Secure in One's Identity

Part One

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Let us begin with some definitions and explanations of some basic concepts germane to our discussion, so that, as we use such terms as personality, character, moral character, personal identity, virtue ethics, morality, and other key ideas critical to our study, I will feel more secure concerning the meaning of the more important terms.

Personality and Character

Personality. When we speak of personality, we refer mainly to certain inborn traits and tendencies in the human being. A human being may be shy, defensive, outgoing, or talkative. Some people are inclined to be leaders, while other are content to follow. Some people act on the spur of the moment, while other are very analytical and hesitant before they speak and act. Some people are task-oriented, while others are more sociable, preferring to share and relate to others.

Classification by personality traits. Because humans beings have a variety of styles, or dynamisms, in their relationships to one another and to their environment, they are considered classifiable psychologically and sociologically according as they manifest specific styles of adaptation: that can take to form of dominance, imposing influence, steady or reliable compliance or, contrarily, indecision, etc. There are, of course, many other ways of categorizing personality traits of people.

Character. It makes no difference whether your personality describes you as an introvert (*e.g.,* a shy or recluse) or an extrovert (*e.g.,* outgoing or gregarious person); the worth of your character is determined by how you treat others. As you work at following the rules of your Judeo-Christian culture, you are rightly deemed morally decent and noble. When you have right attitudes and good habits (*i.e.,* virtues) toward doing what is objectively good and, sometimes, very difficult, your character will be ultimately judged good, right and just by the God of goodness, the Source of all truth, and Champion of the poorest and most defenseless. He alone shows us the way to perfect peace, total happiness, true love, and authentic freedom.

Yes, our Creator alone knows what is authentically human, for He alone has the manual of instructions whose contents explain in detail how human components fit and work together purposively, how they require an adequate intake of liquids, gases and solids, and how they required regular rest for the longest of endurance and the best of performance.

We belong to God. All human beings are let out on lease. Nobody owns them. They belong to Him and, in the last analysis, they must be returned to Him unless, of course, they have willingly been given to the evil one–which, of course, is possible. Character is what keeps the person and personality in good condition; this means that the person will be driven with care on the varied roads of life, will be maintained in accord with what the Good Book says, and will be used for purposes that are unselfish, giving Him always glory, thanksgiving and praise.

Character has to do, principally, with attitudes and values that are found both in the Good Book and in what His assembly of saved and baptized have

taught from before the beginning of recorded time. Authentic instruction must be endorsed by those authorized to render regular maintenance and only official service products must be used; substitute products will be tried solely at your own risk. Practically speaking, life education, maintenance tips, and trouble-shooting are taught by parents, teachers, friends from the assembly, maintenance authority, and committed people of goodwill. The best education comes from the good example of others observed by attentively insightful learners. Leisure and serious thoughts and reminiscences about God and life's purpose sharpen our perception and deepens our insights, enhancing the quality and meaning of observations.

Character and guilt. Honesty is a positive character trait; and dishonesty, a negative character trait. If an individual's upbringing contributes to distrusting others and to questioning their goodwill, such negative influences may spark a desire to break the law. Deliberately breaking a legitimate law that serves the good interest of human beings is a moral evil, for it is against human nature; *i.e.,* against what human being are supposed to be. Guilt is the voice of God's Spirit; it is an alarm telling us that we going off course, that we are in trouble, that we need to make corrections.

Personality, unlike character, depends on the "basics" or the "given" with which we have been born. Our parents–in most cases, it is our mother–help us to form a right conscience; that is, they help us use our mind or intellect logically to discern what is, in fact, good and to recognize the right means or appropriately human behavior to acquire the sought-after goodness and happiness. Increased knowledge can produce continued growth in character. Knowledge alone, however, cannot produce virtue and the virtuous life.

Conscience

"Conscience" is an interesting word; it comes from two Latin words: "con" from the Latin word "cum" meaning "with"; and the Latin word "scientia" meaning "knowledge". And, so, putting the two words together, "conscience" literally means "with knowledge". Your parents–or the significant others lovingly taking their place–appealing to your power to know things (*i.e.,* your intellect) teach you those things are objectively good and those things are objectively evil; they teach you, moreover, that to do good you must avoid evil.

Knowing Power–to be or not to be human? Your conscience is that part of your intellect (*i.e.,* your material brain along with your spiritual power or faculty) that allows you to know and to determine whether a human action is morally good or morally evil–that is, to know whether or not our behavior is appropriately human. Interestingly, the word "moral," in ethical life, can be neatly equated to the word "human": for example, if I do something that is "immoral", what I am, in fact, saying is that my action is not appropriate for a human being.

All human beings experience the universal "I must" law. As we said above, it is taken for granted that in order to do good we–like all human beings– must avoid evil. All mentally healthy people know in their heart there exists the very real notion and need of "I must"–even though they might have been taught wrongly about what that "true" good might be.

The universal Lawgiver is God. We have already established that the idea "must" implies a law to which all human beings are obliged. Since all human beings are, down deep in their very soul, subject to the same "I must" obligation, logic demands that we say:

- If all people have, in some way, a sense of "I must"–no matter what the issue might me–that dictates "This I must do" and "That I must not do", we can conclude that there is implanted within each human soul a power or faculty generating feelings of guilt and moving the person to obey–*e.g.*, "I must".

- The idea "must" implies a law.

- A law implies a Lawgiver.

- This Lawgiver must be supreme since all people come under His "I must" obligation or law.

- This Lawgiver we call God.

Here, then, based on human conscience, is an argument proving the existence God. Blessed John Henry Newman has, in his works, appealed to this argument.*

We are not destined to repeat the sins of our fathers. Although we, as children, learn the basics about character from our parents, life itself, as we grow older, teaches us about the virtues me must develop in order to achieve an overall sense of intellectual and emotional integration and inner peace.

Even though we know the difference between right and wrong, our frail human nature is not constant in doing good. Our freedom allows us to choose lesser goods or even evil. Hence, we see ambivalence and ambiguity in our lives. For example, we might be meek at work but demanding and assertive at home. Or, we may be devious in business dealings but devout and honest at church and among our fellow religionists.

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* *The Argument from Conscience to the Existence of God according to J.H. Newman*, by Adrian J. Boekraad and Henry Tristram (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts, 1961)

Because we learned our character when we were very young, it might be difficult to act otherwise, changing our attitudes and values. If we see that certain learned behavior does not work for us, our character can change for the better. For example, a person with dishonest parents may later see that crime does not pay and, therefore, change his character to be a very honest person. People often change religions and have a different view about what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. If we try to reform solely on a natural level, we have only our human resources to effectuate change; if, however, we have been baptized and, therefore, raised to a higher level of purposive reality, we will have divine resources or grace to help us to choose the best of goal and successfully to achieve them.

Summary. Character is a set of behavior traits that define what type of person you are. It determines whether you will achieve your goals, be forthright in dealing with others and obey the rules of the group. Character and personality are related, but they are not the same thing. Personality is inborn; while character is learned. Character may vary with the situation or circumstances or may be purposely changed. In the area of moral change, the Christian, who has divine grace at his disposal, will always have an advantage.

Components of Personal Identity

Personal identity is the conscious awareness of self. Personal identity originates early in life when we are able to differentiate between the "self" and "world". John Locke states that the notion that personal identity depends on a continuous autobiographical memory. There are six components of personal identity.

Narrative identity. The theory of narrative identity postulates that individuals form an identity by integrating their life experiences into an internalized, evolving story of the self, which provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose in life.[1] This life narrative integrates one's reconstructed past, perceived present, and imagined future. [McAdams, D (2001). "The psychology of life stories". Review of General Psychology 5 (2): 100–122]

Autobiographical identity. Autobiographical memory plays an important role in the construction of personal identity. We review evidence of the bi-directional link between memory and identity. Individuals' current self-views, beliefs, and goals influence their recollections and appraisals of former selves. In turn, people's current self-views are influenced by what they remember about their personal past, as well as how they recall earlier selves and episodes. People's reconstructed evaluations of memories, their perceived distance from past experiences, and the point of view of their recollections have implications for how the past affects the present. [Wilson, A. and Ross, M. (2003) The identity function of autobiographical memory: Time is on our side, *Memory,* 11: 2, 137–149]. For example: "I was born; I will live on a linear trajectory through space and time; I remember many of the events along that timeline. I will die sometime in the future"

Body identity. An individual has an accurate body identity, when a person's idea and feelings of how they should look matches their actual physical form; e.g., My body is the boundary of my physical being. I am that which is contained within my skin. I have a feelings and sensations of my body that are

indication of who I am. I have had my body all my life; it is the very center of where I am.   My conscious self is within my body.

Sense of Agency. Bodily sense of agency or sense of control refers to the subjective awareness that one is initiating, executing, and controlling one's own volitional actions in the world. It is the pre-reflective awareness or implicit sense that it is I who is executing bodily movement(s) or thinking thoughts. [Jeannerod, M. (2003). The mechanism of self-recognition in human. Behavioral Brain Research, 142, 1-15]. Sense of agency implies that I as agent have the power to initiate, e.g., I am physically and socially able to make certain changes in the world.   Physically, agency is concerned with the ever-evolving sense of what my body can and cannot do: "Can I mow the lawn" Social agency is about a person's role in group or community action: "Can I persuade others to become a Catholic?   At the very heart of my relationship with the outside world is my power as agent.

Social identity. Social identity is a person's sense of who they are in relationship to membership. Tajfel (1979) proposed that the groups (e.g. social class, family, football team etc.) which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behavior. *Social Science Information* April 1974 13: 65-93; e.g., "I belong to several groups. At times I am at one with no boundaries between myself and the group; when the group succeeds, I succeed; when the group fails, I fail. Group members are made up of human beings from all over. Social identity involves interpersonal networks of interaction; e.g., families, teachers, friends, members of

different churches, foreigners, etc. Such social networks produce social roles; for example, a minister may behave differently as a father, friend, husband, or pastor.

Beliefs. A person's belief system must be coherent; that is, all beliefs of the system must cohere with all other beliefs of the same system; e.g., "I believe that the earth is round, that the sun rose yesterday, that it will rise tomorrow, and that my friends are true friends. My religious belief is Catholic. My philosophical belief is Aristotelian-Thomist. I am multicultural. I belong to no political party, but I believe in democratic republicanism. I am a teacher, etc. My belief system is unified. "A coherence theory bases the truth of a belief on the degree to which it coheres ("hangs together") with all the other beliefs in a system of beliefs (typically one person's beliefs, but it could be any body of knowledge" [Coherence Theory of Truth *Information Philosopher* http://www. informationphilosopher.com/knowledge /coherence.html]

Conscious identity. "I am the author of my subjective experience." This can be called "conscious agency", the internal ability to direct stream of consciousness. This borders on "free will" and interacts with all other critical features. This is here for two reasons. First, to reinforce the role of consciousness in identity (although it may be implicit in the other features). Second, because the sense of authorship and mental agency is important. Note that this is not covered by "agency", above, because of the felt ability to create imagined scenes, actions and concepts. [Kubie, J. (2014). Components of personal identity. In *Corona Radiata: Brains, Politics, Whatever…*Retrieved from *coronaradiata.net]*

Personal identity is "the persistent and continuous unity of the individual person normally attested by continuity of memory with present consciousness"

(Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2015)

Personal identity after physical death. "Man has always hoped to survive his bodily death, and it is a central tenet of many religions that such survival is possible, and what forms, if any, it might take, are matters which depend crucially on the nature of personal identity over time. For to survive, in the sense that concerns us, means to continue to exist as persons identifiable as those here and now." (Noonan, 2003, Routledge)

Persistence in existence with and mostly stable traits. Philosophically, the issue of personal identity deals with several loosely related issues. For instance, personal identity includes simultaneously persistence, change, sameness, and time. We might say that personal identity are the distinct qualities of a human being insofar as that human being has persisted in existence with specific and mostly stable traits, so that by means of these normative characteristics society or convention has given to that human being a definition or name.

Stable from the version of its last change to the present. Personal identity structure appears to remain consciously stable from the version of its last change to the present time, going through a series of versions throughout life. A human being is recognized or known by means of the perceived characteristics physical components and patterned behavior.

Are There Symptoms

for Not Being in Touch? For Being Out of It?

The boredom of life is symptomatic of not being on to something that will give me reason for striving, something precious to protect, something connected

with everything else.

> "The idea of . . . search occurs to me. I become absorbed and for a minute or so forget . . . What is the nature of the search? . . . you ask. Really it is very simple, at least for a fellow like me; so simple that is easily overlooked. The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. . . . To become aware of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair."[*]

A person secure in his identity has, with personal effort and sound guidance from intellectually and emotionally healthy liberal education teachers, has grown into an integrated personality: that is, all the components that make up that individual's personality and identity are not only compatibly interrelated one to the other interiorly with the self but also exteriorly with objective reality. It might, therefore, be said that an integrated person who is secure in his identity is a mentally healthy human being.

On the other hand, relativism's reliance on subjectivity and emotion dismisses the prize of human rationality that alone can save society from the dark plague of nihilism. The liberal learner sees reason and free will as the powers that put man at the apex of creation. Relativism, subjectivism, and nihilism consider human beings to be no better than other living species. This negation of disproportion between human and non-human life produces curious contrasts: Unborn children purposively protected by nature in human wombs are legally destroyed to honor the will of their disowning mothers, while

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[*] Walker Percy, (1998). *The moviegoer*. New York: Vintage International, p. 13

programs abound to protect from extinction swans, whooping cranes, moths and fish.

Freedom within liberal education promotes the integration of the human personality: By rightly arranging knowledge, disciplines and values, critical thinking is allowed to develop purposively toward authentic good and truth. Freedom and free will have nothing to do with libertinism that actually abandons free will to the movements of subjective sensual appetite. As we grow and mature, our will and awareness strengthen spiritually and our ability to discern and discriminate increases accordingly.

The participant identified a critical mid-20th century turning point when society consciously turned its back on Western civilization and said, "I will not serve"; when academia, in arrested adolescence, went from civility, other-centeredness, objective values and discipline to a libertine life of feelings of freedom, of release, and of conformity to the pleasurable promptings of man's enlightened élan. Pleasure is good, they said; it is the happiness of which were deprived. The participant expressed this drastic change in terms of a transition from civility to vulgarity or from a culture of values to a culture of throw-away.

Cleverly, perpetrators of the resulting nihilism will not take responsibility for their acts which propagate the following results: Reality is confronted on a subjectivist feeling level, while human rationality–in which the potential solution is found–is not figured into the equation. This subjectivity-emotionality versus objectivity-rationality polarization evokes within the individual an intolerably unmitigated and all-pervasive anxiety whose relief is found in self-satisfaction expressed in unsound, bizarre ways: Since the objectivity-rationality resolution means too much self-knowledge and personal work reflectively and

contemplatively–to which the victim subject is not accustomed–the only thing left for the given subject is *the self-satisfaction of serving a fictitious and fleeting happiness that, in the end, leads to desolation and darkness*. The solution and relief for relativism, subjectivism, and nihilism is found in *holiness* which *is to act like a human being who is integrated and committed*. To achieve this, an individual has to be responsible for his actions and recognize that the consequences of his acts will bring him to salvation and to true happiness.

What in life is most precious? And if it is of such great value, what personal obligation do I have to protect it. Bewilderment of what I am talking about demonstrates one of the most alarming realities of life: Most human beings are not in the driver's seat of their life. They do not know where they are going? They do not move, but, rather, are moved by emotion, by pleasure, by struggling to be liked, to do just anything to prove their value. So, practically speaking, what is it that you hold most important? And what do you do to protect it? It would seem to me that if the answers to these questions do not come readily to mind, you probably suffer chronically from some basic human deprivation. If you are not bothered by the question or the problem, you most likely do not know what you are about, so that you neither know what you live for nor whether you are successfully or unsuccessfully fulfilling or contributing to your purpose in life.

There are many too young to know how the signs that led up to the Hitler's global atrocities were actually known, evaluated, and publicized years before they became a horrendous reality. Today, therefore, history and hindsight should make us aware of how comfort and complacency could actually blind our leaders to the imminent evils of Nazism and extensive carnage Second World

War. It is estimated that the human losses of World War II totaled up to 85,000,000 or 3.7 % of the 1939 world population, all because of one man!

Before his invasion of Austria, Hitler unabashedly strove internationally for German military supremacy especially in technology, as the world looked on. Throughout the 1930's, Winston Churchill–as a member of the Parliament and not a Cabinet member–expressed his concern and alarm concerning German rearmament, noting that Britain had far less military strength. His fear of Germany's military might and "his grasp of the realities of European politics" combined over time to convince the British press that Churchill be made a member of the Cabinet.[*] Moreover, Churchill "was convinced that Hitler or his followers would seize the first available opportunity to resort to armed force."[**]

On November 30, 1938, Neville Chamberlain joyfully reported that he, as British Prime Minister, came to agreement with the German Führer "never to go to war with one another again". In the evening just before retiring to his home on 10 Downing Street, Chamberlain said, "My good friends, for the second time in our history, a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bring peace with honor. I believe it is peace for our time . . . Go home and get a nice quiet sleep."

On March 12, 1938, Hitler had already invaded Austria. As far as Churchill was concerned, Hitler's actual intentions of territorial expansion and racial warfare remained neatly disguised, presenting Germany as a victim of foreign aggression reluctantly taking up arms to protect the German people and

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[*] The Daily Telegraph, Observer, Yorkshire Post, Manchester Guardian, News Chronicle, Daily Mirror, Evening News, Star, and the Daily Worker. Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Vol. 5, Prophet of Truth, 1922-1939 (London: Minerva*, 1990), 1080-1082.
[**] Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill Volume V Companion Part 2 Documents: The Wilderness Years, 1929-1935* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 196-197.

Western civilization.

As early as May 2, 1935, Winston Churchill gave to the British Parliament his convictions that he had concluded with clear foreboding the onrushing threat of Nazi Germany to international peace:

"If I criticize these measures it is not at all because of their character, but because of their tardiness. Why was all this not done two or three years ago? If the Prime Minister [Neville Chamberlain] two years ago had thought what he now says in his News-Letter about the German danger, he need perhaps never have published his thoughts to the world. Instead of lecturing the German nation, now already so heavily armed, he could have imparted his ideas as wise guidance to our own Cabinet. If only the French Government two and a half years ago, when the German process of rearmament began, had laid their much-talked-of dossier before the League of Nations and demanded justice or protection from the concert of Europe: if only Great Britain. France and Italy had pledged themselves two or three years ago to work in association for maintaining peace and collective security, how different might have been our position. Indeed, it is possible that the dangers into which we are steadily advancing would never have arisen. But the world and the Parliaments and public opinion would have none of that in those days. When the situation was manageable it was neglected, and now that it is thoroughly out of hand we apply too late the remedies which then might have effected a cure. There is nothing new in the story. It is as old as the sibylline books. It falls into that long, dismal catalogue of the fruitlessness of experience and the confirmed unteachability of mankind. Want of foresight, unwillingness to

act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until the emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong–these are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history." [House of Commons, 2 May 1935, after the Stresa Conference, in which Britain, France and Italy agreed—futilely—to maintain the independence of Austria]

We should ask ourselves at this point: Were not both Winston Churchill and Adolph Hitler secure in their identity? They both were able to enlist an entire nation to support them in their efforts. Can this, or something similar, not happen again. What went wrong? Are we faced with the same scenario, today?

Personality and Character Historically Considered

In researching the history of fall of the concept of character, cultural historian Warren Susman found that the very word "character" began to rise in the 17th century and reached its pinnacle in the 19th century where it became embodied as a "culture of character". During the 1800s, "character was a key word in the vocabulary of Englishmen and Americans," (Susman, 1984, p. 273). During that period in America, men were described in terms of having a character that was either "strong or weak", "good or bad". Or an individual was said to have "a great deal of character" or of having "no character at all." Sons and daughters at home, school or church were encouraged to cultivate "real character," "high character," and "noble character". Character, they were told, was the most precious of things. However, at the beginning of the 20th century things began to change: the term "character" gradually became replaced with the word "personality." This transition–from character to personality–represented

the most tragic moral change in the United States. It was a change much more than a mere word substitution, it was a drastic philosophical, psychological, and religious conversion from objectivism to subjectivism, from absolutism to relativism, from exterior reality to personal experience, from an existence made up of material and spiritual realities to an existence that is entirely material.

With this as a background, we might say that *character* represents the former, while *personality*, represents the latter; that is, growth in *character* supports the humble studied effort objectively to know and conform the self to the truth of exterior reality; while growth in *personality* upholds the contumacious determination to validate and justify the value of personal experience, opinion and subjective interpretation. Confronted with this dichotomy, I posit that today character and personality are representative of two very different philosophical positions.

As the Nation entered the 20th century, the American economy was shifting from a society characterized by industrial productivity to a society almost entirely built on service. This transformation gradually influenced how Americans would see themselves, for the dynamisms that philosophically and religiously gave birth to how the average American saw himself were being changed. Psychology, the mass-production of consumer goods–especially abroad–and the leisure spent on pampering the sensual self combined to become both the self-centered instruments and the products of an unrelenting and debilitating change within which the dynamic character of a once strong moral Nation began to atrophy.

Character and personality are distinct. The change from an industrial society to service society offered Americans new options for identifying

themselves before the international community. During the 19ᵗʰ century,

character development with its practice of virtue served as the foundational

method for forming identity. In the 20ᵗʰ century, however, character formation

was replaced by objects of curious self-interest like playthings, hobbies, dress,

and material possessions whose habitual use addictively developed into personal

cults to the self.

These self or personality worshippers, angry and unwilling to share the

limelight with the products and promoters of the 18ᵗʰ century culture of character

have found it necessary and whenever possible to demean and discredit

character and virtue ethics from the face of the earth. Since personality ethics has

in itself nothing transcendent to offer, its promoters must rely on aggressive

attacks that profane the holy, mocked the revered, make sport of civility,

applaud the bizarre, and, finally, praise the "innovative" that has become, in

education, the very watchword for personality growth and accomplishment.

These changes or transformations based, not on the effort of character, but on the

promotion of personality have served radically as stimuli for feeling alive and for

defining and expressing the very self. For this reason, the revival of character

ethics is a threatening death knell for those comfortably invested in personality's

charm.

Susman's (1984) study *Cultural as History* presents interesting examples

that define this character-versus-personality standoff:

- Self-improvement manuals replaced the need to lead a moral life with
  the need of personal fulfillment and self-actualization.

- "The vision of self-sacrifice began to yield to that of self-realization . . . There was a fascination with the peculiarities of the self" (Susman, 1984)

- Advice manuals of the 19th and early 20th centuries emphasized what a human being really was and did; the new advice manuals dealt more with what others thought a human being was and did.

- In a culture of character, good conduct spang from mind and heart committed to the discovery of goodness, truth and responsible human freedom; with this shift, man's noble inner intentions were replaced with how man was perceived by others; readers were taught charm, voice control, and anything that would help make a good impression. Dale Carnegie's (1936) *How to Win Friends and Influence People* taught the appropriate way to manipulate the interpersonal situation so that people will like you.

- Instead of improving yourself morally, one should learn the proper way to manipulate others so that they might have a favorable impression of you.

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