardly. Cows are very stupid."⁹¹

Even those who displayed what appeared to be stunning courage were warily eyed by the then young O'Brien. Consider the case of Doc, the battalion medic. The other day "he ran from his foxhole, through enemy fire, to wrap useless cloth around a dying soldier's chest."⁹² Yet Doc, to O'Brien's chagrin, does not seem to reflect on courage.⁹³ "I reacted, I guess. I just did it," Doc replies.⁹⁴

The dialogue continues, with O'Brien asking another question, and with Doc further disqualifying himself in O'Brien's eyes by seemingly failing O'Brien's other criterion for courage—a knowledge of danger. O'Brien asks Doc, "Did you think you might be shot?" Doc answers:

"Yes. I guess I did. Maybe not. When someone hollers for the medic, if you're a medic you run toward the shout. That's it, I guess."

"But isn't there the feeling you might *die*?"

Doc had his legs crossed and was leaning over a can of C rations. He seemed intent on them. "No. I won't die over here." He laughed. "Maybe I'll never die. I just wondered why I didn't feel anything hit me. Something should have hit me, there was so much firing. I sort of ran over, waiting for a kind of blast or punch in the back. My back always feels most exposed."⁹⁵

With these words, Doc, for all his incredible feats, does not come across to O'Brien as a courageous hero.⁹⁶

There is reason to suspect, however, that O'Brien's denouncement rests on unrealistic expectations. O'Brien, like Nicias, insists that courage must be the product of studied deliberation.⁹⁷ But courage, or what conventionally passes for it, tends to be most vital in moments that do not afford time for deliberation. Return to Doc's response to O'Brien's question about whether the former felt he "might be shot."⁹⁸ Doc had said: "Yes. I guess I did. Maybe not. When someone hollers for the medic, if you're a medic you run toward the shout. That's it, I guess."⁹⁹

There is no time for Doc to take a calm measure of his actions and weigh whether they satisfy some heralded standard of valor. Re-read General Sherman's definition of courage: "I would define true courage to be a perfect sensibility of the measure of danger, and a mental willingness to incur it, rather than that insensibility to danger of which I have heard far more than I have seen."¹⁰⁰ *Perfect* sensibility of both the measure of danger *and* the willingness to incur it? How would anyone in Doc's position be able to make even ballpark guesses of either element in a given situation where he finds himself having to react within seconds? The only thing which Doc has the luxury to register is the

⁹¹ TIM O'BRIEN, *IF I DIE IN A COMBAT ZONE* 141 (1975).

⁹² *Id.* at 142.

⁹³ *See id.* at 143.

⁹⁴ *Id.* at 142 (internal quotation marks omitted).

⁹⁵ *Id.*

⁹⁶ *Id.* at 144.

⁹⁷ *Id.* at 143–44.

⁹⁸ *Id.* at 142.

⁹⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰⁰ SHERMAN, *supra* note 84, at 886.

prospect of danger, death: “I just wondered why I didn’t feel anything hit me. Something should have hit me, there was so much firing. I sort of ran over, waiting for a kind of blast or punch in the back. My back always feels most exposed.”¹⁰¹

Notwithstanding the fear of imminent attack, Doc reacts to save others. His reasons for doing so are at once simple and illuminating: “[I]f you’re a medic[,] you run toward the shout. That’s it, I guess.”¹⁰² Rather than being preoccupied with being brave, Doc is focused on his work. He defines himself by his professionalism, not conclusions of philosophy.

It’s not just Doc, either. Other soldiers also throw themselves into peril without being conscious that what they do is courageous. Sebastian Junger observed of the 173rd Airborne that “[t]he combat medic’s first job is to get to the wounded as fast as possible, which often means running through gunfire”¹⁰³ “Medics are renowned for their bravery,” Junger writes, “but the ones I knew described it more as a terror of failing to save the lives of their friends.”¹⁰⁴ For the medics, “[t]he only thing they’re thinking about when they run forward to treat a casualty is getting there before the man bleeds out or suffocates; incoming bullets barely register.”¹⁰⁵ Notice how Junger’s description uncannily echoes that of O’Brien’s Doc.¹⁰⁶ Notice also how there is no time for the fabled “perfect sensibility of the measure of danger” which General Sherman had lauded as the criteria for courage.¹⁰⁷ Even Sherman eventually backpedals from his definition, opting for the opinion that “[t]he most courageous men are generally unconscious of possessing the quality; therefore, when one professes it too openly, by words or bearing, there is reason to mistrust it.”¹⁰⁸

Likewise, Junger reports that “[m]ost firefights go by so fast that acts of bravery or cowardice are more or less spontaneous.”¹⁰⁹ He elaborates: “Soldiers might live the rest of their lives regretting a decision that they don’t even remember making; they might receive a medal for doing something that was over before they even knew they were doing it.”¹¹⁰

Junger tells us of Salvatore Giunta, the only living soldier to have received, since the Vietnam War, the Medal of Honor, the highest commendation for valor.¹¹¹ Giunta would eventually save his entire unit from a Taliban ambush as his unit faced gunfire from every direction, a veritable “wall of lead,” according to a subsequent military report.¹¹² Giunta “estimates that not

¹⁰¹ O’BIEN, *supra* note 91, at 142.

¹⁰² *Id.*

¹⁰³ JUNGER, *supra* note 67, at 58.

¹⁰⁴ *Id.*

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

¹⁰⁶ See O’BIEN, *supra* note 91, at 142.

¹⁰⁷ SHERMAN, *supra* note 84, at 886.

¹⁰⁸ *Id.* at 886–87.

¹⁰⁹ JUNGER, *supra* note 67, at 120.

¹¹⁰ *Id.* at 120–21.

¹¹¹ Daniel P. Finney, *Medal of Honor Winner: “I Am as Ordinary as They Come”*, USA TODAY (Nov. 30, 2012, 11:20 PM), <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/11/30/medal-of-honor-winner/1738663/>.

¹¹² JUNGER, *supra* note 67, at 119–20.

more than ten or fifteen seconds elapsed between the initial attack and his own counterattack,” hardly enough time to reflect on whether he was being courageous.¹¹³

According to Junger, most civilians, under enemy fire, would have “experienced those ten or fifteen seconds as a disorienting barrage of light and noise and probably have spent most of it curled up on the ground,” but Giunta “used those fifteen seconds to assign rates and sectors of fire to his team, run to Gallardo’s assistance, assess the direction of a round that hit him in the chest, and then throw three hand grenades while assaulting an enemy position.”¹¹⁴

Like O’Brien’s Doc, Giunta attributes his actions to his institutional role, not courage: “I did what I did because that’s what I was trained to do.”¹¹⁵ Perhaps this is a bid for modesty but I tend to believe that Giunta is being sincere. As a member of an elite platoon, Giunta presumably *had* been trained to perform certain defined tasks in the event of chaos and to carry out those tasks without being encumbered by excessive deliberation. So, notwithstanding the expectations of O’Brien and Nicias, it is quite natural for Giunta to attribute, without fanfare, his actions to his training rather than to some ponderous idea of courage.

In spare prose, Giunta, looking back, narrated those actions which would earn him the Medal of Honor:

There was a task that had to be done, and the part that I was gonna do was to link alpha and bravo teams. I didn’t run through fire to save a buddy—I ran through fire to see what was going on with him and maybe we could hide behind the same rock and shoot together. I didn’t run through fire to do anything heroic or brave. I did what I believe *anyone* would have done.¹¹⁶

Giunta, instead of speculating about courageous motives, narrows the scope of what he did to a series of technical tasks (“I was gonna . . . link alpha and bravo teams.”). Nor does he ascribe to himself a heroic desire to rescue others (“I didn’t run to save a buddy . . . I ran through fire to see what was going on. . .”). And, instead of recounting a cinematic narrative of overcoming fear, Giunta opts for prudence (“maybe we could hide behind the same rock and shoot together”). He wraps up by reiterating that his was only the function of collective and uniform training (“I did what I believe *anyone* [meaning any soldier in the 173rd Airborne] would have done.”). Compare these words with O’Brien’s assertion that “[c]ourage is more than the charge.”¹¹⁷ For Giunta, the logic of a soldier’s function is the reverse: the charge—or, more broadly, the obligations of one’s job—are more important than courage, a subject which does not elicit Giunta’s commentary. Indeed, Giunta, the Medal of Honor recipient, appears flatly agnostic about the meaning of courage, describing his actions as something that any competent soldier in theory could have done were he in the same situation.

Giunta’s public recourse to vocation, rather than courage, is common among soldiers. Junger relevantly observes that “heroism is a negation of the

¹¹³ *Id.* at 121.

¹¹⁴ *Id.*

¹¹⁵ *Id.* (internal quotation marks omitted).

¹¹⁶ *Id.* (internal quotation marks omitted).

¹¹⁷ O’BRIEN, *supra* note 91, at 141.

self—you're prepared to lose your own life for the sake of others—so in that sense, talking about how brave you were may be psychologically contradictory."¹¹⁸ "Try telling a mother she was brave," he states, "to run into traffic to save her kid."¹¹⁹ Junger supplements his reflections with this perfectly eloquent passage by Chief Ed Crocker of the New York City Fire Department who, in a eulogy, tried to make sense of the deaths of five firemen in 1908: "Firemen are going to get killed. When they join the department they face that fact. When a man becomes a fireman his greatest act of bravery has been accomplished. What he does after that is all in the line of work."¹²⁰

Chief Crocker holds that the act of *joining* the fire department is courageous, for that act is strictly voluntary and, thus, presumably involves deliberation. Crocker thereby echoes Nicias's insistence that courage must be "wise," the result of "forethought."¹²¹ But, after the firefighter has formally assumed his obligations, philosophical attempts to calibrate his inner courage are fatuous. Instead, all that matters is how well he does his job. Further, unlike philosophical queries about a man's courage, which necessitate corollary exploration into interior issues of motivation, queries about job performance are easier to answer as they involve the assessment of outward conduct. (Worth remembering is that Nicias and his friends are dissecting courage as a matter of intellectual inquiry from the comfort of safety, while Chief Crocker must face the very real possibility that he will send men to violent deaths, everyday). Besides, a firefighter, when a catastrophe most requires his gallantry, tends to lack the chance to indulge in Nicias's "forethought" about whether his actions are truly courageous or just the result of impulse or professional training, or something else.

Nonetheless, those who do not confront significant mortal danger as part of their daily jobs do not quite grasp the notion that professional obligation does not necessarily entail courage. As Junger remarked, it is still the case that "[c]ivilians understand soldiers to have a kind of baseline duty, and that everything above that is considered 'bravery.'"¹²² On the other hand, "[s]oldiers see it the other way around: either you're doing your duty or you're a coward."¹²³ This latter dichotomy is surely prompted in part by the difficulty in identifying states of "courage" during those exigencies when courage, or something resembling it, is indispensable. Soldiers also may eschew deliberations about courage because such deliberations contemplate what courage had to confront—one's fragile mortality. A soldier named O'Byrne in Junger's unit explained: " 'You can't let yourself think about how close this shit is, . . . Steiner [another soldier] was saying to me, 'What if the bullet—' and I just stopped him right there, I didn't even let him finish. I said, 'But it didn't. It *didn't*.' " ¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ JUNGER, *supra* note 67, at 211.

¹¹⁹ *Id.*

¹²⁰ *Id.* (internal quotation marks omitted).

¹²¹ PLATO, *supra* note 85, at 30.

¹²² JUNGER, *supra* note 67, at 211.

¹²³ *Id.*

¹²⁴ *Id.* at 196.

Combat's success, therefore, hinges in part on *not* thinking about dangers and, ironically, not thinking about corollary issues of courage.¹²⁵ As Philip Caputo remarks of his experiences in Vietnam, when you are away from combat "there was too much time to brood," but in combat "there would be very little time to think."¹²⁶ For Caputo, "[t]hat is the secret to emotional survival in war, not thinking."¹²⁷ Thus reads the paradox, then: the more you are required to be brave, the less you are actually able to assess whether you are brave when circumstances most demand it.

IV. JUST THE WAY YOU ARE

Three years ago, the pop star Bruno Mars released a song, ubiquitously broadcast in every Burger King, supermarket, and dentist-office-reception area in the United States, and which shares the same title as Billy Joel's *Just the Way You Are*.¹²⁸ Billy sweetly, and in his own style, discreetly, crooned in the 1970s that, although he did not know about the rest of the world, *he* would "love you just the way you are," but Bruno went one better (or worse, depending on your view). Bruno sang—no, celebrated—that you were "*aaah—mayyy—zing . . . just . . . the . . . way . . . you . . . are . . .*" and that "when you smile, the whole world stops and stares for a while."¹²⁹ You, blessed reader, are no longer just lovable in the eyes of one, as you were in the '70s; in the 2010s, you are now *amazing* in the eyes of all. Amazing, indeed. Simply for being you. Perhaps it is a sign of our times, in the early twenty-first century, with its democratic narcissism, that such an unblushingly idiotic paean to self-esteem is received without irony as a species of pedestrian praise.

But no matter how frequently Bruno Mars is, like some nightmarish Orwellian propaganda, played everywhere we go, indoctrinating us with the message that all of us are "amazing" for no other reason than we have blood coursing through our carotid arteries, one thing remains the same: No man can consider himself a true man, or be seen as one, without the perceived possession of courage, that most manly of virtues. No man, according to society, is amazing, or even plain acceptable, unless he proves his mettle. That does not mean that courage alone will suffice to make you a man but, for good or ill, without it, no one will think of you as one.

Easier said than done, though. This Essay has argued that identifying something as courage is anything but straightforward. For courage, as I have suggested, is weirdly paradoxical. Courage is sometimes impelled by the vilest feminine vice, cowardice. Courage, conventionally understood as the overcoming of a loathsome fear, is sometimes head drunk in love with that ostensive object of fear. Courage needs time to calibrate the danger and what is necessary to overcome the fear attending that danger, but courage has no time for such measure when courage is most necessary.

¹²⁵ *Id.*

¹²⁶ CAPUTO, *supra* note 32, at 231.

¹²⁷ *Id.*

¹²⁸ BILLY JOEL, *supra* note 2.

¹²⁹ BRUNO MARS, *Just the Way You Are*, on DOO-WOPS & HOOLIGANS (Elektra Artists 2010).

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If courage is so paradoxical, so barbed, how do we make sense of it as the supremely male virtue? How do we make sense, in short, of what it means to be a man?