

Into the Jungles of Lubang: A Discourse on Duty

By Daniel Mallock (December 2017)



The Moment of Truth I, Paul Gauguin, 1892

In 1974, Hiroo Onoda, a young 2nd Lieutenant and Intelligence officer of the Imperial Japanese Army, walked out of the jungles of the Philippine Island of Lubang and surrendered. Ferdinand Marcos, then President of the Philippines, received Onoda's sword, then immediately [electrified](#) Japan. Onoda's former commander, then in his 80s and working in a bookstore, travelled to Lubang with an official delegation. The former commander read aloud Onoda's official orders relieving him of duty.

Japanese society greeted Onoda with astonishment and awe and showered him with attention. Stunned by the changes in Japan and the obsession with commerce and the acquisition of wealth that he saw, he moved to Brazil for a time but later returned to Tokyo, where he [NYT](#), March 13, 1974.)

Duty is a matter of central consideration in all societies; that is, what do we owe to one another and to the society at large? These related questions must follow: What do we owe to our families? What responsibilities do we have to friends and strangers?

Duty is both a personal and a national matter. There are fundamentally understood duties that all who recognize moral and decent behavior understand, several are given here by way of example: The adult child's duty to elderly parents; Parent's duty to care for their children; Society's duty to educate the young, etc. No society can survive when its citizens have no sense of duty to one another and to central societal concepts larger than themselves.

In times of trial, we are encouraged to "do our duty." This

duty is often not delineated as it is understood to be commonly known. Doing our duty is to do what is right, no less, but often more. This is a common concept in American life. We understand what is right from our upbringing, the morality of the wider society in which we live, our religious and ethical training, and from our Constitution and laws. Different cultures have differing concepts of “what is right”—some much less “right” than others.

Doing what is right is the essential duty of everyone in a functional society of decency and justice. In his instructions to a jury in the late 1790s, then Tennessee Supreme Court Judge Andrew Jackson once said, “Do what is right between these parties. That is what the law always means.” Decent people always aspire to do what is right, sometimes unsuccessfully. But, the impetus to “do the right thing” is ever there and stands as a fundamental point of guidance when decisions must be made. Perhaps this, then, must be the answer to Onoda’s unanswered questions as to “why?”

Onoda was a man driven by a sense of duty. On his return to Japan, he was a man as if from another planet—few in the post-war generation could conceive of such sacrifice for, and dedication to, duty. Robert E. Lee, now diminished and widely reviled as little more than a slave holder and defender of the slave system was long revered (until recently) for his sense of duty, and his devotion to his people and country. As with many Americans of his time, he saw his country as “Virginia” and not the United States. This was the foundation of the philosophical and political conflict that began before the Constitutional Convention and that finally engulfed the country in war. White House Chief of Staff General John Kelly noted this in an [appear](#).

While it is difficult to deny the idea that slavery was the

essential *cause* of the Civil War, it is also just as true that few Confederate soldiers fought and died to sustain it, or that the preponderance of Federal soldiers fought for emancipation. For most of the soldiers who fought the war, it was about either Union or Disunion (i.e., Confederate independence). Historian James MacPherson makes a very strong case for this interpretation in his excellent [first inaugural address](#), Lincoln made a plea for reconciliation, for union, and for peace. This eloquent plea fell on deaf ears in many states, unfortunately.

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Robert E. Lee, in a pre-war [Arnold](#) was a traitor to the American Revolution and the new United States. Our investigations into their character are generally constructed around the question of "why," i.e., why did they do it? The history of the world is contrary, jarring, and confused. For example, many in France see Napoleon as a heroic figure while most of Europe and the United States view him as a tyrant and conqueror. In Japan, as in Germany, generations who followed WW2 rejected the aims and actions of the previous governments and of their parents and grandparents. With this widespread rejection of their militarist past how then was Onoda greeted with warmth and admiration when he returned to Japan?

How do we unite our rejection of their mission with appreciation of the servant of the nation who strives to

uphold the wishes/purposes of his country? One must look to the Nazi problem. Can Nazi soldiers in retrospect be “rescued” from their involvement in upholding the Nazi program and state? Can or should they somehow be “rescued” from their involvement with Nazism? And what if they are draftees, young men or women called by their country to serve and fight? Are they to be blamed in the same way that their leaders are? Does the matter devolve to the simple resolution of a statement such as “they did their duty in a bad cause?” Is that the summation of the problem? No, it cannot be.

How do we contrast German opponents of the Nazi effort with those who supported it? We must hold Sophie Scholl and her friends in the [Kurt Gerstein](#), a participant in the crimes himself, came to see that what he and his country were doing was a great and horrible crime. He took action at significant personal risk to warn the world of what he knew and had seen of the Holocaust. They (and others like them) deserve extraordinary esteem and admiration for their courage in recognizing and acting on the knowledge that the aims of their country were wrong.

There are levels of honor and levels of appreciation and these must be understood and contrasted with the actions of a nation. When a nation state goes to war, the citizens are caught up and made to participate in it. When the cause is bad, the entire nation is held morally accountable to lesser or greater degrees, not only individual leaders. Even when people are involved unwillingly still the error of the enterprise itself is a stain upon every participant’s actions and character. In this way, some elements of a person can be sometimes rescued, depending on the person, his actions, his mission, and perhaps what he did afterwards—if he survived his particular conflagration.

Because humans are contradictory, history is a great contradiction.

Onoda could have said, "I did my duty as I understood it and was ordered to do"; Lee might have said, "I did my duty for my country and my people as I understood them", Sophie Scholl and her White Rose friends might have said, "I did my duty *despite* what my country and society told me to do!"

Some crimes committed in the course of doing one's duty are unforgivable. For example, there can be no forgiveness for Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, Heydrich, and many tens of thousands of others like them. A sense of duty without morality and ethics, or one that is corrupted by immoral or unethical systems is a reason for horror and disapprobation, not appreciation. Such things are the foundations of aggressive war, national evils, and crimes. They represent a great danger and likely will forever.

What is to be done with the vanquished enemy? What is to be done when the war is over and peace returns? How are the defeated to be received? What can be the reaction when someone has taken a destructive and morally questionable course? What is to be done when the one-time enemy is your neighbor? What do citizens of a defeated country say to their returning soldiers? How does peace prevail when the violence is over, and the guns and flags all stacked? In the case of the United States' Civil War, the answer was to forgive and look to the future.

When the American Civil War ended, Confederate soldiers and civilians were reintegrated back into the mainstream fold of the re-United States. Defeated southern states rejoined the Union, a wave of reconstruction, forgiveness, and acceptance

characterized the country. The former Confederates were normalized and returned to citizenship, so much so that they participated at every level of civil, business, military, and government affairs in post-war American society. Noted Civil War historian [New York Times](#) reported on March 3, 1974, "'Onoda has shown us that there is much more in life than just material affluence and selfish pursuits. There is the spiritual aspect, something we may have forgotten.' Other newspapers made similar points."

There are things that we, too, have forgot.

Shocked by an ever-widening scandal of sex crimes, abuse of authority, harassment, hypocrisy, and myriad forms of disgusting unethical behavior including rape among those in the rarified worlds of entertainment, journalism, and government the country awaits its own reminder as to what it is we're all about; what it is that we stand for, and what lies at the core of our national character. These are not unknowns, just forgotten for the moment.

As the end of the year 2017 approaches, it is difficult to avoid the ongoing scandal. The often-daily denunciation of public figures in entertainment and politics and exposure of hypocrisy and criminality among the powerful and respected has rocked the country to the core. In fact, the previous great stories of the moment—the decades old conflict with North Korea, Islamic terrorism, and political/social conflict between left and right—have all been knocked off the front pages of both legitimate and fraudulent media outlets. The public denunciations, mea culpas, apologies, denials, and investigations all represent a long-overdue sea-change in how we deal with liars, hypocrites, and criminals—most particularly in how such reprobates interact with women, subordinates, and children.

Many have expounded on the widespread nature of the scandal, and the very public and powerful people among the growing ranks of the victims and the denounced. Perhaps more jarring than the suffering of the victims, or the arrogance or regret of the accused is the devastating hypocrisy of those self-proclaimed champions of women and the oppressed who are apparently guilty of the very abuses and crimes they themselves have for so long condemned.

In this extraordinary mea culpa statement, Charlie Rose, the now disgraced former journalist and interviewer, [suspended](#) by that publication pending an investigation into multiple allegations of sexual harassment. Just one month prior to the allegations being made public, the journalist [asserted](#) that the allegations, if true, were “. . . not in keeping with the standards and values of The New York Times.”

Standards and values are the fundamental drivers of duty. Duty is the embodiment of those things; failure to uphold standards and values that one says they believe in, and that are generally known to be shared values across the majority of the culture and the wider society (many or most of which are sustained by law) is a failure to do one's duty.

We are in the jungles of Lubang now, demanding that justice be done and standards and values upheld. Demands for the powerful and those in positions of authority to find the truth, uphold their trust and their oaths, and that people do their duty ring out daily.

It is incontrovertible that we have a mutual duty to one another as Americans, as citizens of an enlightened and free

country. All of these questions of morality and ethics and of law and personal responsibility must be asked; only in this way can we learn the painful and challenging human lessons of history and of the present day. It is by asking and answering such questions that the most important lessons of all are learned.

We are in the dark jungles of Lubang. There are no rescue parties coming for us. We must make our way out, and do it together. There is no option. It is our duty.

Daniel Mallock is a historian of the Founding generation and of the Civil War. He is the author of