

THE THREE BRIDGES OF WORTH:



ELDER WORTH

“W

hat is that awful noise?” Rachel muttered through a yawn. She

thought, “Cynthia has that Weird Al C.D. on too loud again. Just when I’m trying to sleep--she’s probably trying to get even for when she wanted me to turn down the T.V. so she could study--”

She reached for the pillow to press around her ears to keep the buzzing-sort-of humming noise out. But what she felt against her ears was not her comfortable down filled pillow.

“Ycch, wet. Wet leaves.” Rachel sat up and looked around the birchwood copse. It sparkled, here and there, as the sun turned light frost into morning’s meltwater. She breathed and saw her own steamy exhalation join with a plume of the river’s mist to wind in and out of a latticework of branches. She shivered and stood up stiffly. Her stretching movement and the groan that accompanied it launched a small flock of finches from a nearby birch tree. She watched as the golden birds made a cross-stitch on the blue sky.

“Still here, I guess...Conscienceberg...” She consulted her tour book. “At least I’m across the river. Now if I backtrack to Hoffman’s Point near the Bridge of Connectedness, I can finally find my family and go home.”

The buzzing-sort-of-humming resumed. It was coming from just beyond the copse. She went to investigate, following the path that had taken her off the road into the trees the night before. “Mr. Imp?!” Rachel exclaimed to herself.

There before her, gathered in a circle around The Imp, were the five Umbrella Kids with hands full of instruments that Rachel didn’t recognize. Some of the instruments were strings and some were reeds, some were drums. Off to the side umbrellas were tossed carelessly into a pile. “How will they ever sort out whose is whose?” Rachel mused before turning her attention again to The Imp. He was showing the Umbrella Kids a small mouth instrument. And then he pointed to his t-shirt. It read: **Mr. Imp and His Mystical Casuistical Kazoo Band.** Then he lifted his kazoo to his lips and produced the very same buzzing-sort-of-humming sound that Rachel found so annoying just a few minutes before. The Umbrella Kids, on the other hand, were clearly delighted and clamored for a chance to use Mr. Imp’s kazoo. He held it just beyond the bouquet of their gimmee-gimmee fingers and admonished them in vain to take turns nicely. Rachel made her presence known during the commotion by waving and calling to Mr. Imp.

He looked in her direction, smiled, and called out, “Look! It’s Rachel.” Seeing the Imp thus distracted, one of the kids seized the opportunity to grab the kazoo--none too careful of how the Imp’s finger joints actually worked. “Ow,” the Imp cried with a wince.

The much- if only temporarily- prized kazoo already claimed, the two youngest Umbrella Kids looked to Rachel then ran to her side, “Come see and hear our instruments, Rachel.” They urged as they took her by her hands. Rachel accompanied them, a little embarrassed that she still did not know their names while they clearly knew

hers. "Of course there were fewer of me than them," she thought to justify her lack of social grace.

"Now kids, let Rachel have something to eat--She looks famished."

It was only then that Rachel noticed the tidy campfire and saw the pan of hot cereal steaming and bubbling invitingly, and the pot of hot chocolate, and toast and butter and brown sugar and--"Where did all this come from? It wasn't here before." She thought but didn't ask. Instead she nodded and said, "I am very hungry and your breakfast smells very very good."

"Then join us for some," The Imp beckoned her into the circle of smiling faces. At breakfast, between mouthfuls, Rachel learned the word 'casuistical' (itself a mouthful) which she read on the Imp's shirt. Casuistical had to do with casuistry, which meant a process of reasoning that focuses on moral problems as they arise in a specific case. Casuistry begins with the case. The casuist asks, "In this case what is my responsibility?" She recalls other cases that came before that most resemble the one she's now facing. And she asks and remembers in the context of the moral community of which she is a part. Rachel liked the idea of starting with each case on its own merits.¹⁸ More importantly she began to learn the names and something about the instruments each of the Umbrella Kids had with them. There was Xuan who played a Vietnamese string instrument called a dan ty ba, and Addie with her dulcimer. There was Mahesh who could play tabla and make mouth music, too, and Ingrid who had exchanged her balalaika for Mr. Imp's kazoo. "Virtuosi all," Mr. Imp laughed.

"Virtuosi?" inquired Rachel.

"Well *virtuoso* if it's a boy and *virtuosa* if it's a girl, *virtuosi* is the plural."

"O.K. But what does virtuosi mean?"

Out came the dictionary.

"Well it says here it could be someone who is interested in the pursuit of knowledge or, hey, listen to this: it could be someone devoted to virtu--v-i-r-t-u without an 'e' at the end -- which means productions of art, especially art of an antique or curious nature (I love the part about antique and curious). It can mean someone who excels in the technique of an art."

"Anyway these virtuosi are on their way to the Bridge of Harmony to see if they can help with the repairs."

"Tov will be glad to see them, I'm sure."

"Tov?" The Imp asked, innocently enough perhaps-- but to Rachel, The Imp seemed entirely too innocent to be believed. Then she remembered that Tov told her that he had never met The Imp. She trusted Tov.

"Tov. A good friend I met in Kochanska. He plays violin."

"Well good, repairs are already underway then--better send reinforcements though-that bridge requires constant care. 'Once more into the breach, dear friends!'" he intoned as he hastily shooed the Umbrella Kids down the road.

They left, instruments in hand, giggling and laughing and calling back "Good-bye, Rachel. It was good to see you again. Good-bye, Mr. Imp."

"So where have you been?" Rachel demanded. "You promised to meet me yesterday."

"I'm sorry, Rachel, I was unforeseeably detained in Lob's Wood--"

"Did you see my parents there?"

“No, but I did learn they'd been there and made an appointment to come back.”

“What? Do you need an appointment to visit a place full of ‘if onlies’?”

“Sometimes it helps to have an appointment. Anyway, you won't find them at Hoffman's point or anywhere in the Domain of Attachment.”

Rachel looked crestfallen. “Then, how will I ever find my way home?”

“Rachel, I promise you, I will do everything I can to help you find your home.”

“You mean like you promised to meet me yesterday-?”

“You're right. You're absolutely right. A promise is a promise is a promise. Well I can't turn the clock back. All we can do is go forward, but maybe we can go a little faster than we have been. How about a mountain bike built for two? I call it my Life-Cycle.”

Several hours later, they were biking on ever rougher and higher terrain dotted with cholla, reminding Rachel of desert plateaus she had visited with her family in the four corners area of the United States. Their trail took them along the rim of a small canyon composed of pink rock she recognized at once as formed from volcanic ash and called ‘tuff’. There had once been gases trapped inside the tuff and when the cliff wall eroded a little, numerous caves were left behind, giving the canyon walls a Swiss cheese appearance. She could make out wooden ladders and pathways between the caves.

“It's like Frijoles Canyon where the Anasazi lived,” she cried out to Mr. Imp who was thoroughly enjoying riding at break-neck speed way too close to the edge. “I guess he knows what he's doing,” Rachel thought between the involuntary whoops that came out of her while she clutched her handlebars. Nonetheless she decided that she would be much more respectful of the edge than Mr. Imp when it was her turn to lead. Mr. Imp carelessly turned his head and nodded vigorously. Rachel said in a voice as calm as she could make it, “Mr. Imp, please keep your eyes on the trail.”

He craned backwards to look at her and nodded again, “I see it. I see it. Hang on! Here's our turn.” And turn they did, right off the canyon rim. “You can stop pedaling now,” he said. “We can coast the rest of the way down.” She opened her eyes only after the sensation of the bottom falling out of her stomach failed to make itself felt. They really did coast-- all the way to the canyon floor. But due to the Imp's inexpert deceleration, they did not come to a gentle stop. Aware they were approaching the ground too fast, he applied the brakes abruptly and vigorously. As a result, both he and Rachel were hurled inauspiciously off the Life-cycle. The poor bike took the brunt of the landing on its tires, which blew-out simultaneously. Then the spokes bent and popped as the force of impact progressed up. Then the frame itself shuddered and the entire apparatus fell apart in a metallic heap.

Rachel had nonetheless made a soft landing in a mound of loose dirt below a roadside sign. The Imp had suffered the indignity of landing among some prickly pear. He was still extracting sharp spines from his bottom well into the afternoon.

The sign before them read “Virtuous Living From the 600's”

“That's way too expensive for almost anyone,” Rachel whistled.

“Oh no, no, no- from the 600's Common Era.”

“Oh.”

“Want to look around? There are different walking trails we can take.” The Imp already had a park map unfolded in front of them. “Let's see-- the community trail takes us to the plaza of the village and the long house -”

“ The long house. That’s an Anasazi condo-”

“ Then there’s the trail to the big kiva-”

“ The kiva. That’s an Anasazi religious school where stories were told and prayers prayed and songs sung. And they believed that their ancestors came into this world from another world below through a sipapu. That’s a hole in the floor of the kiva.”

“ You know quite a bit about the Anasazi--”

“ My mother made me read the trail guide when we visited the ruins. But nobody really knows very much about them. The Navajo sometimes call Anasazi the Ancient Ones, you know. But we don’t even know what they called themselves. They’re the ancestors of some pueblo peoples living today. But these aren’t ruins. This is way cool. Somebody must be working really hard to keep this up. See there’s a whole village like pictures of Tyuonyi--it had hundreds of rooms. They needed ladders to get in because the only openings were on the second floor. They used their rooms for cooking and sleeping and working but most of the day they were in the plaza together making pottery, stone tools and bows and arrows. They didn’t have much stuff-- way different from our malls. And they didn’t have much water, you know. Life was really hard but they found time to make beautiful pottery and rock art- carvings called petroglyphs and paintings called pictographs. They liked zigzags.”

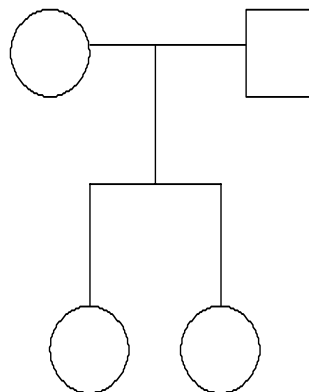
“ What kind of petroglyphs would you leave for people to see on the trail?” The Imp asked nonchalantly.

Rachel regarded him with suspicion. “ Matters what trail, I guess,” she finally responded.

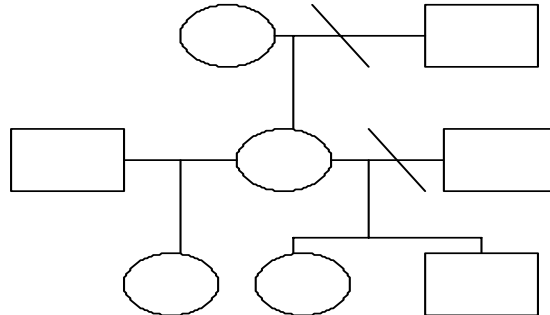
“ Well, for example, the Kinship Trail we’re on now.”

Rachel said, “ I guess they would be symbols of family life. In Anasazi times, maybe even great great grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins would be included. Everyday would be like a family reunion. Perhaps circles inside circles inside circles-like ripples spreading out from a pond where a stone has been thrown.”

“ And in Rachel times...?” the Imp drew out the question as they arrived at the first petroglyph. It showed circles too, but they weren’t arranged concentrically, one inside the other. Instead they were small circles, some in pairs connected by a little line. Some looked like this:



But others looked like this:



And others in still different patterns.

"What do they mean?" Rachel wanted to know.

" Well, the squares represent males and the circles represent females. If there is a line connecting a circle and a square, it means the man and woman have mated. And if there is a line going straight down from the line that connects a man and a woman, ending in either a circle or square, that's the child, a daughter or a son, they have brought into life through their union."

" I see. And where the line going straight down from the line that connects a man and a woman forks into two or more lines--that must mean brothers and sisters."

" Right."

"O.K. So what are all these slashes everywhere?"

" Well, a slash mark across a square or a circle means that person has died. But a slash mark over a line means that the relationship has come to an end--"

"-like divorce."

" Yes. Like divorce."

" There sure are a lot of slash marks on these petroglyphs."

" See the difference between circles within circles within circles and how these shapes are grouped?"

" Each is outside--I don't know how to put it: everyone is outside everyone else even if they are connected by lines."

"The basic pattern of biological connection. See the other colors overlaid on the basic pattern? The first represents emotional connections, the second represents moral connections."

"The emotional and moral connections don't always follow the biological connections," Rachel observed.

" Here's a new trail, it heads to the big kiva. And here are the petroglyphs that show Rachel's time--"

“Let me see,” said Rachel pushing in front of him. The carving split up into three trails. “A school bus. A metal detector. Police. Yes, that must be the School Zone.”

“School Zone? I would have guessed a war zone, Rachel. What’s this?”

“Looks like a mall somewhere-with lots of shops and squares and circles looking and buying things or just hanging: Is this the Community Trail? Diamond traffic signs that say “church”, “temple”, “mosque”.... The Religious Trail. Look the trails in my time go the same way, up this hill. Wait there’s a trail sign:

‘ Bridge of Elderworth- 1.5 km.’”

Underneath the words a colorful zigzag could be discerned. Rachel mused.

“Hmm. ‘Elderworth’--elders, my elders include my parents, don’t they?”

“Yes, your parents and your grandparents and your great-grandparents, among others--”

“Well, what are we waiting for? Let’s go--Mom and Dad may be on the other side of that bridge.”

The trail they followed brought them by turns and twists back to the river. The river made its course in leisurely loops across the canyon floor. The greys and oranges and reds of the surrounding rocky terrain were relieved once in a while by a cholla or a cactus or, at the river’s margin, a willow or a cottonwood. Rachel marveled at the landscape and at the odd corkscrew shape of a hardy evergreen, which had found a purchase in an unlikely crevice between boulders. But it was the color of the sky that most astonished her. She thought through the names of her crayons--the ones that come in a deluxe box. “Cerulean Blue,” she spoke aloud.

“ This valley is called “the place of sky-blue,” or in Latin: locus coeruleus. There’s a part of the brain that has the same name. It is in the locus coeruleus where nerve cell bodies that make noradrenaline live. They send their branches to all parts of the brain. Some say the noradrenaline system is very important in how an elder’s values find a new home in a child’s conscience. Of course there are other systems involved too, but the noradrenaline system is early to mature.”

“ Look, Mr. Imp. What are those?”

Rachel was looking in the direction where sandy mounds gave way to fanciful red rock formations: great hobgoblins of rock mustered together like a crowd in Times Square on New Year’s Eve. This one with a bishop’s mitered hat, that one with a balding pate. Over there an assembly of figures like the pawns captured in a game of chess. They were altogether silent and motionless, some aloof and regal, some frozen in vague mockery of mortal folk.

“Hoodooos,” The Imp said at last. “Some say that an elder race of giants was turned to stone here. Others say that these are the effects of erosion. I do not profess to know.”



“Hey, Hoodoo! Who do you think you are?” Rachel suddenly shouted. And her shout reverberated through the canyon. When the echoes faded, she and her companion moved steadily away from the river and ever more steeply upwards to the top of a mesa. Their ascent, which was by way of switchbacks, took the rest of the morning and part of the afternoon. Sometimes Rachel, like so many others before her, would try to shorten the journey by cutting off the loop of a switchback. But this required considerable exertion. Often her efforts went unrewarded.

Rachel could be seen losing her purchase on the slope and sliding amidst a small avalanche of pebbles back to the trail below. “Like chutes and ladders,” the Imp quipped, “only with real bruises.” Eventually Rachel gave in to the rhythm of to and fro on a steady rise.

The mesa itself had, with eons of erosion, acquired the shape of a castle tower, complete with parapets and cinder-colored creneaux and even rock formations that might have passed for gargoyles shaped from native stone. As much like a castle was this mesa top as Shiprock is like a ship at sea. It held such fascination for those pilgrims and wayfarers whose chief aim was to cross Elderworth Bridge that many tarried and admired the keep and the royals. By tradition many homemade. The banners that any family names. Instead values held most dear within within friendships and other blazons of arms celebrated sincerity, wisdom, devotion, constancy. Traditional crests and courage. Overtime less often- removed to show kinship. Some banners had than banners. Others were smart flags snapping in the winds that came in gusts or gales out of the canyon. But among the crests and blazons of arms there was one especially, to which Rachel was drawn. Though it would take many years for her to recognize her calling, she had her first experience of being inspired by ideals as she gazed at that banner: it depicted an open hand and a family of rabbits. The Imp produced a guide to heraldry and read “ The good servant’s hand upheld in a field of gratitude-- Stewardship.”



throne room and fancied themselves brought a heraldic banner, always flew from these ramparts did not valorize symbols were chosen to represent the kinships or, as was also the custom, close relationships. More traditional fortitude and magnanimity, peace and charity, generosity, elevation of mind, and signified power and authority, strength symbols were added and sometimes-but how values had changed within the more the appearance of patchwork quilts

The level top ended in precipices on two sides, but on the far side it came to an upward sloping promontory which, on either side, fell away in breaks of imposing pinnacles and palisades of the same stone. These could be discerned receding into the near distance and, from where they stood, effectively obstructed an advantageous view of their surrounds. As Rachel and the Imp approached the far edge of the promontory, however, a view emerged that took away what little breath Rachel had left after the climb to the mesa. A layered vista spread out below them in every direction, overwhelming the furthest horizon.

Those who have seen the Grand Canyon describe a wordless wonder that overtakes them and from which it takes some time to recover. But, as they recover and their eyes become more accustomed to the surrounding majesty, they seek certain shapes, landmarks they have learned about from videos or photos or postcards sent to them by friends or relatives who came before, and attempted to communicate their awe. Or, after years of talking and postponing and dreaming, having finally arrived at the rim trail, they are entranced and confounded by their first encounter with the canyon. But the enchantment loosens its hold enough that they cast about for some way of putting it all in a familiar structure or context. They eventually cluster together in a dim observation station and file past a panoramic photograph matching the canyon as seen from that very same perspective with points of interest individually labeled---Zoroastrian Temple, Isis Temple, Tower of Ra, and Woman’s Throne. Then the enchantment begins

anew. As the contours are named, they become places to which a person could actually go, if only she had a magic carpet or else her own wings, or could summon a bridge of living rock that would arch and zigzag across the chasm below, visiting each dreamt-of destination. Such a bridge of living rock was the Bridge of Elderworth, which spanned this Conscience Canyon.

"I'm afraid I'll fall," were the first words Rachel spoke as she drew back, trembling, from the ledge where the bridge began. The river was far too far below to be believed a river. A ribbon or string perhaps-but not even a creek let alone a river. Then she bit her lip, took the Imp's hand, and took the initial step on the bridge.

The journey over Conscience Canyon was a long one. There were fellow travelers Rachel could spy on farther segments of the great edifice, but the persons they actually met were few and far between. From temples to towers to thrones of fluted and polished limestone the bridge spanned an immense space. It pierced through larger buttes by way of tunnels. The tunneled trail spiraled upwards in and out of caverns like a slinky set on the floor and pulled straight up. At length the companions arrived at a point where the trail traversed a span of bridge. The natural bridge rose high above the butte from which it emerged. Above them, they could see a pinnacle continue its heavenward aspiration only a short ways before it ended in a spout shape. It was joined to another spout shaped pinnacle at the opposite end of the butte by an arched twist of the same shimmering black schist of which the entire formation was composed.

"Where have I seen this before?" Rachel wondered aloud. "Of course it is like the wedding vase from the pueblo we saw in the shop."

A tunneled passageway descended steeply through the core of the pinnacle but ended not in a cavern at all. Instead it led into a caldera, which had left the interior of the butte hollowed out into a bowl. They had entered the bowl near the bottom and were following the coils of pathway upwards toward the next span of bridge, which began at the opposite pinnacle. Unlike the caverns they had been through, the light streamed down from the sky above and serene clouds cast shadows among the rock formations in the center. If the interior of the butte was like a bowl, the contents of that bowl which they could walk around were like several scoops of ice cream topping layer cake. At the bottom of the bowl they could see only granite and schist- but these were represented in fanciful and sometimes lovely forms sculpted by erosion. As they approached the top there opened before their astonished eyes a pageant of colorful rock at play with light and shadow.

"There are only so many bedrock colors to be seen," said the Imp. "Here can be traced the course of the bedrock values in human history." Embedded in the strata were human artifacts typical of cultures long gone succeeded by those more recently known. The Imp pointed to one or another and, reading the tour book, interpreted the values that that culture in that time were thought to hold most dearly. There were definite differences in the shape and content of each layer, but there were some values that were repeated in most every stratum.

They took their time to see how values had changed with time. Or perhaps it is better said that they learned a little how values were put into the practice of virtuous living in different times and places. They also noticed how, in turn, the everyday practice

of virtuous living led to shifts in what was most valued. Sometimes these shifts were subtle and the trace of a certain value, which had been hardly noticeable before, became gradually more pronounced until it was as rich and robust a vein as the famous Comstock silver lode. Then as it inclined upwards it might dwindle or even vanish for a while before reappearing. This was a pattern they found with the Value of Connectedness and the Value of Autonomy. The excavation showed how people put into practice being together and standing some ways apart. Another pattern could be discerned with the Value of Harmony as put into practice of expressing moral emotions and the Value of Moral Meaning as put into practice by reasoning. Other patterns emerged among the Three Values of Worth, themselves. Sometimes the continuity of a vein they were tracing was abruptly dislodged as if an earthquake or a sudden settling on a fault line far below them had put part of the rock wall askew and at odds with another part. Here a way of practicing one value would run smack up against a different way of practicing the same or an altogether different value.

“Oh -oh. Cultural value conflict,” the Imp clucked his tongue. Rachel was reminded of the man from the Domain of Moral Attachment and the man from the Domain of Moral Autonomy, of competition and cooperation, of being herself and belonging to a community.

“Look here,” the Imp pointed beyond an outcropping of limestone sculpted fancifully by the passing waters of long ago. “This is the record of Conscience-Berg itself. See how, for a while anyway, what was made most important about conscience was how a person thinks and reasons. Then, later, what was important included how a person feels.” Rachel saw how the practice of moral reasoning dominated the rock wall almost exclusively at first but gradually made way for moral emotional responses.

“But wait a minute,” Rachel said. “I don’t know how to say this just right, but making something important like thoughts or feelings makes me wonder exactly what making something important is-- is it thought or is it feeling?”

“Ah, there’s lots of stumbling over that question in Conscience-berg. Personally I don’t think that making something important --valuation-- can be reduced to either thought or feeling. But it is always found in the company of thoughts and feelings and choices as well. Imagine four rubber stamps, one stamp for thinking, one for feeling, one for valuing and one for choosing. Each stamp is different in its way and no other stamp or combination of stamps can substitute for it. But now imagine that they are all held together in one big handle so that they can only be used together. So when you stamp out a thought, feeling and value and choosing are stamped out too. Still we talk as if value were thought or feeling or a combination of the two.”

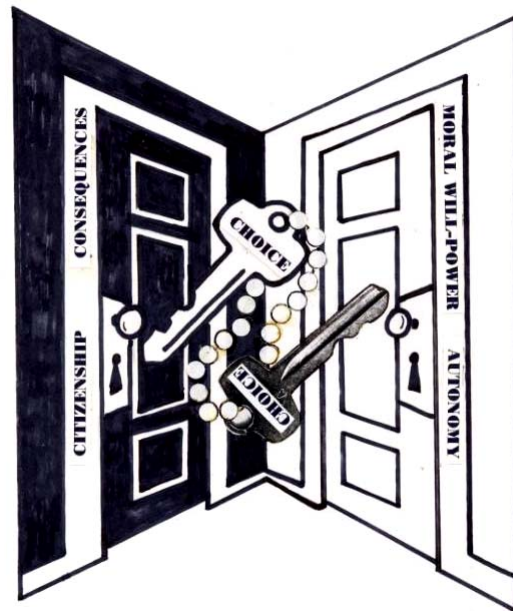
This philosophizing during their steady upward climb made Rachel aware of being worn out--The subtle argument of light and shadow upon the rock’s many faces, the ceaseless dialogue of earth and sky and water were profoundly persuasive-- deep calling to deep. And now ideas as well as sensuous impressions were at play in her mind. Exhilarating but also exhausting. She craved a distraction. The Imp must have read her mind, or he knew the limits of a young person’s endurance in matters philosophical, because he stopped and smiled and pointed. At the rim of the caldera, at the base of the spout-shaped pinnacle, which marked the end of this day’s journey, there was a sign: “The Inn of Conscience Canyon, bed and breakfast.”

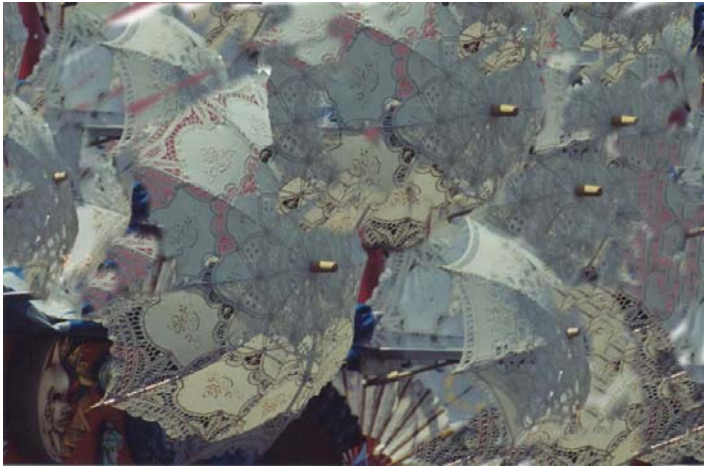
Wearied from the climb, Rachel was deeply grateful for the sign and what it signified. She wondered where the Inn could be. Then amid the purple hues of dusk, she saw lights blink on one by one in inset windows spiraling up the obsidian pinnacle that towered over them. She was too tired to marvel. "All I want is a nice, warm bed--that's what's most important to me right now--that's my number one value", Rachel said, leaning on the Imp, who smiled fondly at her. Ah, but Rachel surprised even the Imp with her sudden revival and just as sudden shift in valuation. The Imp scanned the environs to see what had occasioned Rachel's marked change in attitude and energy level. Still puzzled, his glance returned to Rachel and followed her own gaze outward. Rachel's gaze was lustfully locked on a smaller sign, just inside the tunneled entrance to the Inn. "Souvenirs," the sign read.

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As might be expected, the shop was chock full of trinkets like key chains and pins and figurines and postcards and mementos, posters and reproduced paintings and books for all ages--more or less having to do with Conscience Canyon or Conscience-Berg. There were videos with titles such as "The Legacy of Conscience Canyon" and compact discs with titles such as "Conscience Moods". Other videos were copies of a Nova program entitled **Life's First Feelings** and one film, from a series, entitled **Childhood: Life's Lessons Among Equals**, featuring Jerome Kagan, a name she recognized from earlier in her journey.

An entire aisle was devoted to plush animals: one that must have been very popular looked a little like an octopus, only it's tentacles numbered 7 instead of 8 (so it really must have been a septopus) each labeled for a domain of Conscience-Berg. Owls were likewise in abundance. Otter pairs--dubbed "Ought-er and Ought Not-ter" inspired by the otter colony near the Bridge of Other-worth were new offerings. Among the figurines could be found Pinocchio dolls, complete with a set of noses of various lengths that could be screwed into the face to show how many lies were told by the wooden puppet who wanted to be a boy. Jiminy Cricket was sold separately. ¹⁹





"The Umbrellas of Conscience-berg" photocopy reprinted courtesy of the Conscience-berg Museum of Art.

Umbrellas were offered and Rachel found several in the style sported by the Umbrella Kids.

The books included many of the coffee table kind:

"A Values Genealogy: Tracing the Family Tree of Values" with its competitor, "Valuation across Time and Space: values in historical and cultural perspective." Rachel flipped through photos of churches in Hyde Park in Chicago juxtaposed with photos of Hindu temples in India stopping at a table adapted from



cross-cultural researchers, named Shweder, Mahapatra and Miller which listed candidates for "Moral Universals". It listed virtues and vices that had been found among people in India and people in Chicago. She paused to read the list of virtues: promise keeping, respect for property, fairness, protecting the weak or vulnerable, returning kindness and gratitude, and the vices: incest, attacking others without cause, favoring kin in business and government over others better qualified, and prejudice.²⁰ Books of virtues for children and for adults were displayed, as were various copies of Aesop's Fables. Rabbi Kushner's book **How Good Do We Have to Be?**²¹ caught Rachel's eye. She

liked the rabbi's question an awful lot and was glad at least one person besides herself- and a grown-up at that- was asking it too. **Achieving Moral Health, an exercise plan for your conscience** by Dr. Charles Shelton was on the highly recommended reading shelf²². There were several "be good/feel good" barometers mounted on the wall above the bookshelves. A few abridged versions of Aristotle's book of Ethics, which he had named for his son, Nichomachus, were available, entitled "The Love of Friends." Cynthia and her friend Jamie suddenly came to Rachel's mind. Jamie had a sister who had died of leukemia. She had been through a hard time during which she and Cynthia had drifted apart. But lately they seemed to be spending more and more time together. Rachel was glad about that. She liked Jamie. Another book caught her eye briefly but she did not leaf through its pages: "Bed and Breakfasts In Conscience-Berg." The title held no particular interest for Rachel, but the cover drew her attention: it showed a wonderful old manse, light and airy, with plenty of glass windows and skylights, nestled

in thick green foliage by a cascading waterfall. Underneath in small letters was written: "The House of Liminal Images". Rachel's remarked to the Imp: I'd love to see this place sometime. What does 'liminal' mean?

The Imp replied, "It means 'at the threshold'." Rachel was about to pursue the subject but the Imp turned abruptly down another aisle.

Some of the posters on display had heroic themes: Socrates given poison to drink in Athens, Frederick Douglas speaking out against slavery in America, Nelson Mandela in prison in South Africa, Jane Goodall calling for protection of her beloved gorillas, Elizabeth Cady Stanton standing at the forefront in the early women's movement, Gandhi on a hunger strike in India. Some had deeply disturbing themes like Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah. Many showed very ordinary people—parents with their children in day-to-day activities, helping, comforting, nurturing, protecting, teaching, correcting....

There were china plates inscribed with the Ten Commandments, and The Greatest Commandment given by Christ, authentic reproductions on imitation parchment of "The Serenity Prayer" and "Desiderata Found in A Church Ruin" and even parts of "Hammurabi's Code". "The Beatitudes" were represented and, plaques with The Oath of Hippocrates, with a sign that suggested they would make elegant gifts for relatives graduating from medical school.

There were several versions of the Golden Rule, variously engraved. Rachel recognized her favorite version, the one Cynthia's friend Aaron had shown given her sister. It came from Rabbi Hillel. Aaron had said to Cynthia that the rabbi had been asked by a non-Jew to teach him the entire Torah while the non-Jew stood on one foot. The Rabbi replied "What you dislike don't do to others; that is the whole of the Torah. The rest is commentary. Go and learn." There were several paintings by local artists depicting sights she had seen: The Gardens of Mencius, the heraldic banners upon the mesa, and hand crafted miniatures of the Bridges of Conscience-Berg. She recognized the bridges she had already encountered and was about to look at the replicas of the ones she might see tomorrow, when the Imp tapped her on the shoulder and reminded her it was time to get something to eat and find their bedrooms.



On many family vacations, the last stop was the souvenir shop. Souvenirs were part gift and part reward for good behavior and part Mom's or Dad's desire that there be a little something to remember the family vacation by. Souvenir hunting is serious business. Among her earliest memories, Rachel harbored several of Dad looking more and more impatient and cross as she and Cynthia made their selection. There was always a limit placed on how many souvenirs could be purchased and how much they could cost. There was always bargaining with Dad about getting one that cost a little

more than the limit or getting two at a lower price than one would be if it were bought instead. Then there were always Dad's complaints about the kids "upping the ante," by which he meant they tried to get more than was originally agreed. But the phrase struck Rachel as odd and made her think about her Aunt who always had a crisp 5-dollar bill for her and Cynthia at every visit. Dad sometimes caved under the pressure of the girls' beseeching and pestering, in which case Mom would scold him for spoiling his daughters yet again. Dad's usual response was to set his jaw and impose an impossible limit on the time remained looking for the souvenir. Then the girls' pleading shifted away from how much money to how much time could be spent. "Thank-you" afterwards helped smooth ruffled feathers. And being quietly absorbed in the souvenir while Mom or Dad was driving to the next stop was generally considered good form and much appreciated.

After today's trip, Rachel wanted a souvenir badly and, unlike her parents, the Imp did not offer much resistance to the idea. He did say "A souvenir. One," but he did not rush her to the counter like Dad did. His reminder was not especially impatient. At least she did not detect any foot tapping or watch glancing. Come to think of it did the Imp even have a watch? In fact he was regarding her closely- apparently very interested in what she looked at, handled and what she ignored. "Oh look, Mr. Imp she cried excitedly, these are like those sculptures we've seen. They were snap tight model kits called "Conscience and the Visible Brain." An assembled floor model highlighted the loops of the limbic system and its connections with the right prefrontal cortex. The kits declared, "Glutamate not included." Rachel was puzzled.

The Imp laughed. "Glutamate is one of the neurotransmitters. Some people think it is especially important in letting the different parts of the brain act together as a network. Glutamate-glue-get it? Glutamate not included." He guffawed.

"Oh. Whatever," Rachel said with mild annoyance. The Imp's amusement subsided as her tone registered. "You have a weird sense of humor."

"So sue me," the Imp shrugged and walked over to the next aisle.

Rachel didn't hear his last remark. She had found the jewelry counter. There were the duty charm bracelets and moral mood rings, which turned colors to show fear of punishment, shame and guilt or pride and something called moral passion. She was drawn however to a particular pair of old and tarnished rings, which seemed to emit an aura of magic, an indescribable allure like Aladdin's Lamp. "Glaucou's Rings," the card read. "You must be 16 or accompanied by an adult to wear them." That was enough for Rachel. She had chosen her souvenir.

"Glaucou's Rings?" exclaimed the Imp. "No way! No how! No sir!"

"Why not?" Rachel demanded.

"You're way too young-"

"Not if you're with me-"

"I'm an Imp not a grown-up-"

"The woman at the counter doesn't know that and probably wouldn't care anyway."

"No."

"O.K. O.K. I won't wear them until I'm 16. I promise I won't and you promised me a souvenir."

Now if Rachel's Mom had been there things would not have gone so far. Even if only Dad had been there, Rachel would most likely have ended up at best with a mood ring or a septopus. But, truth be told, for all his talents, the Imp had little experience parenting, or maybe-just maybe- he really didn't mind Rachel having those rings for awhile. In any event he relented and presented the cashier with his charge plate. "What's your return policy?" he whispered.

At dinner, Rachel listened eagerly to the Imp's story about the rings of Glaucon. "Long before J.R.R. Tolkien wrote about Bilbo and Frodo Baggins and the One Ring, long before Wagner's Siegfried made his Rhine Journey, long before the Nieberlungenliad had become an epic poem, there was an Athenian named Glaucon who challenged another Athenian named Socrates to imagine two rings.²³ The first ring had the power to invest its wearer with invisibility- but not only invisibility. Glaucon's first ring enabled its wearer to act in any way he or she wanted -"

"Any way at all?" Rachel marveled that she now possessed these replicas of these rings in the little paper sack at the side of the table.

"Yes, anyway at all for good or ill, rightly or wrongly--anyway at all without punishment--"

"You mean if I wore the first ring, I could be invisible and go into Cynthia's room and try on any of her clothes or use her nail polish or look at what she was e-mailing her friends and she wouldn't get mad?"

"Yes, yes, exactly. But that's not all!"

"What? Tell me."

"Not only would you not get into any trouble but you would be admired and praised and rewarded for having done good deeds. Your fine reputation would precede you wherever you went."

"Well, how bad could the wearer of the ring be and still not get into trouble?" "No limit. Glaucon told Socrates that the wearer of the first ring could act altogether immorally with no penalty: he could rob, murder or rape without being caught or punished."

"Wow.... and he'd even be rewarded for the evil stuff he did?"

The Imp nodded.

"Wow.... O.K. O.K. What about the second ring of Glaucon?"

"The second ring of Glaucon casts an entirely different spell. Anytime the person who wears the second ring of Glaucon does something good or right, he or she is treated with contempt or scorn and is blamed and shunned or suffers some indignity."

"Doesn't anyone know the truth: that she was being good not bad?"

"Not according to Glaucon."

"Well I believe God would know." Rachel had taken the rings from the bag and was examining them.

"I'm not sure what Glaucon would say to that- anyway Glaucon told Socrates to imagine the rings because he wanted to convince Socrates that people can't be counted on to avoid wrongdoing without fear of punishment and that people can't be counted on doing good without some kind of reward."

"So there never were any Rings of Glaucon."

“ Oh, I wouldn’t say that. There are usually times in life when a person finds a Ring of Glaucon on his or her finger. The rings you have there for example are quite authentic-”

“You mean they look just like the rings Glaucon described to Socrates?”

“ Yes, but I also mean they do exactly what Glaucon said they would do.”

Rachel jumped back in her seat. When she found her voice again, she pointed to the rings and stammered:

“ Wh-wh-which is which?”

The Imp picked up a ring and examined it casually. “ I should think this is the first ring and that is the second. Or have I got that right? You know, truth be told, I don’t know which is which. Anyway, you promised not to wear them until you’re 16.”

“ Well, I’m wondering since you are here with me--”

“ Oh no you don’t, Rachel. In fact I’ve put a spell of my own on these rings. Go ahead try one on.”

“ Really-I hope it’s the first ring. I have a fifty-fifty chance it is.” She slipped the first ring onto her ring finger. Or Rachel thought she did-- actually it seemed to pass right through her finger and fell with a clink on the table. “ O.K. You win. It’s like parental controls on the Internet--hmm, there might be some way around them.”

“ You’re right. Parental controls, on or off the Internet, can be foiled. You might say kids can go looking for Glaucon’s first ring --some do it pretty often, I guess. But others don’t go looking. And even when they stumble upon the first ring and try it on--well, they take it right off again and give it to the nearest grown-up. Like when you tell on yourself when you’ve done something wrong even though you know there wasn’t anyone else who saw you do it.”

“ Mr. Imp? I think it’s really past my bedtime now. And I have to brush my teeth.”

“ Well good night, Rachel...” Rachel started to leave the table and headed for her room. “ Rachel-” the Imp called after her, “ There’s apt to be some magic in those rings even if you aren’t the one wearing them. They have sort of unpredictable effects on dreams. Not scary monster filled nightmares or anything but sometimes odd or unsettling effects. I don’t think they would cause you any serious harm, though.”

“ Thanks for the warning. I’m too sleepy to worry about it.”

At first Rachel put Glaucon’s Rings on the bedside stand. She wriggled down between the flannel sheets and smoothed the quilt comforter around her body thinking idly that it must have come from the shoppe in Kochanska. That reminded her of Tov and the music they played at the Bridge of Harmony. She very much wanted to see her friend again. What would he do if he wore the first ring- or the second? She sighed and blew out the lamp. As tired as she was, she thought surely she would drop off to sleep instantly. Perhaps she did. But the glow-in-the-dark from the argnet rings made her more restless than any gibbous moon could have done. So she turned her face into her pillow and closed her eyes tightly. All of her maneuvering to keep those rings out of sight did nothing at all to diminish their allure, their urgent call. So she took them up in her palm, felt their heft and hardness, closed her fist around them and fell asleep.

She dreamt of her parents. But she dreamt of them separately not together. In her dreams, it was as if she had put on Glaucon’s first ring and became invisible but was not otherwise empowered. She thought the ring was not working and lifted her

hand to her face to examine it. There was no ring there. She was merely invisible. Where was she anyway? Not home. Not school. But someplace not altogether unfamiliar. She was gazing over a city from high up. It was late and the lights of offices and streets and cars were twinkling with a kind of hesitation below. She realized that she was inside, looking out a window, which she recognized for the view it afforded from her mother's office. She had often visited Mom there during the day, but only on the Fourth of July had she been there at night. Mom's office building commanded a wonderful view of the skyscraper downtown where they launched the fireworks each year. The whole family would take advantage of this 'perk,' as her mother called it, and walk up a fire escape to the rooftop where they would spread a blanket and empty the contents of a festively prepared picnic basket and wait for the pyrotechnical wizardry to begin.

Rachel always thought to herself with pride how important her mother was to work in an office so high up. Her mother would laugh and say wistfully "I'm an executive secretary, a good one, but I hope my daughters go farther and make the most of their talents". This particular night was not the Fourth of July, Rachel reckoned. She could make out the skeletal shapes of trees and could hear and feel the glass windowpane give a plaintive moan with each gust of the chill autumn wind. With a thrill she heard her mother's voice, speaking in low tones. Rachel turned to see Mom at a dimly lit desk, cradling a phone between ear and shoulder as she typed on a computer keyboard.

"I'll be pretty late tonight," she said. "... No I didn't have time to fix anything for dinner.... I'm sorry.... You're going to get fast food? Again? I know you will. That's all Cynthia and Rachel eat anymore when I'm not there to cook...What do I want? Nothing. Don't worry. I'll get something here. Be sure Cynthia gets to her math homework first thing after she eats. I talked to her teacher. She's not doing so hot. No. No T.V. What? O.K. O.K. They can watch it if they finish homework first.... O.K. See you later.... Yeah I guess it will be tomorrow, if you are going to bed at the usual time.... Honey?.... I just- I ... Never mind. See you in the A.M." A momentary unhappiness captured her mother's countenance. It only seemed to pass like a shadow over her face, only seemed to disappear-- actually it sank below the surface to be absorbed and stored away somewhere close to her heart. She returned her attention to the computer.

Rachel automatically knew she couldn't talk to or touch her mother. The magic of Glaucon's ring followed certain rules, which she understood and accepted immediately in the context of her dream.

It was only then that she saw the silvery glint of the ring on her mother's hand.

"Which ring?" Rachel wondered. "Mom's working hard.... And I guess Dad's not helping out much back home.... Mom's doing something good and not being appreciated. Dad could make the dinner, he's not helpless. Neither is Cynthia for that matter--or me, come to think of it. It must be Glaucon's second ring."

Someone entered the room. He carried several cartons of Chinese food and chopsticks under his chin. "Hey," he said "How about some takeaway Chinese?"

"Hi, Brian," Mom smiled. "In America we say 'carry-out'."

Brian set the cartons of Chinese down on the desk dropped the chopsticks from his chin into Mom's lap and reached into his coat pockets for two bottles of Irish amber beer.

"This looks good. Thank-you for going out in the cold for it."

“ No problem.” Brian glanced out the window.” It’s a brilliant city, no doubt, but frightfully cold this time of year.”

“ You get used to it, after awhile.”

“ Well, I won’t be here much longer. The company is sending me back to Waterford in a week, you know.”

“ I try not to think about it, Brian-- You really brighten up this place a lot. Everyone loves your accent and your tall tales. I’ll miss you.”

“ Likewise.”

Rachel noticed the ring emitted a different glow now-in fact it wasn’t the same ring anymore. “The first ring”, she whispered to herself.

§

Like a silent film clip that had been edited to show the most important scenes, the evening that Brian and her mother shared in their office unfolded before Rachel’s eyes. In the course of watching, she experienced so many feelings she could never have described them all--or the way they changed so quickly and piled up on one another. It was as if a rug had been pulled out from beneath her legs while, at the very same instant, she had been tossed something -like a precious vase- and then something else, and again and again something else equally precious and fragile. And she was responsible for the safekeeping of them all. It occurred to Rachel that this sudden loss of balance was not only hers but also her mother’s. There was first of all disbelief that her mother could look that way at anyone but her father. A sense of betrayal and hurt and anger accompanied her disbelief. Then there was awe at how blissfully her mother smiled in the arms of this stranger and surprise turning to delight at how her mother and he danced. She could not ever remember her mother dancing. It was lovely. Then there was overwhelming sadness when her mother’s eyes filled with tears as, ever so gently, she pushed Brian away and shook her head. What had he asked her? To spend the night with him? To go away to Ireland to live? To allow him to remain and stay near her? Whatever the question, Rachel could tell Mom’s answer was ‘no’ uttered in bittersweet yearning and regret. Brian nodded, wiping tears from his eyes as well. “He is a handsome man with a kind face,” Rachel said to herself, “ and he’s hurt, too.” Rachel let her tears run off her cheek unchecked by the back of her hand or her arm. Rachel found herself glad when they embraced again and kissed, but relieved that the embrace and kiss came only after Brian put on his coat and moved his lips in the shape of ‘good-bye.’ Then her mother took his hands in hers and stepped back. How like a bridge were their joined hands over the space between them. On her mother’s hand, now loosed from Brian’s, Rachel saw the first ring of Glaucon flicker out and disappear.

She longed to put a consoling and proud arm around her mother. She could not. Rachel was bound by her dream to follow Glaucon’s ring and Glaucon’s ring wouldn’t be satisfied until another person wore it. Still invisible, Rachel found herself in the hospital clinic where her father worked. He was a physician’s assistant. He was looking at a chart that had been handed to him by the head administrator for the big practice in which he worked with many doctors. The man was pointing to a note in the chart. Rachel recognized her father’s handwriting. The man said, “ Look I don’t see anything

wrong with adding a line to your note, saying he saw the patient with you and authorized that procedure. After all, he did authorize it. And, what the hell, it worked. It was the right thing to do. So what's the big deal?"

Dad said, "He authorized it. Yes. And it worked fine. Yes. But he wasn't there-he staffed with me on the telephone."

"Look if he were here, he'd put a notation in the chart himself--but he's away on vacation. I'd wait until he returned but we have a site visit tomorrow. I want these charts to be in good shape."

"Well, the progress notes are accurate as they are--"

"As is, they don't cover us--"

"I don't understand--"

"Let me explain it then. The government agency has changed its policy--it says it hasn't but it has. Anyway, now, the docs in the practice can't bill if there isn't evidence that they personally performed the service--that means that the doctor was present at the time the service was rendered AND there's a note on the chart saying so."

Rachel had heard many dinnertime conversations between her Dad and Mom about documentation-- Mom would say, "If you provided the service, then the patient's insurance should be billed for it."

Dad would say, "Yes but if it isn't documented, they don't care. They act like it never happened.... Not only that the diagnosis has to be one they think is right for that kind of treatment. If it isn't they won't pay. And maybe you think a different treatment would be better but they won't pay for it in that case...."

Mom said, "It doesn't sound right to me--you're trying to give the patient the right treatment and the insurance company won't pay for it. What do the doctors do?"

"Well, you know Paula Gallahue?"

"Paula--yes. I like her."

"She just gets absolutely irate every time she has to talk to the people in the insurance company about it. They are always denying her what she bills."

"Michael Gardiner picks a diagnosis that he thinks the insurance company will cover but he admits to fudging--"

"You mean he lies about it?"

"Not exactly--he says to himself medicine isn't perfect and the patient *could* have the condition even though he doesn't really think so. But if he doesn't bill it the right way--which is really the wrong way to think about what condition the patient probably has--then the insurance won't pay and the patient will wind up being billed for the procedure."

"Well at least he's thinking about the patient's welfare and not his own--but he isn't being exactly honest with the insurance company, is he?"

"No, I guess not, it's called gaming the system."

"Have you had to do the same thing?"

"Well, since I'm a physician's assistant, I pretty much have to bill by the diagnosis that the doctor makes even if I disagree. Of course, the doctor tells me what he really wants me to do even if he writes something else in the chart for billing purposes."

Rachel could tell that Dad was now, himself, being asked to write a false document. And it wasn't even for the patient's good--near as she could tell. Dad was supposed to write that a doctor had actually seen the patient when he hadn't. Why?

The answer came from the man Dad was talking to. " Now this was billed for Dr. Carlisle--"

--even though he wasn't there."

"Yes, because that's how it was always done before they changed the rules. As long as the case was staffed with the doctor we would bill for the doctor--"

" I see. But the rules have been changed--well surely they will understand if you tell them that you've not been able to change the way you bill to follow the rules--"

"No. They won't buy it. They say that the rules have always been the rules, even if we interpreted them differently once. According to them, we're still responsible. And if they find we've been billing for services not provided directly by the doctor, they'll fine us for fraud. And believe me they've already done it to another group. That group folded. So anyway, all I want you to do is beef up the documentation a bit. Fortify it. You've only been here a few months but already you're gaining a reputation as a good physician assistant. In this practice you also want to be a good team player. Look it over and see if there isn't something you can do with that procedure note. Thanks."

The man walked out of the room. Dad looked at the chart. There was space between the last line of the procedure note he had written and his signature. No one would really know if he wrote something extra, maybe something vague like "Dr. Carlisle assessed the patient (can't a doctor assess a patient without actually seeing him?) and agreed with the procedure that Dad had proposed." Someone reading that might believe that the doctor had actually seen the patient, but Dad couldn't help what other people believed. Dad just kept looking at the chart. The first ring of Glaucon was glowing with golden intensity. Dad picked up his pen and put it down on the paper. Then with a look of determination Rachel had never before witnessed in her father, he drew a line through the empty space so that nothing more could be written. "There," he said. " I should have done that when I wrote the note in the first place."

The man who had given Dad the chart returned. Dad handed him the chart and returned to dictating a note. The man walked towards the door while leafing through the chart. He stopped abruptly. " Hey, thanks for nothing, man--I'll remember this--" Dad didn't look up- just kept dictating. The ring had changed from gold to silver. Rachel worried just how the man would make life miserable for her father. In fact she worried so much, she awakened from her dream altogether and could not return to sleep the rest of the night.

The next morning, after bathing Rachel had breakfast with the Imp.

" You look tired," he said as nonchalantly as can be imagined.

" I didn't sleep very well, I guess," Rachel responded. " You were right about the dreams--"

"And what did you dream?"

" Well I don't remember--but they were so vivid, I remember that--"

"Ah," said the Imp and concentrated on his breakfast.

Rachel went to her room to brush her teeth. Then she returned to meet her companion at the checkout desk of the Inn. He said, " Well I'm ready to go. How about you?"

“ Yeah, I guess so. But may we stop at the Souvenir shop on the way out, please?”

“ Rachel, I said one souvenir-”

“ I know. I know. Just want to stop for one second.”

“Oh sure-one second-’

“ You sound like my father. Please I promise I won’t be long.”

The shop was just opening. Without going in, Rachel handed the Rings of Glaucon to the shopkeeper. “ I just wanted to return these,” she said.

“ Well we have a strict exchange policy and no refunds.”

“I don’t want any refund or any exchange, either, thank-you.” Rachel said.

“ Hmm. This happens with those rings all the time, “ said the shopkeeper. “Well at least let me give you a free ticket to the House of Liminal Images.”

Rachel was hesitant.

“ Take it Rachel,” urged the Imp. “ We’ll be very near to it. And the visit there will do you some good.”

Rachel took the ticket, thanked the shopkeeper and followed the Imp back to the Canyon Trail.

¹⁸ The authors are indebted to Professor David H. Smith, Department of Religious Studies, and Director of the Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions, Indiana University for his recommendation of and comments upon: Kirk, KE: **Conscience and Its Problems, An Introduction to Casuistry**, with an introduction by D.H. Smith. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999. The explanation that Rachel receives regarding casuistry is based upon Professor's Smith's introduction to Kirk's work. Readers may also be interested in: Jonsen, AR and Toulmin, S: **The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

¹⁹ Collodi, C (1882): **Pinocchio**. Reprint. New York: Puffin Books, 1996.

²⁰ **Life's First Feelings** has already been mentioned. The Childhood Project, Inc.: **Childhood: Life's Lessons Among Equals**, Ambrose Video Publishing, Inc. features commentary by Jerome Kagan. The cross-cultural study highlighted in the gift shop is: Shweder, R., Mahapatra, M and Miller, J: *Culture and Moral Development* .In **The Emergence of Morality in Young Children**, J. Kagan and S. Lamb, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 1-90.

Also recommended: Kagan, J: **Three Seductive Ideas**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998. In this work, *nota bene* Kagan's assertion:

Although the content of every set of moral standards is tied to some time and place, the desire to believe that self is ethically worthy, like the ability to understand language is universal. Humans are the only species that applies a symbolic evaluation of good and bad to actions, thoughts, feelings and personal characteristics and tries continually to choose acts that make it easier to regard the self as good.... A moral motive and its attendant emotions are as obvious a product of biological evolution as digestion and respiration... (p.155).

²¹ Kushner, H. **How Good Do We Have To Be?** Boston: Little, Brown. 1995.

²² The interested reader is strongly encouraged to read Shelton CM: **Achieving Moral Health, An Exercise Plan For Your Conscience**, New York: The CrossRoad Publishing Company, 2000, which offers sustained and academically informed reflections in combination with practical advice based upon a seven dimensional view of conscience. There are substantial overlaps of Shelton’s seven dimensions, which are derived from his general and clinical observations as well as his comprehensive view of the field of moral psychology, with the domains of conscience interpreted from semistructured interviews of children and adolescents.

In Achieving Moral Health, Dr. Shelton, *qua* psychologist, achieves for his conception of conscience, already accessible in several titles to pastoral counselors, spiritual guides and religious educators, new stature in secular moral psychology. In the years in which I have been privileged to collaborate, correspond and converse with Dr. Shelton, I have witnessed his conception of conscience, in its manifold dimensions, become richer and more refined. However, at the same time, I would reflect with a measure of disappointment that his previous titles were apt to be regarded as too snugly and securely lodged in Christian tradition and so might be overlooked by persons of conscience in other faiths or conditions of unbelief. Achieving Moral Health remedies that problem admirably, achieving and sustaining a secular perspective, fully informed by Dr. Shelton's formidable understanding of psychological depths and dynamics. Secular but never losing itself in a misguided bid for value-neutrality or absolute moral relativism, Achieving Moral Health identifies seven dimensions of human nature that persons who would be persons of healthy conscience are beckoned to appreciate, nurture along, and exercise for moral fitness. Through and through it retains what has become the hallmark of Dr. Shelton's contributions to the conscience literature: a wonderful mix of reflection and practical application for the world of work and the world of relationships. When accepting the invitation to "Let your conscience be your guide," this book can become-merits becoming- any adult reader's companion to conscience, a gentle and non-judgmental guidebook to just how and by what he or she is being guided. Author MG.

²³ Glaucon's embellishment of the legend of Gyges, which he uses for moral discourse with Socrates, may be found in Plato: **The Republic**, trans. D. Lee. Reprint. Baltimore: Penguin Books Ltd, 1974, Part 1(Book 2) ss. 359-363, pp.104-110. The story is revisited in Nozick, R: **Philosophical Explanations**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, pp.403 ff.