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Erica Vaiser

Regis University, evaiser@regis.edu

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Courtesy: The Space Between Souls

ERICA VAISER

*Department of Couple and Family Therapy, Division of Counseling and Family Therapy,
Rueckert-Hartman College of Health Professions, Regis University, Thornton, CO*

This paper presents an illustrative dissection of the virtuous power of courtesy. The content, herein, examines the mutual space between individual souls created through courtesy, utilizing Robert Sardello's (2003) definition of "courtesy" as a virtue. True acts of courtesy surpass commonly understood actions and niceties, in which the purpose is to invite one's *soul* into a mutual space of acknowledgment with the soul of another. It is only out of this recognition that the soul remembers its common and worldly origin. Ego processing dictates so much of our daily interactions that the presence of soul connection is most certainly never brought to the forefront of our awareness. Courtesy, which leads to connected moments of existence, can most likely be achieved by ignoring categorization of appearance, as well as maintaining a perception of soul-being. Those who act with virtuous courtesy are lead blindly by the heart, quieting the commentary of the mind. Acts of virtuous courtesy can be seen in the profession of hospice care, as a unifying theme in *Star Wars*, as well as in the prominent work of Mother Theresa. As the nature of the individual soul cannot be expressed in solitude, the relationship between client and therapist most closely represents the process of creating a shared space for one's soul to enunciate its existence.

KEYWORDS courtesy, virtue, counseling, soul

Small, but powerful, the virtue of courtesy has embodied its life-force within my own from a very young age. Intertwined as we were through my development of body and mind, the identification of this virtuous capacity was somewhat difficult to bring to the forefront of my consciousness as a distinguished component of the soul. There has always existed this presence of internal power in my being that has invited connection with others through a blind compulsion of sorts. This connection, which transcends common vernacular, can best be described as entering a mutual vibration with another being which invites the spiritual presence of time and space to engulf us completely. Within this spatial consumption, individuality falls to the wayside, relinquishing all opinions, conscious narratives, and egotistic preoccupations through the exposure of mutual soul existence. Until now, I have never been able to presently identify such transcendental interactions. Until now, I have never known that such interactions were birthed from the virtue of courtesy.

Sardello (2003), brings the meaning of courtesy into present awareness as "recognizing the soul-being of the other person" (p. 111). A loose translation may look like this: The act of courtesy is one that pauses the individual's feelings in order to capture themselves in the moment with the other person, simply as two souls rediscovering their universal wholeness in the space that this act of courtesy has made room for. The person initiating the act of courtesy does not focus on the other person's most outer aspects, as this is too ego-fixed. Instead, the person initiating the act perceives a spiritual connectedness into the core of the other being, senses its goodness, and relinquishes the room for its expression. The purpose of courtesy, then, is to develop an understanding of the self and the other within a mysterious space that negates the pre-established order to our perceptions (Sardello, 2003, p. 110-113).

A quality of virtuous courtesy, as I have come to recognize, is the ability to connect with the dignity and humanity in others whom we may not view as outwardly attractive. Around seven

or eight years old I witnessed a neighborhood acquaintance being bullied because of his weight. Without conscious processing I acted, telling the bullies off, despite being a relatively shy child. Though I lacked the capacity to verbally express my reasoning, I believe it came from the ability to see the good within my neighborhood companion, instead of his outward appearance. To act out of courtesy goes beyond the superficial acts of social etiquette. A virtuously courteous being must provide value, respect, and care to people who may go unnoticed by others. And, it is from within this mutual soul-being space that such perceptions source their meaning.

Secondary to ignoring such ego-centered presentations, a courteous being must possess a certain quality of perception. And not in the individualized sense. Such a perception must instead have an awareness of humanity's communal soul, acting opportunely to invite another's soul-being into a connected moment of existence. This quality may very well occur subconsciously, where the other person may not have a verbalized sensation of the act within the present. Without this perception, acts of courtesy may diminish, and our relate-ability remains in the physical, ego-driven realm of categorized discernment. The concept of "good" is therefore never able to be absorbed by others in a dimension of soul-being, and remains a superficial label dominated by societal definitions.

Perhaps an example should be provided that is largely familiar to current society, and which comes very close to conceptualizing acts of virtuous courtesy. Though the *Star Wars* trilogy embodies a general theme of good versus evil, reminders of virtuous acts of courtesy can be seen throughout the films in the actions of the Rebel Alliance. Through my perception, the connectedness of the Rebels embodies the qualities of courtesy. Despite their origins in vastly differing communities of species, they are drawn together by a common understanding of one another. Robots, humans, and petite bears alike seem to operate on the same vibration of the soul that extends beyond communal values and ethical orientations. However, this reverberation of soul connection within the alliance would not be identifiable if it were not in stark contrast to the ego-dwelling, monotonous presentation of the evil Empire. Through this contrast we can view the Empire as a collective of conformed acceptance aimed at retracting all humanistic intent, egotistically focused on exerting its dominance. Identical uniforms, bodily movements, and even speech signify conformity to the dominating presence of the Empire in the universe, and provide a parallel to the ego's way of identifying others and the self from a socially-informed lens. The movement of virtuous courtesy within *Star Wars* is symbolized by the "force" of perpetual good from which the Rebel Alliance draws its strength, as its members possess the perception of others' soul-beings, regardless of external presentations, and are therefore able to draw from a common connection to soul.

Acts of virtuous courtesy, as described by Sardello (2003), cannot involve viewing the other person "from the place of our ordinary ego consciousness", as elements of control and self-identification may come to dominate our perceptions (p. 113). Adopting such a stance on this virtue surely means that one must come to develop, through the capacity of courtesy, a soul consciousness. Mother Teresa, a prominent humanitarian, provides us with a demonstration of how acts of courtesy come to catalyze our comprehension of our own soul-in-being. As she had famously experienced a "calling" to tend to others in the most deficient and morbid parts of the world, Mother Teresa's actions lead her to unexpectedly experience a "deep and abiding spiritual pain" (Van Biema, 2007, p. 2). In private communications, she verbalized this pain as being in vast contrast to her public demeanor. Through my interpretations of this developed turmoil between conscious ego-surface and conscious soul-depth, I believe Mother Teresa was verbalizing awareness of her split existence. Her calling to serve others served as the pathway for capacity of

courtesy. By surrendering herself to others' soul-beings completely, forgetting her conscious ego, she experienced her own soul-being as one drawn to the dark tendencies of the spirit world; a contradiction so starkly realized from the ego consciousness that preceded these revelations. As Sardello (2003) so eloquently summarizes: "We have to exist with others, in soul, before we can experience the individuality of our soul" (p. 119). Perhaps Mother Teresa had never truly experienced acting from virtuous courtesy until her time in Calcutta with the dying and the diseased. When acts of courtesy presented themselves to her, and she routinely allowed others to present their soul-beings in presence with hers, perhaps it was then that an astonishing cognizance of her spiritual depth unhinged her ego's foundational presence.

Reflections of Mother Teresa's individual soul revelations, and the servant-of-the-world courtesy she adopted, can be found in specific places around the globe. Many know these places to be hospices. Caring for the terminally ill and dying scrapes away at the layers between the physical realm and the soul world, until only a translucent film remains. We may very well find those with the capacity for virtuous courtesy acting as care-takers in these places, likely compelled to respect the body, soul, and wellbeing of others in the presence of death. I would imagine that those in hospice work allow their emotions and needs to be overshadowed by the dying being's expressions of soul, creating an atmosphere where the soul, nearing the end of its bodily inhabitation, may present itself in the most honest forms of spiritual connection. I would also imagine there exists a need for the soul to feel complete before departing the physical world, and those drawn to assisting the dying provide this space for the soul-being's final attempts at becoming virtuously whole through acts of courtesy.

The practice of developing the capacity for courtesy is not easily mastered, as a spontaneous heart drawn toward spiritual connection must be the one steering the metaphorical ship. I myself have recognized my natural propensity to act courteously. Though however present I am to these acts, it still remains my egotistic self-reflection that flags my awareness. Sardello (2003) attributes the virtue of courtesy to the bodily landscape of the heart (p. 15). This capacity for courtesy cannot inhabit the head or the mind, as analytic cognition prevents the spontaneity of the virtue. As courtesy favors the unaltered beauty at the core of humanity, it must operate freely from conscious thought, which may fail to recognize the soul beauty through its preoccupation with the physical presence. Unlike the head, the heart does not have eyes, thus a figurative "blindness" allows for a heightened sense of spirit and soul. To create a parallel, Sardello (2003) reminds us that the psyche is the soul that was "breathed into" the person (p. 111). Respiration occupies the same bodily landscape as the heart, therefore the process of breathing out air (surrendering individuality) that was once gifted by another signifies the soul as a mutual ventilator acting to create our individual sense of soul. Without this breath we cannot connect to one another. Beginning with the courteous act of the heart the lungs then become engaged, exhaling the communal soul and eventually inhaling the soul-being of the other. The virtue of courtesy, in all consideration, could find no better bodily home than the heart.

If we are to resist the pressures acting on the ego from society's expectations, then we must cultivate the capacity for virtuous courtesy. Society very much defines ways that we must achieve its definition of "good", yet these impositions remain on the surface of human interaction. If humans are to engage and receive pure acts of courtesy, then the focus must be shifted from the individual in a world of individuals, to a collective soul-being from which individuality can be identified (Sardello, 2003, p. 119). If we intrinsically align on a universal frequency, harmonizing "life of body, soul, and spirit", then we create the capacity for virtue. (p. 1). Acting from courteous virtue begets soul-in-being interactions, perpetuating the much needed concern to remember that

all souls possess a common origin, an original breath if you will. Keeping such perceptions in mind, a need for the capacity of courtesy may be seen when: 1) Interacting with others whose outer appearance is foreign, whether of heritage or disability, 2) Raising children, as receiving courtesy from a young, imaginative age may influence the apt to act in courtesy, 3) In confrontation with one another, as accepting the opponent's soul-being presence may allow for a common agreement to be initiated, and 4) Psychological deficits that begin to consume our egos may welcome a soul-oriented focus on the good.

When exploring the realm of courtesy as a virtue, acknowledgement of its presence in therapeutic practice must surely be critical. A therapist's courtesy of the client's true expression of soul in communal space may free the client's ego facade to melt away, exposing soul-being elements of the destined self. Acting as a catalyst, the courtesy generated by the therapist may bring about the deconstruction and enhanced understanding of the psychological pathologies paraded by the socially influenced ego. Receiving the therapist's courteous act relieves pressure from the client's egotistical presentation, having been molded by societal encumbrance, and invites acknowledgment of the soul's individualized good. Many clients, perhaps, seek therapy in the hopes of reassuring the direction of their life's existence. However, as the therapist is not in practice to hand out such grand imaginations of individual destiny, they must be courteous initiators of soul-being recognition. I would assume this to be especially true in our time as many maladies of the ego (e.g., stress, hypertension and incompetence) are birthed from the problematic need to "...fulfill our individual destiny in the midst of others who are trying to do the same..." (Sardello, 2003, p. 110).

Dahlsgaard, Peterson and Seligman (2005) remind us of the continuous, universal dialogue concentrating on the psychological debilities found in one another. Virtues, they argue, are the foundational tools required to bring about the much needed therapeutic focus on human strengths and the development of good (p. 203). Psychotherapy, and a capably courteous therapist, may assist those in egotistic pain, allowing them to present their soul-beings and gain subsequent awareness of it. Through acts of courtesy, the therapist can acknowledge this painful lack of individuation in connecting to their soul-being and its communal energy. This practice, as a whole, encourages a focus on the "good".

The virtue of courtesy must be a difficult one to develop a capacity for. Reflecting on personal experience goes only so far, as reflection does not serve to recreate the moment of the act of courtesy. However, being open to entering communal spaces with other beings, with an honest heart and silenced mind, may invite a sharing of soul-beings, encouraging a deeper understanding of humanity and the soul world that exists in harmony.

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