

patience and courage

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



At first glance, it might seem that patience and courage are dispositions that tend in different directions, reflecting different strengths. If we are asked to imagine exemplars of each of these virtues, we probably call two very different individuals to mind—the courageous person imposing, heroic, probably male, and the patient person quiet, reserved, quite likely female. (After all, Ancient Greek courage simply was the virtue of manliness (*andreia*), and the Victorians used to name their daughters Patience.)

Some of our images of courage may even positively conflict with some of our images of patience, with the courageous person insisting upon action while the patient person implores him to wait. In his wonderful paper, "Patience and Courage" (*Philosophy* 68(266), 1993), Eamonn Callan begins with a sort of thought experiment intended to capture our intuitive--though he thinks mistaken--sense of the relative significance of patience and courage: Suppose your friends had to ascribe a single vice to you in large measure, along with any virtues that could be coherently combined with that salient vice.

Suppose further that the vice had to be either cowardice or impatience. Which would you choose? (p. 523) Callan suspects that "almost everyone would choose impatience without hesitation," because a coward strikes us as an unreliable kind of person, and impatience itself might in some cases be a good thing, e. g. impatience with tyranny and injustice. Callan goes on to argue against this intuitive response, in that it underestimates the need for patience (an idea I have explored in previous posts), and also suggests that a more nuanced thinking about courage and patience shows that these virtues do not essentially conflict.

This should not be so surprising if we think, as Aquinas does, of patience as a part of fortitude, and recognize fortitude itself as the core of courage (or, as synonymous with courage). Of course, when we speak of fortitude, we speak of endurance, and talk of courage (or bravery) may seem instead to call to mind the "courage of the charge." But charging, as Tim O'Brien notes in his memoir on Vietnam, is only a tiny slice of bravery--once one has charged into danger, there is much to be endured. Or consider this perhaps surprising remark from Kierkegaard's *Purity of*

Heart: "Is patience not precisely that courage which voluntarily accepts unavoidable suffering? The unavoidable is just the thing which will shatter courage" (p. 173). Interestingly (as the translator notes), the Danish for patience *taalmod* contains the term for courage (*mod*). (Literally, *taalmod* is "enduring courage.") Kierkegaard connects patience to "unavoidable suffering" and thus implies that courage differs in that in courage we choose to put ourselves in the way of danger and adversity for a noble cause.

And he discusses how it may seem then that there can be no virtue in enduring adversity that is unavoidable and which, it seems, cannot be chosen. (If it's unavoidable, then there seems to be no real choice.) Here, he imagines the mocking voice of someone who says that this "patience" is merely "making a virtue out of necessity," and Kierkegaard replies, yes, that's exactly it! His point is that merely being saddled with unavoidable suffering or adversity does not imply that we will, as it were, shoulder that adversity in such a way that we remain committed to the Good.

We may despair, or become bitter and resentful, angry at the world. Of course, it may be that since Kierkegaard is a theist, he can assume that

there is some way in which any suffering thrown at us can possibly be endured well. Non-theists may not have grounds for the same hope. But let me put that, for now, to the side. (I hope to write a chapter about this issue in the future.) Callan discusses a case that goes to Kierkegaard's point: a man loses his sight, and vacillates between despair and rage, who thinks that the possibility of a good life has vanished.

It is not that he fails to learn how to get around in the world in spite of his blindness, but his life is devoid of all hope and joy because of the deep resentment he has about having become blind. He refuses to accept this unavoidable part of his life. Callan says, " The blind man in my story has no patience for the moral task his blindness has set him, and no amount of courage or fortitude can compensate for the absence of that virtue" (p. 526). Now here, there are interpretive difficulties, since I suggested above that we might see courage and patience as linked by fortitude. Here we might take Callan to be treating fortitude as a kind of thickness of skin, the stoniness we might ascribe to the Stoic sage: he is in despair, but doesn't show it. I have argued in my essay " In Defense of Patience" (newly revised as of yesterday), that perhaps we should question the idea that fortitude and patience can be pulled apart very far, that we should not reduce fortitude to the external appearance. (Otherwise, we can't distinguish genuine fortitude and endurance from mere psychic deadness.) Callan's point--at any rate--is that the possibility of this man's seeing and seeking Good in his life depends upon his coming to accept his blindness.

Why call that patience? Perhaps what I said about love and patience in a previous post provides part of an answer, especially if we can translate some

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of what I said about learning to love another person into talk of learning to love one's situation. (This is what Chris Cowley's " Learning to Love" is all about, in *Philosophical Topics* 38(1), 2010.) Here, we come to accept the distance between our new condition and our previous one, and re-commit to living well (and not merely, as Cowley discusses, " making the best of it").

We can call this patience, but at the same time, I think we can see, pace Callan to some extent, that such a process may in any number of cases also involve the kind of strength we describe as courage. People who are seriously injured and require extensive physical rehabilitation are sometimes praised for their courage in their efforts to endure the problems caused by their injuries, and to re-learn what they can, and to learn how to compensate for the abilities they have lost. Why call this courageous? First, there is the great endurance involved.

Second, in such circumstances, we may be tempted to despair, to feel sorry for ourselves, and even be afraid to face our condition, afraid of failing, afraid to learn what our new physical limitations are, and afraid to think about living our lives, or returning to our everyday lives, beset with the problems incurred through our injuries. If we think of courage primarily as the (voluntary) facing of fears and dangers, then courage is involved in facing the fears above, but the need for patience is not very far behind. This isn't peculiar to this example, since many courageous acts are extended in time.

Indeed, focusing on courageous acts that happen in an instant may obscure that many of our actions are in fact chains of action, stretches of activity, oriented toward some goal. Within such a stretch of time, the difference

between a courageous and a rash action may come down to one's ability to wait and endure the anticipation of setting out into "positive" action. (And so, in many sports, great athletes are praised for their ability to "wait for the game to come to them"--not to take bad swings or shots or to throw bad punches.

Consider how Kobe Bryant will sometimes bide his time for three quarters only to dominate the final twelve minutes, or Ali's notorious "rope-a-dope" strategy for fatiguing his opponents. [Not that we should exactly recommend Ali's strategy to young boxers, for unfortunately obvious reasons of long-term health.] So, courage and patience turn out not to be foes, or to show that there is disharmony amongst the virtues. And again, we see how in its quiet, unassuming way, patience reveals itself to be something of a "silent partner" as we seek to develop other virtues and strengths.

Courage Every human being on this planet is given the gift of courage. However, there are very few that ever take advantage of this gift, and actually put it to good use. Courage is the ability to work one's way through a tough situation. Be it mental, or physical. We have all faced tough challenges before. The difference, however, is that some people tend to give up when the going gets rough, while others keep on. Courage is a necessity to the evolution of our people. Without courage, African-Americans would still be stuck in slavery.

There would have been no one there to fight for the rights of the people we now consider our equals. Courage can be found in various forms. An amazing example of courage can be found in a soldier. They risk their lives every day simply to protect ours. We can even see courage in a fellow classmate; one

who is coping with the loss of a parent, fighting depression or even dealing with an eating disorder. As said earlier, it can be mental or physical. Courage is the only thing that gets us through the hard times, and the tempting opportunities.

Without it, every one of us may have given into that cigarette in the 6th grade. Courage is vital to the evolution of the human population. It is also an essential quality to becoming a successful person. Courage is of two kinds: physical and moral. The former is common to both man and beast; but the latter belongs to man alone. Courage comes from the strength of mind or will. Physical courage depends on one's physical strength. A weak; and sickly person is hardly seen to be physically courageous. Because his ill health does not permit him to take an aggressive view in life, although he may be mentally bold.

But a person, who is bold and strong, both in body and mind, is normally found to be courageous. The question of physical courage arises in the event of any danger or difficulty that suddenly appears, when immediate protection or security from that fear of massacre or destruction demands physical courage. If a sudden fire breaks out in a house, or a dacoit is going to take place, physical courage becomes absolutely necessary in such critical moments. Without physical resistance with indomitable courage, it becomes impossible to save the situation.

But moral courage is in no way inferior to the physical courage. It is, on the contrary, more important and glorious to possess moral courage. Moral courage is very rare. It is found in one in a million. There are numerous instances where people have bravely used their physical courage and saved

the life of a drowning man, or a house from burning in fire, by jumping courageously into the scene of danger. But there are few cases, where the common people are found to open their mouth against an unfair or unjust deed that they witness, because they lack moral courage. They are cowards without a backbone.

Noble may be the cause in which physical courage is shown; but nobler is the cause in which moral courage is displayed. Moral courage comes from a firm conviction that the possessor has in him. Let us take the case of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who is known for his noble character and moral courage. The man was highly educated, but hardly with any extraordinary physical strength; yet he was endowed with tremendous moral courage. He did not hesitate to raise his voice of protest or even insult the wicked Europeans who used to rule the country then with enormous power.

He had also ignored all sorts of humiliation in the hands of his own countrymen, when he was determined to get the Bill for 'Hindu Widow Remarriage' passed by the Government. That goes to show his wonderful determination, moral courage and noble character. Galileo, the great scientist, had also to suffer imprisonment in his old age for the sake of his conviction. Men of moral courage never barter away their conscience, but put it before liberty, before reputation, even before life. They think of no danger, nor of death, when the alternative is a disgrace.

They hate more to live as cowards than to face prosecution, imprisonment or death. It is these men who are the true makers of history. It is they who live in honour, die in glory, and have the privileges of being adored by all. Courage is summoning strength in the face of life's difficulties or, sometimes,

life's horrors. It means proceeding in spite of pain, cost, or risk. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the deliberate decision that action is necessary regardless. Courage acknowledges uncertainty, but perseveres because of conviction and resolve.

It offers us focus and self-possession so we can call up our competencies to meet our challenges. Courage is not necessarily an outward act of heroism; it can be purely internal, such as making the decision to be cheerful in grief, to adhere to values different from those around us, or to give something another try. Through my own experiences in life I have been able to define the true meaning of courage. Courage is to have the ability to know right from wrong and stand up for what you believe in even in the face of great adversity.

In my lifetime I have rarely been called upon to display courage, but I clearly remember one specific situation. I was fourteen years old and at one of my friends birthday parties. There were around seventy-five teenagers at the party, along with loud music and dancing. What I thought was going to be a great night, turned out to be the night my courage would be tested. As I was talking to some of my friends I noticed something was wrong with them. Shortly after, I noticed that their behavior was different, I realized that I was smelling the scent of marijuana.

Before I knew it I was being offered some of their drugs. I thought about the consequences that were to come if I had said yes to their offer. I felt that if I had said yes, I would have let down so many people, but most importantly myself. Having courage gave me the will to say no to the drugs and walk away from the peer pressure. In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, <https://assignbuster.com/patience-and-courage/>

both Atticus Finch and Mrs. Dubose exemplify moral courage. Throughout the novel Atticus was portrayed as a man of great courage and integrity. Atticus had to discuss concepts with his daughter Scout when they were at Finch Landing.

Scout wanted to know why Atticus was going to defend Tom Robinson if he already knew he was going to be defeated. Atticus then explained to Scout that, " simply because [Atticus and Scout] were licked a hundred years before [Atticus and Scout] started is no reason for [Atticus and Scout] not to try to win" (76). Atticus was demonstrating his courage by proving that no matter how hard things get, you should never give up, and that you should always fight for what you believe in. Atticus is shown as being courageous by demonstrating perseverance and standing up for what is right.

Another example of how Atticus is courageous is when at Finch Landing, he explains to Scout that this time he knew that he was " Fighting [his] friends, and no matter how bitter things get, they are still [his] friends and this is still [his] home"(76). Atticus' explanation to Scout was important because he had to reassure her that no matter the outcome of the trial they would still have their friends and there home. Even with all the pressure to quit the case, Atticus was determined to go up against all odds to ensure that justice would prevail. Atticus was a courageous, determined, and compassionate man.

Along with Atticus, Mrs. Dubose is another prime example of a courageous person. Mrs. Dubose demonstrated courage when she decided to give up her morphine addiction. Mrs. Dubose died a slow painful death and when she was on her death bed, Mrs. Dubose reminded Atticus carefully, " [Mrs. Dubose] was going to leave this world beholden to nothing and nobody"

(111). In this situation most people would not have been able to tolerate the pain and would have given in to the morphine. Mrs. Dubose could have easily chosen to take the morphine and die without so much agonizing pain, but she was too contrary.

Her moral courage helped her to overcome her addiction. Mrs. Dubose was not only a courageous but also a selfless person. Jem had to learn this about her the hard way. Atticus questioned Jem, "Son didn't you know what her fits were"(111)? Mrs. Dubose chose not to tell anyone that she had been trying to give up the morphine. The withdrawal made her have anger fits. She did not want to burden anyone with her problems. Mrs. Dubose let everyone believe that she was an angry, old, mean, terrible person. Still need to finish conclusion..... patience

Have you ever wondered why certain people succeed and do well in certain situations while others don't? The reason is that those successful people have and have always had a certain characteristics that help them to do so. These characteristics are called virtues. A virtue is a characteristic of a person which supports individual moral excellence and collective well being. One of the most important virtues that helps individuals progress and succeed is patience. This is because patience helps one make good decisions, prevents one from giving up, and helps develop empathy and compassion.

First and foremost patience helps us make good decisions. The reason for this is by being patient you have a clear mind to think through the possible results of your actions. Everyone has stress and has been in stressful situations but the way we respond to the stress is what defines our future

success. In order to become successful people have had to make tough decisions regarding their futures and without patience they would not have been able to do so. For example Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, made the decision to drop out of college in order to pursue his dream of creating a software company.

In its early stages he faced much adversity for his decision but he stuck with it and his patience helped him to become one of the wealthiest and most successful people ever. Along with decision making patience also prevents one from giving up. This is as a result of keeping your goals consistent regardless of how difficult or the time it takes to reach them. One of the greatest examples of success through patience is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He is one of the most influential people that have ever lived. Dr. King's goal which was simple but seemed impossible at the time was to end discrimination and unify our nation