

Analysis of huckleberry finn regarding theory of morality

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



“ My idea of our civilization is that it is a shoddy, poor thing and full of cruelties, vanities, arrogances, meannesses, and hypocrisies,” Mark Twain once reflected. Morality does not flourish in such a society, as illustrated by its rampant violence and racism. Living in such an environment, Huck Finn assimilates many of its prejudices. Yet, the influences of society, both positive and negative, cease to influence Huck upon his departure, suggesting that they are external elements. Once these influences are removed, the development of Huck’s inner, moral self begins to emerge. The conflicts that arise during Huck’s journey south stem directly from the clash between his developing moral nature and his society dictated “ conscience,” brought together by external circumstances. Huck “[finds] himself often enough ‘ in formal opposition’ to what are deemed ‘ the most sacred laws of society,’ through obedience to yet more sacred laws, and so have tested his resolution without going out of his way” (Thoreau).

The “ sacred laws” that Thoreau refers to can be used to describe Huck’s emerging morality. They are the laws of himself, laws of humanity – morals based on the fundamental principles of tolerance and equality between everything, whether human or nature. This morality directly contrasts with cruelty, racism and hypocrisy, behaviors which injure others and violate the fundamental principle of tolerance. “ Human beings can be awful cruel to one another,” Huck observes when he sees the tarred and feathered duke and king. Unlike the villagers’ punishment, Huck’s actions are never intended to hurt anyone, because he respects the humanity of others. Compelled by his new independence and guided by Jim, Huck begins to “ derive his values ‘

fresh,' to quarry them out of experience, to create his own moral consciousness" (Warren).

Jim aids in Huck's moral development; through their friendship, he is able to perceive Jim as another human being, one that deserves tolerance, just like white people. Huck's growing morality manifests itself in a transformation from passive tolerance to active compassion. This change is reflected in his assistance to the Wilkes girls. However, Huck's morality is continuously challenged when forced to confront the immoral elements of society. Each time Huck is reengaged with society, his principles must stand on trial. Often, their perseverance requires self-sacrifice. The duke and the king, for example, " possess consciences distorted enough to make them... masters of all whom they survey, [including Huck and Jim]" (Pearce). Huck's tolerance towards the rascallions merely results in them taking advantage of him. Moreover, what society has impressed upon Huck continues to significantly influence him.

The culmination of this moral dilemma results when Huck debates whether or not to turn Jim in. Despite the racism Huck has assimilated from society, the morality he has developed prevails, and " he couldn't seem to strike no places to harden [him] against [Jim], but only the other kind." Finally, Huck chooses to aid Jim to freedom and declares, " All right, then, I'll go to hell." His own " sound heart" clearly triumphs over the " deformed conscience" of society, when Huck decides to damn himself to hell.

Huck's willingness to sacrifice himself reflects his attainment of a superior state of morality. Similarly, Henry David Thoreau depicts the abolitionist John Brown as a moral character who is willing to sacrifice his life for a cause he truly believed in. Thoreau writes in "Civil Disobedience," "Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think we should be men first and subjects afterward" (Thoreau). Huck's morality requires him not only to do what he perceives to be right, but also to do so regardless of opposition; despite a national government, local governments, organized religion, and individual citizens that champion slavery, Huck perseveres in his commitment to help Jim to freedom. The fictional Huck, like the real John Brown, adheres to morality "by obeying that eternal and only CONSTITUTION, which He, and not any Jefferson or Adams was written in... man's being". Brown, like Huck, disobeys external dictates because a higher law, coinciding with personal morality, demands it.

Huck and Brown, though by no way paragons of virtue, forge their own morality against the whims of circumstance. Despite many blunders and conflicts, they adhere to the personal and transcendental truths which they have forged. By doing so, each creates a "shred of goodness" that provides enduring testimony to his morality.