Introduction

A HOUSE DIVIDED

There's a shadow just behind me,
Clouding every step I take,
Making every promise empty,
Pointing every finger at me,
Waiting like a stalking butler . . .

(Tool, "Sober," Undertow, 1993)[1]

The vices have always had a bad rap, especially when they get reclassified as "sins," that is, as offenses not only against taste and social propriety but against God himself. But then again, isn't it obvious that these so-called sins are in fact the very stuff of life, the hot, puffy, humiliating, pathetic, but essential ingredients in that human comedy that began with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden?

—Robert C. Solomon[2]

We live in a house divided. The same culture that deals with the tragedy of an average of two alcohol-related traffic deaths every hour finds its sporting events saturated in beer advertisements. While the latest pop singer proclaims her willingness to be "A Slave 4 U," parents, teachers, and coaches work tirelessly to instill real independence and value in young girls. We tell our children to "just say no" to the very things that many popular public figures embrace. We celebrate our cultural freedoms to sing and sell and persuade while grieving their excessive and disastrous consequences.

1. Excerpts from "Sober" are reprinted with the permission of Hal Leonard Corporation.
2. Solomon, *Wicked Pleasures*, 1.

That virtue and vice are powerful cultural forces is nothing new. Solomon's quotation above sets the beginning of such a tragicomedy at least back at Eden. What might make our current moment unique is the ambiguity about what exactly constitutes a virtue and a vice. In recasting the vices as "the very stuff of life," Solomon echoes a common idea that the vices often seem more vital or living than the virtues. Our cultural house is divided not only by virtue and vice but by the very meaning of *virtue* and *vice*.

Of course not everyone seems so unsure, so divided, and those clear-sighted and confident people earn our respect and admiration. And they scare us. Such people stand up, go to jail, make personal sacrifices, and even stare down death for what they believe. But what is the basis for such a powerful personal conviction? Is it the power of truth born of integrity, or does it show how, to use Yeats's phrase from "The Second Coming," "the worst / Are full of passionate intensity"? The same Robert Solomon quoted above warns how traditional virtues and vices can make powerful and dangerous combinations; "When anger, envy, and justice join forces, watch out!"[3]

Added to the mix of all of this ambiguity is yet another force, an undertow (to borrow the title of the Tool CD mentioned in the epigraph above). There is an increasingly common cultural location—the addiction meeting or the rehabilitation clinic. In rehab, the vices are not the "stuff of life" or the "essential ingredients in that human comedy." At an AA meeting there are no bonus points for uncertainty. As the Tool quote asserts, vice can be an ever-stalking, ever-clouding, and ever-accusing force that becomes so powerful that it makes every promise empty. One unique feature in the Tool song is that there are shifts in the narration, not exactly what one would expect in heavy-metal rock music. At one point the speaker seems to be vice itself, warning,

> I am just a worthless liar.
> I am just an imbecile.
> I will only complicate you.
> Trust in me and fall as well.
> I will find a center in you.
> I will chew it up and leave,
> I will work to elevate you
> Just enough to bring you down.

Those overcome by vice find their integrity "complicated" and compromised, their center chewed up and dissolved. Victims of vice find that this worthless liar poisons life instead of adding spice; it is corrosive, not a condiment. In the end, vice is a solvent that eats away every aspiration, every plan, and finally every relationship.

So in our divided house we have those collapsed by addictions and those paralyzed by fear of doing anything that might not fit someone else's idea of virtuousness. While some suffer because of uncertainty, and some suffer (ignorantly perhaps)

3. Ibid., 7.

because of certainty, others thrive on uncertainty and still others on certainty. The divided house, inhabited by so many contrasting residents, is a house whose very framework is formed by the virtues and vices, since this house is built from those moral and ethical ideals found in many of our culture's important philosophical, religious, and artistic works. Those works can be didactic or critical or satirical. Some are clear and expository, some elusive and mystical, while others are ambiguous and even paradoxical. The virtues and vices may be reverenced, like alchemy, as holding ancient, magical secrets, even transcendent power, or they can be playfully profaned.

This book, far from seeking to harmonize different concepts or expressions of virtue and vice, provides some of the source documents that have helped establish the philosophical, religious, social, and artistic discussion about virtue and vice. This book includes those works central to a particular house, what we could roughly and inaccurately call Western civilization. It is outside of its scope to trace the virtues and vices in other traditions. This anthology begins with the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian antecedents of the virtues and vices. The second section provides documents related to their codification in the early so-called Christian era. The apex of their cultural importance is the material in the third section. The fourth section's documents show the variety of ways that Renaissance thinkers and artists engaged the tradition, while the last section shows transformations of the virtues and vices up to the present.[4] The power or "virtue" of this book is not its ability to provide definitive answers to questions that surround the virtues and vices, but to provide some of the original ways that they have been presented. While it cannot reunite the house divided, it can inspire its occupants to explore its footings and foundations, as well as its fractures and fissures.

VIRTUES, VICES, SINS, AND GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

I am a professor, and when I teach Dante's *Divine Comedy* students often wonder why some sinners are in hell while others are in purgatory. I respond by asking what they can do with moldy cheese commonly found in college refrigerators. Some insists that moldy cheese must be sent immediately to Chernobyl by someone in full hazmat gear. Brighter students answer with a question: how much mold is there? When I ask what difference it makes, they explain that if there is a little mold, then you can just cut that portion off, while if there is too much mold to separate it from the cheese, then there is no salvaging the cheese. And that is also the difference between Dante's sinners in hell and purgatory. For those who have committed transgressions that sit, metaphorically, on the surface of their souls, some purgative sin removal is called for. But for those completely contaminated and overcome by sin, like cheese filled with mold, the only option is hell. When sin cannot be separated from soul, that soul goes to eternal Chernobyl, so to speak.

4. Unless I've indicated otherwise, all footnotes within anthologized works are my own.

This comparison points toward the difference between sin and vice. Vice, which comes from the Latin word *vitium,* meaning "fault" or "defect," is a characteristic, a habit so ingrained that it has come to dominate. A sin is an individual act of transgression. While the vicious will necessarily sin often as a consequence of the state of their souls, otherwise virtuous people may commit isolated sinful acts. According to elements of the Christian tradition, sins are deadly to the degree, either that they manifest a vicious nature, or that they inevitably lead to more sins. That is not to say that every author or artist or thinker is completely consistent, but, in general, the "deadlier" sins reveal a soul's depravity and lead to more character decay.

Tracing the roots of what we now call the seven deadly sins is an important thread through this book. Someone new to the history of the virtues and vices may be surprised to find that they are not specifically listed in the Bible. This book contains some of their biblical antecedents, but our common list of virtues and vices does not emerge until long after the formation of the Bible. It is also important to note that the specific number of vices and the specific vices themselves fluctuate over time. Prudentius (348–413 CE), for example, listed eight main vices as well as an entire evil entourage to accompany them. Evagrius (345–399 CE) often listed eight, though he sometimes added a ninth, and Gregory the Great (540–604 CE) shuffled those lists to form one with pride as the principle vice followed by seven sinful attendants. Even this list was slightly altered before Dante (1265–1321 CE) penned his *Purgatory*. The chart below gives lists of vices presented in chronological order according to different authors or artists.

VICES				
Prudentius	*Evagrius*	*Gregory*	*Dante (seven deadly sins)*	*Giotto*
Worship-of-the-Old-Gods	Gluttony	Pride	Pride	Foolishness
Lust	Fornication	Vain Glory	Envy	Inconstancy
Wrath	Avarice	Envy	Anger	Ire
Pride	Sadness	Anger	Sloth	Injustice
Indulgence (and entourage)	Anger	Melancholy	Avarice	Idolatry
Greed (and entourage)	Acedia	Avarice	Gluttony	Envy
Thrift (Greed in disguise)	Vainglory	Gluttony	Lust	Despair
Discord or Heresy	Jealousy	Lust		
	Pride			

Standing across the field from the vices in the battle for the soul are the virtues. These also change over time, and in Prudentius's work there are eleven with prominent roles, though more are named. But Prudentius's list of virtues, like his vices, did not become a fixed standard, and Gregory the Great generated his own lists. In one part of his commentary on Job, Gregory gives the list commonly drawn from Isaiah. These are traditionally called the gifts of the Spirit and are often adapted as contrasts or remedies for the vices. Gregory also provided the most common list of virtues. This list was developed from the four cardinal, classical, or humanistic virtues: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. These derive from Greco-Roman culture. To these four were added the three theological virtues drawn from Paul: faith, hope, and charity or love. This list becomes the standard list of virtues.

VIRTUES					
Plato	*Paul*	*Prudentius*	*Evagrius*	*Gregory (Gifts of Spirit)*	*Gregory, Dante, Giotto*
Wisdom	Faith	Faith	Abstinence	Wisdom	Faith
Courage	Hope	Chastity	Chastity	Understanding	Hope
Temperance	Love	Long-Suffering	Freedom from Possessions	Counsel	Charity
Justice		Lowliness	Joy	Fortitude	Prudence
		Hope	Patience	Knowledge	Temperance
		Sobriety	Perseverance	Piety	Fortitude
		Reason	Freedom from Vainglory	Fear	Justice
		Good Works	Freedom from Jealousy		
		Concord	Humility		
		Peace			
		Wisdom			

A couple of features come to the fore when we examine these lists. Evagrius set up the basic cast of the vices, Gregory made modifications, and then by Dante's time one further modification had been made. Giotto's list seems quite different, because his standard was the then rather stable seven virtues; Giotto created seven vices in opposition. In other contexts the seven deadly sins are the standard, with variations on the gifts of the Spirit acting as healing contrasts.

Another element of these charts is the words themselves. The vice on Evagrius's list given as *acedia* is worth pausing over. The Greek roots of this word mean "an absence of care." For monks who take vows, flee the world, and live in the desert, *acedia* means "carelessness," or "a lack of concern about spiritual things." Acedia is the indifference and apathy that leads devotees to abandon their vows. Over the centuries, as the vices moved from cells and monasteries to the public sphere, this spiritual aridity

became sloth. In Dante's work this sloth means a lack of enthusiastic love toward God and toward the good. In our time, sloth means laziness. The best expression of this modern version of *acedia* is the song "Sloth" in Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *The Seven Deadly Sins*. In this song the brothers worry that Anna will lapse in her dedication to building the family fortune; they complain that she "was always a bit strange and easygoing," and that "if you didn't throw her out of bed / that lazy piece wouldn't get up in the morning."[5] Imagine that heinous crime against capitalism: being easygoing and not getting up all morning!

Acedia is not the only interesting term on the charts. Many different words can be used for what seems to be the same vice or virtue. Sometimes *fortitude* is *strength*, *courage*, *might*, *prowess*, or *perseverance*. Any of the virtues or vices can evoke a number of synonyms. A word like the Latin *luxuria* may be translated as "indulgence," "excess," "dissipation," or even "lust." And finally, the word for positive qualities, virtues, has its Latin root in *vir* or "man." *Virtus* not only means "virtue": it can also mean "manliness," "excellence," "worth," "goodness," "courage," or "bravery." The general idea is supposed to be that vices are flaws, while virtues are excellences. The virtues are the quintessential traits of a "man," or of human beings at their best and embodying their fullest potential. In contrast, the vices are the various contaminants that, like mold, can overcome, dominate, and debilitate. These fatal flaws, the vices, subvert human potential or "unman" the man.

CONSTELLATIONS

As a kid I was always frustrated by constellations. I just could not see how those little lights were supposed to be a lion or a hunter or twins. The only ones I could see were the pots or the ladles or whatever. It really takes quite an imaginative leap to outline figures from the vast array of stars. And of course those shapes are not actually "written in the stars" but are our own projections onto them. Had the evening sky been obscured by clouds throughout human history until the very recent past, I wonder what constellations we would recognize. Would we recognize Ferrari instead of Pegesus, or Elvis instead of Orion?

Just as constellations are collections of stars assembled to make recognizable or meaningful images, so the works collected in this anthology can be grouped in different and useful ways. The anthology itself is chronological with introductions that provide historical context. Although this book groups the anthologized texts chronologically, below are five constellations or clusters of ideas that can be used to link various works. These constellations can be used group the works in interesting ways, to identify meaningful patterns, and even to suggest new connections. While there may seem to be a certain naturalness about either the selection or the chronological

5. Kurt Weill and London Symphony Orchestra, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 15.

arrangement of these works in this anthology (or both) and about the connections and patterns that emerge based on the selection and arrangement, the apparent naturalness should not obscure the very real arbitrariness of either the selection or the chronological arrangement of these works.

Competing Cosmologies

Stan and Barbara have a son who had once been a very happy and easygoing child. One day, almost out of the blue, that now-teenage son started to become moody and withdrawn, quarrelsome and confrontational. His schoolwork dropped off, as did his interest in family, social, spiritual, and cultural activities. He began staying up late (and doing who knows what) and sleeping until midday; so many of his normal patterns seemed to have changed. What most parents would conclude about all of these symptoms is that the teenager is, of course, perfectly normal. But what if your child's changes were not normal, did not fit the patterns of other teenagers, and were more dramatic and severe? You may rightly conclude that your child has a problem. She or he may show symptoms of depression. What would you do?

Depression is an interesting cultural phenomenon, because its complexity tests many of our current views of the world. Our scientific view may explain depression as a chemical problem, as a physiological phenomenon, or as a psychological or sociological conflict. The depressed may have a chemical imbalance, may lack proper psychological tools for dealing with reality, or may be victims of overwhelming social forces. According to another view, the depressed may suffer from a spiritual emptiness, perhaps caused by sin or vice, or from the spiritual vacuum of a materialistic culture. The depressed suffer from a lack of God or a lack of the spiritual. Another cultural force may tell the depressed that they need a better job, a better house, better clothes, or a better brand of beer. (They need a little "retail therapy.") So what is depression, and what do the depressed need? Here are some answers our current culture (and divided house) may provide: they need a pill, therapy, a better diet and more exercise, better friends, prayer, a spiritual sanctuary, less anxiety about what car they drive, or a new car.

What the issue of depression brings out is the different worldviews that exist in the same culture and how those different and even contradictory views attempt to make sense of such an important issue. This multiplicity of views is not unique to our culture. One of the most valuable things about examining the virtues and vices is to see different worldviews at play in the same work. Such an examination allows us to see how worldviews can come together, split apart, and twist around one another in their harmonious and conflictive coexistence.

The early Christian writer Tertullian (160–225 CE) once asked the rhetorical question: "what indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Tertullian was contrasting the worldview of the Greeks and Romans with the view developed by Christians

working out of the Jewish tradition. The Greco-Roman view focuses on human beings and how humans live in a world of other humans. That world has human-made problems that call for human solutions. This is therefore called a humanistic view. The Greek word *cosmos* means "order," and Tertullian was critical of the Greco-Roman cosmology, or method of making sense of, or of ordering, the universe. Tertullian envisioned a clear split between the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian cosmologies. The Judeo-Christian cosmology is theocentric or God-centered. God is the ultimate creator and sustainer of all, and is the judge of what is right and wrong, what is virtue and vice. According to this view, real success in mortality and blessings in the afterlife come from living with God as the center of one's life.

The contrasts and conflicts between the humanistic and the theocentric are woven through this anthology. This book's first section shows the contrast with documents from (so to speak) Athens and Jerusalem. Prudentius, Gregory, Giotto and others attempt to synthesize these cosmologies using different approaches and yielding different results. Some, like Franklin, take a more humanistic view, while others, like Lewis, adapt a decidedly more theocentric one. Machiavelli and Nietzsche use the humanistic to tacitly or explicitly criticize the theocentric. One way to discern the humanistic from the theocentric in a given work is to find how it backs up its claims about virtue and vice. Theocentric works refer to the authority of God or other supernatural sources, while humanistic ones use human experience and insight as the standard.

If the central comparison of the humanistic and theocentric is the rivalry between Athens and Jerusalem, then the contrasting images for the organic and the mechanistic world-views are the plant and the machine. These views emphasize that the world is made of parts that function together. The contrast is that the machine functions universally, forever, and with absolute predictability. The laws of thermodynamics, for example, were not just enacted and have no statute of limitations. In contrast, the organic view of the world emphasizes the way that phenomena grow out of others, emerging, blooming, wilting, dying, and then setting the stage for another birth, another life. The organic view places an accent on flux and unpredictability. While the trees of virtue and of vice found in the *Speculum Virginum* give the most obvious example of the organic, it is perhaps the dreamy, fluid, and somewhat open or even unpredictable quality of Langland's *Piers Plowman* that makes this work the best expression of the organic approach. Franklin's project to improve his character, his formula to better his moral machine, reveals most clearly the mechanical worldview. The mechanical worldview can reinforce the stable, the absolute qualities in the virtues and vices, where the organic could make space for doubt, indeterminacy, and even grace.

A powerful view of the world, of human social and economic interaction, and one that came to prominence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is Marxism. This worldview examines, among other things, the ways that capitalism influences

every aspect of life, including social interactions. Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *The Seven Deadly Sins* gives compelling expression to this view and the ways capitalism configures virtue and vice. A Marxist cosmology can also be applied to works that predate its emergence to explore otherwise hidden or ulterior views or interactions. Could Machiavelli's *The Prince* show how capitalism transforms social and economic realities, forcing a prince to use whatever means necessary to keep control? What ulterior motives or agendas might be hidden under the virtuous and vicious imagery in Lorenzetti's murals in the Palazzo Pubblico?

Cosmologies are ways that people make sense of reality, how they find or make meaning, or how they discern significant patterns among the otherwise undistinguished data or "stars" of reality. With an issue as important as depression or virtue and vice, the cosmologies often come into sharp and powerful relief. The competition between different cosmologies is another heated indication of the divisions of our cultural house. But such competitions can also reveal the limitations of any single view. By seeing the inherent limitations in any cosmology, those engaged in important debates may embrace the humility sufficient for real dialogue and for the emergence of any issue's best synthetic solution.

Public or Private

The virtues and vices are normative, or, in other words, they are like building codes. Building codes are standards that every builder must conform to when creating a structure. The idea behind building codes is that they ensure that the structure is safe for all of its occupants. Building codes in tropical areas, for example, make specific requirements about walls and windows to ensure that the structure will survive hurricane-force winds and flooding. A house in a colder climate would be built according to codes designed to ensure protection against freezing and snowy conditions. These codes are readily available, and they establish certain expectations.

The virtues and vices are also meant to establish certain public norms for proper and safe conduct and character. They set up expectations for social interaction, such as social equality and justice. These public norms can be used to establish one's status as a citizen. Good citizens live by the norms; bad ones do not. The virtues and vices can be used as personal and internal standards to establish one's scruples and for self-evaluation. To the degree that this standard of virtue and vice is of divine authorship or inspiration and authority, it can also establish one's "rightness" with God.

In order for building codes to work, they must be as public as possible. The same holds true for the normative function of the virtues and vices. From the first document here, Plato's *Republic*, and then prevalent in many subsequent works, there is a connection between virtue, vice, and education. Plato's ideal world would not only include a mandatory education in virtue for its most important citizens, but it would severely limit the art that might subvert such an education and have a dangerous moral

impact upon the whole society. Cicero gives his son specific instructions on virtue that are not unlike those of Proverbs. Jesus and Paul indicate to their listeners the path of virtue as does the father in Rejlander's *The Two Ways of Life* or as do the panels that contrast virtues and vice at Amiens Cathedral and in Giotto's frescoes. Sometimes this inculcation in the virtues and vices takes a more decidedly public cast, as in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico, whereas in other cases this education is both public and private, as in Franklin's *Autobiography*.

Part of what makes Franklin's work more private is that it involves the more individual and solitary act of reading. Large public images, like frescoes in the town hall or sculptural decorations on the cathedral, invite a more public reception. At the other end of the continuum of public and private are Evagrius's reflective and meditative tracts. In the solitary confines of the desert cell, the monk uses Evagrius's writings to discern the evil influences that would assail the soul. Other written documents fall more toward the public side. Prudentius's *Psychomachia* reaches out to a broader audience to give a graphic and dramatic representation of virtue and vice's battle for the soul. This battle becomes more public with illustrations. Dante's work is even more general and public than Prudentius's, but it still inspires individual self-reflection. Perhaps Brueghel's prints, which could be readily reproduced and therefore in wide circulation, fall right between the public and the private. While they are widely available, they are of a smaller and more intimate scale than sculpted panels, large-scale paintings, or murals. They depict a large number of figures in the entire panorama of virtue and vice but can still strike a chord with an individual's struggle with those conflictive forces.

As the virtues and vices are normative, they not only set public and private standards, but they also set the stage for one of their most powerful artistic expressions—satire. For satire to be effective and entertaining, it must reverse commonly held expectations. Homer Simpson is funny because he reverses many expectations of a good father, husband, neighbor, and employee. The satirical elements of *Piers Plowman* and other works play on the tension created by the norms established by the standards of virtue and vice, and the gross or ironic or humorous betrayal of those norms. Nowhere is this reversal clearer and more striking than in Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's satirical swipe at capitalism in *The Seven Deadly Sins*.

If the virtues and vices are like building codes, then a variety of public and private authorities often act as inspectors. For Plato, inspection should be constant, public, and in the hands of those most qualified to enforce the proper standards. Part of that enforcement is censorship. Standards of virtue and vice form the basis of censorship from at least Plato all the way to the present. While it is beyond the scope of this book to include the many codes, regulations, and ratings systems, as well as the lively debates around them, such censorship standards and contests inevitably invoke questions of public and private expression and reception, circling back to various ideas about virtue and vice.

Power or Peace

If you were visited by a wish-granting fairy and told that you could have either immense power or a deep and abiding peace, which would you choose? Think about this carefully before you answer. What do you want, control or serenity? Perhaps power and peace are complements. After all, what kind of real power do people possess if they are in turmoil, especially if they have a constant fear of losing that power? And what sort of peace does not include a certain sense of predictability, reliability, or security?

Many works included in this volume address peace and/or power. In his dialogue about an ideal state, Plato discusses the emergence of social conflict when people are no longer satisfied with having their basic needs met. Plato's utopian republic would be a state where peace is secured by the moorings of power in the hands of those best equipped to look out for everyone. Machiavelli, on the other hand, presents a real-world or realpolitik perspective of a leader's need to exploit the ignorance and fear of the masses to maintain dominance. Nietzsche extends some of these elements in his critique of the various ways that people abdicate their power to others. In these three works there are the powerful and the powerless, some who hold power while others are held by their power. This struggle for control, or at least the effort to authorize one's power, can also be read into works like the murals in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico and in Pollaiuolo and Raphael's panels for the Florentine Mercanzia.

In these examples power is public, but the battle for internal control is perhaps even more important in works about the virtues and vices. Jesus's account of the blessed and the interior battles described by Paul, Tertullian, Prudentius, and Langland illustrate the soul's innermost power struggle. And that struggle is variously illustrated in *Psychomachia* manuscripts and by Bruegel, among others. Even Dante's poem and Chaucer's tale show the gradual process whereby the power of vice is painstakingly identified, confronted, and finally overcome.

At the end of the battle scenes in Prudentius's version of the soul's internal fight for power, the narrator describes how "a fair and happy state of circumstance and life has been established over all." This is a place where all of the faculties or the "peaceable Sentiments can dwell in security under the protection of guard-post and rampart," and where the soul can "find relief and relaxation." The struggle for control of the soul turns out to be a battle for peace. For Prudentius, peace comes from the absolute harmony of the faculties. This peace is not unlike the stillness that Evagrius holds aloft as the soul's highest end. For both of these writers, the vices are spirits, forces, or "thoughts" of disorder, disintegrating the harmony that should reign in the soul. Such dissonant forces are cast from the Garden of Virtue in Mantegna's painting and are gruesomely depicted in Cadmus's panels.

From these works we could get the impression that peace and power are two sides of the same coin, and maybe they are. Power and peace are central to the qualities of

Isaiah's promised Messiah. Maybe one cannot go wrong in picking either one when the wish-granting fairy finally shows up. But it is still hard to square certain notions of power with Jesus's promise that the meek would inherit the earth. In our daily lives, we see Machiavellian individuals in all political and social organizations, even in families, where members may exert power with vicious means like dishonesty, fraud, blackmail, passive aggression, and coercion. When will their (meek) victims come into that inheritance? We know powerful people who have a dramatic influence because of their goodness, their integrity, and their courage. Think of Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King Jr. But we also know the power of those who work in hate, who foment fear, and who twist otherwise good ideas for very destructive ends. Many of the texts in this book ask and variously answer questions about the relationship between virtue, vice, power, and peace, and about the many ways to negotiate those relationships.

Firmness (and Pliability)

There is a universally recognized list of virtues and vices. The virtues are faith, hope, love, wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. The first three are the theological virtues, which come from the Judeo-Christian tradition via Paul. (Oh, by the way, there are other lists of Judeo-Christian virtues in Proverbs and Isaiah, and in other places in Paul's writing. And there are also the Beatitudes, and you could easily draw some virtues from the Ten Commandments.) The last four virtues we listed are the cardinal, classical, or humanistic virtues. They are wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. (Well, those are the four that Plato listed, but sometimes prudence takes the place of wisdom; fortitude—or just strength—takes the place of Courage; and while temperance seems pretty common, Plato's concept of justice is actually less like fairness and equality, and more like doing right or secular "righteousness." And Aristotle had a whole slew of other virtues that he listed, and Benjamin Franklin tried to live by thirteen virtues. Ben of course failed—maybe he should have pared his list down.)

There is an equally precise, concrete, and universally recognized list of vices. They are pride, anger, envy, sloth, greed, gluttony, and lust. Actually Aristotle had two vices for each of the many virtues he listed, and Paul had a few lists of sinful qualities. By the way, Evagrius had a list of eight vices, which sometimes climbed to nine, and which included *acedia* and sadness. (Imagine that: depression as a vice!) Oh, and Prudentius has a different set of vices to go with his different set of virtues. And when the builders of the French Gothic cathedrals in places like Paris, Amiens, and Chartres set the virtues and vices in stone, they used twelve of each.

The list of virtues and vices is set, firm, and stable, and that means the whenever you mention them, everyone knows exactly what you mean. (Unless, of course, you mean the virtues and/or vices according to Plato or Jesus or Paul or Evagrius or Prudentius or . . . With each of these writers and with every work in this book there is pliability, to varying degrees, about the virtues and vices.)

Because the virtues and vices are set, firm, and universally recognized, they communicate unequivocally. If you see a statue or painting of a woman looking into a mirror, for example, you know that she is a figure of Wisdom, who embodies the Greco-Roman ideal that true understanding is to "know thyself." (Or she could be a figure of Vanity, who is consumed with either herself or mere "appearance.") Wisdom often has the head of Janus, showing that she sees past, present, and future. (Or you could be looking at a symbol of the two faces of Fraud or Duplicity.) It is even more telling if she has the snake and apple, further connoting Wisdom. (Unless it is a figure of Eve.) All other vices and virtues have an equally stable and universal set of symbols or attributes. (Vagaries abound.)

Besides making works of art recognizable, and thus eliminating the need for supplemental texts to explain or names to designate, everyone everywhere knows exactly what is virtuous and vicious, no matter what the situation is. (Well this just falls apart almost immediately. Most of the works included here have titles or texts or even labels right there, so that you know that the naked lady with the sword is Justice (or maybe Fortitude or Strength or Perseverance) and not Anger or Fury or Violence or War. And of course there is a huge difference between Nietzsche's and Lewis's worldview, and subsequently their view of virtue and vice.)

What makes the virtues and vices so interesting is their firmness—and their pliability. They are canonized in sacred texts, etched in stone, inculcated in the young, used for confession and self-examination, and become a universal moral standard, pointing toward absolute values like a compass. (Yah, like a compass in a magnet factory!)

Because the virtues and vices have such a universal validity, one should learn about them and incorporate them. (And one should, with suspicion and sympathy, be inspired to respond to them in every way.) Their stony inflexibility (and lively liquidity) can charge one's approach to life, to others, and to creativity. It is the concreteness (and fluidity) of the virtues and vices that make them so compelling.

Do the Virtues and Vices Work?

I think that Benjamin Franklin was genuinely confused that his noble project for moral improvement did not work. The excerpt included in this book from his *Autobiography* describes his very deliberate plan for self-improvement. We must assume that Ben really tried, but somehow failed. Ben's failure raises the above question: do the virtues and vices really work?

Since at least Evagrius, we can see the list of virtues and vices as a sort of moral diet. Even Cicero recommends daily doses of goodness for his growing son. Our culture knows plenty about diets, and perhaps drawing such a comparison raises some interesting questions. Is a regimen of the virtues and vices a useful or even doable character diet? Did Franklin fail because he just had the wrong diet? Did Ben need the

moral Weight Watchers (or the Evagrian Evil-Thought Watchers) or the Psychomachia South Beach instead of his Enlightenment Atkins? Did he miss two important virtues—perseverance and patience—and therefore never see their fruit? Was Ben so focused on food, on individual acts, that he lost sight of the larger goal—a healthy character? Another point which some writers and artists in this book may make is that Ben's attempt to change his character amounted to an attempt to save himself without recourse to God. Did Ben fail because, in his pride, he made himself his own god? Someone like Nietzsche may retort that this idea is just more moral Munchausen syndrome to encourage sickness and dependence instead of power and independence. Suddenly Ben's moral flabbiness becomes everyone's concern.

This question of the power, the *virtus*, of the virtues and vices can seem rather hypothetical if not comical. The question becomes real when you or someone you care about feels a compelling need to overcome a vice and/or acquire an important virtue. Eradicating vice and embracing virtue is not cocktail-party banter for the people included in this book. How does one come to grips with the true nature of virtue and vice and how does one live in the healthiest way possible is a deadly serious issue in most of the works included here, even in cases where that brass-knuckles seriousness is cloaked in the velvet glove of satire.