



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Stephanie L. Painter for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Philosophy presented on May 29, 2013. Title: Disney and Virtue Ethics: Understanding Disney Film through Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

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The purpose of this thesis was to develop an analytical framework based in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and to apply this framework to Disney films in order to broaden the current discussion and analysis of Disney films. The first portion of this thesis was an overview of the most common critiques of Disney film, which includes a discussion of Disney's portrayal of race, class, and gender. Next, the analytical framework was outlined to include the four main elements of Aristotelian virtue ethics: *telos*, moral agent, cultivation of virtue, and friendship. Then, the framework was applied to three Disney animated films: *Pinocchio* (1940), *Hercules* (1997), and *Brave* (2012). The results demonstrated that *Pinocchio* and *Brave* did not fully comply with the framework, while *Hercules* was perfectly described by the framework. However, this analysis revealed that Disney films present relevant modern moral dilemmas in spite of their problematic stereotypical representations of people of color, of lower classes, and of the female gender. It was concluded that Disney films included morally objectionable material, however, some Disney films were worthy of moral consideration due to their inclusion of moral narratives.

Key Words: Disney, Aristotle, Virtue Ethics, Film, Analysis

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Disney and Virtue Ethics

Understanding Disney Film through Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

by

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Stephanie L. Painter, Author

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## Introduction

Disney has become a global force sharing American culture, constructs, and ideas with the world. It is held as an exemplar of childhood, innocence, virtue and by some is effectively held without reproach in popular culture. In the *Mouse That Roared*, Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock discuss the pervasiveness of Disney's influence in terms of wealth and power comparable to a Nation-State: "In 2008, Disney pulled in a record \$37.8 billion in revenues from all of its divisions. What the 2008 financial meltdown in the United States would seem to demonstrate is that Disney and other megacorporations are in fact more powerful than nation-states, as they remain immune from the kind of accountability measures that limit government power" (207). Disney's network of influence starts targeting children from a very early age with franchises like *Baby Einstein* and *Club Penguin*, all the way through older adolescents with movies like *High School Musical*. Additionally, this network extends globally with Disney theme parks extending all the way to Hong Kong. "From its inception, Disney has understood the crucial connection between profits and selling culture to mass audiences. But Disney has mastered an understanding of how people learn through media consumption and how this grants a corporation overwhelming power to shape people, politics, and the larger culture" (208). Giroux and Pollock conclude that Disney is a global corporation with a lot of power and influence and any content that is consumed from Disney should be highly scrutinized because it has the power to change our daily lives (220). Disney's power stems from their ability to construct cultural narratives that tap into current, popular thoughts and beliefs about topics ranging from sexism, racism, classism, religion, politics, economics, and morality. Disney then takes these ideas, repackages them in



cultural narratives, and sells it back to their consumers. As popular opinion evolves, so do the Disney narratives: they are both a reflection and a projection of our cultural attitudes and struggles, repackaged as a commodity.

“Culture is actual people, who have collectively been shown some, but not other, images. They consequently have some, but not other, ways of organizing, of valuing, and of making and understanding language about their solitary and shared experiences” (Miller 87). If this is truly how culture operates, then the vast consumption of Disney film and animation, as Americans have experienced it, becomes highly problematic due to the scale of its affects.

Some critics hold that Disney films, especially in their movies aimed at children, are sexist, racist, and classist. Considering these accusations, why has Disney stood all these years as such an exemplar of goodness? Why do parents take their children to see Disney movies in theatres, watch the Disney Channel, buy Disney clothes and toys, take their children to Disneyland—to “the happiest place on earth”—and continue to purchase Disney products? If Disney has truly implemented such negative ideas into their movies like racism, classism and sexism, then why is Disney frequently held up as a moral standard for children? Why do some parents rely on Disney movies to teach their children about right and wrong and to explain the difference between good and evil? I argue that despite all the criticisms of Disney, a compelling traditional moral perspective can provide the grounds for a defense of the Disney movies: virtue ethics—specifically the Aristotelian version in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Disney has been discussed through countless different analytical lenses: culturally, religiously, in terms of sexism, racism, classism, just to name a few. However,

Disney has not been analyzed through a framework of virtue ethics—at least not in the world of academia—a framework I intend to develop and discuss in detail. Ultimately, I intend to use this framework to broaden our understanding of the narratives and characters of specific Disney films and to interpret the moral messages that these stories attempt to convey.

First, I will begin with a discussion of some of the ways that Disney films have already been understood, analyzed, and broken down. Then, I will develop and outline a virtue ethics framework grounded in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* by which to analyze Disney films. After this theoretical framework has been explained, I will use the framework in the analysis of three major Disney films: *Pinocchio* (1940), *Hercules* (1997), and *Brave* (2012). Finally, I will close by considering some questions that might arise from an analysis of the virtue ethic framework. I will conclude that there are limits to the Aristotelian virtue ethic framework as presented in this thesis; there is still value found in applying it.

The films that I chose allow me to demonstrate the range of the virtue ethical framework. Additionally, this framework does not excuse Disney of their objectionable representations of people of color, people in lower classes, and women in their film. However, these films also demonstrate an important role Disney films play in our culture: with a consideration of these films it can be seen that Disney has evolved to tap into the moral struggles of our time and present them in media. It is important to understand the relationship between Disney and their construction of moral narratives because it helps reveal current trends and attitudes within our culture—including significant moral trends and attitudes. Through the reading of this thesis, it will become apparent that while

Disney is a megacorporation with some racist, classist, and sexist tendencies, they also have created *some* narratives that present relevant moral messages to the average consumer.

## Disney Literature Review

In this chapter, I discuss some common critiques of Disney narratives. For example, I look at how Disney films present gender, class, and race in a culturally normative way that is often viewed to be problematic considering their power and sway in the creation of cultural narratives. What I intend to demonstrate later is a very different kind of critique about the content of Disney films.

In “The Movie You See, The Movie You Don’t,” Miller and Rode demonstrate that racism is apparent in two examples of older, classic Disney films. The portrayal of African Americans in *Song of the South* (1946) is that of happy, folksy, uneducated workers who are content with being second class citizens (89). It portrays African Americans as happy to be subservient to their white owners, that this is what they really wanted in life, and that achieving anything more with their lives was far from their minds (Miller 90). The stereotype being portrayed of African Americans was that they were happy to work on the plantations, “singing their work and toil away” (Miller 90). Above all else, it diminished the horrors of African American slavery and made it appear as if African Americans were *happy* to be *slaves*. According to Miller and Rode, the NAACP “objected strenuously” to the way in which African Americans were being portrayed in this film, even before the film was released.

Perhaps one of the best examples of racism prevalent in Disney movies is the *Jungle Book*: the portrayal of African Americans as apes. This occurs primarily with King Louie, the king of the Apes, “who wishes in vain to be human”: “[the film’s] racial stereotyping... finds its fullest expression in a scene in King Louie’s jungle kingdom, the decaying, abandoned remains of some now extinct, supposedly ‘primitive’ culture”

(Miller 92). These create a striking picture of African Americans as coming from a jungle kingdom, with decaying remains of an extinct culture, and having a primitive culture.

King Louie has a feature song in the *Jungle Book*—"I Want to Be Like You". Miller and Rode point out the connection being made with the qualities of being a man and the qualities that this orangutan does not possess. He sings of wishing to be a man and understanding that he is not a man, and therefore concludes that he could not ever acclimate to any human society (Miller 92). This suggests that African Americans are something *other* than human.

Classism is also apparent: only "characters with power" are associated with "regal mannerisms and posh British accents"—regardless if they [are] compassionate or wicked (Miller 93). For example, in the *Jungle Book*, Shere Khan the tiger who terrorizes the creatures of the jungle, Colonel Hathi, the militant leader of the pachyderm of elephants, and Bagheera the high-brow panther who tutors Mowgli and journeys with him to the "Man-village" are all characters who possess British accents and carry themselves as if they were nobility. They seem to be well educated, and they all maintain power and privilege in this jungle society (93). However, "The vultures..., scavengers and outcasts from jungle society, speak in various lower-class British accents. The Black-coded characters speak a jazz lingo that reflects the most stereotypic African American dialect" (93). The final, major indicator to these class distinctions, argues Miller and Rode, is the defining of "man" as that which Mowgli should become. In the film, Bagheera, who maintains a British accent, qualifies King Louie, who speaks with a jazz lingo, as "beneath contempt" and Baloo, who also speaks with a jazz lingo, the bear, as a "shiftless, stupid, jungle bum" (93).

Aside from these discussions of racism and classism, there have been extensive discussions of sexism in Disney films. Elizabeth Bell, "Somatexts at the Disney Shop," analyzes the presentation of women's bodies in six animated films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *Aladdin* (1992). Bell argues that Disney presents: "Within the language of Disney animation, the constructed bodies of women are somatic, cinematic and cultural codes that attempt to align audience sympathies and allegiance with the beginning and end of the feminine life cycle, marking the middle as a dangerous, consumptive, and transgressive realm" (109). Disney intentionally creates characters based on preconceived societal notions about women and their age, marking the time between youth and old age as a period of time when women should be feared, in order to cause the audience to identify with particular female characters and to reject other female characters. Bell discusses this period of women between youth and old age, as Disney's femme fatales, they are characterized as dangerous and vain, examples include *Snow White's* Wicked Queen, *Cinderella's* Lady Trumain, *Sleeping Beauty's* Maleficent, and *The Little Mermaid's* Ursula (115).

In earlier films, Bell discusses how the teenage heroines were constructed from the bodies of professional dancers (110). Disney utilized classical ballet and the bodies of ballerinas to develop the bodies of their heroines. They actually modeled the bodies of their heroines from ballerina dancers. They would bring ballerinas into the studio and begin the drawing of their characters based off of the shape of the ballerina's bodies, the way they moved, walked, held their head and their arms, and how they pointed their feet. They were to be "naturally" graceful in this way. If you were to look at Aurora, from

*Sleeping Beauty*, or Cinderella, from *Cinderella*, it is apparent that the way that they move is the way that ballet dancers move (Bell 110-111). In conjunction, if you were to analyze some of the minor characters like Anastasia and Drizella, from *Cinderella*, the way they move is the antithesis of ballet form and their bodies are not that of professional dancers (Bell 112). They are clumsy, with large feet, rounded bodies, and poor posture. In this way, Disney shows that their young heroines are to be graceful and beautiful—their obvious royalty is also demonstrated through classical ballet, even if they are unaware of their royal lineage or their propensity for it (Bell 111). However, while these heroine bodies are strong, they are inherently passive characters. Bell describes this disjuncture as a mixed somatic message: “While the characterizations of Disney heroines adhere to fairy-tale templates of passivity and victimage, their bodies are portraits of strength, discipline, and control, performing the dancing roles of princesses” (112). While these heroines seem strong, they are incapable of actively determining their fate and need others to do so for them.

In more recent Disney movies, the professional dancer teenage body was abandoned. In *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney employed Sherri Stoner as the live-action model for Ariel and Belle (Bell 113). She is 5’2” and weighs 92 pounds, has an expressive face and a small frame. Her body is very different from the bodies Disney used to develop in their earlier films (Bell 113). Also, Disney departed from the stereotypes of women displayed in *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* fairytales: “Both are active, intelligent young women in pursuit of their dreams against the wishes of the parent figures in the films” (Bell 113-114). Critics applauded Disney over their “accurate portrayals of teenage petulance.” Their bodies, instead of being

drawn from an unachievable professional dancer's body and movements, were portrayed in the "conventions of cheesecake" (Bell 114). Elements of striptease are heavily imbued in *The Little Mermaid*, with Ariel's purple seashell bra and her suggestive poses throughout the film. Bell explains why this is problematic: "While the earliest folk heroines move in the stilted lines of classical dance, the latest folk heroines tease with the conventions of burlesque. While the first approach distances the audience in the guise of artificiality and elitism, the second approach entices with the implicit warning, 'look but don't touch'" (Bell 114). It is important to remember that often these teenage heroines vary in age from fourteen to sixteen, sometimes eighteen. Bell summarizes the portrayals of these Disney heroines as either being of asexual dancers or strippers posing with props (115). Disney does not allow these young heroines to be something other than either a sex-tease or a woman of extreme grace and poise.

These analyses show Disney films to be sexist, classist, and racist. They portray women as sex objects or virginal goddesses, those in a lower class to be unintellectual and lazy, and they present African Americans as happy slaves. These reviews demonstrate that Disney films should be approached with a critical attitude and an understanding that these films are not merely fun narratives for children and adults to enjoy. These films are conveying real cultural messages that are impacting real individuals, members of our society. These films reflect the ideas and social constructs of our time. I completely agree with many of the conclusions of these analyses and only wish to further the critical discussion of the ideas portrayed in Disney films. However, I will argue that another analytical framework is needed in order to highlight overlooked elements of Disney films: positive moral messages. In the next chapter, I will outline and



develop a framework that analyzes these films through a virtue ethical lens. To do this, I will reference Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Christina Sommers' and Fred Sommers' *Vice & Virtue in Everyday Life*, and *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*.

## Virtue Ethic Framework

Before my analysis of these films can be made, I need to establish a conceptual framework in which to understand and interpret these pieces. This framework is based in Aristotelian Virtue Ethics and will include the following components: the moral agent, virtue, friendship, and teleology. However, before I can explain the framework in detail it is important to understand a few foundational components of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics as discussed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

### *Telos*

Aristotle is very concerned with determining the end goal—or *telos*—of the human life, or the purpose of a human life. For Aristotle, achieving happiness—or living a life that amounts to happiness—is the *telos* of a human life: "...happiness appears to be something complete and self-sufficient, and is, therefore, the end of actions" (Aristotle 1097b). Every action a person ever commits is towards the furtherance of happiness, and if a person has achieved happiness, then they have fulfilled their purpose and have lived a "good life". But happiness is not just feeling good about oneself, or one's moral aptitude, or about one's life, it is about functioning well as a human being. Living well ultimately equates to happiness, and according to Aristotle this requires cultivating virtue and cultivating friendships based in the good.

In his translation of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Thompson explains, "Aristotle defined happiness as functioning well. The function of a thing is its special kind of activity: what it can do better than anything else. Thus, the function of human beings is the exercise of their capacity to reason. A capacity that enables a thing or a being to function well is a

virtue” (Thompson 293). Developing and cultivating virtue is functioning well as a human being, even when not in action. Virtue Ethics places a large role on the moral agent. It is the agent’s responsibility to cultivate virtue, to cultivate friendship, to pursue living well. No one can force someone to behave morally; it must come from the agent and no one else. It is up to them to develop the *praxis* of living well, or the practice of living well as opposed to the theory, and embodying virtues (Audi 731). From the moral agent, all of the other components of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics that we will be analyzing are derived.

### Moral Agent

Before I begin, let me clarify and define virtue as it will be discussed. There are two types of virtue: “one pertaining to thinking and the other to character” (Aristotle 1103a). Virtue pertaining to thought can be instructed or taught while virtue pertaining to character results from disposition and practice. An example of virtue pertaining to thought would be philosophizing about virtue and reading Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Virtue pertaining to character would manifest in a person using that knowledge in their daily life, so when they encounter a situation, like a child stuck in a burning building, they know how to implement the necessary virtues in order to behave in such a way that is moral and right. I am mostly concerned with virtue pertaining to character—because it is developed through a moral agent’s action and is the most prevalent form of virtue in the films I will analyze.

The primary manner in which Aristotle discusses virtue is in analogies of arts and crafts. He uses these subjects to describe how virtuous character is developed through

practice. Often this concept is understood from habit, which is a somewhat misleading term (Sachs xii). Habit, which is translated from the Greek word *hexis*, means more than just repetitively completing an action. Aristotle does not believe character is so passively developed (Sachs xi). *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* defines *hexis* as “a state of character or of mind that disposes us to deliberately choose to act or to think in a certain way” (379). Defining *hexis* as habit suggests that the action is done involuntarily, or without thinking, but Aristotle’s *hexis* is defined as a necessarily deliberate act.

Practice would be a far more suitable description insofar as it requires intentional implementation. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle relates harp playing and house building to character development through *hexis*: “But we do take on the virtues by first being at work in them, just as also in other things, namely the arts; the things that one who has learned them needs to do we learn by doing, and people become, say house builders by building houses or harpists by playing the harp” (Aristotle 1103a-1103b). Building houses badly will make for a bad builder just in the same way that playing the harp well will make for a good harpist. Aristotle makes the claim that if this were not the case, then “everyone would have been born good or bad at the arts” (Aristotle 1103b). This suggests that an individual is not born moral or immoral at birth, but they have the capacity to both learn and practice living well. The cultivation of virtue can be best understood as learning how to be a moral person through the act of living morally: “we become just by doing things that are just, temperate by doing things that are temperate, and courageous by doing things that are courageous” (Aristotle 1103b).



run inside a burning building to save a cat would be foolhardy if one was to risk their life to do so. This is the mean of moderation: “virtue is an active condition that makes one apt at choosing, consisting in a mean condition in relation to us which is determined by a proportion and by the means by which a person with practical judgment would determine it” (Aristotle 1106b-1107a).

### Friendship

Friendship is another very important component to Aristotelian ethics. Aristotle considers it a “kind of virtue” and believes that at least virtue and friendship are connected (1155a). Friendship is a necessary component of a well lived life, and all through his philosophy the component of friendship and people being social is crucially important (Aristotle 1155a). There are three categories of friendship. The first is friendship based in utility, the second is friendship based in pleasure, and the third is friendship based in the good (Aristotle 1156a-1156b).

Friendships based in utility only lasts so long as each party can provide each other the service each party needs, “So those who love one another for what is useful do not love one another for themselves, but insofar as something good comes to them from one another” (Aristotle 1156a). A friendship based in utility would be most employer/employee relationships. That friendship only lasts insofar as it is beneficial to both the employer and employee. If the employee is frequently late or acts inappropriately at their job, then much of the usefulness they provide the employer ceases to exist. Conversely, if an employee finds a higher paying job with more benefits or conveniences them in a way that her or his former job did not, then s/he has no need for

their employer. Their form of friendship ends when either can no longer satisfy the needs of the other.

Additionally, the same is true with friendships based in pleasure, but instead of loving each other for their goodness and likeness in virtue, it is from the pleasure they feel around one another (Aristotle 1156a). These kinds of friendships are friendships that revolve around doing activities together: they have no stake in the relationship except for the pleasure that is derived from it. An example of this kind of friendship would be friends formed from a book club or a philosophy club. The enjoyment received out of the relationship is the basis for the friendship and not something useful someone receives from the friendship; the pleasure derived from the friendship alone is enough. Aristotle qualifies friendships based in utility or pleasure as lesser friendships than friendships based in the good.

For Aristotle, friendships based in the good are the best sorts of friendships. “But the complete sort of friendship is that between people who are good and are alike in virtue.... And each of them is good simply and good for his friend, since good people are both good simply and beneficial to one another” (Aristotle 1156b). These friendships involve a mutual admiration for one another and respect for their moral virtues. An example of this kind of friendship would be best friends who have been best friends who care about each other’s moral goodness more than any pleasure or useful that their friendship could provide. Aristotle goes on to say that this form of friendship is rare, because good people, in this capacity, are rare (Aristotle 1156b). Also, only the good can partake in the friendship based in virtue: “It is clear that only the good can be friends for themselves, since the bad do not enjoy their own kind unless some benefit comes from

them” (Aristotle 1157a). Ultimately, friendships based in the good help each other live virtuously because they hold each other accountable to the virtues they both simultaneously value and value each other for their virtuous behavior.

Finally, the last distinction that can be made regarding friendships rests in their equality. Each type of friendship holds the capacity to be equal or unequal. Aristotle gives the examples of father and child, ruler and subject, and husband and wife (Aristotle 1158b-1159a). These types of friendships might only exist if the superior partner in the friendship should receive a proportionate amount of affection from the inferior partner (Aristotle 1158b-1159a). Essentially, the superior friend should receive more affection than the inferior partner in the proportion of their superiority to the inferior friend. This kind of friendship will be relevant to my analysis of Disney films because it will disqualify a few friendships from being friendships based in the good.

### Applying the Framework

How is virtue ethics manifested in Disney films? Disney movies often portray a main character, or two, embodying a particular kind of virtue such as courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, magnanimity, proper ambition/pride, patience/good temper, truthfulness, wittiness, friendliness, modesty, righteous indignation. These are Aristotle’s twelve virtues. Usually, it is only one virtue and the main character spends the better part of the story trying to discover what this virtue is, encountering situations that call for the character to embody the virtue, repeatedly, until they finally acquire the virtue. Often along the way, the development of a key friendship occurs that makes this virtue transformation possible. Between the moral agent pursuing the *telos* of a good life,



developing friendships, and cultivating virtue, Disney produces a story that has significant and positive moral content.

In the following chapters, I will use this framework of the Aristotelian moral agent, the cultivation of virtue, friendship, and teleology to discuss these Disney movies. Specifically, I will analyze the way in which the main character is constructed, using a standard Aristotelian moral agent as a guide for understanding the narrative and development of a virtuous character which is presented to the audience. I will use the Aristotelian understanding of the cultivation of virtue as it relates to the mean of moderation to interpret the actions and decisions of the main character as the character struggles to act virtuously. Through the conception of Aristotelian friendship, I will analyze minor characters in relation to their association with the major character and classify the role of this relationship as it relates to the main character's cultivation of virtue. Finally, using the conception of teleology, I will analyze the main character's overarching narrative as it relates to their pursuance of a good life. This type of analysis is only possible if it is predicated upon the assumption that the goal of the main character is to develop a virtue. If there is no virtuous trait being cultivated or if there is no moral struggle, then this analysis is not possible. For this reason, I chose *Pinocchio*, *Hercules*, and *Brave*, as the Disney films to analyze.

Film 1: *Pinocchio* (1940)*Telos*

I begin, chronologically, with Disney's *Pinocchio* (1940). As stated by *The Gospel According to Disney*, "[Pinocchio] is a simple morality tale—cautionary and schematic—ideal for moral instruction..." (28). While *The Gospel According to Disney* is discussing the religious undertones of the *Pinocchio* film, I believe this statement holds true for any moral discussion of the film. From its very outset it is clear that *Pinocchio* is primarily a story about teaching right and wrong to young children. From the moment of Pinocchio's birth, he is told that while he might have been granted consciousness, but in order to become a "real boy" he must prove to be "brave, honest, and unselfish". Also, repeatedly Pinocchio is told that he is ultimately responsible for his transformation into a real boy. This is characteristic for any film that is amenable to a virtue ethic analysis film. The moral agent is solely tasked with the responsibility of becoming a good person and, in these films, there is a far-off goal in mind that is representative of becoming a virtuous person. It can be implied that whatever this extrinsic goal is, which in this case is to become a real boy, the desire stems from wanting to be happy and believing that by pursuing these goals then the moral agent will be living the good life.

According to the Disney version of this tale, there is a puppet maker named Gepetto who makes toys, clocks, and nick-knacks. He lives alone, save for his cat, Figaro, and his gold fish, Cleo. They live contentedly, but he wishes that his recently made puppet, who almost looks like a real boy, could be a real boy. That night he wishes to the wishing star that his puppet, Pinocchio, could be a real boy. While he sleeps, the

wishing star comes to his house in the form of a beautiful blue fairy and tells Gepetto that he deserves to have his wish come true. She grants Pinocchio consciousness and allows Jiminy Cricket, who snuck into Gepetto's house earlier that night, to act as Pinocchio's conscience.

### Moral Agent

Utilizing the virtue framework, we can identify Pinocchio as the moral agent who defines achieving the good life—or happiness—as becoming a real boy. The virtues he is cultivating are bravery, honesty, and unselfishness. However, what makes Pinocchio morally interesting is that the focus is less on cultivating these specific traits and more on developing the moral character to even begin cultivating these traits. The Blue Fairy, the person who endows Pinocchio with consciousness, tells Pinocchio to let Jiminy Cricket be his guide and to follow “the straight and narrow path”. The story unfolds with Pinocchio experiencing situations where he should have been brave, honest, or unselfish. However, Pinocchio begins with no character in which to develop his morality. Developing morality hinges upon the idea of character and Pinocchio is too new to the world to even have developed any kind of moral compass, any kind of awareness of some actions being good and others being bad. At this point he does not even realize that there is a sliding scale by which one could be virtuous or one could be vicious—hence the appointment of Jiminy Cricket by the Blue Fairy.

## Cultivation of Virtue

Aristotle addresses the importance of becoming acquainted with distinctions between right and wrong: “All people are good at making distinctions about the things they are acquainted with, and each is a good judge of those things. Therefore, good judgment goes along with the way each one is educated, and the one who has been educated about everything has it in an unqualified way” (1094b-1095a). Aristotle goes onto to say that for these reasons that the young should not study politics because they are inexperienced “in the actions of life” (1095a). Pinocchio demonstrates this inexperience aptly. He cannot even begin to appropriately choose right from wrong because he does not understand why some decisions are good and why others are bad: listening to your father, going to school, not divulging into feel-good impulses. Not long after Pinocchio becomes an animated puppet, his father sends him to school. Pinocchio was effectively a baby in the world with no knowledge of the dangers of temptation that filled the streets in between his home and school. This is apparent in some of the first scenes with animated Pinocchio. Jiminy sits down to explain morality. He even attempts to explain the Mean of Moderation to Pinocchio, with a less philosophically inclined vocabulary: “Yep, temptations. They’re the wrong things that seem right at the time, but even though the right things may seem wrong sometimes, or sometimes the wrong things may be right at the wrong time, or visa versa.” If we understand temptations as vices, we can see Jiminy trying to explain to Pinocchio the need to avoid vices. The narrative of Pinocchio is that of an individual discovering the mean of moderation in general, rather than a particular virtue.

Not long after Pinocchio is pushed from his home and shoved off to school, Pinocchio encounters a wily fox named Honest John and his minion, Gideon, who whisk him away to become an actor (unbeknownst to Pinocchio that their real intentions are to sell him to a puppeteer). Jiminy discovers that he overslept and Pinocchio is on his own. Once Jiminy finds Pinocchio, realizes he does not intend to go to school, he pulls Pinocchio aside and tells him to go to school. However, Pinocchio does not listen and goes to become an actor. On stage, he is a hit, which causes Jiminy to doubt his former advice and abandon Pinocchio. Later that evening, however, Pinocchio realizes that becoming an actor and working for the puppeteer, Stromboli, was a terrible decision when he is locked in a cage. Jiminy finds Pinocchio in the cage and fortunately the Blue Fairy comes to free Pinocchio. At first Pinocchio lies to her—against Jiminy’s advice—which prompts his nose to grow, teaching him that lying only results in terrible consequences and that lying is wrong. Pinocchio is freed and begins to travel home with Jiminy. However, he bumps into Honest John and Gideon again, only to be convinced he is sick and that the cure rests at Pleasure Island—a place where “bad” boys go to wreak havoc, consume alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and transform into donkeys. On his way there, he befriends a boy named Lampwick, who assists in leading Pinocchio away from the “straight and narrow path”.

### Friendship

*Pinocchio* really focuses less on the cultivation of specific virtues and more on the development of character in general. However, friendship is fundamental to Aristotle’s virtue-based model of morality and in the telling of Pinocchio, the relationship between

Pinocchio and Jiminy Cricket is explored in comparison to Pinocchio's relationship with Honest John, Stromboli, and Lampwick. Honest John is clearly only friends with Pinocchio insofar as it serves his purposes, making the friendship one based in utility. At first, Honest John made money off selling Pinocchio to Stromboli, the puppeteer; then he made money off Pinocchio a second time by selling him to the Coachmen, who is the owner and operator of Pleasure Island. The same can be said of Stromboli, who only seeks to make a profit off of Pinocchio. Pinocchio's relationship with Lampwick is a friendship based in pleasure; this is shown through the time they spend together doing things for fun. However, it becomes clear that neither of them have a vested interest in the well-being, the moral goodness, of the other. This is obvious when Pinocchio and Lampwick begin transforming into donkeys and they abandon each other.

The only relationship that is really developed as a friendship based on the good is Pinocchio's relationship with Jiminy. In fact, Jiminy is offended when Pinocchio calls Lampwick his best friend instead of him. Jiminy is always concerned for Pinocchio's well-being and always trying to help him do the right thing. However, the downfall of this relationship, in terms of virtue ethics, is that Pinocchio cannot, yet, reciprocate this form of friendship. Jiminy has a vested interest in this friendship and is invested for the sake of the good, but Pinocchio has no vested interest in Jiminy behaving morally. Aristotle even explains that unless a friendship is between two equals, then it is impossible for a friendship based in the good to exist (1158b). However, I believe after a period of time and after Pinocchio learns to behave ethically, his relationship with Jiminy will change to be reciprocally based in the good, then making it possible for Pinocchio to achieve the good life and this highest form of friendship. But Pinocchio cannot yet have

admiration for the moral goodness of Jiminy because, at this stage, Pinocchio has no conception of virtue.

### Conclusion

After the debacle on Pleasure Island, Pinocchio returns home, having finally learned his lesson about listening to his conscience, only to learn Gepetto, Cleo, and Figaro left in search of him and were swallowed by Monstro, a giant whale. Pinocchio, with displays of determination, bravery, unselfishness, and honesty, go in search of them. He travels to the bottom of the ocean, is eaten by Monstro, finds his family, and cleverly causes Monstro to sneeze, successfully freeing his family. However, in the chaos that ensued, he is killed. The Blue Fairy comes to Pinocchio and brings him to life as a real boy as reward for his moral successes; he has attained bravery, unselfishness, and honesty—or rather, he has learned the value of behaving virtuously.

*Pinocchio* operates as a proto-virtue ethical film; in that it does not focus on the cultivation of particular virtues as much as it focuses on the ability to cultivate any virtue at all. In the movie, Pinocchio never really attains the virtues, not in an Aristotelian way, i.e. after much time and practice is had determining how to act appropriate in a given situation. But the film is very instructional. For this film to fit the model perfectly, it would focus on Pinocchio learning how to be brave, honest, and unselfish, when all Pinocchio actually learns in this film is how to listen to his conscience. Listening to Pinocchio's conscious demonstrates Pinocchio is learning how to evaluate a situation and act with virtue, in how to avoid vices. Cultivating virtue would be repeatedly practicing a particular virtue until one could actively and easily act with that behavior. He now

possesses the skills needed to proceed forward in the procurement of virtues. He developed the capacity to be brave, honest, and unselfish, wherein the beginning of the film he did not possess any capacity to be virtuous and had no understanding of vice.



Film 2: *Hercules* (1997)

In this section, I analyze the film *Hercules* under the same virtue ethic framework. According to Tom Schumacher, Disney's Vice President of Feature Animation, the idea behind *Hercules* is "about [...] who you are, and what you character is. It also deals with the notion of what a celebrity is" (Pinsky 177). This easily lends *Hercules* to a study under a virtue ethics model. In this film the moral agent is Hercules, the main male protagonist, and the virtue he cultivates is courage.

The film opens with the birth of Hercules on Mount Olympus, where we learn that he is a god, son to Hera and Zeus, Queen and King of the Gods. It is in this scene where the antagonist is introduced: Hades, Lord of the Dead. In the next few scenes, the main conflict is established with Hades learning that in order for him to conquer Mount Olympus and defeat Zeus, he must first defeat Hercules. Hades sends his minions, Pain and Panic, to kidnap Hercules from Mount Olympus, to give him a poison that turns gods into mortals, and then to kill Hercules—effectively eliminating the possibility of Hercules thwarting Hades' plans.

After kidnapping Hercules and feeding him the poison, Pain and Panic attempt to kill Hercules, but due to an interruption, not all of the poison was drunk, preventing them from being able to kill Hercules. Hercules maintains part of his abilities as a god: super-human strength. Hercules is discovered and taken in by two mortals: a husband and a wife desperate for a child of their own. So instead of growing up on Mount Olympus as a god, Hercules grows up as a farmer in the world of mortals.

*Telos*

This is where the movie begins to display elements of virtue ethics. It is obvious in the scene located in the agora that Hercules does not fit in with his community—the townspeople fear him. He is awkward and does not know how to control his strength. From the view of virtue ethics, at this point Hercules has the capacity to be a good person. He has just not cultivated his virtue yet: he constantly makes poor decisions regarding the right thing to do and because of this he destroys the agora. In terms of the Mean of Moderation, Hercules continuously misses the mark of virtue. Generally, he leans towards the vice of foolhardiness, rather than the virtue of bravery. In addition, at this point Hercules cannot form friendships. However, Hercules admits a desire of wanting to fit in, to maintain and develop friendships—qualities Aristotle stresses that a proto-virtuous person must possess. After Hercules destroyed the agora and confided in his father how he felt like he never really fit into this community of people, his adoptive parents reveal to Hercules that they found him abandoned and took him in. From this information, Hercules decides to journey to the temple of Zeus so that he might discover where he “truly belongs”.

This leads into one of the feature songs of the film: “Go the Distance”. “Go the Distance” invokes a teleological view and purpose in the movie. Hercules sings this song to express that he would do whatever it would take in order to belong and that regardless of the task, he would be willing to try to accomplish it. Only in this way does he feel he could be happy: “I will find my way/ I can go the distance/ I’ll be there some day/ If I can be strong/ I know every mile/ Will be worth my while/ I would go most anywhere/ To feel like I belong.” His entire goal is to feel the sense of the good life.

At the temple, Hercules discovers that Zeus is his real father and that he had been kidnapped and *turned* mortal. Hercules inquires as to what he might do in order to rejoin his family and restore his status as a god. Zeus declares that Hercules must become a “true hero”—or cultivate the virtue of courage—for his godhood to be restored. Zeus sends Hercules to the trainer of heroes, Philoctetes, so that Hercules might learn what he must do to become a hero and what it means to be a hero.

### Cultivation of Virtue

Hercules meets Philoctetes—who prefers to go by the name Phil—and they begin hero training. Hero training, for Hercules, is completing obstacles that Phil sets up that test Hercules' strength, agility, and wit also while learning important rules for surviving battles with monsters and saving damsels in distress. It is, in essence, where Hercules learns intellectualized courage. He is taught how he is supposed to respond to certain obstacles and potential disasters. After completing the musical number, “One Last Hope,” where Phil sings of Hercules being his last hope for being able to develop a true hero, demonstrating the utility nature of their friendship, and after successfully completing Phil's training—and tripling in muscle mass—Hercules and Phil travel to Thebes in order to put his hero training into actual practice: more cultivation of virtue through *hexis*. Now, Hercules will become a hero by acting like a hero. He will practice the craft of heroism in order to be a hero, just like builders practice their craft of building in order to become good builders.

Before Hercules ever arrives in Thebes, he encounters a D.I.D—or a damsel in distress—and decides to rescue her from a monster. Phil, still being Hercules' coach, tries

to direct Hercules; however, Hercules begins making his usual blunders—he only learned courage intellectually, his judgment in action has not been appropriately conditioned.

Hercules, as soon as he sees the damsel in distress—Meg, the woman who becomes Hercules' love interest (who will ultimately satisfy the highest friendship component of virtue ethics) and who happens to cavort with Hades—stops thinking and just marches in to save her. After a series of missteps, Hercules saves Meg and defeats the River Guardian. As they leave, Hades appears to Meg, annoyed with her having lost a negotiation with the River Guardian. Meg claims it was not her fault, that it was Hercules, the baby that Pain and Panic were supposed to have killed years ago. With the revelation that Hercules is still alive, Hades becomes committed to destroying Hercules before his plans are ruined.

In Thebes, Hercules' moral character is tested when he first arrives. Hades lures Hercules to a rock gorge, with Meg crying that there are two children—who are actually Pain and Panic—trapped under the rubble. The townspeople were unconvinced of Hercules' abilities as a hero and wanted to see him in action. So, they all went to watch Hercules save the children. After Hercules saves the kids, a giant Hydra rushes forth from the cave to eat him. This is the first test where Hercules displays the virtue of bravery: he implements *hexis* as well as his theoretical training in bravery. Before, Hercules constantly made foolhardy decisions and was only saved because of his god-like strength. After having severed the head of the Hydra and watched three grow in its place, Hercules eventually figures out another way to kill the beast: by causing a rock slide. Hercules intentionally proceeds in a brave, but not thoughtless, manner. He almost does not survive the battle. Hades is furious with the outcome of the battle and continues to send

forth monster after monster to challenge and defeat Hercules. “Zero to Hero” becomes a montage of all the monsters Hercules defeats—which becomes quite a few. Also, Hercules becomes beloved by the people of Thebes and is treated as a super star.

Once this montage is over, Hercules journeys back to the temple of Zeus to converse with his father. Hercules believes that he has learned what it means to be a hero. Unfortunately for Hercules, Zeus disagrees that Hercules has become a *true* hero. Zeus leaves the conversation telling Hercules that becoming a true hero is something that “he must find for himself” and that he must “look inside [his] heart”. Frustrated, Hercules returns back to Thebes disappointed at his inability to become a true hero.

### Friendship

In his frustration, and away from the probing eyes of Phil, Meg sneaks into Hercules’ mansion and convinces Hercules to “play hooky” for a day. However, Meg’s intentions are not pure; she only wishes to discover Hercules’ weakness and report it back to Hades. The next scene is of Meg and Hercules laughing about their day. Meg attempts to discover any physical weakness of Hercules but finds none. Phil finally catches up with the couple, interrupting a romantic moment, and takes Hercules back to train.

After Hercules leaves, Meg sings the musical number “I Won’t Say I’m in Love” that depicts her struggle with her feelings towards Hercules. Once her song is over, Hades confronts Meg and asks her what Hercules’ weakness is. Meg refuses to comply with Hades and refuses to help him anymore because she refuses to hurt Hercules. At this point Meg and Hercules have developed a friendship of the good. They are concerned with what is good for each other more than any pleasure that they would derive from

being with one another or any usefulness one could provide to the other, with their virtuous behavior. Hercules even states that he believes Meg is not like how she views “normal people:” petty and dishonest. Meg even tells Hades that she does not want to help Hades hurt Hercules because she thinks Hercules is “strong”, “caring”, and that “he would never do anything to hurt [her].”

The next scene is of Hercules, alone, working out in his stadium. Hades finds Hercules and asks him to give up his god-like strength for one day in exchange for the release Meg, even though Hercules knows innocent people will be hurt if he is without his strength. Hercules agrees, provided Meg stays unharmed—because he would do anything to preserve her well-being. After the deal has been struck, Hades reveals Meg’s subversion and leaves Hercules and Meg both heartbroken.

Hades initiates his attack on Mount Olympus, sending the Titans to capture the gods, while sending the Cyclops to kill Hercules. Hercules confronts the Cyclops because he has no other choice. Everyone is counting on him to defeat the Titan; however, without his strength and his lost hope in love, his morale is low and he continues to make poor decisions in fighting the beast. Meg shows up with Phil and Phil reignites Hercules desire to cultivate virtue. Through this act, Phil and Hercules’ friendship is elevated to that of a friendship of the good. For the first time, Hercules relies on his intellect and wit to defeat the monster, not his sheer strength. In the process, Meg gets hurt. Hercules rushes to her side devastated, knowing that she will probably die. Before Hercules can do anything to save Meg, he must stop Hades from overtaking Mount Olympus. Hercules quickly rides off and swiftly frees the gods and overcome the Titans. At this point, Hercules has almost cultivated courage because he did what was necessary of him before

charging off to save Meg. He put Meg on the back burner because it was more important that Mount Olympus be freed than he save her life right then and there. He has learned what it takes to be a hero, almost. He is the closest he has ever been to truly embodying courage. He still needs to embody the friendship component at its fullest before he can truly become courageous.

By the time Hercules returns, he finds Meg deceased. In a last ditch effort to save her, Hercules rushes down to the underworld and strikes a bargain with Hades: if Hercules can catch her soul in the River of Souls, he can take her with him. Hades agrees to this because he believes Hercules will die before he ever makes it out of the River of Souls. Regardless, Hades is wrong. Hercules risks his mortal life to save the woman he loves. Instead of dying, Hercules becomes a god, having finally and fully cultivated the virtue of courage. Hercules became a true hero. Once Hercules places Meg's soul back into her body, they are whisked away, back to Mount Olympus so that Hercules can join the gods. Hera explains that because he was willing to save Meg's life by risking his own life—not glory, not fame, not to be a hero, but to save her life—Hercules was a true hero. Zeus proclaims, "For a hero's strength is not measured by the size of his strength, but by the size of his heart." The movie ends with Hercules deciding to stay on Earth with Meg and his friends instead of joining the gods on Mount Olympus, because—after having cultivated virtue—he has found where he belongs and what happiness actually is.

Film 3: *Brave* (2012)

The final film I will analyze is Disney's *Brave* (2012), which seemingly breaks ground in the development of female characters as opposed to the standard sexist tropes we are generally used to seeing in Disney films (Hains). However, unlike the title and the marketing campaign would suggest, the film is less about the cultivation of virtue and more about the development of a relationship between a mother and a daughter (Hains). Additionally, *Brave* seems to challenge our traditional understandings about what bravery is at all.

*Telos* and Moral Agent

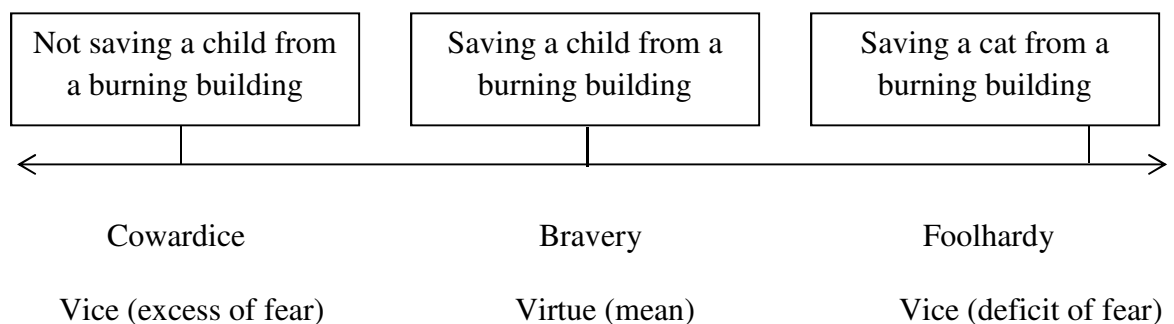
*Brave's* main protagonist and moral agent is Merida, a fiery young Scottish princess, who seems to reject everything about being a princess—rejecting qualities that her mother strongly endorses. Merida's *telos* could be described as her existing as an autonomous being, the activities she pursues on the days she spends free from her mother and princessly duties. Early on in the film, during Merida's angst-ridden dialogue, Merida explains how she hates her princess duties, enjoys shooting her bow, riding off into the sunset on her trusty horse, Angus, and drinking from the Fire Falls. Merida is presented as brave because she has no problem accomplishing feats that were reserved only for the Bravest Scottish Kings. In response to Merida telling her father that she climbed Crone's Tooth and drank from the infamous Fire Falls, her father states, "Fire Falls? They say only the ancient kings were brave enough to drink the fire." Merida has already cultivated a kind of bravery, but not the bravery of this film.



## Cultivation of Virtue

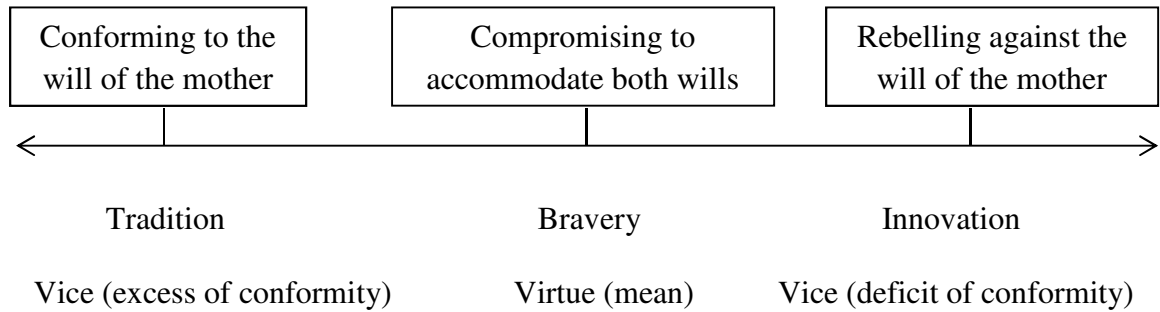
Throughout the marketing campaign, *Brave*'s Facebook Page posed questions like, "What does being Brave mean to you?" and "When was the last time you acted Brave?" They posted the dictionary definition of brave and included their own take on what bravery is and what constitutes brave actions: "Brave is facing the unknown" and "Brave are the ones who stand up for someone in need." The post that most aptly explicates the kind of bravery that *Brave* represents occurs in their post stating, "Brave is what you must become when you confront tradition, challenge destiny, and seek to change your fate...." This progression of "brave is" statements and "are you brave" questions present a main concept of *Brave*: redefining our understanding of bravery. In terms of the mean of moderation, *Brave* redefines the vices that we have thusly identified with the virtue of Bravery.

Mean of Moderation:



But for *Brave*, the scale was redefined. The mean is still bravery, but the vices are not cowardice or foolhardiness. It is not the same virtue ethical story of Hercules, or a proto-virtue ethical story like Pinocchio; it's a different kind of narrative.

*Brave's* Mean of Moderation:



Merida is constantly shifting between conforming to tradition, expressed as the wants of her mother, and rebelling with innovation, or Merida's wants, and this is the way the story unfolds. From the outset, the movie sets up the competing wills of the mother and daughter. In the beginning, Merida begrudgingly accepts her mother's instruction on how to be a proper princess, or how Merida sees it, how to be her mother. Merida would much rather be climbing Crone's Tooth, practicing her archery skills, or riding into the unknown on Angus. Merida's attitude changes towards her princess training once she learns that her training has only been to prepare her to be a wife and that soon she will be married. She does not want to be married, expressing that she feels unready. Her parents do not listen and Merida unwillingly conforms.

The suitors come, the celebrations begin, Merida puts on the dress that Elinor handcrafted for her—a dress that Merida hates wearing but is forced to don regardless. This dress is a physical symbol of her being forced to conform to tradition. As the suitors begin to compete in the traditional Highland games for Merida's hand in marriage—another symbol for tradition dictating Merida's life—Merida learns that only the firstborn of the various clans can compete in the games. Merida is the first-born of her clan; she

chooses the nature of the competition that will be used to compete for her hand in marriage: archery—her primary skill. After all of the suitors, more or less, fail at the competition; a winner is picked from them. Merida stands up, declares that she will be “competing for my own hand” and proceeds to overwhelmingly beat the competitors. She rejects outright the tradition by which she must marry, rejects the games that dictate who she should marry, and destroys the dress that symbolizes her conformity. Merida jumped from one end of the scale to the polar opposite of the scale, from one vice to another.

Merida is sent to her room, where she and Elinor argue. In the heat of the moment, Merida destroys her mother’s tapestry and Elinor throws Merida’s bow into the fire. Merida leaves, distraught, running off into the forest. Merida stumbles upon the will-o’-the-wisps, which lead her to a witch’s cottage where the witch gives Merida a potion that will change Elinor. Merida presents the potion, in the form of a cake, to Elinor as a pseudo apology; her mother eats the cake and turns into a bear. It is now her mother who is forced to don “clothing” that she does not accept. Merida is the outdoorsy, wild princess. Elinor is not wild at all and wants nothing to do with any of the activities Merida participates in.

Merida helps Elinor escape the castle, because King Fergus—Merida’s father—is a rabid bear hunter. Merida attempts to return to the witch’s cottage but finds the witch is gone. The witch has left a message saying that the cure to the spell rests in this riddle “Fate be changed, look inside. Mend the bond, torn by pride.” In the way Merida was forced to endure conformity to tradition, Elinor, in the form of a bear, is forced to conform to innovation by living in the wilderness and eating from the river.

When Merida and Elinor discover that Elinor will become a real bear unless the spell is reversed, they are led by the will-o'-the-wisps to an ancient kingdom. In the remains of the kingdom, tradition and innovation clashed, with unfortunate circumstances. The kingdom collapsed, resulting in the ominous bear, Mor'du, who wanders the forest, causing havoc and destruction wherever he goes. The witch's riddle suggests that this is the fate of their kingdom if they do not "mend the bond, torn by pride." With a renewed vigor, Merida and Elinor, undergo a series of events in trying to procure the tapestry to fix it. Through these events, they begin to compromise with one another instead of constantly battling with conflicting wills. Eventually, Merida procures the tapestry and stitches it together, as she races to prevent her father from mistakenly hunting her mother. After an epic battle ensues, Merida manages to throw the tapestry over her mother and hopes to break the spell.

As the sun rises and Merida's deadline to fix her mother's spell is upon her, she becomes upset that sewing the tapestry did not transform her mother into her old self. Merida begins crying, explaining that it was all her fault, that the reason that her mother was a bear was because she had been selfish. She tells her mother that she wanted her back and that she loved her, signifying that Merida did not want her mother to change or conform to her wants. Just in time, Elinor transforms into her normal self, as a human woman. Merida exclaims, "You've changed!" Elinor responds with, "we both have," indicating that they both moved towards the mean. The next scene is of Merida and Elinor with Elinor's hair flowing in the wind like Merida's, and a new tapestry of Merida and a bear, symbolizing their new understanding for each other.

Merida ends the movie stating, “There are those who say fate is something beyond our command. That destiny is not our own, but I know better. Our fate lives within us, you only have to be brave enough to see it.” Bravery has been redefined not as merely valiant actions, but articulating your feelings, understanding your loved ones, compromising with each other, and being willing to listen to one another.

### Friendship

Another interesting way in which *Brave* pushes the boundary of this framework is that while there are several relationships portrayed in the movie, the only one developed is between Merida and Elinor. However, Aristotle firmly believes that a relationship based in the good, which is necessary for the cultivation of virtue and the pursuance of a good life, it be between parent and child. Relationships that are based in the good must be alike in virtue (1156b). Parent-child relationships are inherently unequal, as they should be (1158b). A different virtue is attributed to each side of the relationship, the function of the relationship is different, and it cannot satisfy the needs of a relationship based in the good (1158b). Because a friendship based in the good is necessary for a moral agent to achieve the good life, and Merida’s relationship with Elinor cannot help Merida achieve the good life.

*Brave*, although one would assume otherwise, pushes the boundaries of this virtue ethical framework. It redefines the virtue of bravery and portrayed the development of friendship that holds no hope of ever being a friendship based in the good. It presents itself as a film primarily concerned with the cultivation of virtue, but in reality it is not. However, this framework uncovers the unique way in which *Brave* understood and

developed the modern conception of bravery. *Brave* breaks with tradition and boldly redefines narratives about bravery to include female protagonists, mother-daughter relationships, and cooperation—a groundbreaking task for Disney animated films.

While Aristotelian virtue ethics do not apply to *Brave* in its fullest, *Brave* still seems to be a virtue ethical narrative—just not an Aristotelian one. The theory that most aptly seems to apply to *Brave* stems from a Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. In his book, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre incorporates into the theory of virtue ethics tradition and Nietzscheism (Audi 527). He updates Aristotelian virtue ethics in a meaningful way and draws upon history to help formulate this transformation (Audi 527). “MacIntyre pays particular attention to formulating concepts of practice (communal action directed toward an intrinsic good), virtue (a habit needed to engage successfully in a practice), and tradition (a historically extended community in which practices relevant to the fulfillment of human nature can be carried out)” (Audi 527). MacIntyre argues that the struggle of our modern culture is that between of being an autonomous individual and existing in our traditions: a clash that is represented in *Brave* (220-221).

## Conclusion

Now that I have outlined my framework and applied it to three films, demonstrating the full capacity of the framework, I will now raise and address some questions and objections to my analysis.

Disney films clearly represent minorities and those with less power in an unfavorable light, as discussed in the literature review portion of this paper, and the virtue ethical framework largely ignores these kinds of power dynamics and their morality. Why should the virtue ethical framework be used at all?

While Disney animated films maintain sexist, racist, and classist elements, their narratives also include positive moral elements. The presence of Disney's moral narratives propelled Pinsky to write an entire book analyzing the different representation of religious ideas as they manifest in Disney films. In William I. McReynolds thesis, "Walt Disney in the American Grain," he states "If children could be 'entertained' into good behavior, then Disney is just the one to send them to for instruction" (Pinsky x). Disney films do not have religion in them, but they do tell tales of morality (Pinsky 1). Using the virtue ethics framework, I sought to analyze these films through a moral lens—particularly a virtue ethics lens. Without the virtue ethics lens, a fundamental and complete understanding of any Disney films cannot be gained.

Even if the films present some valuable accounts of the development of virtue, are they still, all things considered, morally objectionable based on their racism, classism, and sexism?

*Pinocchio*, *Hercules*, and *Brave* do present morally objectionable content. Each film presents racist, classist, and sexist stereotypes, but these films are not Disney's worst

offenders. The films that I discussed in my literature review are some of Disney's worst perpetrators: *Song of the South* (1946), *The Jungle Book* (1967), *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *Aladdin* (1992). However, what you will note is that these films are all old having been initially released at least twenty years ago.

Throughout time, Disney's films have lessened in their negative portrayals of people of color, the lower class, and women. Part of this change is due to the change of narrative structure over time. In some of the older, classic fairytales, the primary tale is that of a love story—like in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Beauty and the Beast*—so there are no positive moral values being taught in these films, their messages are not about the development of moral character. Stories with the moral lessons like in *Pinocchio*, *Hercules*, and *Brave*, have fewer instances of the negative representations that have been discussed. As Disney has grown and developed over the years, the stories have changed from primarily love stories to stories about what it means to be a good person, the struggles become entirely different. With this change in struggle, the negative stereotypes are generally less present.

However, this does not mean that these films with moral narratives as opposed to other kinds of narratives are entirely without these negative representations. These films do better, especially better than the classic Disney films, but they still are offensive. *Pinocchio*, out of the three films that I analyzed under my framework, is the worst offender in terms of racism, sexism, and classism. *Pinocchio* portrays people of color, like the puppeteer Stromboli, in extremely problematic ways. Stromboli is selfish, cruel, large, and only concerned with profit. He is also one of the only people of color in the



film and can be classified as a Jewish gypsy. The problem is not that Stromboli is Jewish or a gypsy, it's the fact that the reasons why he is selfish, cruel, and only concerned with profit is *because* he is a Jewish gypsy. In terms of classism, the only people in Pinocchio who seem to possess any kind of money are the Coachman and Stromboli. Stromboli seems to have money because he is a Jewish gypsy; however, the Coachman seems to be wealthy because he is an English gentleman—although with nefarious plans. Other problems with Pinocchio are that the only woman in the film is the beautiful Blue Fairy, who seems to have no personality other than her beauty and good-hearted nature. Jiminy, when he meets her, is taken aback by her, however, not because she has magical powers, but because she is beautiful. She might be useful to the narrative of the film, but how the characters in the film respond to her suggest that her real value lies in her beauty.

*Hercules* is a newer film and actually has prominent characters who are people of color throughout the film. However, these people of color, are the Muses, they are gospel singers who have no real bearing on the events of the story and only help to tell the narrative but have no active roles in the narrative. Additionally, it portrays stereotypes about African-American women and how they bicker, speak, and only seem to sing gospel music. *Hercules* also depicts the only people who have material wealth as gods or as heroes. The gods on Mount Olympus seem to live extravagant and lavish lifestyles and it is only after Hercules discovers that he is the son of a god does he acquire material wealth. In terms of sexism, while it is refreshing to see a spicy female character such as Meg, it is problematic that she is portrayed as a partially evil seductress and partially wholesome love interest. While she is intellectual and witty, she is reduced to Hercules' love interest. While she insists she never needs saving, Hercules always comes to the

rescue, suggesting that even the smartest of women need saving, that they do not know better, and that they need saving because they get themselves into trouble.

*Brave* features no people of color, while it is set in Scotland, Disney still found a role for people of color in *Hercules* which is set in Ancient Greece. While not showing any people of color keeps Disney out of trouble for portraying people of color, there is only one film to date that features only people of color: *Mulan* (1998)—although all the characters are extremely white-washed. Considering our increasingly globalized society, portraying cultures as if they exist in a vacuum without other influences such as non-native cultures is problematic. In terms of classism, there also is not much shown. The story is primarily a narrative about people who are in power: royalty. It does not develop any characters outside of the royal lineage, perhaps except for Maudie, who is their servant. She is constantly harassed by the royal children who receive no punishment for their treatment of her. She is extremely melodramatic and was designed with an outfit that does little to conceal her very large breasts. Finally, Disney began to make headway with portraying women in very positive ways. Merida is the first Disney princess who was not designed to be overly beautiful or glamorized. She did not outrightly reject the fact that she was a female (as we see in *Mulan*). Merida dislikes the dress that her mother puts her in, not because it is a dress, but because it restricts her movements. Elinor does not frown upon Merida for having a bow because she is a girl, but because she is a princess, and archery takes away from her princessly duties. Her father has no qualms with Merida being an archer. Merida can hunt and fish; she is capable of taking care of herself in the wild and is a force to be reckoned with when she is forced into physical violence to prevent the killing of her mother. It takes several abled-bodied men to prevent

Merida from fighting. She is able to save her family without the help of any men. In fact, they are always portrayed as a hindrance rather than any help. There are a few problems in that Merida is always led to her fate, through the will-o'-the-wisps, although she does change her fate in the end. Elinor constantly chastises her husband and the other clan members to behave well and always seems responsible for any mediation between the clans—as if men are incapable of acting cooperatively or without aggression. Finally, and more recently, Disney launched Merida as an official Disney princess; however, in doing so, Merida underwent a makeover. She was aged, made to be skinnier with larger breasts and hips, put in the gown that she rejected in the film, wore makeup, and was depicted without her bow (Child). Due to the negative backlash by the creator of Merida, Brenda Chapman, as well as numerous Merida fans, Disney has removed Merida's glamorous makeover from their promotional website (Child). However, the implications are still there that Disney will include negative portrayals unless otherwise reprimanded by the public.

While Disney has done better in terms of mitigating negative portrayals of people without power and minorities, they are still instances in Disney films, even in films with positive moral messages. Over time, these portrayals have improved but are not completely gone from Disney films. There are some Disney films that are worthy of moral consideration, but not all of them are because of their racist, classist, and sexist elements. These newer films, especially the ones with moral narratives, are redeemable to the extent that they do a better job of showing moral development in characters despite their racism, classism, and sexism.

Disney films might tell moral narratives, but why develop a framework for only virtue ethics? There are many other moral theories that could be used to defend the moral values portrayed in Disney films. This framework ignores other ethical theories in support of virtue ethics, a theory from an entirely different period of time and culture: that of ancient Greece. This theory does not seem like it could generate a fundamental and complete understanding of Disney films because they are situated in a different culture and time period from the theory's inception. A lot has changed, culturally, ethically, and philosophically since Aristotle conceptualized his virtue ethics.

Out of all the moral theories I have studied, virtue ethics is the theory that is easiest to represent in narratives due to its teleological nature: virtue ethical moral agents are always seeking for their lives be aimed towards "the good" or a life well lived. Narratives focus, inherently, on a protagonist, who will undergo a struggle and develop their character throughout the story. They are always seeking for a change in their life—a change that will manifest in their conception of who they ought to be and how their life ought to be. Oftentimes, the protagonists learn a valuable lesson or reevaluate their beliefs in some meaningful capacity.

Why focus only on Disney films? There are other films from other companies that tell moral narratives. Plus, Disney is not the only franchise that releases films targeted at children.

As I stated in my introduction, Disney is a global multi-billion dollar company whose media is consumed by babies, children, adolescents, teenagers, and adults. People grow up with Disney and people die with Disney. Disney has real political and economic sway. They maintain their franchises with global domination: people in Hong Kong and

Japan know and love Disney films as much as the average Americans. Recessions do not even hurt their business in a meaningful way. Their power is terrifying and the fact that Disney has charged itself with creating moral narratives for children is an equally terrifying idea because they have no authority in which to be accountable to. In the same way understanding how Disney represents minorities in their films, how few women directors they employ, and how many Disney princesses and princes are culturally diverse is important, so is understanding what moral lessons they deem are important to teach children.

Disney has been making films with great success since 1937; their first full-length feature film was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Why did you include *Pinocchio* (1940), *Hercules* (1997), and *Brave* (2012) as your choice movies to demonstrate your virtue ethical framework? *Hercules* seems to be the only film that completely embodies your framework.

It is true that *Hercules* perfectly fits my framework and that there are other films out there that better represent my framework. However, from the virtue ethical framework both *Pinocchio* and *Brave* showed how the films were operating as moral narratives and it makes each film more interesting. *Pinocchio* is designed for early moral instruction while *Brave* completely redefines a cultural value. It was not until after I had applied the framework to each that I discovered what each film was actually trying to convey. However, in *Brave*, the relationship between the mother and daughter did not meet the requirements of a moral friendship with Aristotelian virtue ethics, but it is met by another virtue ethical theory, suggesting that perhaps this framework should be developed to encompass both kinds of virtue ethics in the future. Even though

Aristotelian virtue ethics does not perfectly describe *Brave*, applying the framework still deconstructed the film in a valuable way that demonstrated the undercurrent of philosophies represented in the film.

In short, my framework does not explain everything that these films discuss and present. However, I argue that it is the best model for understanding the intent of the narrative. Through the framework we see Pinocchio developing the capacity to be moral, Hercules cultivating bravery, and Merida redefining what it means to be brave in the first place. Without the framework, these ideas and themes are largely lost in the discussion of Disney film under their animated magic and adeptness at creating whimsical tales. With this framework we can see what stories Disney wants to teach and what stories we are learning and valuing as a culture. It becomes apparent that while Disney is not perfect and they are guilty of promoting sexist, classist, and racist stereotypes, they are also very good at creating a complex moral narrative that reveals current ethical problems in our culture. The virtue ethical framework is important for revealing that Disney films are a reflection of our culture, including our collective understanding of morality.

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