

Part II

Honor, Face, and Prestige

Honor, Symbols, and War
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CHAPTER 6

What Is National Honor?

In *Duck Soup*, the Four Marx Brothers poke fun at statesmen's concern with their national honor. Groucho, as the prime minister of Freedonia, summons the Sylvanian ambassador specifically to deliver an insult. He tries "baboon," "swine," "worm," until for some reason, "upstart" does it. Faces are ceremonially slapped and the cry rings round the palace that this means war!

Even in the 1930s, the idea of a war over honor was inane enough for a Marx Brothers movie, and nowadays the conviction is that leaders save their violence for goals that matter. Honor talk is heard occasionally—before the 1993 U.S. expedition to Somalia, for example—but it is usually taken as rhetoric, to rally the public behind a policy justified on practical grounds. Veblen (1917), anticipating the modern attitude, saw honor as just a rhetoric of complaint: "National honor . . . is not known to serve any material or otherwise useful end apart from affording a practicable grievance consequent upon its infraction."

This chapter's thesis is that a version of honor is still in play. It is a primitive one, constructed as the common denominator of the elements of honor within various societies and transformed by its use in the international system. Honor still matters, however—it is simply the name that has changed.

In 1969, while the Vietnam War was rending American society, the *New York Times* surveyed those who continued to support U.S. policy. It reported that "time and again people who hate the war talk about national prestige" (November 16, 1969, p. 62, quoted in McGinn 1972). More evidence comes from Henry Kissinger, who wrote in his memoirs as if honor had kept the country trapped in Vietnam (1979, 228), "No serious policymaker could allow himself to succumb to the fashionable debunking of 'prestige,' or 'honor' or 'credibility.'" In a study of some ancient and modern wars, historian Donald Kagan (1995) wrote, "The reader may be surprised by how small a role . . . considerations of practical utility and material gain, and even ambition for power itself,

play in bringing on wars, and how often some aspect of honor is decisive." The basic dynamics of honor may still be operating in a different vocabulary, he suggested, perhaps as "ideology."

Herman Kahn (1984) described a 1963 seminar he had conducted for government leaders. He had given the participants a scenario in which the Soviet Union had destroyed the major capitals of Europe and the American president could either retaliate with nuclear weapons or do nothing at all. Retaliation would destroy the Soviet Union's population but not its missiles and would trigger a counterstrike that would incinerate American cities. What should the president do? Four attendees thought he should attack in spite of the consequences. They were Gerald Ford, Melvin Laird, Henry Jackson, and Bourke Hickenlooper. Three of these would later assume positions important to U.S. defense policy, Jackson as the preeminent Senate defense critic, Laird as secretary of defense, and Ford as president. Herman Kahn, hard line but practical, was dismayed at their preoccupation with the reputation of a country that would no longer exist and hoped that they changed their minds when they assumed greater power. Perhaps they did, but his exercise showed their concern with national honor even in the face of nuclear destruction.

The vocabulary of President Wilson's day included "honor," "insult" and "self-respect"; now countries "show resolve" or "show national will," they worry about "credibility" and "reputation," or they avoid an "image of weakness." Concern with "national humiliation" was seen as a major factor in the 1967 Middle East War (Stein 1985, 57; Cohen 1990), and the Cuban missile crisis (Steinberg 1991). The question is this: Vocabulary aside, is the structure of modern behavior around war isomorphic to honor behavior in societies? A clearer theory is needed, since as long as honor remains nebulous, its role is hard to determine. The chapter identifies the common elements of honor across various societies and sets up a game model to reproduce many of them and show how they fit together.

The Elements of Honor

The thesis is that international society takes the common denominator of the elements of honor cultures. These can be identified from various sources: studies in social history and anthropology, social psychology, legal studies of honor as one's good name, especially from Germany, nineteenth-century studies of ethics, and long tracts on challenges and duels, especially from Renaissance Italy and Spain, where these matters were set into law.¹ Not all the elements are seen

1. Frank Stewart (1994) gives an excellent critical survey of the literature on honor.

in any one honor-based society, but overall they seem to lie at the core of the concept.

The behavior required by honor depends on the person's gender. The honorable man is supposed to respond violently to threats to his honor; he is true to his social class, his leader, and his country, while the honorable woman is true to her husband and family. Feminist theorists have discussed how international relations are shaped by male attitudes and behavior (e.g., Cohn 1987, 1993; Peterson 1992). Indeed the male version of societal honor is closer to the one nations seem to follow and is the kind examined here.

The first element deals with honor's content. Honor has a "Don't Tread on Me" component or, better, "Don't Tread on Me or Mine."

(E1) Honor requires

trueness to one's word when given on one's honor;
readiness to defend one's home, and the rights of oneself and one's group,
and to avenge violations;
social grace, in the case of aristocratic honor;
sometimes nonvoluntary traits, like noble birth or physical strength.

At the national level also, honor means that one is willing to defend an ally. On receiving word that Germany wanted Britain to promise neutrality in case of a war with France over its colonies, British secretary of state Lord Grey telegraphed his ambassador in Vienna, "From the material point of view such a proposal is unacceptable, for France would be so crushed as to lose her position as a Great Power, and become subordinate to German policy without further territory in Europe being taken from her. But apart from that, for us to make this bargain with Germany at the expense of France would be a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover" (Albertini 1952–1957, vol. 2, 633).

The second element makes honor dichotomous—either one has it or not.

(E2) Having honor is associated with personhood, autonomy, group membership, and sexual identity.

A man who has lost honor is treated as a nonperson in many societies, ignored rather than punished. One does not talk to him and, in Montenegrin society, reaches behind one's back to hand him a drink (Boehm 1983). Consistent with treating honor as personhood is that adults start with a presumption of holding it and, barring an event that puts it in question, in many societies need to do nothing to acquire or maintain it. This is reflected in the metaphorical ex-

pressions of “staining,” “blemishing,” or “tarnishing” one’s honor. Hardin (1995) sees honor as a “norm of exclusion” and dueling as a device primarily to set the honor-group apart.

Another consequence of E2 is that someone outside the social class possessing honor has no privilege to issue a challenge (e.g., Peristiany 1966, 31). In Renaissance Italy, a challenge from a woman, a cleric, or a commoner could be ignored.

The connection of national honor and autonomy becomes clear when states are pressed to submit disputes to arbitration. In the affair of the U.S. warship *Alabama*, Lord Russell (quoted in Perla 1918, 106) responded that “England’s honor can never be made the subject of arbitration.” Heinrich von Treitschke (1916, 29) refused arbitration on the grounds of autonomy, “Were we to commit the folly of treating the Alsace-Lorraine problem as an open question, by submitting it to arbitration, who would seriously believe that the award could be impartial? It is, moreover, a point of honor for a State to solve such difficulties for itself.” At the 1899 Hague Conference, the Arbitration Treaty required signators to arrange an international commission to engage in fact-finding in case of an impending war. Some smaller nations claimed that this presented a threat to their sovereignty, and Romania had a phrase added that exempted disputes involving crucial interests or honor (Holls 1900). Those least able to defend their sovereignty were the most concerned about it and defined it as part of their national honor.

The next element introduces a reputational component.

(E3) Honor involves caring that one has a commonly known reputation for honor.

An episode from the Roman historian Livy illustrates that honor must be visible (Nobili 1550). Lucretia was the wife of a nobleman in the era of the Roman kings, about 500 B.C. A prince of the ruling Tarquins visited her while her husband was away and demanded her favors. If she refused, he would kill her, as well as her male slave, and leave their bodies side by side with the implication of adultery. Lucretia had a choice of losing her reputation for fidelity or being unfaithful in fact. She yielded to Tarquin. She then summoned her husband and relatives and described the outrage. After receiving promises of vengeance, she drew a dagger and took her own life. When Lucretia chose her good name over actual virtue, neither her family nor Livy reproached her for it, and she became a heroine to his readers.

It is the duty of the honorable person to generate common knowledge that he is honorable, to assure everyone that he would be willing to defend the group.

If each member knows that others are confident in the given member, they too will be steady. This requirement differentiates honor from virtue, whose test is sometimes described as doing what one would do even if no one were watching. The need to assure others of one's honor generates the norm of responding to a challenge² and the norm in many cultures of maintaining publicly a proper style of life and a graceful demeanor, as stated in E1 (Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992). Another consequence of E3 is that honor comes to depend only on behavior *commonly known* to be publicly observed. In the context of Renaissance England, James (1986, 229) writes, "Men of honor could (and did) lie, cheat, deceive, plot, treason, seduce, and commit adultery, without incurring dishonor. Such activities were of course immoral, and might compromise the perpetrator's religious status, bringing his eternal salvation into question. But as long as they were not attributed to him in a public way, honor was not brought into question." The group meant to hold a high opinion of the honor possessor is typically a well-defined one, those others that hold honor. Following Stewart (1994), it is called the *honor group*.

The need for national honor to be visible was emphasized by von Treitschke (1916, 550, quoted by Thayer 1918). "Whoever attacks the honor of a state even in its externals, thereby impugns the essential character of the state. To attribute to the state a too irritable sense of honor is to ignore the moral laws of politics. A state must have a very highly developed sense of honor if it is not to be false to its nature. It is not a violet that blooms in the shade; its power is to be displayed proudly and brilliantly; it cannot permit this power to be questioned even symbolically."

Element E3 introduces a circularity in honor, and this self-reference may have prompted some authors to avoid a definition, or state a confused one, or just discard the concept. Perla (1918, 56) noted, "The attitude of men toward honor therefore becomes a matter of 'loyalty to loyalty,' or loyalty for loyalty's sake rather than loyalty to an ideal involved in a specific case." This argument led him to reject the notion as incoherent. Loyalty to loyalty, in his view, makes honor an excuse for wars that are really prompted by anger or greed. In E3, the idea is put more accurately as loyalty to *others' perceptions of* loyalty, as well as (not "rather than") loyalty to certain ideals.

The self-reference of honor, as asserted by E3, means that honor-conscious people worry about others' beliefs about their own attitudes. Germany's request

2. From the *Decameron*, Patrizi cites the story of Agilulf, king of the Lombards, who was "reputed most wise because, not being able to take secret vengeance for an offense to the honor of his wife, he bore the injury patiently to avoid publicity" (1553). This is a case of reputation counting more than revenge.

for a British promise of neutrality induced Lord Grey to start worrying about German beliefs about British beliefs: "The proposal made to us meant everlasting dishonour if we accepted it. . . . Did Bethmann Hollweg not understand, could he not see, that he was making an offer that would dishonour us if we agreed to it? What sort of man was it who could not see that? Or did he think so badly of us that he thought we should not see it? Every thought the telegram suggested pointed to despair" (*British Documents XI*, 293, 506–7, quoted by Albertini 1952–1957, 632.) We cannot compromise our honor. What must they be thinking of us for them even to consider that we might do so?

A consequence of E3 can govern behavior when two principles of honor come into conflict. An official who no longer supports government policy is caught between loyalty to the group and honesty and can maintain honor only by resigning. Cyrus Vance resigned as secretary of state because he had opposed President Carter's commando raid to free the Iranian hostages. As with Lucretia, his only option was to withdraw. Honor functions differently from morality in this regard. When moral principles come into conflict, one chooses the lesser evil. One's conscience is the accepted judge of morality, but society judges honor, and one cannot necessarily trust one's own judgment about what society will say.

(E4) The group acts as if the traits, virtues, and values that make up the content of honor are one or at least strongly covarying.

This is the *unity of honor*. Honor may involve assorted traits, as listed in E1 and E3 and others, and in theory, an individual could possess some and not others. However, E4 asserts that they are treated as present or absent as a whole.

The unity of honor is often contradicted by evidence, so how does the idea survive? Three factors sustain it. First, a culture socializes its members to follow the whole set of honorable behaviors, and this makes contrary evidence less likely. Second, honor deals with inner motives and character that influence behavior only indirectly, so an observer has some room to interpret another's actions in a way consistent with the unity of honor (Miller 1993). Finally, the unity of honor is a *social fact*, in that everyone expects everyone else to act on it. They may not believe it privately, and may even reject it openly and verbally, but they follow it in their public actions.

(E5) Regarding the importance of honor in society:

it is normative, that is, supported by guilt, shame, and others' dispositions to reward and punish;

*it accrues to groups as well as individuals, and one member can honor or dishonor the group;
it is often seen as sacred.*

Honor is normative in both individual and social ways. Individually, those who have it feel proud, and those without it feel guilty.³ Shame is a social response (Lewis 1971). It includes the wish to avoid other group members (Boehm 1983, 80). This reaction fits the idea of E2, that honor is like group membership, in that those who lose honor want to withdraw.

Honor is normative in a social way, also in that possessing it legitimizes one's claim to certain benefits from others. Other members feel that they *ought* to favor the honorable; conversely, losing honor means losing the right to respectful treatment.

Since the honor of the individual and the group reflect on each other, the whole group has an inducement to pressure the individual to behave correctly. Honor and dishonor extend into the past and future—one can tarnish ancestors or descendants even though they have no part in one's act. Demosthenes wrote, "There is a thing which Athens has always placed above success and that is honor, the elevated feeling of what she owes to her traditions in the past and to her good name in the future" (1993). Terraillon (1912, 251) called it "the government of the living by the dead," and Groucho refused to make up with the Sylvania ambassador, "My ancestors would rise out of their graves, and I'd just have to bury them again."

Tying honor to one's ancestors makes it like religion. In many religions, norms are reinforced by linking them to God's will; the traits of honor are linked through the principle of the unity of honor, and this interconnection makes it more important to keep each individual norm. Honor is regarded as sacred, lying at the core of the individual's self-esteem and connecting the meaning of the person's life with the group over time.

(E6) Preserving one's reputation for honor often requires publicly enduring some cost or risk, often by participating in violence.

A fair fight was required by most cultures, but in Albania, one could sneak up and shoot the offender in the back (Hasluck 1981, 228). This custom seems

3. Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers (1992), writing of Mediterranean society, distinguish guilt and shame in a different way but argue that the difference does not matter, "Guilt related to the lack of virtue, shame to the loss of precedence or face. . . the function of the concept of honor is precisely, despite the frailty of the logic involved, to equate them. . . ." Translated into our terms, this is an expression of E4, the unity of honor.

to promise honor without risk, but the murderer had to leave a token at the scene to reveal his identity, so the victim's kin could take their vengeance in turn. "It was everywhere 'held dishonorable' to kill and not to tell," according to Hasluck, so there was no safe route to keep one's honor.⁴

In some medieval societies honor was shown by going to war or hunting wild boar with minimal weapons or engaging in dangerous jousts. Jousts were public (Vale 1981), often symbolically observed by other knights and the monarch. These honor-proving deeds were undertaken on the person's initiative, but there were others, like dueling, that required a cue, like a challenge. In some societies, an insult to oneself or one's family was a cue for violence. Internationally, honor is linked with violence through its emphasis in military culture and during times of war.

The Basic Game of Honor

Some of these elements can be incorporated into a game. The game takes account of E3, E4, and E6, which are, respectively, that honorable people care what others think, that honor is treated as a unified bundle of virtues, and that honorable people pay a cost to prove it. It uses the idea of showing some innate quality by paying a cost, which was introduced to the political science literature by Schelling (1960) and discussed more explicitly by Jervis (1971), and independently since the late 1970s it has become widespread in the economics game literature. Later the game will be extended to include other points, the variability of honor's importance across societies and the institutions of challenges and oath taking.

The simplest model assumes the individual is worried about only two things: reputation for honor and the cost of engaging in some risky activity like a joust. There are no other goals related to honor or self-interest. A nonnegative real number h is the individual's personal honor or *sense of honor*, a term of Frank Stewart's (1994), and it measures the degree to which the individual values honor relative to self-interest goals, like the cost of conflict. The cost c might be the risk of a joust, for example, which we assume that the person is required to do on the proper occasion, as a way of showing honor.

The individual knows the coefficient h exactly, it is assumed, but the pub-

4. Some social institutions have been called *honor* but are quite different. Kathleen Stuart (1993) describes craft guilds of sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Germany where dishonor spread like a disease, often by inadvertent social contact with animal skinners or executioners. As in the common pattern, this dishonor meant exclusion from the group, but it could not be avoided by challenges and violence. It could be restored by a proclamation from a high authority

lic is uncertain about it.⁵ They all share the same probability distribution for h . Since by E3, an honorable person wants to be recognized as honorable, it is assumed that the individual cares about the audience's expectation of that distribution. This will depend on what the public has seen the person do. If the public's evidence is that the person has performed action A , the expectation is designated $E[H | A]$, read "the expectation of H given A ." Capitalizing H indicates that it is an unknown variable that the public estimates, different from h , which is a number. This expectation is the individual's *social honor* or *reputation for honor*.

The two available actions are Jousting and Not Jousting, and their payoffs to the individual are

for Jousting: $h E[H | \text{Joust}] - c$;

for Not Jousting: $h E[H | \text{Not Joust}]$.

The essential point is that the individual's reputation $E[H | -]$ has been multiplied by h . The more honorable the person is, the more he cares about reputation for honor.

To summarize, the stages in the game are

STAGE 1: The individual learns his sense of honor h .

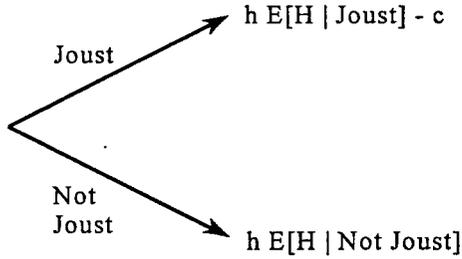
STAGE 2: The individual chooses Joust or Not Joust.

PAYOFFS: The audience observes the choice and reestimates the individual's honor; the latter receives a payoff that depends on the cost paid and the audience's opinion, as specified previously.

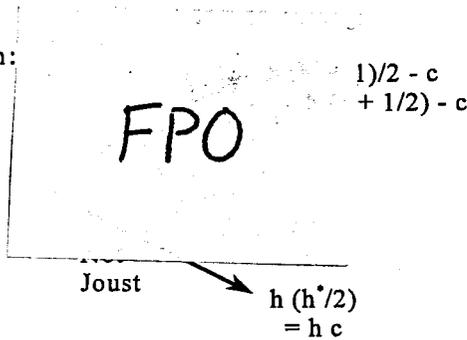
This game has two kinds of equilibria, summarized in figure 14. The first involves a threshold rule: all observers expect that a person whose honor lies below some cutoff h^* will Not Joust, but one with honor at or above h^* , will at-

5. The alternative, which is *not* knowing our own h , would lead to a model of "self-respect," where we learn about ourselves from our actions in critical moral situations and attach a value to what we learn. Over the years, self-respect has been tied with honor in foreign policy debates. Grover Cleveland, vowing to defend Venezuelan territory against British claims, told Congress (Cleveland 1913), "I am firm in my conviction that there is no calamity which a nation can invite which equals that which follows from supine submission to wrong and injustice, and the consequent loss of national self-respect and honor, beneath which are shielded and defended a people's safety and greatness." In June 1995, Bob Dole asked the U.S. Senate, "What would the consequences be on our national self-respect—on the nation's soul—of a preventable Serbian victory, followed by 'cleansing massacres'?"

General
 payoffs:



Threshold
 equilibrium:



Pooling
 equilibrium:

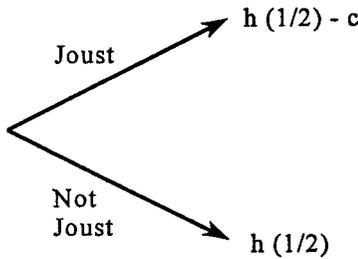


Fig. 14. General payoffs for the basic game of honor and payoffs for the threshold and pooling equilibria

tach enough importance to reputation to choose Joust. (The prescription for exactly h^* is not important because that event has zero probability.) By the rules for revising probabilities, choosing Not Joust induces the public to reestimate the individual's honor at $h^*/2$, less than before the test, while jousting gives a

new estimate of $(1 + h^*)/2$, which is higher. Substituting these values in the formulas for the payoffs allows us to be more specific about the payoffs when players believe the threshold equilibrium is in effect.

for Jousting: $h(1 + h^*)/2 - c$

for Not Jousting: $h h^*/2$.

These expressions allow a calculation of the cutoff h^* . At the threshold equilibrium, a person whose honor is exactly at h^* will be indifferent between jousting and not jousting. Equating the two expectations and substituting $h = h^*$, gives $h^* = 2c$. Thus he jousts when honor is equal to or greater than $2c$.⁶ (This conclusion assumes $c \leq 1/2$, since otherwise h^* would go beyond the possible range of honor; for $c > 1/2$ the only equilibrium is Not Joust.) The threshold h^* determines his estimated honor in society's eyes. By choosing Joust, the individual will enjoy a reputation for personal honor $c + 1/2$, [$= (1 + h^*)/2$ with $h^* = 2c$], which is higher than before, but choosing Not Joust drops estimated honor to c , [$= h^*/2$ with $h^* = 2c$], which is lower than the original $1/2$.

A second type of equilibrium involves never jousting no matter what one's personal honor. Such equilibria are called *pooling equilibria*, since players' actions do not reveal their types, as if they were mixed in a pool. The audience's part of the equilibrium is to keep its estimate at $1/2$ if it sees Not Joust and adopt some partly arbitrary estimate after seeing Joust.⁷ Estimating the value at $1/2$ will do here—the audience views jousting as irrelevant to honor and continues to hold its original opinion of h after seeing a joust. The individual has no motive to joust, since it involves a cost with no benefit.

The existence of two equilibria means that in some cultures committing a certain deed gains one honor and in other cultures it does nothing.

The game has two unusual features. One is that the payoffs at an outcome depend on players' beliefs, which change depending on the equilibrium.⁸ It is

6. There is another equilibrium identical to this, except that Not Joust, rather than Joust, is chosen exactly at cutoff. The distinction will be ignored here since the difference arises with zero probability.

7. The latter cannot be calculated by the axioms of probability, since not jousting is a zero probability event. It can be set arbitrarily as long as it is low enough to give no one an incentive to joust: the most honor-conscious person, someone with h close to 1, gets approximate benefit $E[H | \text{Joust}] - c$ from jousting, and $1/2$ from not, and this implies that $E[H | \text{Joust}] < c + 1/2$.

8. Allowing beliefs directly into the utility function has some unusual consequences when the beliefs are determined by moves in the game. Standard techniques like backward induction sometimes do not work, and an equilibrium may not exist (Geanakoplos, Pearce, and Stacchetti

natural that an equilibrium depends on the payoffs, but here the reverse relation holds too. The other feature is that one player has no moves; the audience's behavior is defined by what it believes rather than what it does. This approach is consistent with newer definitions that see an equilibrium as a consistent set of actions and/or beliefs (app. B).

Extensions: Nonreputational Honor Goals, Differing Importance of Honor Across Societies

The basic model included only one honor-related goal, enhancing one's reputation for honor, and only one thing to do to pursue it. In accordance with element E1 there may be other honor goals. Suppose the real number x_j measures the degree to which an action A_j achieves other honor-related goals other than reputation. A high value of x_j means that doing A_j is important according to the society's principles around honor, for example, that i's action A_j contributes to defending the group. Individual i's total weight for the honor-related consequences of i's actions is then $h_i \{E[TH^T_i | A_j] + x_j\}$. (By the principle of unity all honor goals are multiplied by the same constant h_i . The scale for x is chosen so that the rate of proportionality is 1. A subscript has been added to personal honor to show it is a property of the individual.) The utility of other self-interest (non-honor-related) consequences of action A_j are y_j . The individual will choose an action that maximizes $h_i \{E[TH^T_i | A_j] + x_j\} + y_j$, which can be determined as before.

Element E5 noted that some cultural practices seem designed to bolster the importance of honor. The basic model can be extended to reflect the degree of importance the culture places on honor. "Importance" means the weight placed on honor in the payoff, other things equal. A player's payoffs can be changed to $kh_i E[TH^T_i | Joust] - c$, and $kh_i E[H_i | Not Joust]$ where k measures the cultural importance and has no subscript because it holds across people. The threshold for jousting is calculated as $h^* = 2c/k$. For a given cost of proving honor, the more important honor is, the less the individual's paying the cost increases the audience's estimate. This is ironical, but the logic of the model shows that it is reasonable.

1989; see also Gilboa and Schmeidler 1988; Nalebuff 1991; and Bernheim 1994). Geanakoplos, Pearce, and Stacchetti extend the Nash equilibrium concept to what they call a *psychological equilibrium*, but this is not an ideal name from my viewpoint—all equilibria are psychological in that they use subjective probabilities and utilities. Their concept is similar to the one used here, although it applies only to games of complete information.

Is Honor Personal or Social?

The model offers an answer to an ancient question: Does honor reside in one's character or in one's reputation as granted by society? The Italian Renaissance writer Valmarana (1598) stated that honor results from personal virtue like the casting of a shadow. He was assuming that society's judgment is as reliable as the laws of optics, but Lucretia's story shows that this is not so. Writing on the nobility of the Italian Renaissance, Burckhardt (1929) recognized the puzzle, calling honor an "enigmatic mixture of conscience and egotism," but he proposed no solution. The anthropologist Jean Peristiany (1966, 21) equivocated on the personal/social question: "Honor is the value of a person in his own eyes but also in the eyes of society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride." Virtue becomes *self-perceived* virtue here, which is equated with socially perceived virtue. The stance of some writers (e.g., Miller 1993, writing on Icelandic sagas) is that the individual-versus-social question cannot even be asked in honor societies, where social perception and individual perception of virtue are one in the members' eyes. This overstates the principle of the unity of honor. The dual-nature question has been raised constantly by those writing within honor cultures, for example, in the tracts of the Italian Renaissance (Bryson 1935).

As quoted earlier, Perla dismissed honor on the grounds that it was circular. In *Henry IV*, Part I, Falstaff rejects it because it is purely social perception. He must decide whether to go into battle, and to rationalize the safer choice, he runs through a "catechism" of questions. Honor cannot cure wounds or set broken legs, he says. It is held by the dead, but they cannot feel it or hear it, and they lose it at the whim of living detractors. It is just a word, a mere "scutcheon," a coat of arms. His dismissal can be answered by the model, which suggests that there are two concepts of honor: an individual's personal trait h , and the society's estimate of it $E[H | \text{the individual's actions}]$. They become linked because the person makes a choice based on their product.

Is National Honor a Sham?

An important question is whether a system of national honor promotes or endangers peace, especially given that details of the system may be changed when it is raised to the national level. Josiah Royce (1914, xxiv) wrote, "What is called national honor is at present altogether too much a matter of capricious private

and often merely personal judgement simply because the nations are not as yet self-conscious moral beings.” Perla (1918), writing toward the end of World War I, saw international honor as a sham, since clear principles about what it meant were lacking. A monk knows what he is promising by the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and a physician understands what the code of ethics calls for. However, when a government holds that “national honor is the sublime ideal for which it is ever ready to suffer annihilation if necessary, that it is one thing which it can never consent to arbitrate, we know almost nothing about the implications which the phrase comprises.” He allowed that a legitimate system of national honor was possible and hoped that when the war was over the code could be based on pacific values.

Perla was overstating the point. Not every invocation of national honor has been bellicose. In keeping with E1, it has sometimes meant fidelity to moral principles, for example, England’s honorable duties to help Armenians in the early part of this century, or oppose slavery in the last one, as he indicates. On the other hand, part of his case must be granted. There is an unavoidable problem in transferring honor up to the international system. Many societal honor systems call for obedience and loyalty to those in authority, loyalty to one’s patron, lord, or king, or in military codes, to one’s country. These requirements reinforce the social hierarchy by making loyalty an expression of who the person is.

(E7) Honor reconciles autonomous action with obedience to a hierarchical order by making obedience the individual’s duty.

A system of honor is like a shell that can be filled in different ways. Some societies have changed honor’s content but retained its structure. Nye (1993, chap. 3) recounts how the code of French feudal society provided a structure for postrevolutionary bourgeois honor. The original concept involved personal courage and prowess in battle, the latter sexual power, fidelity of one’s wife, and discipline and reliability in public and commercial life.

The fact of this kind of evolution makes it plausible that an honor system might be moved up to the level of international society, but it suggests that there would be changes in content. It turns out that some elements in the structure of honor change as well—some are lost, and others are deemphasized. In the international system, there can be no duty owed to some higher power, as there is no higher power. Honor is left to be an assertion of autonomy. The German theorist and teacher Heinrich von Treitschke (1916) commented after the seizure of Alsace, “The world will recognize that in disregarding the will of the Alsatians of today we are only fulfilling an injunction imposed by our national

honor.” In the dispute between Germany and England over a treaty concerning Morocco, the kaiser announced, “Germany has risen to a world power and our honor demands that we be consulted in any further exploitation of the globe” (von Bulow 1914, 96, quoted in Perla 1918). International honor tells a powerful nation that it has a right to have its way, but it puts no corresponding duty on that country or anyone else to comply with a social order. Contrary to Perla, the problem of honor at the international level is less that its content disappears and more that those components that support reconciliation and peace get left behind. More of this phenomenon—the withering of the pacific features of honor—will be seen in the next chapter on challenges.

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