

William Sessions on Honor

Review of William Lad Sessions', *Honor For Us: A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretation and Defense* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 226 pages.

I

William Lad Sessions in his *Honor for Us: A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretation and Defense* (hereafter cited as HU) has written what is likely the very first philosophy of honor as a concept. In writing the definitive text he has done “honor” an inestimable service, though we shall require some few revisions to his presentation. He first identifies five general categories of honor, beginning with the two kinds of honor best known by their forms: *conferred* honor comes from being the best at something, what we will refer to as some “concrete” act, while *recognition* honor comes from an “excellence” that must be found, not made. We will say that these two forms refer in fact to “achievements” and “participations grounding excellence”, respectively.

Winners in contests of skill, for example, or those attaining the honors of offices make admirable examples of conferred honor in which, Sessions argues, “appearance and reality coincide: to appear honorable is to be honorable, because how one appears to others simply constitutes one’s (conferred) honor.” (HU, 12–13) This reflects the problem encountered when the concept of dignity is held to be a separate matter or topic from that of honor. But as we see from anthropology, the *appearance* of honor is itself the “dignity” that upholds and expresses it. This dignity is quiet, not loud or boastful (in “cooperative societies” especially¹); thus the wrong appearance may well redound negatively upon the honor itself.

When participating in some true excellence, the grounding is *abstract* – the activities known to us by symbols. (By analogy, just as we say less pain in the abstract, we say fewer pains in the concrete.) When the “warrior” is used abstractly to refer to traits necessary to the warrior’s skill set, it refers to an excellence that is

1) Many anthropologists recognize two primary groups, the cooperative and the competitive. In the latter, which typically includes the so-called “warrior” society, there is allowed room for some braggadocio.

found, not made.² This is why we so often hear it said that every soldier is a hero, that is, is meritorious of honor. When the warrior performs especially valiantly, he or she receives a conferred honor for being the best in this category of excellence (a Medal of Honor, for example, or military decoration such as the Purple Heart).³

Sessions then discusses “position”, “commitment” and “trust” honors. “Positional honor naturally divides into *achievement* and *status* honor,” he says. But any position able to warrant an honor is essentially a status, so that we are actually wishing to categorize types of status relative to the honors received. Status presupposes a recognized excellence in regard of abstract referents such as wealth, position, and even, occasionally, success itself. In this connection, “position” refers most frequently to an “office”. His so-called positional honor is in fact the canopy term under which all others are types thereof, including trust and commitment.

The relation of achievement and participation to status is made clear by the ancient Greek concept of ostracism. Themistocles, in helping to win the battle of Marathon in 490BC, achieved a stupendous military victory – an achievement which *automatically* saddled him with an office, along with the honors accorded to the office (today we would throw a parade for a victor, for example, as well as bestow glory).

This office existed, however, because of prior “recognition honor” for the status of excellences presupposed of any office. Themistocles went far above the ordinary in defending Athenian honor, and the office conferred should not be taken to deny that “Membership in an honor group is not automatic or conferred; it must be earned through voluntary adherence to a practice with a tradition.” (HU, 88)⁴ As Greek history illustrates, the honorers of this office could take it away through an act of ostracism. Indeed, *all* achieved high status implies an office the excellence of which is *recognized* by conferring the actual office. (In *conferring* the office it should be treated metaphorically as an as-if *concrete* platform for the exercise of authority.) Still today, what the public at large grants it can take away. Think of the personages of status who have lost it on account of charges of sexual misconduct. Public pressure to take away a recognized office is the modern form of ostracism.

We have mentioned that offices carry dignity and that the common law countries long held the two ideas as synonymous. Dignity is assuredly a goodly part of the “excellence” of the office. Again, it is found, not made, and is known through the superior *stewardship* of the office. We note in addition that every office is an implied contract between the honorer/s (the public or its representative/s) and the officeholders who are honored as well with the perquisites which follow upon that status. People agree to respect office and officeholder, and the later agrees to properly steward this new status. Again, the office is recognized for being the symbol of an excellence found rather than made, and the holder is expected to uphold this excellence and represent the qualities which were presumed of him in having merited the office. The officeholder is essentially the steward assuring the qualities by which the official excellence is known.

“But clearly positional honor [status] is a normative, not a factual notion.... The reason for thinking this normative concept is indeed a concept of *honor* is that while positional honor, unlike conferred honor, doesn’t consist in others’ regard, it is usually regarded as a proper basis of conferred honor, something that *should* be highly regarded.” (HU, 19) Such positional honor *is*, as already said, a status which *is* (in the form of an office)

2) “A good warrior...serves as an exemplar or model to others of their *excellent* employment.” (HU, 69, my emphasis) See also: “Even non-warriors may admire the honorable qualities of warriors, their very qualities of fighting honorably.” (HU, 75)

3) It can be difficult to ascertain when individual merit is the expression of an excellence (redounding to recognition honor) or whether it constitutes a feat or action otherwise rewarded with conferred honors. See, for example, this, at: “Often greater warrior recognition honor accrues to those who risk more in killing.” (HU, 71)

4) It should be added that “membership” is open to interpretation. In a traditional society one is of course born into the tradition and participates in recognition honor; by the same token, initiation ceremonies are typically required to establish the participation as official in all regards. Said differently, personal honor can be said to have been achieved through initiation even though the entire youth experience is one of learning to respect and be respected and so forth.

indeed highly regarded by others as well as meriting the conferring of honors. While it is true that “Personal honor... differs from *esteem*, which values someone for talents or achievements apart from group membership” (HU, 89), esteem brings status first, and position secondarily. Said differently, status brings position, not the other way around. Positions may *confirm* status, but do not create it. Offices exist to protect and maintain status.⁵

We expect the very wealthy to commit themselves to stewardship of their communities (for they, too, are saddled with an imaginary office to further the benefits status may bestow) precisely because we value wealth (recognition honor) as an abstract good worthy of honor (whence their status) and in particular of the stewardship which honor requires. Companies failing at stewardship lose brand quality just as the reverse is also true. We expect the famous to accept positions as role models on much the same basis (in other words, of status).

Trust and commitment honor are now, we see, actually subcategories of “status honor” characterized by an excellence found, not made: whence recognition honor. Each implies an ad hoc office generated by the participation in committing and trusting, each an inherent excellence independently deserving of recognition honor. We the honorers then honor the achiever for meriting the office in *our own* acts of trust and commitment (the honors of reverence and loyalty). Furthermore, trust and commitment are critical aspects of any stewardship which, as we have seen, assures quality, performance, trustworthiness and prevention of harm. Every officeholder possesses status and presumptive achievement to an abstract rationale. Every officeholder is conferred respect and regard owing not least to the dignity, the excellence, the recognition honor, of the office.

We can see all of these types of honor in any honor-based institution. Take an honor-based society, for example. This is a society in which honor is an abstract good, an excellence deserving recognition. Every member of the society holds a civic office and as such not only participates but who because of this may lay claim to recognition honor. For acts that exemplify the office the society *confers* honor to the successful person, conditioned by stewarding of the office in acts of commitment and trust both to the principles advanced and the honorers who made the office possible. Not for nothing are respect, trust, and merited worth the hallmarks of any honor-based culture.

We may define “honor” accordingly as the deservedness to receive respect, trust and meritorious regard where a person or group has membership in the founding status and/or exemplifies community ideals. In the honor-based society the notion of “respect” includes commitment and *loyalty*, and “trust” requires no explanation. Conferred honors follow upon merited worthiness. Sessions gives loyalty its due, but not, as we believe it should, as a type of honor. Loyalty shares with reverence (or veneration or piety) the character of a conferred honor.

As Sessions quite rightly observes, “honor groups are fundamentally *egalitarian*, resting upon every member’s presumed capability for personal honor and upon the mutual recognition, indeed respect, across the honor group.” (HU, 32) Sessions is also correct to say that the honor owed every member of the group is “status honor”, whereas personal honor, we will say, arrives by the achievement of added status for having reflected social ideals formulated in terms of honor. Personal honor is one such social ideal, and despite possibly (but not necessarily) being the result of achievement, it comes from participation in a grounding excellence, that of the commonly regarded honor inherent to the society as a whole. Figure one lists eight types of honor as we reconceive the organization from Sessions’ presentation. Conferred and recognition honor apply to natural or earned status, four more are subcategories of these three. All together contribute to and constitute personal honor.

5) Sessions states that, “in general, [our society] confers status of the basis of achievement recognized by established authorities, or accomplishment according to ‘objective’ standards, i.e., the standards of high-status others.” (HU, 115) It matters not what “position” these holds, but that their decisions determine the fact and grade of other such status, which decision is typically followed by the fact of a “position”. The confusion arises in large part because the notion of “position” is a dual one: it can refer to a *comparative* placement, as in a ranking of performance, or it can exist as a *situated* placement such as an office or other designation. Often enough the latter is simply the descriptive for the former.

II

In chapter five Sessions takes on some terminology, focusing on the distinctions between deviance, difference and deviation. Unlike most, who see a cult as necessarily wrong-headed (colloquially deviant), I have elsewhere presented it as the splitting from a group to the extent of elevating one or more social attributes to a position of prominence which ought to be emulated as normatively superior to the status quo.⁶ Thus we arrived at the cult of honor (laudable) and the cult of dignity (pejorative). By colloquial standards, to label something as deviant expresses, in Session's view, "the labeler's belief that the difference noted is sub-par, lacking, defective, or even dangerous in some respects." (HU, 45)

Yet Sessions is also one of the very few who recognizes "honor groups that not only diverge (and often derive) from ordinary honor groups but also exceed them in putting recognizable honor principles such as equality and respect into more perfect practice...for many are successful over many decades, and often serve as beacons – of guidance or warning – to other honor groups as well as to wider society." (HU, 51)

In defining the deviant as a "person or group that differs in certain respects from what is regarded as the standard or normal (in the sense of normative) case" (HU, 45), he appears to passively acquiesce as to those deviants considering themselves (or acting as if they could consider themselves) as *normatively* different, as in elevated, from the wider society in select aspects. Quite to the contrary: for him, an honor cult, despite wishing to redirect emphases and directions in cultural life, is deviant *if and only if* the larger society sees it as too weird or offensive. He prefers to restrict good cults to the label of "deviation" rather than deviance. While this meets colloquial sentiment, we wonder if this is really all there is to it.

The Robin Hoods of the world certainly feel their cause to be normative relative to the status quo. There was also a time when mob bosses (titular heads of honor groups) were something of a celebrity, though acting at clear deviance from social norms, placing "order" and not a little self-interest over many other desirable attributes. Fanatical warriors are "persuaded, indoctrinated, or deluded into thinking that the transcendent greatness or sanctity of their cause licenses, even encourages or requires, them to silence...*all* enemies, whether fighters or not." (HU, 74) The common criminal acts as if contemptuous of law or right, as if his needs normatively trump those who otherwise deserve his respect of their dignity.

Civil disobedience, despite being a part of our legal mythology, is at the same time necessarily punished. Like civil disobedience, affirmative action (and all quota programs) is likewise inherently deviant, breaking ethics or law in favor of an ulterior good. In these two examples the socially accepted standards are hardly clear to many of us to this day. What seems wrong on the surface is clearly deviant, but *not* pejoratively so.

These are normative approaches that we generally view pejoratively, but we must also admit those deviants which are in fact laudable by our own reckoning, which ought to include civil disobedience and affirmative action. These are deviant, not merely "at deviation" from the norm; for they are norms in more or less direct conflict with some one or more significant aspects of the status quo (if we consider the "deviant" to be "normatively" deviant from the norm). But they are positive or negative according to whether the norms advanced are in fact laudable or pejorative. Honor cults are by this reasoning laudably deviant. This conception necessarily treats cultural mores as a take-all-or-nothing proposition so that alterations in any fundamental value is actually a (colloquially considered) deviance as opposed to a mere difference or deviation. Of course, not all are amenable to such a view.

In the end, Sessions also offers us four excellent criteria that a code of honor ought to admit of. As it happens, these run parallel to the four objectives of stewardship. In the order in which he addresses them: As

6) Charlie S. Herrman, "The Cult of Honor," *Global Journals Human and Social Sciences (C)* 17, no. 1 (2017): 1–21; Charlie S. Herrman, "The Cult of Dignity," *English Linguistics Research* 6, no. 2 (2017): 1–15, doi:10.5430/elr.v6n2p1.

with any office, the first criterion is that the code “must be *other-regarding*, in several important ways. It must contain some important *duties to others*” (HU, 54) that make manifest the quality of all that honor represents. Secondly, as the steward must organize and methodically manage the work of the office, so the code of honor “must make every individual member *personally responsible* for honor’s maintenance.” (HU, 54) Thirdly, we recognize that a proactive effort toward avoiding damage to the principals urged by the office will entail that officeholders’ principles “may not be calculated in terms of self-interest, and they may on occasion require considerable *sacrifice* of those interests.” (HU, 54) And fourthly, the officeholder must act so as to foster trustworthiness in the eyes of those to whom duties are pledged. How this happens “must imply or project an *ideal of life* as well as lay down minimal requirements.” (HU, 54–55)⁷

This can be summarized in one happy instance of the author’s signal awareness of dignity: “Honor’s dignity rests on ultimate individual responsibility.” (HU, 67)

III

In the early 1970’s, Peter Berger was probably the first ever to put the words honor, dignity and society together in one sentence. His basic conceptions of these terms follow below in a compilation of several excerpts.

Both honor and dignity are concepts that bridge self and society... Honor is a direct expression of status, a source of solidarity among social equals and a demarcation line against inferiors... Dignity, as against honor, always relates to the intrinsic humanity divested of all socially imposed roles or norms.⁸

Sessions goes on to discuss two major classes of office, the civic and professional, taking the first in the context of patriotism, and both from the vantage of personal honor. This is where Berger’s remarks come into play, for there seems to be a parallel between social constructions with honor on the one hand, and political ideals with dignity on the other. The former are tied more to nationalism, while both are equally tied to patriotism. In other words, patriotism, in our view, encapsulates both political and cultural grounds that must be preserved at all cost, whence the personal honor in fighting for these two core sets of values on the battlefield as also their celebration in ceremonies and holidays and in the regard of tokens such as the national flag.

This being said, in the United states the conservative faction is in broad terms more patriotic, more culture-based; they are more honor-based and also tend toward the nationalistic ideology which places culture

7) In chapter seven, Sessions treats sportsmanship from the vantage of personal honor, which in faithfulness to a code of honor implies an “ideal of life”, which in the context of sports typically includes off-field conduct (we note the results of sexual harassment and worse as infractions against the code of sportsmanship – what else could they be?). Nonetheless, Sessions declares that “these would not be, strictly speaking, rules of sportsmanship.” (HU, 89, n. 14) To be more explicit still, such “ideals” are effectively stewardship practices in accord with the office implicitly conferred on those with a high public persona as reflecting the excellence giving rise to recognition honor. The top echelon of sports figures implicitly recognize themselves as “role models”. One might also note that such offenses against the code are also, in the vernacular, moral offenses, which Sessions believes amounts to “thinking that sportsmanship and morality coincide. Such coincidence is precisely what I am denying.” (HU, 90)

8) Excerpted statements come respectively from: Peter Berger, “On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor,” in *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 176, 174, 176, <https://altervsego.hypotheses.org/files/2009/12/Peter-Berger-On-the-Obsolescence-of-the-Concept-of-Honor.pdf>. Berger’s famous essay appeared originally in the *European Journal of Sociology* 11 (1970): 339–47. It has been variously reprinted, as for example in *The British Journal of Sociology* 11 (1970): 149–58 and more recently in Hauerwas and MacIntyre, *Revisions*, 172–81, previously cited.

front and center of a country's *Weltanschauung*. "Honor groups," Sessions reminds us, "can seem to exist for little else than promoting and maintaining respect, mutual respect for others and self. This is an especially tempting model, or analogy, for *national honor*..." (HU, 104, my emphasis)

A final comparison: dignity and (modern) morality are far more tied together than are honor and (traditional) morality. "Morality," says Sessions, by which he means modern morality, "is impartial, considering the interests of all and weighing interests equally, caring for all and not just for some, and caring for equal needs equally no matter whose they are." (HU, 105) Consider what Berger notes of dignity in his piece, associating it with most of our modern advances in extending various rights to one and all regardless class or race, etc. "The ethical test of any future institutions, and of the codes of honor they will entail, will be whether they succeed in embodying and in stabilizing the discoveries of human dignity that are the principal achievements of modern man."⁹

Honor tends to identify aspects of its code with normative morality, leading to conflicts of a moral nature vis-à-vis other cultural units. Conservatives in our country declared war on liberals some fifty years ago because liberal principles came across to them as decadent or worse, and appeared (falsely) to constitute a serious threat to the very existence of their honor culture. What the liberals were espousing was simply the morality presupposed of dignity, itself a concept endorsed by conservatives what with their religious credentials newly minted as political causes. This has led to an abuse of honor that leaves a bad taste in many mouths. Liberals are in principle the only group reliably affirming all the cultural desiderata of the honor-based folk, yet they have been seen by many conservatives as pariahs.

Sessions wisely counsels that honor should by and large be consistent with ambient morality while appreciating that it oftentimes is not, and occasionally cannot be. "Members of the honor group might feel that their honor is somehow ratified or even especially singled out for approval by morality.... But the important point is that while matters of morality are distinct from matters of honor, they do not conflict because they cannot conflict." (HU, 39) Morality can be, often must be, what honor says it is. On the other hand, perhaps *true* honor must be moral honor.

As Sessions moves from civic offices to those of the professions proper, he makes a first stop at the door of academe, where he takes the opportunity to address an issue that he seems to feel is so ingrained and tied to academics that it is best brought up in this context. In fact, his discussion might better have opened his treatise. The concern is as real as genuine: what has befallen the concept of honor? Why is there no serious discussion of it, and why is it not uppermost in our thoughts, equally to that of morality itself?

My impression is that his overall answer lay with what he calls the "myth of individualism". This is the correct use of the word "myth". This word is *not* inherently pejorative but instead reflects a fact of existence, a fact tied to the ideals of a society. Historically the topic is by most scholars situated clearly within and on account of the Enlightenment period, when the concept of dignity came to the fore, and when every individual was now owed regard for her individual dignity as a human being. This was never, of course, intended by the philosophes to presuppose the primacy of the individual over and against society.

9) *Ibid.*, 181. If this makes it appear that Berger associates honor, in particular personal honor, with social *roles*, you would be entirely correct. But Sessions takes him to task: "Since personal honor doesn't derive from status honor, it is not essentially tied to the traditional social roles that generate status, contra Berger (1970). Still, personal honor may be useful for performing those roles and maintaining that status, particularly if there is some need (or pretense?) of merit justifying the positional honor they have." (HU, 33, n.18) The relation of personal to status honor is a nonissue (see note 4 above). That personal honor isn't tied to roles is balderdash. Berger wins this one despite the fact that personal honor also transcends role (and is an excellence qualifying for the status of recognition honor). Anthropological studies reveal to us just how much honor, unlike the modern conception of dignity, requires to be maintained (whereas dignity requires to be expressed in the form of acceptance of everyone's worth and the rights upholding that worth). Ultimately, this is the reason why honor so often implies an office.

Philosophers and others who lay the blame for society's ills at the door of the Enlightenment are profoundly mistaken. Kant's lapidary *aude sapere* meant, loosely, "dare to think" – that is, think for yourself and stand by your reasoning over and against brute and unthinking authority which at the time thoroughly censored the publishing of perfectly reasonable thought. By this measure individualism meant nothing less nor more than to accept some self-regard and take some responsibility for ideals of moral and political gravitas. To be more openly honest than is perhaps considered proper, I nevertheless locate the core problem in two social processes, those of 1) capitalism and 2) the coextensive weakening of incentives to responsibility for what we all owe to one another as members in a common effort of civilizing behavior and improving the lives of one and all. The motivations behind successful capitalism (private ownership of instrumental goods, or "capital") placed individual success above self-restraint and at the same time as big business all but bribed the legal profession to ignore social justice where success and responsibility conflicted. Were corporate officeholders morally bankrupt, "individualist", or both?

Only Western Europe has learned from history and morality both. Health and social safety nets actually inspire, rather than conspire against, both success in economics and success at life itself. Closer to home, Sessions argued that four elements implicated in the individualistic myth were critical to understanding what ever happened to honor:

1) individualism "transcends all social roles and relations and is free to choose or reject any of them at will." (HU, 120) On the surface this sounds right to the point – but is actually gratuitous. The stronger point is the extent to which what is professed in fact fails to occur; thus esprit de corps similar to that of honor groups exists in the well-run workplace, in fraternities and sororities, at home and in activities such as sports, and in memberships dedicated to social and political "causes". In fact, reality suggests that individualism has no *necessary* qualm or quarrel with the benefits of honorable conduct;

2) individualism sponsors " 'ends in themselves', valuable for their own sakes quite apart from any value they might have for other selves." (HU, 121) At issue here is lack of an incentive to commitment, which Adam Smith may have thought grounded the benefits of the "invisible hand" but which has in fact failed to materialize in modern American society. But how much of this is due to mismanagement of economic or legal affairs and how much to individualism? Perhaps this also is a moral defect?

3) with individualism "'uniqueness' is prized above commonality, dependence and connectedness." (HU, 121) But uniqueness is often a human excellence and is also eminently marketable and, in any case, has little or no necessary connection to dependence. As to commonality or shared values, people as a rule value and desire to share in what they approve as unique values, ideas and ideals. How can this possibly redound to a loss of community?

4) "Individualism sets the fundamental project for human life: to make of oneself what one wants. . . one's commitment ultimately is to self, not to others (unless, of course, one chooses to commit to them)." (HU, 121) Lost in the individualism v. collectivism debate is the requisite anthropological perspective. Many traditional societies (the Maya and Eskimo societies, for example) are notoriously "individualistic", yet they seem not to suffer the social ailments besetting modern American society.¹⁰

10) Margaret Mead, in her famous concluding chapter to *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples* (1961 [1937]) identified three groups of traditional societies, one of which was the "individualistic". She listed the Bachiga, Ojibwa, Eskimo and Arapesh as individualistic in this particular study of thirteen groups. For more, see: Margaret Mead, "Interpretive Statement," in *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples* (Boston: Beacon Press), 458–511.

Sessions admits this overview was “crudely” sketched, but one must wonder aloud whether it isn’t the case that “individualism” is a scapegoat concept. It does, superficially, seem evident that we can think backwards from consequences and observe a common denominator and falsely, if with well-intentioned reasoning, deduce it as a causative reason for our ills. My feeling has long been that we have permitted a lavish life-style to justify, rather than incite inquiries, as to why we have not persuaded the legal system and legislatures to handle the crux of these matters. It seems better to call it what it actually looks like – knowing immorality – rather than attributing it to “individualism” per se. In the end it is more a failure of the voter than a failure of Enlightenment thought.

Recall that dignity and morality stand on very firm and cooperative foundations. Our failure seems less a matter of personal prerogative than a failure to institute the legislative backing of these moral accompaniments to our professed dignity. Individualism is less explanative than descriptive of a process of moral backsliding. The explanation might be as simple as an excessive pride in the society we have made for ourselves. It is a human frailty, no less common among honor-based groups, and ironically more prevalent among conservatives than liberals, who are neither less nor more individualistic than anyone else in our society, but who more often subscribe to a laissez-faire doctrine of capitalism and a supreme court held captive by corporate interests.

IV

What happened to honor? It appears to be pride, one of the proverbial seven sins. Pride as much as dictated, for example, that instead of spending one’s life on the homestead, farm or local community, migrations to urban areas splintered what were formerly ideal circumstances for honor groups. Once promise of advancement occurs in distant locales, people will follow, never mind they are already honor-based societies. Take China as an especially relevant modern example. Pride is not all bad, after all. Central Americans gain pride for their families by sending money home on account of their newly acquired financial status up north. Community and family remain relevant despite the distances involved. “Perhaps the prideful culprit,” Sessions suggests, “is not their sense of personal honor but something else – a desire for positional or conferred honor. It may be that everyone wants to think herself better than others – but this is not the fault of honor.” (HU, 163) Nor is pride the fault of individualism.

Is honor really dead, or is it alive and well but in a different form? This asks for an anthropological inquiry: traditional societies are, relative to modern societies, more moral and spiritual, whereas the latter are more ethical and pragmatic. These are the results of my own studies and I do not claim that the profession will agree without further evidence (though I suspect they will). In his chapter on the professions, Sessions notes that the fact of codes of ethics presuppose relations that amount frankly to honor groups. For example, “the motivations of lawyers to follow these [ethical] constraints will reside primarily in peer regard – one’s professional ‘face’, so to speak – and only secondarily in individual existential commitment to moral principle or concern for acting lawfully.” (HU, 151) I will return to this in a moment.

Honor serves the one, the only, the most critical function necessary to sustaining a traditional society: social *order*. Second, the honor that provides this function provides for their morals (here equivalent to mores). After all, they have no modern conception of a morality that applies across cultures. They see their morality as the one unique and best morality. Thirdly, they not only do not fathom the meaning of inherent worthiness, they may as well hold it anathema. How can they be other than more moral than the moderns?

Their communitarian values (we speak here only of traditional societies) help to make religion an affair broadly spiritual. Spirituality is, after all, something springing from the inside that holds forth respect and regard to others. And in this, spirituality is essentially like honor. “Personal honor essentially embraces *both*

inner and outer: Personal honor cannot exist without both inner disposition and outer connection; it is not simply located ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ an honorable person, but in both, because they are related in certain ways.” (HU, 173–174) They are related spiritually.

Ethics, we all know, is difficult to enforce, but only because pride gets in the way of a spiritual relation between lawyer and law. The lawyer treating only the letter of the law (or ethics, as in, thou shalt be “zealous”) risks ignoring the *spirit* of the law. Personal honor is obfuscated in the sense that losing face to one’s fellow practitioners is meaningless because it is distant to conscience. Were the code to be altered even a small amount to compel lawyers to adhere to law and justice instead of over-defining zeal as caprice and histrionics,¹¹ and if that rule were upheld by judges in their oversight of trials, law would become a normative honor-group.

All in all, there is only one point with respect to which I have reservations in following Sessions: “Personal honor is a non-consequentialist virtue; its structure does not involve consideration of consequences. If honor requires something, then one must just do it or cease being honorable.” (HU, 185) To me, this fails to account for refusals *on the grounds of honor* (which usually appeal to ultimate consequences) and so doesn’t make a great deal of sense; even spirituality takes note of higher specific values that guide spiritual behavior. “Do no harm”, for example, or treat everyone in accord with the Golden Rule, etc. Consequences are applied to failures in spirituality. One may go to hell, for instance; one may lose one’s honorable bearing among fellow travelers. If the reader will not fully stomach a consequentialist position, then “virtue ethics” is the place to be.¹²

The consequences for failing at honor in a traditional society are a loss of social order, and the possible failure of the survival of the group in question. While we can acknowledge that there should be an “inner light” that leads us to behave in accord with the code of honor without having to pre-think or reason-out consequences, that does not mean that honor is non-consequential in nature. It is what the honor code says it is, and that exists as it is because of foreknown consequences. We would not change the codes of ethics to permit greater use of “face” in professional relations if we didn’t think consequences mattered.

In the end, a spiritual honor can exist with a minimum of forethought *only when order (or other necessities) can be taken for granted*. The sense of honor must come from within yet outwardly express the code.

11) Sessions mentions “impugning the credibility of adverse and vulnerable witnesses known to be truthful; allowing or even encouraging clients to perjure themselves...emitting smokescreens of possibility to obscure actual or likely fact; or burying opponents under mountains of legal process – ceaseless discovery, endless motions.” (HU, 148)

12) “Modern moral philosophy,” declares Michael Slote, “has emphasized moral obligation and moral law at the expense, some have felt, of the sources of morality in the life and character of the individual. And virtue ethics in recent times has sought to make good that deficiency while at the same time adapting ancient ideas of virtue to the requirements of current-day ethical theory and to practical issues of applied ethics.” Michael Slote, “Virtue Ethics” in *Three Methods of Ethics: A Debate*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 175. Consequentialism is a type of value theory which views consequences of choosing right values “depending on whether any values are taken to require honoring rather than promoting” Philip Pettit, Philip “The Consequentialist Perspective,” in *Three Methods of Ethics: A Debate* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 141. Many see the honoring aspect as specific to virtue ethics. I do not take that stance. There is no reason not to value right actions based on consequences reliant on honoring of said values. If you can’t take social order (for example) as a *consequence of honoring* select values, I don’t see how you can have a philosophy of ethics at all. Honoring a value is merely a type of “privileging” in order to establish desirable consequences for individuals and their society. Otherwise it is hard to so much as envision a philosophy of consequentialism. There is “act” consequentialism and “rule” consequentialism. That latter is more relevant, since it says in essence that following a rule (a code of honor or of ethics, for example) promotes better consequences than other approaches. This it seems to me is the gravamen. In addition, it hardly excludes many tenets of virtue ethics, which rely more on the character behind the actions. What it does not counsel is taking ethics as a matter of blind faith (in a rule or principle, for example). In this it is akin to Fletcher’s “situation ethics” (where the end, say, love, really does normatively justify the means that are normative to such an end). This all works much better when the end is a clearly understood and accepted goal and the means are rationally and ethically suitable to that goal. For honor societies “order” and general welfare certainly qualify. When discussing the role of morality (modern) as reducing false or wrong pridefulness, Kantian ethics become paramount, being suited to generalized rules of conduct. Nothing here gets in the way of a solid consequentialist approach for honor groups.

It seems to me that this boils down to a strictly moral consideration. If we truly value dignity, we in democratic moieties have the wherewithal to cast votes that spell changes in codes that sponsor moral values dictated by dignity. *Modern* honor follows from this and only from this. When we know enough of the consequences of our moral failure and learn that health, for example, is a right commanded by dignity, and so forth down the line (*qua* Europe), we will learn to take for granted these great benefits (only in the sense that they need not fill our conscious minds at every turn of thought) and begin thinking spiritually and honorably.

Berger, for one, is hopeful: “It may be allowed, though, to speculate that a rediscovery of honor in the future development of modern society is both empirically plausible and morally desirable.”¹³ The facts on the ground remain, however: honor, when used as a political football to serve provincial interests at the expense of the whole cannot help but make honor less, rather than more, welcome to the broader society.

Conclusion

If it is the objective of philosophy to compel thought, this book of Sessions does just that. I have been one to consider “rampant” individualism as a curse. In pondering Sessions’ volume, I have come to reconsider my position somewhat. It is still correct to say, however, that to the extent individualism describes a moral lack, a “rampant” individualism speaks to a *severe* moral lack accordingly. So while I do not object to the use of the term “individualism” in the negative sense in a context of moral mire, I require a more thorough gut check when it appears that morality must speak forcefully to this issue. It can, of course, be suggested that individualism fosters immorality, but still – immorality does not exist in a vacuum; the moral objectives promised by attending to human dignity implies willful and voluntary examination prior to and subsequent to our actions. When this moral matter is given its due, I think the moral view is *the* view – and that a lack of morals fosters blinding pride which does indeed show through as rampant individualism.

13) Peter Berger, “On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor,” 181.