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## Self-Realization and Validity Surplus in Proactive Heroism

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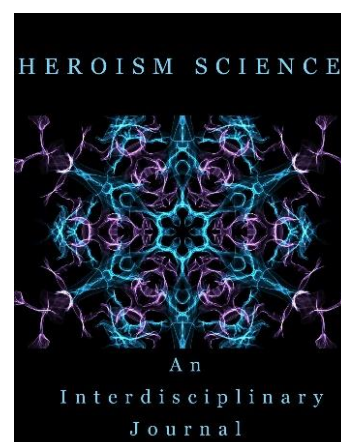
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# Self-Realization and Validity Surplus in Proactive Heroism



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**ABSTRACT:** This article provides a brief outline of an approach to understanding proactive (or social) heroism in embodied terms, taking this as essential to supporting the idea of ‘the banality of heroism’. I first present an analysis of heroic action in general that shows it as involving self-realization through nonselfsacrificial existential necessity, and then show how in cases of reactive heroic action this necessity is best understood in predispositional embodied terms, such that the agent may be said to quite literally incarnate certain generally accepted norms of the intersubjective ethical context. I then briefly sketch out how this same kind of embodied necessity can be seen in proactive cases, albeit with the difference that here it has to do with realizing the ‘validity surplus’ of that ethical context, that is, with the expansion of the scope of application of its norms. Unlike the norms enacted in reactive cases, this expansion is initially not generally accepted, and in this way proactive heroism is conceptually tied to the idea of immanent social progress. By way of conclusion, I comment very briefly on how this relates to questions concerning the wider cultivation of heroism.

**KEYWORDS:** *Heroism, Embodied Action, Predispositionality, Existential Necessity, Self-Realization, Saintism, Supererogation, Self-Sacrifice, Validity Surplus, Social Progress*

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# 1 SELF-REALIZATION AND VALIDITY SURPLUS IN PROACTIVE HEROISM

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My aim in these brief remarks is to provide a fairly succinct outline of an approach to understanding heroic action in *embodied* terms, that is, as a phenomenon of human embodiment or corporeality. I'll mainly discuss *reactive* heroism, that is, cases in which a heroic action is a more or less spontaneous response to some occurrence or event. But my real interest lies with cases of *proactive* (or social) heroism, which typically involve protracted courses of purposeful action. My motivation is to lend rigorous support to the general idea of 'the banality of heroism' (Franco and Zimbardo 2006), that is, heroism's being a phenomenon of universal everydayness, and I believe that the single most important way to do so is to offer a compelling reconceptualization of proactive heroism in corporeal terms.

Let me begin with a few preliminary remarks.

In one sense, the claim that heroism is an embodied phenomenon is perfectly trivial—heroic action, like any kind of action, is *obviously* an embodied phenomenon inasmuch as it is only instantiated by embodied agents. But there is a much deeper significance to the claim. Broadly speaking, human action in general has traditionally been understood as issuing primarily from self-conscious processes of reflective deliberation, with the mind 'piloting' the body like a ship (to invoke the well-known Cartesian metaphor). More recently, however, this top-down view of action has been challenged as significantly misrepresenting what is actually going on in at least many forms of human action, alternative accounts of which have been proposed that instead foreground the role played by pre-reflective and habitual dimensions of the agent's corporeality. It is in this precognitive sense – which, while clearly

related to biological facticity, is nonetheless strictly irreducible to it – that I propose to consider heroism.

The analysis here will be primarily conceptual and phenomenological, rather than empirical in the ordinary sense. The main reason for this has to do with the fact that heroism science is still at an early stage in its development (cf. Efthimiou and Allison 2018), and its central concept – namely, heroism – remains shaped and informed by conflicting and possibly even mutually inconsistent intuitions. This is an observation, not a criticism—comparable situations are not atypical in emerging new areas of the human and social sciences. But just as in any other area, it is something that needs to be addressed in order to make scientific progress, even if this means that some existing intuitions concerning heroism will have to be revised or dismissed.

I am especially interested here in our intuitions concerning just what it is about heroism that so grips our attention and elicits such strong approbation. On the one hand, the idea of the egalitarian banality or universal everydayness of heroism seems – correctly, in my view – to have gained widespread support. Yet at the same time, there remain many vestiges of older views of heroism that hold it up as something quite exceptional and even elitist, in a way that is not dissimilar to a child’s veneration of fictional superheroes. So even if it is widely agreed, for example, that selflessly rescuing others in situations of, say, systematic genocide, professional firefighting, and subway-platform mishaps are all cases of heroic action, it is by no means clear what they have in common. What is the object of heroic approbation—is it the agent herself, or the action *per se*? If the former, then can there be heroism without heroic action, that is, can one be a ‘hero in waiting’?<sup>2</sup> If the latter, then does heroism have more to

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Zimbardo often uses this expression, particularly in connection with the Heroic Imagination Project (<https://www.heroicimagination.org/>).

do with the intentions behind the action, or rather with its actual consequences? Can one be an incompetent hero, or an accidental one?

Questions of this sort typically prompt conflicting and confused answers. The main reason for this is that *the shift in our thinking toward the banality of heroism is at odds with traditional (top-down) thinking about human agency*. Simply put, the question boils down to this: if heroism is a phenomenon of universal everydayness, then what's the big deal? The upshot of my remarks will be that we can formulate a more coherent and useful concept of heroism on the basis of an embodied (or, if you like, *bottom-up*) approach—that such an approach can better enable us to capture the sense in which heroic action is banal, even in the diverse forms that it may take, while at the same time clarifying the grounds for the strong approbation that we ordinarily (and quite fittingly) assign to it. This will go hand-in-hand with a distinction between heroism and what I shall call *saintism*, where the latter denotes those cases exhibiting the exceptionality that contrasts with heroic banality. This distinction between heroes and saints will prove to be extremely helpful with regard to clarifying the muddy intuitive waters concerning the sorts of action in question here.

The principal reason why my discussion is not empirical in any straightforward sense, then, is simply that it is undertaking to reexamine just what heroism is, and in advance of any such basic reconceptualization, it remains, strictly speaking, an open question as to which observable actions or behaviors are in fact instantiations of relevant phenomena, and thus which available studies, if any, can be relied upon. New empirical studies could, of course, at least in principle, be designed and conducted on the basis of the reconceptualization that I will lay out, in order to test it. I'm not sure whether that could be done in practice (or within the ethical limits of human research), but in any case, we're not at that point yet.

My discussion will unfold across four main steps: (1) I will first make a conceptual case for construing heroic action in general as involving self-realization through a kind of *nonselfsacrificial existential necessity*. (2) I then show how in cases of reactive heroic action this necessity is best understood in predispositional embodied terms, such that the agent may be said to quite literally incarnate certain generally accepted norms of the intersubjective ethical context (or ethical *habitus*).<sup>3</sup> (3) I will then briefly sketch out how this same kind of embodied necessity can be seen as obtaining in proactive cases, albeit with the difference that here it has to do with realizing the ‘validity surplus’ of that ethical context, that is, with the expansion of the scope of application of its norms.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the norms enacted in reactive cases, this expansion is initially not generally accepted, and in this way proactive heroism is tied conceptually and normatively to the idea of immanent social progress. (4) By way of conclusion, I comment briefly on how this relates to questions pertaining to the wider cultivation of heroism.<sup>5</sup>

## 2 HEROISM AS NONSELF-SACRIFICIAL EXISTENTIAL NECESSITY

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This first step in the discussion is primarily a matter of conceptual analysis. The main claim here is that the confused intuitions referred to above are sustained by the misconception that heroic action is *supererogatory*. In moral theory, supererogation refers to actions that are morally praiseworthy but not morally required—e.g., one receives moral praise for generous acts of charity, but these are optional in the sense that one is not morally blamed for *not* engaging in such acts. Supererogatory actions are thus simply those that go above and beyond one’s moral duty.

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<sup>3</sup> My use of the term ‘habitus’ is guided primarily by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977).

<sup>4</sup> I am borrowing the term ‘validity surplus’ from Axel Honneth’s theory of social recognition (2003: 186).

<sup>5</sup> Some of these points are dealt with more fully in Smyth (2018a) and (2018b).

Now, it does seem to make good intuitive sense to regard heroic action as supererogatory—it is certainly praiseworthy, but not normatively expected. The problem, however, is that this would imply that heroic action involves *self-sacrifice*. This claim could be argued on the grounds that moral action in general is self-sacrificial in the sense that the basic point of the other-regarding considerations of morality is to place limits on purely self-interested behavior. Without much difficulty, however, such limits can be seen in terms of *enlightened* self-interest—I choose to act morally because the option to act otherwise is in fact ultimately detrimental to my self-interest. But what about supererogatory action? Such action can-not be regarded in that way because, *ex hypothesi*, the degree of self-sacrifice that it involves exceeds the threshold of what is normatively expected. It follows that what is morally praiseworthy about supererogation has precisely to do with its self-sacrificial character.

Here we must note an implicit assumption to the effect that the very idea of self-sacrifice implies its *contingency*—something can only be a matter of self-sacrifice if there was in fact a more self-interested (or less selfless) option available. In general, moral action is only genuinely *moral* on condition that one *could have* acted otherwise. And the same holds for supererogation in particular—such action must be freely chosen, even if the alter-native option was simply to refrain from the action in question. In other words, what is morally praiseworthy about supererogatory action is precisely the fact that one freely chooses to engage in self-sacrificial behavior—we praise someone who engages in supererogation because she acted in that way *but she didn't have to*, that is, it is implicitly assumed as a necessary condition of such approbation that she *could have* acted otherwise, including through simple omission.

It goes without saying that this condition obtains in most cases of human action. But it certainly does not obtain in *all* cases. For there are cases of action in which the agent is un-

able *not* to act in a certain way. Crucially, this need not be due to any external necessity, but could stem rather from an internal necessity rooted in her own character. Such necessity need not therefore undermine or otherwise compromise the agent's autonomy. Indeed, Bernard Williams noted how certain incapacities can be constitutive of one's character, and that 'to be an expression of character is perhaps the most substantial way in which an action can be one's own' (1981: 130; cf. 1993). Similarly, Kyle Fruh has recently expressed how such incapacities can be seen 'not as constraints imposed on an agent, but as expressions of the core characteristics of the agent' (2017: 32). So while in such cases it may certainly *appear* to an external third-person observer that the agent is choosing to act in a certain way over the equally possible option of refraining from so acting, the reality of the situation could be that she has no meaningful choice to make at all, and yet it is nonetheless still fully a matter of her authentic self-realization.

My contention is that we should understand heroism in this way. That is, we should recognize that the assumption of contingency does not hold in cases of heroic action, and thus deny, outward appearances notwithstanding, that heroic action is a kind of moral supererogation. To be clear, a certain degree of conceptual stipulation is involved here, but unavoidably so—it does us no good to carry on with confused intuitions, and we need to straighten them out. My suggestion is that we focus on the underlying intentional structure of actions that appear to be instances of supererogatory self-sacrifice, and give conceptual articulation to the fundamental difference that resides there.

Take, for example, the action of selflessly rescuing someone who has fallen off a subway platform. In principle, this action could emerge in two fundamentally different ways. On the one hand, the agent might have engaged in a more or less reflective process of de-liberation that issued in the decision to rescue the person rather than remain a bystander. This would make it an instance of supererogation, and the key point is that this agent *could have*



remained a bystander—she opted not to, and for this reason she justly merits high moral praise, for that is what makes the action self-sacrificial. But the option to do otherwise was, for her, existentially real. Otherwise put, that other option was not directly antithetical to her self-realization as an individual.

On the other hand, the agent might not have engaged in any such process of deliberation. Indeed, agents' self-reports of such action very often claim that they did what they did quite spontaneously, without any sort of moral reflection, and hence in a way that excluded any meaningful choice. But they are not thereby suggesting that they engaged in the action unfreely. In general, there need not be alternative possibilities in order for one's action to count as free, and for one to be deemed responsible for it (Frankfurt 1969). And in the scenario under consideration here, the point after all is that the abstract possibility of not engaging in the action is negated by features of the agent's own character—the action issues from what can be described as an *existential incapacity to do otherwise*. Unlike the first scenario, then, the bystander option is not a *real* possibility for this agent because here it would be directly antithetical to her individual self-realization. In contrast to the moral contingency of that first scenario, then, her action expresses a kind of *existential necessity* which, precisely as a species of necessity, is not self-sacrificial, since there is no option, let alone a more self-interested one, available to decline.

There is thus a significant difference in terms of the underlying intentional structure of certain actions that might be outwardly indistinguishable. My claim is that we would do well to rethink heroism as lying on one side of this difference, because doing so could help to eliminate the problematic ways in which we still tend to exceptionalize heroism, and thus to come to clearer terms with its banality. My suggestion is that we reserve the concept of heroism for cases of the second sort, i.e., cases of nonselfsacrificial practical necessity, and maintain a distinction between this and supererogation proper, which, modifying a term from

moral theory, I shall designate as *saintism*. This distinction between (exceptional) saintism and (banal) heroism is not meant in any way to detract from either, and has no immediate implications with regard to relative degrees of approbation. The point is just to recognize that our intuitive confusions stem from the conflation of these fundamentally different models of normatively extraordinary action, and that such a distinction, even if it upsets some of our existing intuitions, can enable an important step of theoretical progress.

### 3 REACTIVE HEROISM AS PREDISPOSITIONAL EMBODIED (ETHICAL) ACTION

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Whereas the traditional top-down model of action applies perfectly well to saintism, heroism as something banal calls for a bottom-up approach, and it is for this reason that we need to think about it in embodied terms. Here the analysis will be primarily phenomenological. It is by considering the phenomenology of embodied action that the nature of the necessity implied in heroism can be clarified. I shall first look at this in connection with reactive heroism, where it can be seen more easily, and then more briefly sketch out how it might apply to proactive heroism.

The phenomenology of embodied action centers on a well-established multi-stage model of skill acquisition that was originally developed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980). The idea is that when one is acquiring certain skills – learning to ride a bicycle, for example, play a musical instrument, or speak a foreign language – the process necessarily begins quite self-consciously, with a deliberate reflective focus on the relevant techniques and rules. For this reason, at the ‘novice’ stage one is generally slow and maladroit. But what occurs with further practice is the accretion or sedimentation of the relevant experiences in one’s embodied being (which certainly does not exclude the brain and central nervous system, but is not limited to that). In other words, skill is acquired as bodily habit, where this habituation is understood as the corporeal internalization of pre-reflective perceptual and motor

schemata. Progressing through stages up to a level of ‘expertise’, this habituation involves the development of a predispositionality that supports situationally transposable know-how. It is characteristic of highly developed skills to be sensitive and responsive to situational factors and thus correspondingly flexible or even improvisational—at the level of skillful expertise, even novel actions can be performed with an unselfconscious virtuosity and flow that cannot be understood as a matter of sheer automaticity, but only as the actualization of perceptual and motor predispositional habitualities.

Two important aspects of this general process are to be noted. First, skill level is inversely proportional to the degree of reflection involved—whereas at the novice level one thinks a lot and performs badly, through habituation one’s skill level increases exactly to the extent to which the cognitive burdens are, so to speak, offloaded onto the body. One performs better the less one needs to think about it (hence the well-known injunction against ‘overthinking’). Second, and relatedly, skill level is also inversely proportional to the experienced degree of contingency or optionality of one’s action. In most situations there is an optimal action or step to be taken, and central to increased skill is the ability to recognize this action immediately—the virtuosity and flow of expert behavior stem from the fact that here one typically does not waste time deliberating between different possibilities—one just sees what is to be done and does it. In other words, skillful expertise – cycling down a hilly path, for example, playing a complex concerto, or conversing with idiomatic fluency – typically involves a high degree of *experienced necessity*, although this necessity has clearly nothing to do with metaphysical determinism and in no way compromises the freedom of the agent.

This model applies well to the sorts of individual action that we might typically consider in terms of the notion of skill. But it also applies much more broadly—in interpersonal terms, there are skill-like modes of comportment that comprise culturally shared ‘body techniques’,

corporeal ‘styles’ or ‘idioms’ (Mauss 1936; Elias 2000 [1939]; Goffman 1971)—for example, forms of emotional expression, communicative gestures, and the norms of physical co-presence in different settings. Pre-reflective bodily habituation in perceptual and motor terms can thus be seen as internalizing – or, if you like, *incorporating* – and hence coming quite literally to incarnate certain aspects of an individual’s social milieu.

Inasmuch as such interpersonal skills have to do with how individuals relate to one another, it is but a small further step to recognize that certain actions pertaining to the ethical life of society exemplify this process particularly clearly. In very general terms, there is in any given social context a system of moral normativity that regulates the behavior of individuals for the common good by requiring a certain degree of other-regardingness, and it is the minimally altruistic compliance with these norms that merits normal moral approbation. Building upon the distinction drawn above, we can easily see that someone could fulfill her moral duty in two different ways: either in a *saintly* way, in which she engages in a process of deliberation and, after contemplating the options, reflectively chooses to act morally rather than not; or else in a *heroic* way, in which she spontaneously or habitually acts without reflection on the basis of an internalized ethical expertise (cf. Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1991; 2004).<sup>6</sup> Sometimes we choose to do act morally, and sometimes we just do it.

Although situations of moral deliberation and choice may strike us as paradigmatic of ethical life, I suspect that they are more exceptional than typical. For if we take a broad view, then it would seem that more of what goes on in everyday ethical coexistence corresponds to the habitual scenario, in which one’s ethical comportment relies upon ‘pre-reflective ethical know-how’ (DeSouza 2013) in a way that is strongly analogous to other forms of acquired

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<sup>6</sup> Contrary to its usual connotation, as it is used here the term ‘expertise’ should not be taken as implying any high level of cognitive engagement—indeed, as discussed, quite the opposite is the case

skillful expertise. As a kind of ‘ethical second nature’ that we literally come to embody through socialization and interpersonal experience, it guides most of our quotidian interactions with others with the same sort of existential necessity, even while it may also provide the motivational and evaluative background for any more explicitly formulated moral intentions.

It is in these terms that best sense can, I think, be made of reactive heroism. It is very common for agents in such cases to report that they felt no choice, that they simply acted, and that they did so just as *anyone* would do. From the perspective of the traditional understanding of human agency, such self-reports actually make it quite puzzling as to why praise is heaped upon these agents. For if someone acts on the basis of what amounts to an impersonal necessity, then even if the outcome is very positive, it is not clear why their action itself should be regarded so highly. Indeed, it seems scarcely to be an action at all, but rather just a natural event. There may even be a misguided tendency to regard it as a *supernatural* event, not unlike the action of a superhero, just to make sense of our glowing response to it.

But now we can have an incomparably better understanding of reactive heroism as a matter of ethical expertise: all individuals internalize their society’s normative landscape to some extent, but some do this particularly well, and on this basis these individuals can see immediately what needs to be done, and they are predisposed spontaneously to perform even novel actions that instantiate those common norms. This can happen at any moment, but certain circumstances trigger an actualization of those habitualities in a way that leads to extraordinary actions that *appear* supererogatory, but which in fact remain instances of existential necessity. In this way, there is no *essential* difference between reactive heroism as enacted by ordinary individuals and, say, professional firefighters (or others) who have received specialized training (this just greatly reduces the bystander effect). Both cases exhibit *extraordinary ordinariness* in the sense that they literally embody aspects of a shared

ethical habitus. It is on account of how such action gives *carnal expression* to important values that *we* (i.e., the relevant social collectivity) share that makes it a matter of universal everydayness that is at the same time something highly estimable (at least for *us*).

## 4 PROACTIVE HEROISM AS EMBODIED ACTION

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It is quite illuminating to account for reactive heroism along these lines, and in theoretical terms it is relatively easy to do so, inasmuch as the actions in question tend to be compact and well-defined. But as stated above, my main interest here has to do with whether this account of embodied predispositionality and necessity might also apply to cases of proactive heroism. This question is key to the viability of the thesis of the banality of heroism. For if that banality does indeed imply this corporeal account, then unless that account applies to proactive cases, the category of heroism would be reduced to its reactive core, while all cases of seemingly supererogatory proactive comportment would indeed be instances of supererogation, or saintism, and social progress would be premised in a problematic way on self-sacrificial behavior (more on this below).

So does the above account apply to proactive heroism? To pose the same question slightly differently: given the analysis of heroism in general as nonselfsacrificial existential necessity, could there possibly be such a thing as *proactive* heroism? Is that a coherent concept? And if so, then is it also best understood in embodied terms? I can only give a few brief indications here.

First, there are some evident differences from reactive cases. For instance, unlike the latter, there is clearly a great deal of reflection in cases of proactive heroism. But what is important is the nature of this reflection—must it always be a matter of moral deliberation as in saintism? Extending the earlier discussion of existential necessities, it seems entirely plausible to imagine that in some cases the reflection in question is instead a matter of the disclosure to oneself of

just such a characteristic internal necessity, that is, of an existential incapacity to act otherwise on the part of the agent herself. In other words – and this is an idea that I intend to develop in further work – the reflection undertaken in a case of proactive heroism amounts to a process of self-discovery and self-clarification of the fact that the agent’s self-realization is fully caught up in an extended existential ‘*must*’ rather than a series of moral ‘*shoulds*’.

This would mean that there is a generally a much higher level of self-awareness in proactive as opposed to reactive cases of heroism. This difference makes for a more direct contrast with the supererogation characteristic of saintism, for which reason the denial of self-sacrifice is even stronger in cases of proactive heroism. For in these cases, the agent has, at least in an abstract sense, far more opportunities to back out—the existential necessity involved is not a one-off thing, but is positively affirmed and reaffirmed over long periods.

This difference resonates with a more basic similarity. With regard to both sorts of cases, the model of embodied habitual predispositionality affords the most compelling way of understanding how values, principles, and any other elements of the ethical habitus can in the first place be internalized so as to become stable and irreducible features of an individual’s character—how, in other words, the ‘integration of agency and communion’ (cf. Frimer et al 2011) that is characteristic of heroism is actually achieved. In cases of reactive heroism this allows us to understand how dramatic instances of seemingly self-sacrificial ethical behavior can occur spontaneously, while in cases of proactive heroism it will allow us to understand the perseverance, the recurrently reaffirmed motivation, and the longitudinal continuity that characterize the agent’s endeavors over time. In both sorts of cases, though, the basic point is that it is literally true and not merely a suggestive piece of rhetoric to say that heroism is the embodiment of ethical commitment.

So it does seem that the notion of proactive heroism is a viable one, that it can be construed along the lines of the embodied necessity originally evinced in reactive cases, and

thus that the conceptual distinction between heroism and saintism holds at the proactive level. Both figures are alike in terms of transcending the minimum threshold of normative expectation in a given social context. But whereas the saint is internally divided and turns to moral reasoning for guidance in resolving the tension of the normative contingency of the alternative possibilities she faces, the proactive hero embodies an undivided commitment to an internalized imperative, such that for her there really is no contingency to grapple with.

In terms of the specific actions involved, proactive heroism and saintism may overlap. But the moral deliberation of saintism could also generate normative aspirations that fully transcend the given normative context. It is crucial to recognize that, as I have described it, proactive heroism does no such thing. Rather, owing to its embodied nature, heroism in general is bound to its ethical habitus. But this manifests differently in reactive and proactive cases. In the former, generally accepted norms are realized in a particularly intense way, and that is why virtually everyone applauds. The latter, however, has more to do with realizing the ‘validity surplus’ of that ethical habitus, that is, with the recognition that the implicit meaning and potential scope of application of its norms are broader than is actually the case currently, and with efforts that may be undertaken to extend their actual meaning and scope accordingly. Unlike the shared value that is affirmed in reactive cases, and which thereby merely reaffirms, albeit in dramatic fashion, the ethical *status quo*, this extension is initially *not* generally accepted, and in this way proactive heroism is essentially tied to the idea of immanent social progress. Saintism might also contribute to social progress. But unlike the way in which proactive heroism is anchored organically in the ethical habitus, in virtue of which it serves as a ‘loyal opposition’ that gives expression, not so much to *who we are*, as



with reactive heroism, but to *who we are in fact becoming*,<sup>7</sup> the connection of saintism to its social context is fundamentally incidental and arbitrary.

## 5 CULTIVATING HEROISM

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To reiterate a basic point, the above discussion aims to do nothing more than articulate a potentially helpful new conception of heroism in contradistinction to saintism. It does not yet make any claims about which actual actions, if any, would fall into which category. Where exactly the chips would fall in terms of heroism and saintism, and how this relates to current intuitions, remains to be seen.

By way of conclusion, though, I simply wish to make the point that if, as seems likely, social progress is most effectively pursued immanently through the realization of an ethical validity surplus, rather than through moral aspirations that are incidental to (and possibly even transcend) the existing normative context, then the prospects of actually achieving it by cultivating appropriate sorts of actions on a broad scale are much better if pursued on a heroic rather than on a saintly basis. And this means on an embodied basis. For if within a given social context there are indeed latent but nonetheless real ethical tendencies that would exceed the existing moral baseline, then it seems entirely reasonable to suppose that enhanced prosocial behavior could be promoted much more effectively as a positive expression of individual self-realization through identification with those tendencies, even to the point of becoming an existential necessity, rather than as a moral aspiration to be achieved through self-sacrifice. This implies a focus on corporeal predispositionality. What exactly this will mean in more concrete terms, I reserve for future work. But it is in this way alone, I submit, that the idea of the banality of heroism is viable and coherent.

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<sup>7</sup> I owe the expression 'loyal opposition' to discussion with Zeno Franco at the Second Biennial Heroism Science Conference in Richmond VA (October 2018). In my usage here, the 'loyalty' in question is to the deeper and possibly not yet fully realized – sense of the operative ethical principles in a given social context.

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## 7 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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*The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*