VIRTUE IN THE WORLD OF CHARLES DICKENS

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Michael W. Curl
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NON-REFUTATION DISCLAIMER

Though this thesis concerns itself greatly with the potentially heretical notion of *original virtue*, the exploration of this concept specifically does not refute the Doctrine of Original Sin, as espoused by the Apostle Paul in *Romans* (verses 5:12-14).

Also, I would like to add that, although I employ some simple Marxist notions in this thesis, I am not a socialist, *per se*. 
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ABSTRACT

VIRTUE IN THE WORLD OF CHARLES DICKENS

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My thesis is a literary analysis looking at Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*. Dickens's literature assumes that life is a struggle for all persons between virtue and the false allures of the world and both of the novels in view clearly demonstrate this. Dickensian scholarship suffers a noticeable deficiency in addressing the original and enduring virtue aspects of Oliver in *Oliver Twist* and Pip in *Great Expectations*. Nonetheless, the virtue aspect of the novels under consideration plays a central role in both of them.

Given the dearth of scholarship on virtue in Dickens's work, the work I do in this thesis breaks new ground by fully addressing this very important aspect of Dickens's literature. In examining *Oliver Twist*, I explore how Oliver's original and enduring virtue enables him to refute the presumptions behind the specific historical abomination of the Poor Law of 1834 that Dickens attacked in *Oliver Twist* and which rationalized the mistreatment of the poor, most especially the
intentional gradual starvation of workhouse orphan boys. With *Great Expectations*, I demonstrate how the originally virtuous Pip sublimates his virtue as a consequence of having accepted worldly notions of happiness and then how his virtue reemerges as a result of his acquisition of wisdom, the latter affected by several epiphanies, most especially the revelation of Magwitch the (former) convict as Pip’s actual source of coming into wealth or his “great expectations.”

Tangential to the virtue theme in both novels under consideration, I also address the rampant hypocrisy of both “charitable” worker middleclass persons and non-charitable middleclass persons, as well as the shocking and striking similarity between the behaviors, values, and creeds of “legitimately-employed” middleclass persons and “illegitimate,” or marginalized, “criminal” persons. In addition, my analysis addresses a significant aspect of Victorian England that is germane to all historical epochs, that is, the matter of *paradigm*. Paradigm points to the way that the “powers that be” justify the societal inequity in the distribution of wealth and resources by controlling the perception of what is found to be acceptable or unacceptable.

Beyond discussing the implications of injustice outside of the Victorian England era, Chapter Four, or the conclusionary chapter of the thesis, will also address the greater implications of both *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* which I believe Dickens fully understood, including the unfortunate effects of paradigm; the nature of “true wealth” (that is, love, wisdom, and righteousness);
the relationships between wealth, poverty, vice, and virtue; and, lastly, issues of
destiny involving original virtue, enduring virtue, and original sin.

The “payoff” or lessons for the reader are many. The primary lessons
are that the false allures of the world and the injustice rationalized by paradigm
transcend historical periods and that virtue and wisdom overcome both the
shimmering falseness of worldly glamour and the injustice inherent in any era’s
historical paradigm. The same greed and hypocrisy chronicled in Oliver Twist
and Great Expectations can be conquered by the individual’s wielding of a virtue
guided by the reins of wisdom.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: VIRTUE IN THE
WORLD OF CHARLES DICKENS

My thesis is a literary analysis of Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*. Dickens’s assumes that life is a struggle for all persons between virtue and the false allures of the world. Both of these novels clearly illustrate this. The meaning of “the world” is palpable. I use the term “virtue” as a secular synonym for its Christian equivalent, *righteousness*, because I do not want to alienate the non-Christian reader. By employing “virtue” instead of “righteousness,” more readers are apt to identify with and learn from Oliver and Pip’s struggles. Moreover, even though, as George Orwell argues, “Roughly speaking, his [Dickens’s] morality is the Christian morality” (458), it must be understood that because Dickens was not a self-proclaimed Christian one cannot claim all Christian interpretations of his work as valid, at least from Dickens’s point of view. I demonstrate Dickens’s views on Oliver and Pip’s struggles with the world by a close reading of each text, *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*, respectively. A “close reading” entails quoting liberally from each novel, as well as drawing logical inferences from both quotations from characters’ speech and from the narration in each novel. It will be seen that each text is rich in material that corroborates the view that life, indeed, at least within these
novels, is a struggle between virtue and the world, and I, as a literary analyst, readily agree with Dickens’s interpretation of life.

The particular types of virtue germane to both *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* are original virtue and enduring virtue. There is scant extant work on original virtue *per se*, and a near-absolute dearth in reference to Dickens’s work, save a passing reference by Dennis Walder in his book *Dickens and Religion*, which says “For Dickens … charity operates on the assumption of original virtue” (59). However, there are a few additional, diverse notions of original virtue in circulation, such as Eknath Easwaran’s views on what he calls original goodness; Jewish theologian Solomon Levy’s ideas of a Jewish-Abrahamic original virtue imputed by God because of Abraham’s righteous willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac upon a pyre; non-religious or non-philosophical views on original virtue; and, lastly, the Christian concept of a Christ-imputed righteousness. Given that Dickens was not a self-professed devout Christian, in my reading of Dickens it seems clear that he adhered to a secular view of original virtue merged or associated loosely with a Christian idea of original virtue probably as a result of his having been an inhabitant of a largely Christian nation with a longtime and great Christian heritage.

Though Levy claims to have coined the term original virtue when stating, “Original Virtue is a term invented by the present writer” (1), it is certainly not new as an idea. Though Dickens was not privy to Levy’s assertions concerning original virtue (because Levy published his ideas on the subject in the early twentieth-century long after Dickens’s demise), both men would agree with
Levy’s possibly heretical assertion that original virtue “present[s] a complete contrast to the Christian theory of Original Sin” (1). That theory is expressed definitively by the apostle Paul in the *Book of Romans*, verses 5:12-14. Antony Flew’s *A Dictionary of Philosophy* translates the somewhat inaccessible Biblical passage from *Romans* in the following way: “In traditional Christian teaching, the doctrine that the whole human race inherits, and is corrupted by, the sinfulness first brought into the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve” (259).

Dickens’s version of original virtue both in Oliver and Pip stands in stark contrast to the Apostle Paul’s belief in original sin. In *Oliver Twist*, original virtue relies upon a supernatural or God-predestined quality within the protagonist Oliver Twist that endures or withstands any worldly opposition. On the other hand, in *Great Expectations*, the protagonist Pip’s original virtue equates generally with the relative innocence we see in all children. Though children are not perfectly innocent, they are obviously imbued with a beautiful innocence that surpasses most adults’ virtue. This relative lack of virtue on adults’ part results from living in a world that works to erode that virtue, primarily by having them exchange truly valuable things, such as integrity and fairness, for dubiously worthwhile material comforts or status. In any case, no matter what the theoretical underpinning of original virtue in Dickens’s work, he certainly conceives of both Oliver and Pip as originally virtuous.

In addition to averring both protagonists’ *original* virtue, Dickens imbues both characters with an *enduring* virtue that carries both protagonists through their travails. The original virtue of both Oliver and Pip posits them as
persons opposed to the decidedly immoral larger world. The enduring aspect of Oliver and Pip’s virtue conveys them both through their struggles with the world. In Oliver’s case, that enduring virtue amounts to a superhuman ability both never to deride his tormentors and also never to succumb to the temptations of the London criminal underworld. In Pip’s situation, enduring virtue keeps him anchored to his original virtue even as he sublimes that original virtue while succumbing, some degree, to worldly allures. More expressly, Pip rather uncomfortably shunts inwardly his better instincts in an attempt to remain a snob, something which he foolishly believes will bring him happiness in contrast to his unhappy years as a youth at the forge. Enduring virtue sustains a Pip neglectful of the people who truly love him—Joe and Biddy—until his rediscovery or reemergence of virtue affected by his acquisition of wisdom towards novel’s end. Magwitch’s reappearance in England and Pip’s subsequent revelation of Magwitch as his actual benefactor, among other epiphanies, in turn produces the acquisition of wisdom in Pip.

Dickensian scholarship suffers a noticeable deficiency in addressing the original and enduring virtue aspects of Oliver in *Oliver Twist* and Pip in *Great Expectations*. As mentioned, Dennis Walder briefly addresses original virtue in Chapter Two (“Oliver Twist and Charity”) of his book *Dickens and Religion*. In *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*, J. Hillis Miller declares “There is no acceptance of the doctrine of original sin in Dickens’ anthropology. Each human creature comes pure and good from the hand of God … Some are, however, like Oliver, paradoxically more naturally good than others” (67). In the same work,
Miller also associates “a natural innocence” with Oliver (80). Considering the brevity of both Walder and Miller’s comments, my thesis breaks new ground by fully addressing the very important virtue aspect of Oliver in the two novels under consideration. Not only do I address both original and enduring virtue through a methodical close reading of the two novels, but, in the case of Oliver Twist, I relate how the two aspects of Oliver’s virtue demolish the particular historical abomination of the New Poor Law; and, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four (or the conclusionary chapter of the thesis), in the case of Great Expectations, Pip’s struggle with virtue and the world transcends the specific historical setting (roughly Victorian England) of the novel. In this sense, Pip’s struggle is archetypically the human struggle that comprehends or transcends any historical era.

The core or heart of the thesis, that is, Chapters Two and Three, demonstrate how the two protagonists, Oliver in Oliver Twist and Pip in Great Expectations, “overcome the world” in similar but unique ways. Oliver accomplishes this feat by wielding his original and enduring virtue and doing that by always adhering to his perfect conscience. Because Oliver never wavers in adhering to his conscience, with the sole exception of accepting the Dodger’s offer of shelter which Oliver’s conscience tells him might be suspect, there is no need to trace Oliver’s relation to conscience in the Oliver Twist chapter (Chapter Two): Oliver’s conscience remains static, perfect. As I demonstrate in Chapter Three of the thesis, Pip achieves his conquest of the world by acquiring the wisdom which reactivates his sublimated virtue. Pip, it will be seen, neglects his
conscience, and therefore his obligation to be virtuous, because he is seduced by the allures of the world, especially as represented by the exceptionally attractive Estella. For a while, he believes falsely that the glittering vision of life worldly views offer—consisting of wealth, affectation, the pursuit of Estella—will bring him happiness.

Dickens penned *Oliver Twist*, in part, as an attempt to stop the heinous mistreatment of the poor caused by the enactment of the Poor Law of 1834 (which soon became known simply as the New Poor Law) by arguing against the validity of class-discriminatory misconceptions (or lies) behind the new law, which rationalized the mistreatment of the poor. The purposeful gradual starvation of orphan boys stands out as the most deplorable aspect of pauper mistreatment. The misconceptions which rationalized pauper mistreatment included the views that the poor were naturally indolent, morally depraved, given to vice, and generally inferior. I demonstrate how, through the person of the protagonist Oliver Twist, Dickens refutes the misconceptions behind the New Poor Law and, thus, defeats rationalizations of the mistreatment of the poor predicated upon the validity of the misconceptions. Dickens’s refutation of the pauper’s supposed natural indolence, moral depravity, proclivity to vice, and general inferiority means that none of the mistreatment of the poor is justified. It also points to the injustice of societal material inequity. Hence, Dickens’s refutation amounts to a vindication of the pauper in general and a criticism of social injustice in England as well.
In the process of this demonstration, I also show two additional aspects of Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* that further reveal how English society was arranged unfairly, especially with regard to the distribution of wealth or resources and to the mistreatment of paupers. Those two aspects include, one, the rampant hypocrisy of both “charitable” worker middleclass persons and non-charitable middleclass persons, and, two, the shocking and striking similarity between the behaviors, values, and creeds of “legitimately-employed” middleclass persons and “illegitimate,” or marginalized, “criminal” persons. The hypocrisy of the English middleclass, as well as the similarity in beliefs, values, and creeds between the “legitimate” middleclass and the “illegitimate” criminalized poor, only further bolster Dickens’s indictment of English society, most especially the inhuman “charitable” workhouse “solution” to pauperism.

Finally, a significant aspect of Victorian society, as revealed in *Oliver Twist*, which I address, is the matter of paradigm. “Paradigm,” as indicated in Antony Flew’s *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, points to “a central overall way of regarding phenomena” (261). My analysis of *Oliver Twist* proves what I believe Dickens understood very well in writing the novel: “The paradigm may dictate what type of explanation will be found acceptable” (Flew 261). The implied qualification in the quotation is “however unfairly.” In the West, for many centuries this has meant that capital organizes things socially in a way that is implicit and often unseen and is also highly unfair. Dickens understood that because those with wealth and power, such as the administrators of the New Poor Law program who instituted the atrocious workhouse solution to pauperism,
create and impose a biased perception (consisting of lies) of the putative fairness of the distribution of wealth and resources in society the poor only suffered more greatly.

_Paradigm_ also functions in _Great Expectations_ as the “central overall way of regarding phenomena.” I equate this “overall way” with the force of “the world.” Pip is greatly affected by “what type of explanation will be found acceptable.” He, in fact, makes a great gamble that the “overall way” is accurate and will bring him happiness. Whereas Oliver Twist always exhibits virtue, Pip’s story involves the sublimation of his virtue, because he succumbs to false worldly, paradigmatic allures, and then rediscovers his virtue as a consequence of his acquiring wisdom. Pip’s acquisition of wisdom then conveys him back to the original virtue of his childhood. If that original virtue in Pip had not also been _enduring_ (like Oliver’s), Pip would not have regained it.

In my analysis of _Great Expectations_, I trace Pip’s growth through several stages. In the first stage, Pip is an originally virtuous child who feels compassion for a Magwitch who demands that Pip bring him “file and vittles.” In between the time of this demonstration of Pip’s good heart to Pip’s descent into an acceptance of false worldly beliefs about life that cannot provide him the happiness, he, lamentably, becomes a snob. Pip’s problem throughout most of the novel is a lack of wisdom. Concomitantly, several specific circumstances, culminating in the exceptionally attractive Estella’s estimation of him as “coarse and common,” impel Pip to seek a new life or an “out” from his current life. Unfortunately for Pip, one day, rather miraculously the barrister Jaggers arrives
to announce Pip’s coming into his “great expectations.” All of these factors ambush Pip into becoming a genteel London snob. Chapter Three examines Pip’s failure during this phase of his growth. When Magwitch arrives to inform Pip that he is the source of Pip’s wealth, Pip suffers great internal conflict which eventually brings him to wisdom. The disparity in how Pip the child demonstrated compassion for Magwitch on the marshes and how Pip the snob views the returned Magwitch as a repulsive convict shows how far Pip has fallen from virtue. Magwitch’s true nobility and his love for Pip, however, win Pip over and begin the conversion of his snobbish worldly notions back to his childhood basic compassion for all persons, regardless of status. Pip experiences remorse, repentance, and a return to ethical normality as a result of his acquisition of wisdom and a recovery of his virtue. Pip learns to make peace with life. By novel’s end, he is mature, loving, and humble.

In addition to discussing the implications of injustice outside of the Victorian England era, Chapter Four, or the conclusionary chapter of the thesis, will also address the greater implications of *Great Expectations* which I believe Dickens fully understood. These include the unfortunate effects of paradigm; the nature of “true wealth” (that is, love, wisdom, and righteousness); the relationships between wealth, poverty, vice, and virtue; and, lastly, issues of destiny involving original virtue, enduring virtue, and original sin.

Oliver and Pip function in Dickens literature and scholarship as recurring types of the virtuous but unwitting youth pitted, again, against the world. In literature in general, both Oliver and even less perfect Pip suffice as inspiring
embodiments of great and virtuous spirit which serve as examples for all readers to admire and emulate. Because both protagonists exemplify the hope of overcoming the world or the conquest of it and because the thematic constituents of both novels transcend historical limitations, that is, because they are timeless, both *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* are effective heuristic texts from which readers of all ages can learn or benefit.

With both Oliver and Pip, one payoff for the reader is the understanding that only the enactment of virtue, accompanied by either an adherence to conscience or the acquisition of wisdom, or both, can defend one against the wiles of the world. This understanding extends to knowledge of the world as a deceptive realm that can cost a person virtue, true friendship, happiness, and the possession of the true riches of love, righteousness and wisdom. These conclusions can be gleaned from the plain fact that none of the world’s lies about what constitute happiness ever bring Pip any happiness, even as well as Oliver’s torturous route in life. Again, both characters’ painful experiences indict society, the paradigm, and the world because all three of these forces in life proffer lies to unwitting youths such as Pip as false promises of the world’s paradigmatic view. Pip learns all of this and the careful reader learns from Pip’s failures as well. The implications of these lessons concerning the pernicious role of paradigm for the reader outside of the Victorian England era are significant. I will address those implications in Chapter Four.

From the example of Oliver, the reader learns, in addition to the great value of his virtue, that the world is unfair. Most specifically, readers learn that
paradigm, class distinctions, and hierarchical societal arrangement are some of the greatest enemies of the common people, as matters of happiness, liberty, and material enjoyment. What Pip learns is a payoff for the reader, too. By novel’s end, Pip has acquired all of the following wisdoms: all persons are equal regardless of their “position” in a class-structured social hierarchy; being a poor tradesman (in Pip’s case, a blacksmith) in a rural town offers a person sufficient dignity to be happy; people that pretend to be one’s friends only if you impress them with status—especially wealth, manners, and affection—really aren’t one’s friends at all; an average looking virtuous, loving, and wise woman is better than an attractive but less noble woman.
CHAPTER II

ORIGINAL VIRTUE IN THE WORLD OF

OLIVER TWIST

Oliver Twist (1838), subtitled The Parish Boy’s Progress, is Charles Dickens’s first satirical novel, and one of his most popular novels (Murphy 754). Soon after finishing The Pickwick Papers (which was serialized in 1836 and published in book form in 1837), Dickens began the serialization of Oliver Twist in monthly installments beginning in 1837 and continuing until 1839 in the periodical Bentley’s Miscellany. The novel was first published in three volumes in late 1838 prior to its completion in Bentley’s Miscellany. Dickens penned Oliver Twist, in part, as an attempt to stop the heinous mistreatment of the poor caused by the enactment of the Poor Law of 1834 (which soon became known simply as the New Poor Law) by arguing against the validity of class-discriminatory misconceptions (or “lies”) behind the new law, which rationalized the mistreatment of the poor. J.R. Poynter, in Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834, characterizes those misconceptions as the assumptions that “any pauper was vicious until he was proved innocent. And there were many who pointed out that if vice and indigence was found together, depravity could be the result of poverty as easily as poverty might issue from
depravity” (xiv). Generally, then, the poor were incorrectly seen as naturally indolent, morally depraved, given to vice, and generally inferior. A law built upon such incorrect and discriminatory views resulted in the gross mistreatment of the poor and caused great suffering. Pivotal to the rationalization of the mistreatment of the poor was the additional erroneous supposition that, because all poor persons were inferior, they all deserved mistreatment. In the novel, this assertion is implicit in almost every word and deed of every workhouse employee and board member, and is characterized, generally, by Bumble’s shocking, repetitive denunciation of the orphan paupers under his false care as “them wicious paupers.”

Dickens refutes all of the incorrect assumptions about the poor by demonstrating, in the person and life of the protagonist, Oliver Twist, that one pauper is originally and enduringly virtuous. Because Oliver provides one exception to the rule, the entire “house of cards” of class-discriminatory views of the poor crumbles, thereby leaving no rational basis for the mistreatment of the poor. Through “the person” aspect of Oliver’s virtue, Dickens postulates in Oliver the quality of original virtue, even before the action of the novel has begun, in theory or as a matter of principle. The 1841 “Preface to the 3rd Edition” of Oliver Twist provides this assertion where Dickens states: “I wished to show in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last” (Oliver Twist vi). Showing “the principle of Good in little Oliver” means that Oliver is full of virtue, that he is virtuous. “The principle of Good … triumphing at last” implies an ending. There is always a beginning to an ending,
so the passage also implies a beginning. We know that that beginning is either before birth or at birth because “every adverse circumstance” begins for Oliver even before he is born. The narrator states that Oliver falls “into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 25-26). The world falsely associates Oliver’s—and, by extension, other “wicious paupers”—meager life circumstances with the image of him as lazy, immoral, attracted to crime, and generally inferior. The association is false because Oliver’s virtue endures through, beyond, and in spite of his life circumstances.

Imbued with “the principle of Good,” Oliver functions as the person who is the exception to misconceptions of the pauper *in principle*, a representative in the novel of all paupers. Oliver’s exceptionalness as a Christ-like martyr makes the accusations against all other paupers void because his original and enduring virtue is imputed to other paupers by the “in principleness” of his virtue. This aspect of Dickens’s attack on misconceptions about the poor makes his aims more productive than merely entertaining the reader by showing just one hapless boy’s exception to prevailing, class-discriminatory views of the poor. The more productive aim is achieved, beyond its “in principleness,” by employing “the life” aspect of Oliver’s virtue, through which Dickens demonstrates in action the *enduring* quality of Oliver’s virtue. In so doing, he demonstrates how one pauper repeatedly and continually behaves virtuously both in the face of cruel mistreatment and when encountering temptation: two feats which defy the
world’s conception in early-Victorian England. To be more precise, it is not so much that Oliver refutes the misconceptions of the world about the poor by his actions, but that he refutes those misconceptions by his inaction: that is, whenever he *endures* mistreatment or temptation. The one exception to this rule is the case of Oliver beating Noah Claypole in response to Noah’s insulting the honor of Oliver’s mother. This is only an *apparent* instance of “general inferiority,” though, because Oliver’s defense of his mother’s honor is actually an honorable activity of righteous anger, which I will explore later.

Working against Oliver’s “in principle” original and enduring virtue, the world of money, power, and discriminatory laws create self-fulfilling prophecies that systematically justify the mistreatment of the pauper and oppress him into depravity. The workhouse employees and board members accomplish this oppression thoroughly and in every way possible by unfairly wielding convenient moral norms that include the misconceptions of the poor such as their natural indolence, moral depravity, proclivity to vice, and general inferiority. “Convenient moral norms” are part of *paradigm*. *Paradigm*, as discussed in the introductory chapter to this thesis, refers to the way that the societal puppet-masters shape the way that reality is interpreted, most especially as a justification of the unfair distribution of societal wealth and resources. *Paradigm* may loosely be equated with the view of things known as “the world.”

Dickens points to this paradigmatic evil aspect of early-Victorian England by having the narrator speak early in the novel of the “systematic course of treachery and deception” to which Oliver is subjected during his first “eight or
ten months” of his life at Mrs. Corney’s workhouse where he suffers the “hung[er] and destitution” of being “brought up by hand” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 27). Though the designation, “systematic course of treachery and deception,” is employed in the context of the first eight or ten months of Oliver’s stay at Mrs. Corney’s parish, it also applies to the lifetime experience of Oliver, and, being systematic, to all other paupers and/or criminals as well.

In Victorian England, as Richard Dunn says in *Oliver Twist: Whole Heart and Soul*, poverty was “considered a sin, if not a crime” (9). First, there was the widespread practice of incarcerating debtors and beggars. Then, as John Knott, in his book, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law*, quotes, “Our intention,” admitted one Assistant Commissioner, “is to make the workhouses as like prisons as possible” (226-227). This was done, Knott indicates, to discourage paupers from the “vice” of relying upon charitable assistance. The criminalization of poverty points to the systematic mistreatment of paupers by a government that cared only to “manage” paupers with a bare-minimum subsistence program, instead of helping them in any of many ways that might demonstrate true care. The fact that Oliver is neither treated any better at Mrs. Mann’s branch workhouse nor at the workhouse to which he is moved on his ninth birthday than he is under Mrs. Corney’s care corroborates the assertion that the “systematic course of treachery and deception” is a matter of societal paradigm that will continue to afflict Oliver as long as he is a pauper. Oliver’s conversation, upon fleeing Sowerberry’s domicile, with Little Dick, with whom Oliver “had been
beaten, and starved, and shut up together, many and many a time” confirms, as well, this universal fate of the poor (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 78).

In addition to defeating the body of misconceptions about the poor by employing original and enduring virtue, Dickens also defeats those misconceptions in two more ways: one, by exposing the sickening hypocrisy of the middleclass in general and of the middleclass workhouse employees and board members specifically, all of whom fail to live up to the standards by which they judge the poor and upon which they base their mistreatment of them; two, by satirizing the near-identicalness of middleclass values and the values of the London criminal world, as embodied in Fagin’s cheap “philosophy” of “regard for number one.”

The mistreatment of the pauper children, as chronicled in the novel, constitutes Dickens’s tangible enemies: namely, the physical suffering of starvation and corporeal punishment, and the psychological torment of intimidation or fear-mongering. The temptation to which Oliver is submitted is comprised mostly of the criminal underworld’s attempts to corrupt him into becoming a willing accomplice in crime himself. In keeping with his superlative, original, and enduring virtue, Oliver never says an ill word toward his persecutors nor to his tempters. In every case of mistreatment and temptation he faces, Oliver refutes the assumptions of the world, thereby, disproving the paltry arguments for his and other paupers’ mistreatment.

I will conduct further analysis of *Oliver Twist* in three ways. Firstly, I will address the significant events in Oliver’s life that constitute his mistreatment and
his temptation by the criminal underworld. Secondly, I will address the significant themes in the novel of the power and effect of paradigm; the similarity in behaviors, values, and creeds of the “legitimate” middleclass (both of “charitable” and non-charitable employees) and “criminal” behaviors, values, and creeds, the latter represented best by Fagin’s “philosophy” of “regard for number one.” Lastly, I will indicate Oliver’s refutation of the New Poor Law presumptions about the poor as the discussion unfolds.

The significant events in Oliver’s life that constitute his mistreatment and his temptation by the criminal underworld include Oliver’s mistreatment under the uncertain care of Mrs. Corney, Mrs. Mann, and Mr. Bumble, as well as the orphan workhouse generally; Oliver’s “asking for more gruel” incident; Oliver’s nearly being apprenticed to Gamfield machinations; Oliver’s experience as Mr. Sowerberry’s apprenticeship, most especially Oliver’s physical conflict with Noah Claypole and the conflict’s consequences; Oliver’s temptation while under Fagin’s control; Oliver’s “handkerchief epiphany” and his experience in Mr. Fang’s courtroom; and, lastly Oliver’s experience with Sikes (and Toby Crackit) in the abortive burglary of the Maylie home.

The significant themes in the novel of the power and effect of paradigm; the similarity in behaviors, values, and creeds of the “legitimate” middleclass (both of “charitable” and non-charitable employees) and “criminal” behaviors, values, and creeds, the latter represented best by Fagin’s “philosophy” of “regard for number one” evince themselves most convincingly by
the corollary notion of *hypocrisy* which figures to corroborate the validity of the themes’ implications.

Oliver’s refutation of the New Poor Law presumptions occurs as he never behaves as paradigm—or, in this case, the presumptions behind the New Poor Law—would predict he would behave. Specifically, Oliver never behaves in any manner but nobly; he never says a cross word to any of his tormentors; and he never succumbs fully to any temptation of the criminal underworld.

I will not address the events in the order I have just listed them nor in the chronological order in which they occur in the novel. The analysis of the events and the themes involves some overlapping and requires an integration of the discussion of the events and themes. I will do my best to clearly, logically, and coherently present the complex discussion of both the events and themes from the novel.

Because starvation is the worst mistreatment that workhouse paupers endure, Dickens tackles it in the beginning of the novel by laying bare the thinking and actions of the workhouse board, which decides purposely to starve the workhouse pauper inmates. Dickens communicates his dismay and rage at the lack of true understanding and compassion on behalf of the workhouse employees and board members through carefully employed diction but mostly through tone in the form of sarcasm or satire. For instance, in Chapter Two of the novel, the workhouse board members, to whom Dickens satirically refers as the “very sage, deep, philosophical men,” determine, once they, as “experimental philosophers,” ponder the workhouse (perceived) free giveaway program, what
“ordinary folks would never have discovered—the poor people liked it! It was a regular place of public entertainment for the poorer classes; a tavern where there was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper all the year round; a brick and mortar Elysium, where it was all play and no work” (Oliver Twist 34).

Because of their very misguided conclusion that the workhouse charity was a boondoggle for lazy opportunists (the latter appellation also implying their immorality), the board members of the workhouse in which Oliver resides inhumanely and heartlessly decide “to set this to rights” (Oliver Twist 34) by

Establish[ing] the rule that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they) of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it … they made a great many other wise and humane regulations … kindly undertook to divorce poor married people, in consequence of the great expense of a suit in Doctors’ Commons; and, instead of compelling a man to support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor! … The relief was inseparable from the workhouse and the gruel, and that frightened people. (Dickens, Oliver Twist 34-35)

The passage drips with sarcasm, through the use of words such as “alternative” and “kindly,” as well as phrases such as “a great many other wise and humane regulations.” The word “alternative” refers to the false option of being starved gradually or immediately, which is really no alternative at all. The adverb, “kindly,” drips with sarcasm in the predicate “kindly undertook to divorce poor married people,” because there is nothing in fact kind about the action of divorcing married people because they are poor. Language such as “a great many other wise and humane regulations” is sarcastic, of course, because none of the regulations established is wise or humane. The presentation of the facts communicates the horror alone. Dickens’s sarcasm accentuates his incredulous
fury, most specifically, at the inhumanity of persons who would (and did) consciously mete out a ghastly plan of gradual starvation.

Justifications of starving children take on perverse manifestations; for instance, consider Bumble’s expostulation of the New Poor Law “philosophy” on the correct treatment of paupers to Mrs. Corney. Here, Bumble describes what he calls the “the great principle of [pauper] relief” as “giv[ing] the paupers exactly what they don’t want, and then they get tired of coming,” by which Bumble means that by starving pauper children they will be discouraged from their natural tendency to indolence, a tendency which only motivates paupers to rely on the workhouse to feed them, as if that reliance is a moral sin (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 209). Bumble’s “great principle” is merely Dickens’s fictional representation of what New Poor Law authorities believed and planned, including, as discussed above, making workhouses like prisons so that the poor would not want to rely upon them. This criminalization of poverty points to the systematic mistreatment of paupers by a government that cared only to “manage” paupers with a bare-minimum subsistence program, instead of helping them in any of many ways that might demonstrate true care for them.

Dickens’s refutation of the misconceptions behind the “mistreatment” of *starvation* begins early in the novel after he has identified this primary enemy. As a result of their decision to set to rights the problem of a free food giveaway program boondoggle enjoyed by the indolent indigents, as well as the consequence of the paupers becoming much thinner, “the board,” Dickens satirizes, “were in ecstasies” (*Oliver Twist* 35). The boys in the workhouse are so
underfed that “The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again” (Oliver Twist 35). Finally, after “Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months,” they can stand it no more (Oliver Twist 36). One starving boy, who “had a wild, hungry eye,” declares that, unless he more gruel regularly, “he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next to him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age” (Oliver Twist 36). Motivated by this boy’s intentions, the boys cast lots and the lot falls to Oliver to ask for more gruel on behalf of the entire workhouse. This act of fate provides Oliver his first real opportunity to refute the lies of the poor’s general inferiority.

First, Oliver demonstrates integrity by following through with the unspoken agreement among the boys that to whomever the lot falls that boy should approach “the master” and ask for more gruel. Oliver does exactly that. Given the master “was a fat, healthy man” of some bulk and that Oliver knows his request will go against the grain of every other lard-laden workhouse employee or board member’s heartless defense of starving Oliver and his companions, the mere nine-year-old Oliver demonstrates great courage, offering himself up as a martyr by simply imploring, “Please, sir, I want some more” (Dickens, Oliver Twist 36). The refutation of the misconception that Oliver, as a sort of human maggot, must be “up to something” by attempting to finagle some free food is accomplished by the integrity, courage, and earnestness with which Oliver approaches the master. None of these qualities theoretically pertain to a pauper, yet Oliver is in possession of all three of them.
For instance, the reader can discern the polite earnestness (he honors the fat man by addressing him as “sir”) with which Oliver makes his plea; the heartless charitable employees, however, cannot discern Oliver’s polite earnestness and within seconds of Oliver’s meager words, the narration indicates, “There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every countenance” (of the workhouse employees and board members) (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 36). The master serving the paltry gruel “gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some second” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 36). The master’s stupefaction underscores the gulf between the paradigmatic views adhered to by those enjoying a middleclass or even better living standard and the honest and true views of the starving poor. Because of the worldly views the master believes he absolutely cannot comprehend how a “young savage” would dare ask for more gruel (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 73).

The brave and noble deed of asking for more food on behalf of his companions incurs for Oliver serious consequences. In the face of terrible mistreatment, what does the dreadful rebel Oliver Twist have to say to any of his tormentors: *not a single harsh word. Not ever to any of his tormentors, ever.* Oliver has been starved, beaten, neglected, cheated, intimidated or fear-mongered, cowed, conned, deceived, loathed, humiliated, and, above all, if it can be said in a word, bamboozled or denied humanity, and he never says any cross word about or to any of his torturous afflictors. Like a mute Christ before an interrogating Pontius Pilate, Oliver demonstrates his supreme virtue through an inventive form of civil disobedience: a silence, which, by implication of omission,
In keeping with the paradigmatic view that the status quo distribution of societal wealth and resources is fair, Oliver must suffer punishment commensurate with his crime of challenging the paradigmatic workhouse program of gradual starvation. First, he is sequestered in a “dark and solitary room” where he “only cried bitterly all day” and suffered at night “in the gloom and loneliness which surrounded him” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 38). Oliver is caned by Bumble during his morning showers, every other day is “flogged as a public warning and example” before the other boys in the dining hall, and is graced at every evening prayer by hearing the warning given to Oliver’s companions “to be guarded from the sins and vices of [himself], whom the supplication distinctly set forth to be under the exclusive patronage and protection of the powers of wickedness, and an article direct from the manufactory of the very Devil himself” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 38-39). Oliver’s inordinately “just” punishment calls to mind a comment made by the narrator a few pages prior in the novel as Oliver sobs himself to sleep: “What a noble illustration of the tender laws of England! They let the paupers go to sleep!” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 34). One cannot imagine a more hellish existence for starving orphans to have to endure and all under the guise “charitable” care.

Oliver’s innocence amounts to “a shot heard ‘round the world.” The “gentleman” in the white waistcoat declares, among many instances the same thing throughout the beginning of the novel, “I never was more convinced of
anything in my life, than I am that that boy will come to be hung” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 37). The “revolutionary” aspect of Oliver’s plea amounts to effectively asserting that he and the other boys, as a matter of humanity, have a right to equal sustenance with their overseers. This is a dangerous claim in a stratified, hierarchical society such as England and all other industrialized nations. More than simply starving Oliver, though, Bumble and the “gentleman” in the white waistcoat believe that Oliver should hanged. Hanging, generally, is reserved for murderers and traitors. Oliver has murdered no one but is slowly being murdered. The reader may wonder if the “gentleman’s” certainty is to be taken literally: why is a starving boy’s plea for a little more food so revolutionary? The reason: Oliver’s question challenges the injustice of the entire establishment of societal order, which justifies the starvation of children. Though the verbal window dressing is different, the facts remain that the actions of the early-Victorian England workhouse administrators are not any different than the starvation of Jewish persons in World War II Nazi war camps. Both systems regard their subjects as non-humans, which is why Oliver’s question pierces to the marrow the injustice behind the veil of false charity and false wisdom. Asking for one paltry bowl more of gruel sends shivers up the spine of the socioeconomic hierarchy, all the way up to the power center, that is, Parliament, King, and Queen, working with social theorists, from which the thoughts of law and ideology emanate. What, then, can be said of Parliament and Throne that perpetuate the unnecessary suffering of starving children? Answer: everything Dickens says in *Oliver Twist*. The “shiver” is sent up the spine as Bumble rushes
into the room where the board were, and, before the reaction of a “general start,”
addresses “the gentleman in the high chair”: “Mr. Limbkins, I beg your pardon,
sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!” (Oliver Twist 36).

The sheer astonishment of the men entrusted to care for orphan
paupers elicited when one of the starving children asks for more food strongly
indicates, again, that something is direly wrong with the workhouse solution to
caring for paupers. The “something” is its corrupt foundation, the New Poor Law,
which the Northern Star newspaper of early-Victorian England characterized as
designed to “enable the High Priests of this modern Moloch, to offer up a human
sacrifice to the household Gods of ‘Capital’” (Knott 8, footnoted as Northern Star,
7 April 1838). The “human sacrifice,” of course, is the pauper generally. The use
of “Moloch” in the quotation refers not only to the costly (and greedy) personal
gain of the workhouse employees and board members but also the concomitant
ungodly sacrifice of the paupers’ nourishment and comfort to bankroll that
personal gain.

The instance of Oliver’s torture and the “Moloch” passage indict the
entire world of “legitimate” money-earning persons at the putatively “charitable”
charitable workhouse. Though Dickens accomplishes this particular, greater
indictment (that is, beyond just the workhouse per se) by demonstrating the
similarity in behaviors, values, and creeds between the workhouse employees
and board members, middleclass working persons, such as Mr. Gamfield and Mr.
Sowerberry, and the criminal world, as represented by Fagin and gang, the
primary means of comparison is accomplished by considering Bumble’s actions,
beliefs, and coveted things against those of Fagin’s. The similarities are striking and the differences only superficial.

In addition to Mrs. Mann’s mistreatment, Oliver also frequently suffers Bumble’s “well-known cane” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 52). Similarly, Fagin, on one occasion, “went so far as to knock them [the Dodger and Charley Bates] down a flight of stairs” for having come home at night empty-handed (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 95). In terms of similar starvation, while the children in the workhouse are purposely, gradually starved, Fagin punishes the Dodger and Charley Bates for reasons of “sloth,” “by sending them supperless to bed” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 95). Punishment of all sorts is as familiar to Bumble’s wards as it is to Fagin’s.

In a case of similar manipulative behaviors, Fagin and Bumble employ lies to ply Oliver. Fagin lies to Oliver in an attempt to persuade him of the virtue of becoming “the greatest man of the time” once he is properly schooled by Fagin’s lackeys (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 94). In Bumble’s case, he accompanies a lie with goading, offering Oliver “a sly pinch” to persuade him *not* to say that he did not “dote” on the perceived virtue of being a hardworking chimney-sweep (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 44). The debauchery of Fagin’s ways is evident; however, when Fagin “would expatiate with great vehemence on the misery of idle and lazy habits” he exposes Bumble and “gang’s” identical business ethics, which allege the pauper’s inherent indolence, proclivity to vice, etc. (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 95). This similarity in ethics is a similarity in creeds. Fagin adheres to a creed—really a cheap “philosophy” which he calls “regard for number one”—that, despite the accompanying, flowery rhetoric, boils down to a “philosophy” of
selfishness an amorality no different than polite or “legitimate” society’s
euphemism for selfishness, called “enlightened self-interest.”

For instance, Mrs. Mann’s amoral activity of stealing from her orphan-
wards is theft no less than Fagin directing the Dodger and Charley Bates to steal
handkerchiefs. At least, Fagin causes no person to starve. In another instance of
striking similarity between the wanting ethics of “legitimate” persons and the
ethics of criminals, when Oliver departs on his ninth birthday from Mrs. Mann’s
branch workhouse to the non-branch workhouse, the kind-appearing Mrs. Mann
stands behind Mr. Bumble’s back and intimidates Oliver by “shaking her fist at
him with a furious countenance.” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 32). Mrs. Mann’s
objective is to ensure that Oliver does not let on to Bumble that he is ready to
leave Mrs. Mann’s hellish workhouse, as the narrator says, “with anybody with
great readiness,” including fleeing “the fist [which] had been too often impressed
upon his body” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 32). The last clause also demonstrates the
corporeal punishment to which Oliver is subjected under “charitable” care. The
original comparison, though, resides in Mrs. Mann’s fist shaking and Fagin’s own
behavior chronicled in the following passage:

Take head, Oliver! Take heed!” said the old man, *shaking his right hand
before him in a warning manner*. “[Sikes] is a rough man, and thinks nothing
of blood when his own is up. Whatever falls out, say nothing; and do what
he bids you. Mind! (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 185) [author’s italics]

The intimation of violence calls to mind the public flogging to which
Oliver is subjected after committing the “impious and profane offence of asking
for more” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 38).
In Chapter Forty-Three of the novel, Fagin expounds upon the “virtues” of his pet theory to his new gang-member, Noah Claypole, alias Morris Bolter. Before I lay bare the particulars of Fagin’s “philosophy,” it is worthwhile to consider Noah’s role in the novel. As a charity boy apprenticed to Mr. Sowerberry, he represents middleclass virtue. However, whereas Oliver, being a workhouse orphan, is expected to turn to and succumb to the temptations of crime, Noah, in a show of the failure of middleclass virtue, turns to crime and willingly joins Fagin’s gang, even admitting to Fagin that at school he had been “a regular cunning sneak” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 404). Even further, Noah agrees to conduct the surveillance upon Nancy that will lead to her murder by Sikes for the price of one pound and with the willing words to Fagin, “I’m your man” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 404). As Fagin expounds upon his “theory,” Noah/Morris, the narrator indicates, “who was largely endowed with the quality of selfishness,” clearly revels in the sheer sordidness of Fagin’s deceptive creed, uttering once in adulation, “Oh, the devil!” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 385; 384). How much more can a representative of the middleclass demonstrate the failure of the middleclass to live up to its pretence of virtue?

Fagin begins delivering his treatise on selfishness to Morris by declaring, “Every man’s his own friend” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 384). Then he employs sleight-of-hand, in order to seduce the tractable “Bolter,” by making use of confusing gibberish in the assertion that “When a man’s his own enemy, it’s only because he’s too much of his own friend” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 384).
Fagin seduction continues: “Some conjurers say that number three is the magic number, and some say number seven. It’s neither, my friend, neither. It’s number one” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 384). In very few words, Fagin has demonstrated his refined ability at deception. By using the term “some conjurers,” he deflects suspicion from himself as a deceitful person. By suggesting that either “number three” or “number seven” might contend for the special position of “magic number,” he feigns an argument, pretending that he is actually reasoning his way to his conclusion that “number one” is the “magic number.” The “surprise” ending to Fagin’s brief comment, that “It’s neither, my friend, neither. It’s number one,” also is tricky because it relies on the paradigm in storytelling where the surprise answer at the ending of a tale turns out to be the correct answer. Lastly, as a depraved criminal, Fagin cleverly inserts into his communication to Bolter, the actual lie that Bolter is his “friend.” In the world of selfish persons, whether their work is “legitimate” or “criminal,” friendship very rarely has anything to do with associating with another person.

Selfish persons associate in social circles for personal advantage, without regard for the sort of feelings one might have in a genuine friendship. Fagin’s rhetoric suggests to Bolter the validity of his own “theory” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 384). Thus far, the essence of Fagin’s ideas, as the foundation of his modus operandi, is selfishness and deception. But what Fagin says next to the captivated Bolter that identifies precisely with “legitimate” society’s widely-entertained notion of “enlightened self-interest” should make one’s eyes open wide. Fagin remarks: “You can’t take care of yourself, number one, without taking
care of me, number one” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 385). This utterance is cryptic, and purposely so. By making the statement, Fagin tries to identify selfishness with selflessness, so that selfishness becomes palatable. The statement is suspect, though, because, if Fagin truly intended to communicate the truth about selflessness, for instance, the Biblical declaration that “It is better to give than to receive,” then he would state it in plain terms. Moreover, Fagin’s “theories” share in essence what is fundamental to hierarchical capitalism. The nature of hierarchies—even small ones like Fagin’s den of thieves—is to steal the loyalty of a subservient while salving the theft-wound with rewards and confusing lies about the moral propriety of the transaction and the establishment of power relations. From a distance, the sensible listener-reader questions the motives of Fagin’s convolution. Recall, however, what I said earlier about “justifications of starving children tak[ing] on perverse manifestations.” Considering this reality, the reader can see the similarity in creeds by identifying selfishness, sort of “minor” deceptions, as well as the larger, elaborate lies (called “justifications”), which characterize the values (again, this is euphemism) or worldview of both the criminal world and the middleclass (and higher up the socioeconomic ladder, as well), as depicted in *Oliver Twist* by the workhouse middleclass. Even if one had not known Fagin’s condition of moral depravity, his smitteness with his own “theory” also belies true motives.

The “theory” is a rationalizing rhetoric no different than the rationalizing rhetoric which accompanies the workhouse virtual-prison-system. Fagin’s rhetoric attempts to bestow legitimacy on his criminal actions by making
middleclass. Bumble and the board members’ rhetoric attempts to bestow legitimacy on their legally-criminal behavior by making them it seem non-criminal. Both attempts implicitly condone wrongdoing and, as all such rhetoric of systems of servitude, cloud the issue of the near-identicalness of “legitimate” and criminal worlds. So, for instance, when Oliver displays the great despair in his heart to Bumble, the beadle can only heartlessly reach for a manipulative control-measure and invoke the hallowed “gratitude” ploy by denouncing Oliver as “the ungratefullest and worst-disposed boys” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 52). Similarly, Fagin’s ploy of insinuating that Oliver can be “the greatest man of the time” is merely base flattery. The ambiguity of the phrase, “the greatest man of the time,” however, calls attention to the misguided values of both “legitimate” means of making money and “criminal” means. For instance, where, in actuality, resides the self-professed greatness of “great” philosophers, esteemed legislators, and powdered-wig workhouse board members, when, in all of their “great wisdom,” they can only conceive to make workhouses “a terror to the poor [to] prevent them from entering” (Knott 227)? Only a helpless, beautiful, and virtuous Oliver can refute these false self-identifications and he does so by never making a peep. Oliver’s silence implies a resounding dissent of the workhouse injustice. One presumption behind self-professed greatness is that if only one would be like one’s superiors, then one would be a better person. This proves false in *Oliver Twist* with every single person whom Oliver meets.

In addition to the similarity in behaviors, values, and creeds between Mr. Bumble and Fagin and gang, similarities exist in the world of “legitimate”
middleclass business (as opposed to the world of charitable work) most especially through the persons of Mr. Gamfield and Mrs. Sowerberry, both of whom demonstrate a lack of humanity equal to or greater than Fagin’s own deviousness. For example, after Oliver is punished for committing the “impious and profane offence of asking for more,” he is nearly apprenticed to Mr. Gamfield (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 38). This experience that Oliver endures amounts his second “nightmare” of mistreatment. The apprenticeship Gamfield offers is no better a life than any pauper-criminal can expect. Tellingly, the sage men of the board are first and foremost concerned with the profitability of the “business deal” of transferring ownership of Oliver to Mr. Gamfield and with how well the deal will appear, that is, as a matter of public relations, to persons who might notice negligence in the transaction. If the sage men of the board were concerned with Oliver’s well-being, then they would not dismiss Gamfield’s apathy toward his acknowledgement, indirectly quoted here, that boys have been smothered in chimneys only because a fire has not been properly lit beneath them to motivate them quickly to extricates themselves from the chimney, that “roasting their feet” properly motivates them even more (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 40-41). (The latter comment amuses the “gentleman” in the white waistcoat).

The deal between the board members and Gamfield seems to be going well, and the narration indicates “the bargain was made” to apprentice Oliver to the grisly Gamfield, at which point Gamfield “gave an arch look at the faces round the table, and, observing a smile on all of them, gradually broke into a smile himself,” conveying the fact that the board members and Gamfield are
aware of their complicity in evil in apprenticing Oliver to a man whose “villainous
countenance,” Oliver discerns, “was a regular stamped receipt for cruelty”
(Dickens, Oliver Twist 42, 44). Like ravenous wolves discovering a stray sheep,
the board can no longer hide behind the false mask of protection conceived
euphemistically as “the misconceptions” about the poor. No, the false notions of
the poor, justifying their mistreatment, are outright, intentional lies, employed to
benefit their conceiver with as much wealth, power, and prestige that they can
grab. Meanwhile, to mention it once again, “charitable” worker Bumble
sadistically enjoys having affected Oliver’s bitter sobs. Bumble’s sadism not only
reveals the true “heart of darkness” of English New Poor Law charity, but also
implies a global system of unfairness in “advanced” industrial societies and in
realms outside of “charitable work,” which transcends in time the limited, early-
Victorian epoch. Oliver perceives the evil and pleads, upon his knees, not to be
apprenticed to Gamfield. Despite Bumble’s unkind interpretation, Oliver,
providentially, is saved from the doom he perceives under tutelage to Gamfield,
but not because of sympathy or compassion for Oliver, rather because the board
is concerned with appearances that might, again, make for bad public relations.
The board’s complete indifference to the most human and germane aspect of the
matter, that is, Oliver’s safety and well-being, as well as their pronounced interest
for the non-humanitarian concerns of profitability and public image demonstrate a
morality no more moral than that of criminals, of “regard for number one.”

If the sage men of the board were concerned with Oliver’s well-being,
then they would not fail to discern that Gamfield, as the narrator indicates, was
“under the slight imputation of having bruised three or four boys to death already” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 41). In comparison, Sikes’ rough behavior toward Oliver surrounding the incident of the abortive burglary of the Maylie residence does not exceed in moral turpitude that of Mr. Gamfield’s, and, as shall be seen, nor Mrs. Sowerberry’s. Sikes does command Oliver to drink some alcohol—“Down with it, innocence”—but only to calm the boy (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 201). Yet, at the same moment, Sikes, sounding much like Bumble, imprecates, “Drink it, you perverse imp” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 201). When Oliver sinks upon his knees upon his revelation that Sikes and Toby Crackit intend for him to take part in a burglary, Sikes, who has a pistol, threatens Oliver with life and limb: “Get up, or I’ll strew your brains upon the grass” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 203). This sounds more like a merciful action than the gradual starvation of paupers, or burning children in chimneys. Finally, once the burglary attempt has failed, at least Sikes does not exhibit the sort of indifference and neglect of well-being of Oliver that Gamfield does toward his charges because Sikes and Toby Crackit make an attempt to help the wounded Oliver. All of the actions of the workhouse board members, of Gamfield, of Sikes are reprehensible. But in a hierarchy of morals, one cannot fairly distinguish between the behaviors of the “legitimate” persons and the “criminal” persons. That represents a serious problem because, again, if legitimate persons are generally no more ethical than criminal persons, then society is inherently and *systematically* unjust.

In addition to demonstrating the workhouse board’s indifference to Oliver’s fate, the Gamfield machinations illustrate the similarity in behaviors,
values, and creeds of the "legitimate" world of middleclass persons and the subculture of criminals.

The board’s first concern is the profitability of “the deal,” the latter designation again accentuating that the transfer of a pauper to apprenticeship amounts to a transfer of owned and sold merchandise. The board furtively discusses the matter, and I say “furtively” because they know of the bad “public relations” associated with discussing the transfer of an orphan to a tradesman—especially one as heinous as Gamfield—as a matter of profitability. Among the pertinent issues are the “saving of expenditure,” that the deal “looked well in the accounts,” and concerns with the publishing of a “printed report” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 41). In a show of sickness, the “gentleman in the white waistcoat,” as it were, “stains himself” with panache by throwing in a few, extraneous and macabre words, adding: Oliver’s “just the boy for you. He wants the stick, now and then: it’ll do him good; and his board needn’t come very expensive, for he hasn’t been overfed since he was born. Ha! ha! ha!” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 42).

The heights of hyperbolic idiocy and evil attained by this miscreant earn him rank in literature as the most consummate symbol of civilization’s failure to be civil.

Oliver’s Sowerberry-apprenticeship experience amounts to his second “nightmare” of mistreatment. Considering the more subtle, but just as devastating, psychological torment heaped upon Oliver by Mrs. Sowerberry, we see that middleclass “sensibility” is completely insensible. While Sikes’ aims are just plain robbery, Mrs. Sowerberry functions as a dupe in the system “treachery and deception” that is far more injurious to all persons, pauper and non-pauper
alike, than mere physical coercion. Mrs. Sowerberry's actions reassert the
money-power relations of the apprentice-master relationship, specifically, and the
system of societal hierarchies, in general, all in contradiction to “the principle of
Good,” or Oliver’s original virtue. Mrs. Sowerberry insults Oliver with her offhand
query: “You don’t mind sleeping among the coffins, I suppose?” (Dickens, *Oliver
Twist* 54). Finally, Mrs. Sowerberry insults Oliver in a sly, impersonal way with
her comment that “parish children … always cost more to keep than they’re
worth” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 53). To Mrs. Sowerberry, apparently, paupers and
apprentices are no better than soulless automatons worth only what they reap in
profits to her. As noted earlier, such selfishness is the essence of business,
except in business the euphemism *profit motive* is employed, again, in a game of
false appearances, to bestow an air of fairness to the activity of “merely” seeking
profit. The real meaning of the euphemism is *greed*.

Business never mentions *greed* because that would be bad public
relations: it is difficult to justify unabashed, relentless selfishness when one
admits that it is greed. Instead, business invokes the hallowed notion of “profit”
as an insurer of the workingman’s livelihood, which sounds much more caring
than the motives of a corporation’s board of directors personally to reap
inordinate sums of money. In the way of naked greed, “legitimate” business
activity and the activity of criminals are nearly identical. Business persons will
always do anything legal to make a profit, without regard for ethics. Oftentimes,
business persons will do anything to make a profit, be it legal or illegal, if they
can escape punishment, or if the cost of the punishment is less than the gain of
the illegal activity. In addition, as in the case of Oliver under the Sowerberrys’ small-business profit motive, the way is made for humiliating dehumanization and mistreatment. The connection between profit motive and mistreatment is made because, one, greed is a motivation to find happiness through the possession of physical things and, two, because in the process of pursuing happiness through greed, people, also, must become things. No real difference, then, can be proclaimed between “legitimate” business “values” and the criminal, Fagin’s, “regard for number one.” And Sikes’ physical control over Oliver, though terrifying to the protagonist, is significantly less harmful than a pervasive system of control, propped up by lies and predicated upon a dictum—“Me first”—that includes my life, liberty, and sustenance before anybody else’s.

Noah Claypole’s inflammatory remarks about Oliver’s mother provide a convenient opportunity for the inevitable, systematic, and humiliating dehumanization and mistreatment which Oliver must suffer in his new capacity as apprentice to Mr. Sowerberry because power relations must be confirmed. Oliver must come to understand that he has no rights, that he is no more than a human animal, and that, above all else, he had better make a good appearance of being grateful for little he does get, or else! The narrator prefaces the momentous clash between the youths, assigning the guilt to whom it belongs, as follows: “Noah … being hungry and vicious, considered he could not possibly devote to a worthier purpose than aggravating and tantalizing young Oliver Twist” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 67). Noah instigates the conflagration by jeering, “yer mother was a regular right-down bad ‘un” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 68). As an
orphan, Oliver is naturally very defensive of his deceased mother, and, as the narrator indicates, “the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 69). Oliver unleashes his righteous wrath upon Noah in a physical manner. This is Oliver’s only physical retaliation chronicled in *Oliver Twist*, and it demonstrates Oliver’s virtue of defending the honor not only of a departed relative, but also of a hapless mother whom Oliver in his loneliness sorely misses. The paradigm of systematic treachery and deception of paupers will not tolerate the perception of honor in a homeless pregnant woman because that would imply unfairness in the system in general, unfairness in the distribution of material resources specifically, and, in the least, guilt on the part of persons in power for not having ensured the pauper woman’s care.

As brainless, middleclass-adherent zombies, Noah, Charlotte, and Mrs. Sowerberry’s *somehow* have prescient knowledge of Oliver’s mother’s character, though no one—not even Oliver—has known her or anybody else who might have known her. For instance, a presumptuous Charlotte chimes in, railing at Oliver: “Oh, you little un-grate-ful, mur-de-rous, horrid villain!” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 69). Despite her ignorance, Charlotte has learned the power of being “morally correct” by invoking the guilt-laden *gratitude* gambit. Mrs. Sowerberry, sensing the power in this strategy, avails herself of it as well, denouncing Oliver self-righteously, as a “little ungrateful wretch” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 76). Mrs. Sowerberry then continues to do what she must do, if the story of Noah’s beating is to be rewritten correctly, that is, according to the world’s lies about the homeless, the poor, and the unwedded, she denounces Oliver’s mother as well,
adding “She deserved what [Noah] said, and worse” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 76).

Nothing rational can explain this: Mrs. Sowerberry has never met Oliver’s mother; in fact, neither has Oliver.

The mystery of discriminatory clairvoyance is explained by the top-down power of hierarchies to command the thoughts of those who have exchanged their allegiance for (relative) privilege. To receive the rewards or resources of society, one must consent to agree with the rules of resource distribution—the foremost rule being the lie that the distribution is fair—otherwise the powerbrokers who manage the distribution of those resources will discontinue your receivership of them. The issue with Oliver and his mother, it becomes clear, has nothing to do with Oliver’s mother and everything to do with the recalcitrance of a peasant, the disobedience of a slave. Oliver’s “failure” is that he intuitively knows, as an aspect of his original and enduring virtue, that all persons, regardless of social class, should demonstrate respect for one another. Because of his virtue, however, Oliver shows respect, but never gets angry when he is not shown respect. Oliver’s persecutory trio, Noah, Charlotte, and Mrs. Sowerberry, unwittingly agree with the rules or resource distribution because they have not yet (or ever will) pierce the veil of false legitimacy. Only semi-consciously, then, do Oliver’s tormentors affect a propaganda campaign, which rewrites the incident, casting Oliver, not so predictably, as a murderer. The gentleman in the waistcoat, who, after Oliver’s request for more gruel, had been certain Oliver would be hung, asserts again in a superstitious manner his estimation of Oliver after Oliver thrashes Noah, thus: “I knew it! I felt a strange
presentiment from the very first, that that audacious young savage would come
to be hung” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 73)! To reiterate, it is not that Oliver is doing
anything which merits execution by hanging. The problem is that Oliver is
unaware of the subtle communication by which persons sense who is going to
“play along with the game” and those who are not, by which I mean those who
comprehend and accede to the invisible hierarchy of power to which persons out
of fear assent. As Oliver is aware, whether in the workhouse under Bumble, in
Fagin’s “care,” in Mr. Fang’s courtroom, or as Mr. Sowerberry’s apprentice, the
structure is enforced with force. “Sophisticated” social relations always find their
most essential power in the veiled threat of corporeal punishment. Because
Oliver fails to understand the “flow of oppression” inherent in language and
because he is a pauper, he is a pariah for two “good” reasons. Again, he must
suffer physical reform, like Gamfield’s donkey, so that “by way of gentle reminder
[he may understand] that he was not his own master” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 39).

Thus, the “prescient” knowledge does more to make Oliver into a
criminal than predict criminality inherent in his personality. The paradigm which
castigates the poor as inherently indolent, morally depraved, given to vice, and
generally inferior, conveniently makes an appeal to the conspirators of Oliver’s
innate depravity, a formula devised when his mother conceives him even before
the Noah-beating incident. The middleclass persons have acquired their sense of
the flow of oppression, that is, the contours of the formula of power, which are
essential to the perpetuation of the paradigm, unconsciously through feelings,
images, and examples. The acquisition process concerns identity, which is
vested in status, so that the Oliver who is an enemy of the status tyranny becomes the murderer of the middleclass representative, Noah, except Oliver does not wish to kill Noah, only what Noah represents. The problem is that Noah and Gang have become what they represent. Noah, true to his feelings, but not exactly a thinking sort of person, implores to Bumble, half-truthfully, Oliver “tried to murder me,” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 72). The implication that Oliver has done this, and done it irrationally, under-girds the entire rewriting of the event. What Oliver has done becomes irrational only because the power of numbers (of persons) dictates what definitions and designations will be accepted as part of the final account of the incident. None of Oliver’s assailants ever consider that he has rationally and virtuously defended his mother’s honor. No, because if she were honorable, then society or the world would have been her murderer.

Oliver’s opponents understand that to disobey is to threaten their own means of subsistence. They might end up like Oliver’s mother.

In yet another instance of the similarity in behaviors, values, and creeds of middleclass persons and criminals in the novel, Mr. Sowerberry expresses his concern to Mr. Bumble that “there’s no denying that, since the new system of feeding has come in, the coffins are something narrower and more shallow than they used to be; but we must have some profit, Mr. Bumble,” to which Bumble retorts, sagely, “A fair profit, is, of course, allowable” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 48). Mr. Sowerberry proceeds to decry the losses of profit associated with having to expend more on wood to bury larger persons. Bumble’s words merely echo centuries of futile, human wisdom, which amounts
to greed is good. Mr. Sowerberry can only all-too-quickly agree. Greed, whether legitimately-condoned or censured as criminal, is ethically equivalent to crime because, for one, human well-being often takes a backseat to profit. In this instance, the sanctity of greed is greater than the sanctity of the deceased persons whom Mr. Sowerberry is burying.

Oliver’s retorts to Noah and Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry do not constitute any ignobility. Honorable Oliver says no words but the truth he believes. For instance, he states factually, “[Noah] called my mother names” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 76). And, specifically in reply to Mrs. Sowerberry’s insulting claim that Oliver’s mother “deserved what [Noah] said,” Oliver plainly declares, “It’s a lie!” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 76). He never “takes things personally,” while the oppression enacted against him is “socially personal.” He never derides any of his tormentors, thereby refuting their misconceptions, or lies about him, flat out. But, because Mrs. Sowerberry bursts into tears (the psychoanalysis of which I will not engage in), Mr. Sowerberry is compelled, by strictures of social hierarchy or pecking order, ironically, to defend his wife’s honor by administering “a drubbing” to deflect all accusation of himself as “a brute, an unnatural husband, an insulting creature, a base imitation of man” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 76). Oliver, however, has not insulted Mrs. Sowerberry directly, as Noah did his mother.

The preconceived, institutional interpretation of the class warfare reaches high heights of hypocrisy and hyperbole. Agent-of-middleclass-establishment Bumble, in a flourish or Orwellian doublespeak, explains knowingly to Mrs. Sowerberry, “It’s not Madness, ma’am. It’s Meat” that has “deranged”
Oliver (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 74). Contrary to reason, Bumble explains to Mrs. Sowerberry, “You’ve overfed him” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 75). Bumble’s absurd revisionist historiography is just another expression of the upside downness or the inversion of justice in a world controlled by money and power. In a bid to refute any of Oliver’s rational claims, Bumble must employ the strategy of dehumanization. “What,” Bumble suggests, “have paupers to do with soul or spirit? It’s quite enough that we let ‘em have live bodies” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 75). Thus the “soulless” animal, Oliver, is not spoken to rationally about unreasonable violence and the virtue of forgiveness—if it had been warranted in Noah’s case—but is instead persuaded, like a dog, with the corporeal punishment Mr. Sowerberry exacts upon him for having dishonored his wife.

This spectacle of justice, or charade of false fairness, is depressingly farcical for two reasons: one, because there is no rational thinking going on and, two, because everything that is said is a lie iterated only to reaffirm status quo power relations. The lies are told because the oppressors fear for their own survival, security, stature, etc. Noah and Charlotte are unaware of their perpetuating a lie, and while Mrs. Sowerberry seems willfully ignorant, Bumble seems completely aware of the injustice he is perpetuating. In fact, in an effective attempt to create or reassert a hierarchy of power over Mrs. Sowerberry, Bumble in effect blames Mrs. Sowerberry because of Oliver’s diet. Just to bring a little thought to the event, the wretched, amoral monster, which Oliver is perceived to be would not care about his deceased mother’s reputation. Nutritious food never deranged any person’s mind, but Oliver is not given nutritious food: the problem
might be that he needs better food. And, if he has been fed too much meat, or if he has not been fed well—in other words, if a diet not of Oliver’s own choosing is the cause of his perceived misbehavior, then how can he be blamed for his own behavior and what is all the nonsense about his ingratitude, his wretchedness, his not having a soul? Nonetheless, to reduce Oliver’s perceived, or, more correctly, imputed or designated proclivity to violence, Bumble, in a maneuver of fear, sagely advises the undertaker’s wife to “keep him on gruel all through his apprenticeship,” else Oliver’s madness might resurface (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 75). Bumble, the immoral man he is, also takes unfair advantage of the situation to buttress the entire class discrimination mind-job by adding that Oliver “comes of a bad family,” which seems to explain everything about Oliver’s behavior (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 75). But, which is it, diet-induced derangement or genetically-inherited mental illness? The employment of an additional theory would suggest Bumble is uncertain, if it were not evident that Bumble is a consciously pathological liar.

The only time in the novel Oliver approaches, but never transgresses, the threshold of voluble denunciation is in the case of the row between he and Mrs. Sowerberry, which follows his drubbing of the insulting Noah Claypole. Oliver’s speech and behavior remain perfect until novel’s end. How does a morally depraved and generally inferior pauper drawn to vice behave better than any person in the entire charitable apparatus and better than “decent” hardworking persons such as Mr. Sowerberry? Because the world turns things upside down. This is more significant than it may seem. “Turning things upside
down” means that virtuous acts, such as Oliver’s asking for more gruel, become sins and the starvation of paupers or any of their mistreatment becomes acceptable, standard operational procedure.

“Turning things upside down” means that whatever the cover-up rhetoric may be the creed only justifies greed. The bottom line, or ultimate “value,” if it can be legitimized by such a designation, whether in “legitimate” business or in “criminal” activity, is that if one does not “deliver the goods,” then the axe will fall where it may. The similarity in behavior, values, and creeds demonstrates that in terms of morality and justice, there is no difference between Fagin’s “work” and Bumble et al.’s official-looking administration of the workhouse. There are only two main differences between the worlds of “legitimate” and “criminal,” one, “legitimate” crime or greed is not generally viewed as immoral; and, two, “legitimate” crime is often executed more subtly, so that its immorality cannot be detected. Further, just as any gang is a threat to its rival, any source competing for the resources controlled by a “legitimate” source will be criminalized, so that the “legitimate” source’s resources will not be compromised. Effective maintenance of one’s resources means that criminalization necessarily entails a “systematic course of treachery and deception” all to protect one’s assets. Here, I believe Dickens sees more virtue in Fagin’s forthright debauchery than the sly evil of selfish, moral weaklings masquerading as saints.

What is at stake with the unjustly imposed paradigm is the entire structure of society and the rationalization of that unjust structure. If legitimate
persons are generally no more ethical than criminal persons, then society is inherently, systemically unjust. That injustice includes the unfair distribution of wealth and resources. “Inherently, systemically unjust” means also that the starvation of paupers and the criminalization of poverty are not sad matters of fate, but matters of design or paradigm. The entire societal edifice is a grand scheme designed to benefit greedy persons at the cost of the suffering of or the very lives of the poor and/or criminal. The pickpocket and the thief, who have been purposely marginalized, merely emulate “legitimate” persons in order to survive, except that such “criminals” usually do not invoke a pretext of “legitimacy.” The creeds comprised of the ethics, values, and thoughts of the criminal poor and the legitimate are identical, at least as portrayed rather realistically in the world of Dickens. The differences are how the paradigm (controlled by wealthy “legitimate” persons) casts the criminal poor, the rewards (especially monetary) that each class enjoys, and “window dressing.” Window dressing refers, one, to physical appearances, such as adornment with suits, ties, and powdered wigs, and, secondly, to verbiage. Generally, “legitimate” but criminal wealthy persons have been afforded the privilege of education. Education brings refinements which people associate with better morals. The most deceptive of these refinements is eloquence. Many educated “legitimate” criminals speak well enough that many persons—even the poor who are oppressed by them—think these “legitimate” persons are honorable. It is a matter of false appearances because, in fact, “window dressing” does not guarantee ethical behavior, and neither does poverty preclude virtue.
The “systematic course of treachery and deception” follows logically from the fact that both “legitimate” and “criminal” money-seekers know that they are involved in immoral, acquisitive activity. The cover up entails a game of charades. Thus, the “game” of advantage involves false appearances more than realities, feigned feelings more than heartfelt emotions, and cunningly-employed words more than honest communication, all of which attest to the great power of appearances, canned emotional responses, and buzzwords. Power and advantage are not ethical, whether they are condemned as “criminal” or condoned as “legal” or “legitimate.” The immorality of both sides of the status-coin is revealed by the employment of false appearances, feigned feelings, and clever verbiage. For instance, the workhouse board members don powdered wigs, and nothing can explain this but a power-grab to confer authority upon their wearers. Bumble suspects Oliver of being “one of the most bare-facedest” of “artful and designing orphans,” after Oliver implores in earnest to the board members not to apprentice him to Gamfield, only because Bumble himself, like Fagin is an artificer of feigned feelings (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 45-46). Lastly, in connection with the enforcement of a power structure through titles of honor, the equating of moral character is implied by the identical designation of “gentleman” for Fagin as well as the heartless man in the white waistcoat. The men wear different uniforms but are of the same cloth: each stoops to depravity to protect his advantage. A similar comparison is implied by Bumble and Fagin’s identical usage of “my dear” to refer to perceived inferiors. Does one really believe Bumble better morally than Fagin? Being “legitimate” is a ploy meaning that one
abides by the norms, customs, and laws of a society or nation, but doing so does not ensure that one is behaving morally. As with men, so with ideas: bad men look like good men when wearing white waistcoats, and bad ideas, such as the starvation of children, when dressed up with fancy names, such as “theory” or “philosophy,” sound good to people who do not think, and the pecking order discourages true thought and encourages, through reward, false appearances, feigned feelings, and cunningly-employed words. Once stripped of their robes and powdered wigs, the workhouse board members appear no more humane or ethical than Fagin or even Hitler.

Because the instigators of a system of planned “treachery and deception” are greedy, there is always a tolerable amount of pauperdom. As long as a number of persons can be swindled and denied humanity through economic deprivation, and the status quo is not compromised by the deprived persons’ rebellion, then the swindling and denial will continue. Hopefully, at least, some labor can be gotten out of them. When the poor threaten to take from those that have, “pauper management” must be instituted, not out of care, but out of a rational desire to limit loss of (costly) resources to needy persons who would claim a right to them. Meanwhile, honor is conferred upon “holy” charitable persons who deign to help those who cannot help themselves. Except, the reason for this latter fact is cast as a result of being naturally indolent, morally depraved, given to vice, and generally inferior in contrast to the factual circumstance of having been deceived by treachery out of one’s means to life, liberty, and happiness. The pauper-slave owned by a system that starves him is
regarded as a possession no longer worth owning, so it must be disposed of in the bone yard.

As I discussed above by way of mentioning the false appearance of legitimacy which physical, as well as social, “uniforms” bestow upon their wearers, Dickens satirizes the false virtue of the charitable workhouse heist, which benefits employees and board members only, through the use of symbolism and metaphor in the person of the “gentleman” in the white waistcoat. The *whiteness* of the “gentleman’s” uniform symbolizes purity. Wearing a uniform, in turn, is a metaphor of how honor and legitimacy of authority are conferred upon their wearer. As the narrator indicates, “Strip the bishop of his apron, or the beadle of his hat and lace, what are they? Men. Mere men. Dignity, and even holiness too, sometimes, are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some people imagine” (Ch. 33-37). For Dickens, perceived power, dignity, and holiness are not inherent, but often merely socially-constructed uniforms, taken off as easily as they are put on. Honor or authority become, in this way, an activity of legerdemain, involving appearance and reality, a fact, which indicts the entire workhouse establishment because only very rarely do any of the employees or board members actually exhibit any real virtue. They merely make a claim to it, for their own advantage, by, as a matter of false appearances, claiming it or “wearing it.” Given these understandings, the “gentleman” who wears the white waistcoat, and who prophecies, or, more likely, hopes for starving Oliver’s hanging, becomes, in terms of symbolism, the wearer of a black uniform. By repeatedly referring to the man in the white waistcoat, who is
remarked by the narrator as “callous” to the helpless children who depend on him, as “the gentleman” in the white waistcoat, Dickens satirizes or emphasizes the ironic falseness of his implied purity of/or honor. Dickens suggests that because the masquerade of virtue is precariously balanced it can be easily overthrown by real virtue. Thus, persons of real virtue such as Oliver pose a threat to house of cards masquerade and must be immediately immobilized to protect the status quo.

The upside downness discussed is very aptly communicated in the exchange that follows Oliver’s later denunciation “as a fool” by that very suspect “gentleman” in the white waistcoat, when, as the narrator indicates, “another gentleman in a gruff voice,” condescendingly adds to Oliver’s humiliation, “I hope you say your prayers every night, and pray for the people who feed you, and take care of you—like a Christian.” The words of this sage are absolutely ironic and hypocritical: can one imagine men who determine to starve children praying in earnest thanks to their Creator? One does imagine Dickens balking at the gall of these pampered hypocrites. At least, the narrator says, these men of a parish workhouse had never taught Oliver how to pray (Oliver Twist 34). This fact is consonant with upside downness, because upside downness is paradigmatic in a Fallen world, meaning, for instance, that, while the saintly Oliver Twist is humiliated by men who appear to be charitable officials, the holier-than-thou workhouse employees and board members are, in fact, to state it again, not much better than Nazi death camp “personnel.” The quotations around personnel accentuate the fact that both the workhouse and the death camp are matters of
business, something ordinary one might expect, because whatever business
does—more so than any other sphere of collective human activity—is condoned,
perhaps because people relate the profit of business with their own survival. We
see in Oliver’s reactions and behavior thus far toward his malefactors no ill-
sentiment or ill behavior, just, mostly, intermittent sobs signifying his incredulity at
being treated so poorly and deprived or neglected of love. Since no ignoble
behavior of Oliver’s can be identified, then Oliver’s behavior is virtuous. It is an
effective refutation of the shenanigans justifying his mistreatment.

While, after Oliver’s vilification for virtuously mustering the courage to
dare to ask for the justice of receiving more gruel, not just for himself, but for all
his companions, Bumble admonishes Oliver to eat his food and “be thankful”
(Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 42). “Be thankful” in the upside downness of worldly
doublespeak means “appear to be thankful,” which is all the heartless can do:
feign a gratitude they do not feel. Really, the moral notion of gratitude, just as the
guilt-ridden, effective accusation cited above for Oliver to pray “like a Christian,”
is simply a weapon used in the Pharisee’s arsenal of class-warfare strategies to
cower the pauper. Because of this hypocritical standard, Oliver is expected, for
instance, to make “his best obeisance” on presentation to Mr. Gamfield. Oliver,
like a barnyard animal or Southern slave, has been put up for auction, not to the
highest bidder, but, rather, to the first bidder, who happens to be creepy
Gamfield.

Oliver’s Gamfield and Sowerberry experiences are the last of
middleclass mistreatment he will endure, and he has endured successfully: he
never once has misspoken against any of his persecutors. Even with Noah, he spoke factually and did not denigrate Noah’s person, except physically. Oliver has never once, as far as the narration indicates, even thought, let alone acted, spitefully toward anyone in his life, except in the case of righteously defending his mother’s honor against Noah’s insulting accusations. After Oliver has concluded his associations with the workhouse and with middleclass apprenticeship, he proceeds into the world of criminal temptation, which he also successfully, and virtuously, endures. If, as *Benet’s Readers Encyclopedia* succinctly summarizes, Dickens’s view on the cause of crime is that “poverty breeds crime,” then Oliver is forced by the mistreatment, which accompanies poverty, to apprenticeship; and from apprenticeship to association with criminals (Murphy 754). Paradoxically, however, Oliver’s penury does not determine that he will become criminal. Oliver is an exceptional case of virtue, which guarantees that he will not succumb to the temptations of the criminal world.

Hypocrisy is at the heart of the “game of charades” which justifies unmitigated acquisitiveness, be it “legitimate” or “criminal.” This is easily understood in the case of the criminal world, but with “legitimate” society is not so clearly discerned. Taking Mrs. Mann as an example, the game of charades amounts to knowing just how, when, and why to make things appear as they should. “How” means to feign care. For instance, in a moment of hypocritical skullduggery, the Mrs. Mann who steals from her wards replies to one of Mr. Bumble’s queries with the false words: “I couldn’t see ‘em [her infant wards] suffer before my very eyes, you know, sir” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 30). “When”
means in front of anyone who might discern her true sans souci attitude towards the suffering children under her “care.” “Why” means so that she can continue to enjoy the monetary rewards of her job, as well as, perhaps, the honor of being recognized as a “charitable worker.” Mrs. Mann, for example, only gives Oliver “a thousand embraces” upon Oliver’s departure with Mr. Bumble back to the regular, non-branch, workhouse so that her farewell to Oliver might appear caring and well managed to her boss, Bumble. Mrs. Mann also designingly provides Oliver upon his departure with “a piece of bread and butter, lest he should seem too hungry when he got to he workhouse (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 32). As he leaves Mrs. Mann’s branch workhouse, contrary to appearances, the narration indicates that “Oliver was then led away by Mr. Bumble from the wretched home where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 32). The inhumanity of this “pauper management” solution, though, amounts to more than just a lack of kind words. The dubious “care” of Mrs. Mann has included the torture or corporeal punishment, as well as the psychological torment of the threat of corporeal punishment, and intimidation or fear-mongering.

The fear Mrs. Mann has inculcated in Oliver somewhat in the manner of mastering a beast of burden is so complete that when Oliver is being taken away from the branch workhouse by Bumble, he is so afraid of the fiendish Mrs. Mann that he “make[s] a feint of feeling great regret at going away” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 32). Hypocrites, again, require making an appearance of gratitude. This same paradigm of ownership and control of humans, produced by the
inculcation of fear, differs little from routine concentration camp procedures. The scene in the novel of Gamfield the chimney sweep’s chastening of his donkey conveys the same metaphor of control by master over servant witnessed in workhouse employee “management” of paupers. Gamfield, by beating his donkey and giving its jaw “a sharp wrench” by means of catching hold of the bridle, and by administering to the donkey a “blow on the head,” makes the beast to understand “by way of gentle reminder that he was not his own master,” again, illustrating a picture of the pauper under the New Poor Law bridle, which sharply wrenched the jaw of its wards by all means possible (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 39). The narration also implies, by adding that Gamfield cleverly understands, “knowing what the dietary of the workhouse was,” he knows that Oliver, too, will be reminded that he is “not his own master” through his dependence on being cheaply fed, just like a donkey (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 39-40).

After Oliver’s mistreatment in the “charitable” workhouse and under Sowerberry’s uncaring “care,” Oliver overcomes his first instance of temptation that he will encounter in the novel when he experiences a revelation as to the true nature of the handkerchief exercises played with Fagin, the Dodger, and Charley Bates. See in the narrator’s description of Oliver’s adherence to a perfect conscience: “What was Oliver’s horror and alarm … to see the Dodger plunge his hand into the old gentleman’s pocket and draw from thence a handkerchief!” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 97). The narration continues:

In an instant the whole mystery of the handkerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew, rushed upon the boy’s mind. He stood, for a moment, with the blood so tingling through all his veins from terror that he
felt as if he were in a burning fire; then, confused and frightened, he took to
his heels; and, not knowing what he did, made off as fast as he could lay his
feet to the ground. (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 97)

Oliver neither merely avoids evil, nor skirts it, nor steers clear of it: he
*flees* from evil. The great genuine horror of the Dodger's criminal act which Oliver
experiences, as well as his dramatic reaction to it, powerfully demonstrates the
nature of Oliver's heart, his perfect virtue: Oliver runs from the scene of the crime
expeditiously. Oliver's brush with the law begins here after he is apprehended by
a police officer, who, precisely in-line with the paradigmatically-prescribed
thinking, predictably dehumanizes Oliver with the tag, “young devil” (Dickens,
*Oliver Twist* 99). Oliver is brought to Mr. Fang’s courtroom for the crime of
thievery. The magistrate’s appellation conjures an image of protruding canine
teeth which symbolize or allude to the predatory nature of a justice system that is
both mingled with money and which feeds off the innocent poor.

In addition, Fang, ironically like the workhouse board members, is
referred to as “His worship,” the mention of which in the narration means that
Dickens intends to satirize the injustice of the justice system, as well as the
injustice of the workhouse. In an absurd show of incompetence, Fang hardly
listens to anyone. He only shouts interrogations or orders: “Officer! Who is this
fellow?” or “Hold your tongue, sir!” or “Swear this person!” (*Oliver Twist* 102-103).
But Fang knows one thing: how to protect his pay and privilege by heeding the
rules concerning the predictability of behavior within the paradigm of “systematic
… treachery and deception” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 27). Fittingly, he decries
Oliver a “young vagabond” and a “hardened scoundrel” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist*
When Oliver merely faints in dire fear of the law’s thirst for retribution, communicated by Fang’s zeal and tyranny, Fang predictably, and identical to Bumble’s denials of Oliver’s genuineness, counters: “I knew he was shamming” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 105). Then Fang sentences Oliver to “three months—hard labor” without even having conducted a trial at all, not to mention a fair trial. Oliver is saved at the last moment when the elderly book-stall keeper interrupts the concluding proceedings, demanding to be heard. His words exonerate Oliver, and convey Oliver’s virtuous, natural aversion to crime: “The robbery was committed by another boy. I saw it done, and I saw that this boy [Oliver] was perfectly amazed and stupefied by it” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 106). The event of a bookseller speaking up on Oliver’s behalf to save him from further societal mistreatment, I believe, is more than coincidence. Dickens is accentuating the responsibility and power of writers, as well as educated persons in general, to adhere to the same sort of conscience found in virtuous Oliver to speak up volubly and to be the “whistleblowers” that can and should challenge injustice.

The importance of the courtroom scene is that it conflates the false justice of the workhouse with the false justice of the false justice system. Dickens is going for broke: he indicts all the accessory apparatuses, which conspire against the poor to make them criminals somehow responsible for their own poverty. The systematic nature of oppression means that men with status tacitly agree, that is, very quietly, or without words, to work as a gang in order to procure their own advantage. That is why denunciations of the poor, as well as the exaltation of the rich, become predictable. For instance, Oliver, who has
threatened the prosperity of the workhouse employees and board members by asking for more gruel (because that gruel would have to be paid for out of employee and board member salaries), incites the Gang of Board Members’ spite, so that the gang retributively intends to send Oliver to sea upon a “trading vessel bound to a good unhealthy port” (Oliver Twist 47). Witness, also, that Oliver’s character is assassinated, in principle counter to virtue, before Mr. Fang’s mock-trial has been conducted. Oliver, in keeping with his enduring original virtue, never speaks an ill word of his criminal companions nor of the unjust magistrate.

Oliver demonstrates the same righteous earnestness exhibited in the handkerchief and subsequent courtroom episode in the two other major temptations to criminality which he experiences in the plot of Oliver Twist. The first temptation, subtly employed by Fagin, was to cultivate Oliver’s interest in criminality by leaving for the confined and bored Oliver, a book that “was a history of the lives and trials of great criminals” (Dickens, Oliver Twist 186). The word, “great,” I believe, relates directly to Fagin’s earlier false flattery about Oliver becoming a “the greatest man of the time,” so it is another temptation, this time relating to pride, to which Oliver is subjected (Dickens, Oliver Twist 94). The earlier temptation fails. Oliver expresses his virtues of innocence and unknowing, the narration says, as “Oliver wondered what picking the old gentleman’s pocket in play had to do with his chances of being a great man,” yet Oliver, in a virtuous show of deference for an elder man, assumes that Fagin must know better (Dickens, Oliver Twist 94). The “great criminals” temptation fails, too, of course.
The narration of Oliver’s reaction to the history book is virtuous, normal, and healthy, and reads as follows:

In a paroxysm of fear, the boy closed the book, and thrust it from him. Then, falling upon his knees, he prayed Heaven to spare him from such deeds, and rather to will that he should die at once than be reserved for crimes so fearful and appalling. (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 186)

Oliver, again, by resisting the temptations of Fagin’s criminality, demonstrates a virtue “he cannot possibly have” either by expectation or systematic plan, the cause and effect of which can be difficult to discern.

The final, significant temptation of Oliver by criminals in the novel is his coerced involvement with Sikes and Toby Crackit in the abortive burglary of Mrs. Maylie’s residence. As a tried-and-true devotee to virtue, Oliver, though he is coerced with alcohol and intimidated with the threat of physical retribution (even death) into physical participation with the crime, never succumbs to the spirit of the temptation to commit burglary. This is clear upon his revelation of the plans to burglarize the home, at which moment, “Oliver, well-nigh mad with grief and terror, saw that housebreaking and robbery, if not murder, were the objects of the expedition. He clasped his hands together, and involuntarily uttered a subdued exclamation of horror” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 203). Then, weak with fear, Oliver “sank upon his knees” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 203). When Sikes expresses his rage at Oliver’s failure to comply, Oliver prays, “For the love of all the bright Angels that rest in Heaven, have mercy upon me!” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 203). Because Sikes threatens violence upon him, Oliver goes through the house window, but only “firmly resolved that, whether he died in the attempt or not, he
would make one effort to dart upstairs from the hall and alarm the family” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 205). The burglary attempt concludes with Oliver’s martyrdom as the victim of a gun-wound. In keeping with Oliver’s indefatigable virtue, he never utters a curse at any of his abusers, neither Fagin nor Sikes, and never even considers harming them either, though they have nearly cost him his life. Oliver complies with Sikes’ commands to aid and abet in the burglary only because he understands that if he doesn’t he may be murdered. At the first chance he has, that is, once Oliver’s through the window and inside the house, he rushes to do right by heading for the stairs. What more practicably can be expected morally of any person in these circumstances, let alone a child?

Oliver is not perfect, but he is as virtuous as any person gets. For instance, while Oliver’s conscience admittedly may have been briefly suspended during a moment of doubt when he sublimates his intuition of “whether he hadn’t better run away” (from Jack Dawkins) to the “unexpected offer of shelter [that] was too tempting to be resisted,” Oliver never suspects the threat on the horizon of violence or death implicit in Sikes’ intimidation that will coerce him, against his every moral fiber, to go through the motions of burglary while, in his heart, hoping to “alarm the family” of the burglary of their home (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 84, 85). If “poverty breeds crime,” then Oliver’s misguided association with criminals is vindicated (Murphy 754). Oliver’s brush with criminality is affected by economic circumstances, not by the putative innate-depravity of the poor. London, the narrator indicates, is “the very place for a homeless boy, who must die in the streets unless someone helped him (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 79). Oliver knows he
will die, unless helped, because “large painted boards were fixed up, warning all persons who begged … would be sent to jail” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 80-81). By historical, economic forces not of Oliver’s own choosing, Oliver is forced to accept the artful Dodger’s offer of shelter (Dickens, *Oliver Twist* 84). By associating with criminals and yet not succumbing to their immorality, Oliver demonstrates, in yet another way, the incontrovertibility of his virtue, because he does not assent to criminality despite his penury (Murphy 754). A critical reader may, too, question Oliver’s physical rage vented upon incendiary Noah, but I have justified this action as “righteous indignation,” meaning that, if righteous God can get angry, then why cannot also a virtuous child? Apart from these two examples, Oliver never, either when tortured or tormented in the workhouse by persons who ought to have demonstrated love to him, or when tempted subtly by Fagin or brutally by Sikes, gives his heart to sin, though his flesh may be weak. If, perhaps, the reader thinks I’m making apologies for Oliver’s behavior in order to make him fit my interpretation of the novel, I only implore: has anyone in their life ever met a more realistic, enduringly noble or virtuous person than the Oliver Twist portrayed in *Oliver Twist*? To cite an example of exceptional virtue on Oliver’s part, look to his kindness toward his half-brother, Monks, who had plotted to murder Oliver, but with whom, upon Brownlow’s suggestion, Oliver decides to share his inheritance.

The hyperbole of Oliver’s virtue is purposeful: it operates heuristically to refute the “theoretical basis” of the factual torture and torment of thousands of innocent persons, a refutation, which, in principle, appeals to the refutation of any
doctrine that justifies the mistreatment of any people at any time, past or present, and at any time in history, and which calls attention to the exceptional virtue of Charles Dickens himself, in whose imagination and heart Oliver was conceived.
CHAPTER III

VIRTUE AND WISDOM IN THE WORLD
OF *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

Charles Dickens’s thirteenth novel, *Great Expectations* (1861), was written during the mid-Victorian period, but the action of the novel was situated in the early part of 1800’s, known as the early-Victorian period, even though Queen Victoria was not coronated until 1837 (Murphy 1078; Sanders 422). *Great Expectations* was serialized in the periodical *All the Year Round* in England from 1860 to 1861, and also simultaneously in the United States in *Harper’s Weekly*. The novel was published in three separate volumes in London in 1861 (Sanders 423).

*Great Expectations* chronicles the protagonist Pip’s struggle with the world and his conquest over it through the acquisition of wisdom. Pip is born with original virtue but his experiences in life obscure that virtue. Pip sublimes his virtue as a consequence of adopting a worldly view of life that is comprised of lies. Those lies include the notions that wealth and prestige (status), as well as marrying an externally beautiful but inwardly ugly young women (Estella), will bring him happiness. Not all persons believe these notions; however, the great majority of people do. Because of their preponderance, these persons are representative of the world generally; therefore, I summarize the notions
as “worldly views.” Those who do not adhere to worldly views are generally wise persons, who are, though, also generally poor, victimized, oppressed, or otherwise oppressed.

Pip turns from his original virtue for three reasons. One, the unhappiness caused by his poor social environment (that is, most of the persons who surround him); two, other specific circumstances in his life which make him unhappy and cause him to seek an “out” of his existence; and, three, his initial Satis House visit which effects a “mind job” upon his delicate psyche. At Satis House, Pip finds Estella’s beauty coupled with her contempt for Pip in a psychologically curious way compelling or irresistible. Pip leaves Satis House accepting Estella’s estimation of him as “coarse and common” and believing that he is not acceptable as the respectful and innocent youth he is. Pip falls in love with Estella in every way possible. He becomes convinced that he needs to change to be the person Estella would have him be and commits to pursuing a path of worldliness that, of course, can never bring him happiness.

Associated with Estella’s allure is the wealth of her position as Miss Havisham’s ward. Pip decides he must pursue wealth, gentility, and refinement to be happy, all aimed at what he perceives will bring him the greatest happiness: Estella’s love. Despite Estella’s repeated candid confessions, for instance, as she says to Pip, “You must know that I have no heart,” Pip still remains deeply in love with her (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 242). Pip has “bought into” or capitulated to worldly views of life. He has semi-consciously exchanged his simple awareness as a rural boy fated to be a blacksmith’s apprentice for a
worldly awareness of status as the main thing to be concerned with, all for the promise of happiness with Estella as a gentleman.

Pip sublimes his virtue because he is at once goaded into it by the adults in his life (with the exception of noble Joe) and also volitionally chooses the world’s false conception of “the good life” because of his Satis House experience. Pip’s sublimation of his virtue is a natural or direct consequence of his new views because the life of a worldly person and that of a lowly, rural blacksmith are antithetical—both mindsets cannot reside long in Pip’s mind without wreaking conflict, havoc. Pip’s sublimation evidences itself in attitudes he feels or experiences and things he confides to Biddy, such as Joe’s seeming backwardness or commonness and that he aspires to be a gentleman.

Very unfortunately for Pip, the barrister Jaggers arrives one day—a la an ersatz Deus ex Machina—to announce Pip’s coming into great fortune, his “great expectations.” The apparent fortuity only confirms the self-fulfilling prophecy in Pip’s mind that he is meant, as a matter of fate, to be a wealthy, refined gentleman and that he is also fated to marry Estella. The latter assertion enters Pip’s mind because he assumes Estella’s caretaker, the wealthy Miss Havisham, to be the source of his “great expectations,” even though at the time of Pip’s being apprenticed to Joe, Miss Havisham answers Pip’s question—“Am I to come again, Miss Havisham?”—with words indicating the certain conclusion of their association “No. Gargery is your master now. Gargery! One word!” (Dickens, Great Expectations 104). Pip’s assumption that Miss Havisham intends for he and Estella to marry is irrational and fanciful.
Unfortunately, inexperienced Pip’s poor choices of abandoning rural life and aiming with high hopes for being an esteemed gentleman in London have painful consequences. Only by acquiring wisdom does Pip turn back to his original virtue. In fact, any individual can only successfully repel the lies foisted upon him/her by the world through the employment of wisdom. Pip’s wisdom is acquired partly through his disappointment in or the failure of his worldly life to make good on its promises but mostly through a series of epiphanies toward the end of the novel, most especially the revelation of Magwitch as his actual benefactor. As Pip’s discovers by novel’s end, the promises (i.e., “lies”) of the world turn out to be the sham they have always been.

Once Pip accepts the worldly view of life as a worthy pursuit, he must sublimate the original virtue with which he is born because antithetical views cannot reside in his mind simultaneously. Fortunately for Pip, though, he never accomplishes a full sublimation of his virtue. The reader knows this mostly because Pip feels great remorse over his neglect of Joe and Biddy and because he somewhat unconsciously knows that a worldly existence isn’t living up to its promise. Edmund Wilson in *The Wound and the Bow* asserts that upon Pip’s coming into wealth “He straightway turns into a mean little snob,” meaning that Pip attempts to behave like the wealthy aristocrat he either perceives or hopes himself to be (Wilson 59). Before leaving for London with high hopes, Pip exhibits unloving and condescending behavior toward Joe and Biddy. Once Pip arrives in the metropolis, he finds that London is decidedly overrated and soon learns that money never makes him happy, that socializing with “high society” persons
neither fulfills him, and, worst of all, that when he does have the chance of Estella’s company he is most miserable of all. Pip also suffers great remorse over his neglect of Joe and Biddy. A wiser Pip might have given up the entire charade, renounced London, high living, and Estella, and returned to the forge, Biddy, and Joe, where he would have found true love and community.

Because Pip somewhat knows his new life isn’t delivering the goods because of the unhappiness he feels after he opts for a worldly existence, he despairs. What possible can bring Pip happiness? Returning to a humble life at the forge is the last alternative which comes to Pip’s mind in answering this question. Naïve Pip fails to understand that only wisdom will guide him to the happiness which seeks. Wisdom is a matter of the mind; virtue a matter of the heart. Both are indispensable for happiness since the world will tempt persons such as Pip away from wisdom and virtue toward false dreams and empty promises that are both immoral and never will bring happiness. To say it more plainly: wisdom and virtue, on the one hand, and worldly beliefs—again, such as the notions that wealth, prestige, and marrying a beautiful but contemptuous young women will bring happiness—are antithetical.

Wisdom is both the implied subject of the novel and the payoff for the reader. However, Pip’s suffers a dearth of wisdom. Fortunately, Pip experiences a series of epiphanies which awaken his limited sense of wisdom, most notably the revelation of Magwitch as his actual benefactor upon the latter’s return to England, as well as the additional realization that Miss Havisham never intended
Estella for him. As Pip acquires wisdom, Dickens also educates the reader with Pip’s own learning.

Pip has changed since his innocent days of chancing upon Magwitch on the marshes and he must learn to love Magwitch again. Learning to love Magwitch resuscitates Pip’s virtue. Over time, he genuinely and deeply does so. As Pip’s virtue reemerges, he learns also the golden value of Joe and Biddy’s love, of the dignity of being merely a lowly blacksmith. Pip returns home with a repentant heart for the wrong he has done to Joe and Biddy, and Joe and Biddy very nobly forgive him, reaffirm their love to him, and welcome him back into their lives. Pip’s ulterior motive of returning home to marry Biddy is, as fate happens, preempted by the additional revelation that Biddy and Joe have married.

Pip works for eleven years with Herbert overseas and then returns home again. Pip has learned the value of hard work and of being happy living frugally. Pip’s wisdom becomes wisdom for the reader, too. Among the many lessons the novel offers are that loyalty and community among loved ones are more important than wealth or status.

There is also an archetypal aspect of Pip’s struggle with and conquest over the world which transcends any historical era. For those allured by having more material things and/or wealth, the elements of their seduction by that allurement essentially do not change. In any society outside of early-Victorian England, especially in “advanced” industrial societies, the worldly myth is perpetuated that money and a physically attractive women, even one without
heart, can make a man happy. In fact, *Great Expectations* demonstrates, excessive wealth makes people unhappy and distorts their perception of reality.

I will examine how and why Pip falls from a condition of original virtue, and how he is healed and returns to virtue through the acquisition of knowledge or wisdom. I believe it’s clear that Dickens paints a “black and white” picture of virtue, on the one hand, and worldliness, on the other, and I will elucidate this dichotomy throughout this chapter of the thesis.

**Pip’s Original Virtue and Aiding Magwitch with File and Vittles**

Near the beginning of the novel, Pip retrospectively narrates his perception of his generally unfair treatment as a child:

> I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality … Even when I was taken to have a new suit of clothes, the tailor had orders to make them like a kind of reformatory. (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 24)

Being “born in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality” is another way of saying that Pip is born originally virtuous because predominant world views on “reason, religion, and morality” stand in opposition to virtue. I’m contending that “the world” is inherently “upside-down,” meaning that the things of the world make good bad and bad good. This is a basic Christian tenet. At home on Christmas Eve, the day of having encountered Magwitch, Pip empathetically “think[s] afresh of the man with the load on his leg” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 13). Pip’s very humane concern for Magwitch demonstrates his fundamentally Christian heart, thus also demonstrating his virtue. Because
Pip is virtuous from a very young age, his virtue is original. The fact that adherents of worldly views, such as Mrs. Joe, Pumblechook, etc. consider aiding a convict deplorable, heinous, immoral, or shameful shows that Pip’s original virtue stands in opposition to many earthly wisdoms, institutions, or conventions, such as “reason, religion, and morality.” Dickens is casting Pip as a human instance in opposition to an unfair and deceptive world.

We see this later when the adults at the Christmas dinner express their disdain for convicts in general by referring to Magwitch and Compeyson as “the two villains” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 34). The self-confident adults at the Christmas dinner rely on societal, worldly views to judge two men they have neither met nor know anything about. According to the world, a putatively rotten man like Magwitch ought to suffer or just die. A higher morality, however, demands compassion for all persons. The experience of the disparity in views of correct or moral action begins Pip’s war with virtue and the world. Said another way, Pip is confused by the world’s false “dictates of reason, religion, and morality.” At the age of helping Magwitch, Pip does not yet possess the wisdom to know the difference between worldly injustice and a morality above or beyond the world which supercedes that injustice. Even though Pip’s ignorance misguides him, his good heart, that is, his original virtue, carries him through his temporary allegiance to the world and onward to the triumph of wisdom achieved after Magwitch’s return at novel’s end, which can also be understood as a renunciation of the allegiance Pip has made erstwhile to the world.
Later in the novel, in her correspondence to the “gentleman” Pip, Biddy demonstrates her faith in him by saying “For you had ever a good heart” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 222). Biddy, as a paragon of virtue equal to Joe in the novel, is qualified to make such an assessment of Pip’s heart. The assessment means that Pip’s virtue is not only original but also enduring. Possessing original virtue supposes that Pip is born with a good heart. Having also an enduring virtue means that, whatever Pip faces in life or however he sublimates his virtue, his virtue cannot be completely lost. If Pip had only been originally virtuous and not enduringly virtuous, he would have lost himself in his struggle with the world but, because Pip’s virtue is enduring, he providentially reconnects with that virtue, as he acquires wisdom, and regains his senses about what things are truly worthy and worth pursuing in life. Unfortunately, some of the lessons Pip learns in his early life only serve to distract him from truly worthy aims and to engage in unfair judgments of people. The lesson Pip learns from his conflict over providing file and vittles to Magwitch is that in life he is to make distinctions between “good people” and “bad people,” between “worthy persons” and “unworthy persons,” which later, as a sort of higher lesson with deeper implications, plays a role in his decision to “realize” that he is “coarse or common.” Once Pip understands that some persons are “coarse and common” and others higher or better than that low station, he makes a decision for the perceived better choice of not being coarse and common, of being “better” than the coarse and common. Thus, Pip’s lesson of learning to make distinctions between persons conveys him toward the practice of behaving snobbishly.
Becoming a "respecter of persons" or acquiring the class consciousness identity of being a (superior) "gentleman" forces the sublimation of Pip’s original virtue. Without having the quality of an *enduring* original virtue, which can thus reemerge after its latency, Pip would never have recovered from his worldly detour into genteel snobdom and the vain pursuance of Estella.

The reader knows Pip’s virtue is not lost after it becomes latent due to his acceptance of or being co-opted by the world because, for one, Pip experiences remorse over his snobbish behavior, most specifically in connection with his neglect and mistreatment of Joe and, to a lesser extent, of Biddy. After arranging business relations for Herbert surreptitiously with Clarriker, Pip narrates: “I did really cry in good earnest when I went to bed, to think that my expectations had done some good to somebody” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 306). Pip’s “cry” points to the guilt or remorse he feels over neglecting Joe and Biddy. He is weighed down by the guilt of the poor choices he has made about what is worthy to pursue in life. Another way of saying Pip’s virtue is sublimated but not squashed is to say that he has an enduringly good heart. Though Pip does make a choice to sublimate his virtue—because he believes the vision of life as proffered by the adults in his life who attend the Christmas dinner (again, with the exception of Joe), as well as Estella’s snobbish view of life communicated to Pip by her low estimation of him—Pip’s heart remains the same. The sublimation indicates that Pip lacks the instruction or wisdom that would lead him to making better decisions, that is, trading honest Joe for the world. Pip, then, is more a confused person than a bad person.
THE GENERAL SOURCE OF PIP’S PROBLEMS: A DEARTH OF WISDOM

People are not born with innate wisdom and Pip is no exception. In fact, a lack of wisdom is Pip’s undoing. No one at birth is prepared for the attacks the world wages upon his or her being. Youth and rural life are the sources of Pip’s dearth of wisdom. The challenges of urban living, I believe, afford one wisdom or, at least, practical wisdom more readily than rural life. Joe and Biddy’s wisdom, in contrast, does not involve the practical wisdom of the urbanite. Joe and Biddy, however, have learned love in their hearts for their fellow humans in addition to a discerning and commonsense awareness of right and wrong. In any case, every person begins equally unwise and, if they’re led to wisdom, will find it in varying degrees. Wisdom generally is acquired through the process of learning from successive failures. That is why the more intensive challenges of urban living afford one a greater likelihood of acquiring wisdom more quickly than rural living. The more wisdom one has, the more easily is more wisdom acquired; therefore, young persons lack the inertia to acquire wisdom quickly or easily. Pip, like any rube, is, until his first Satis House experience, blissfully unaware of the terrible “thing” he is in the eyes of the world. As a rural bumpkin, Pip does not learn wisdom particularly quickly, and, yet, wisdom is precisely what he and all humans need to find their place in life. Luckily for Pip, he has a good heart (is imbued with original virtue), which like charisma to its bearer carries Pip through otherwise difficult experiences. But having a good heart is not enough because the world will chip away at one’s virtue as one becomes an adult with adult desires, such as wealth, power, prestige, and sex confused with romance.
Wisdom, in the specific form of discernment, could have directed Pip to an alternative solution in the case of aiding Magwitch, whether it be turning in Magwitch to the authorities, appealing to a church for alms for the convict, conferring privately with Joe, etc., but, of course, at the age of encountering Magwitch on the marshes, Pip is an unwitting and innocent child. The law demands that Pip, if he were old enough to know “better,” turn Magwitch into the authorities; but another law, that of the compassionate heart, demands mercy to all suffering beings. Pip knows this mercy due to all persons as an innate part of his original virtue. Through his compromise with the world, however, Pip unlearns virtue and learns the dubious ways of making distinctions between persons based upon status. Pip’s revulsion at Magwitch, upon the latter’s return to England, demonstrates the new, worldly learning he has acquired.

Wisdom comes into play when individuals wrestle with or even succumb to the contradictory notions of right and wrong presented by the world which stand in opposition to any of several doctrines of higher morality. Pip’s mission, then, like all humans, is to acquire the wisdom needed to see through the deceptive wilderness of mirrors proffered by the world and then to rise above that deception. If worldly views were not so seductive and so slickly presented, moral choices would be easy to make.

Pip is not prepared for the wiles of the world and therefore easily succumbs to the persuasive power of Estella’s physical beauty, to her worldly estimation of himself (remember: she is wealthy; hence “worldly”) as “coarse and common,” and the consequent understanding on Pip’s part that he must woo
Estella to be a happy man, and that he must be wealthy and refined to be worthy of wooing her. Succumbing to Estella’s insulting estimation of himself because he is enamored by her beauty, as well as awed by the albeit dilapidated wealth of Satis House, accepting the erroneous belief that he must win Estella to be happy, and finally believing that only wealth and refinement make a young man worthy of wooing such a physically beautiful young lady are the sum total of most of Pip’s lack of wisdom. As the narrative develops, because Pip greatly lacks wisdom and because moral choices are difficult to make in the world, he compromises or sublimates his virtue for the sake of ambitions he believes will make him happy.

In connection with the importance of wisdom, George Orwell says “Roughly speaking, [Dickens’s] morality is the Christian morality” (458) and that, as Walder quotes of Angus Wilson, “[Dickens] thought of himself as centrally a Christian” (1). One may safely assume that Dickens’s sort of virtue is the Christian variant of virtue. Because of this fact, when we are speaking of wisdom in conjunction with Dickens, the seminal work on wisdom, The Book of Proverbs, proves relevant and indispensable in understanding the term. Among the many assertions about wisdom in Proverbs are the two following: one, “Wisdom is the principal thing” (4:7a); and, two, “With all thy getting get understanding” (4:7b). Pip begins to understand wisdom as “the principal thing” and that natural human acquisitiveness should be reoriented around getting understanding, that getting wisdom is more valuable than getting wealth only towards novel’s end when a
succession of realizations sparks the process of the acquisition of wisdom within him.

The wisdom that Pip lacks amounts to the following: all persons are equal regardless of their “position” in a class-structured social hierarchy; being a poor tradesman (in Pip’s case, a blacksmith) in a rural town offers a person sufficient dignity to be happy; people that pretend to be one’s friends only if you impress them with status—especially wealth, manners, and affection—really aren’t one’s friends at all; an average looking virtuous, loving, and wise woman is better than an attractive but less noble woman.

Specific Circumstances of Pip’s Unhappiness which Cause Him to Seek an “Out” of His Existence

By novel’s end, Pip has acquired a modicum of wisdom, though the journey has been circuitous. Before acquiring wisdom, however, Pip, failing fully to distinguish between Joe and Biddy, on the one hand, and the selfish persons, most notably Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook, on the other, is motivated by specific, significant circumstances which serve as his motivation to seek an “out” of his unhappy existence. Pip understands, at least retrospectively, that his superiors are poor role models, greatly because of their greed. Pip says “He [Pumblechook] and my sister would pair off in such nonsensical speculations about Miss Havisham, and about what she would do with me and for me” (Dickens, Great Expectations 99). In reality, Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe seek their own personal gain through Pip’s association with Miss Havisham. In
Chapter Thirteen of the novel and just after Pip and Joe have returned from their visit to Miss Havisham’s, Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook greedily revel in the “five-and-twenty pound” Miss Havisham has bestowed upon the Gargery family (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 106). Because Pip is allowed no enjoyment from this money, Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe’s greedy “nonsensical speculations” only demonstrate their selfishness, and, by extension, the selfishness of the entire cabal of adults who surround Pip in his youth: the paragons of selfishness Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe, as well as accessory selfish persons of the Hubbles and the Wopsles. Because Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe do not concern themselves with helping Pip, but rather use Pip’s association with Miss Havisham to secure monetary advantage for themselves, I call them “the selfish persons.” The mistreatment of being used by adults who pretend to be virtuous goads Pip to seek an “out” of his existence, to impel him to snobdom. The selfishness jades Pip, whereas, if he had had sufficient wisdom, he would have associated the cabal’s selfishness with the worldliness antithetical to virtue and would have guarded his mind from the unhealthy thoughts of these persons.

Early in the novel, Pip the narrator retrospectively ruminates that he had a “desire to be wiser,” and though Pip’s motivations are genuine, he confuses the path to that goal and the object it represents (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 111). Pip operates under the misunderstanding that being wiser means being refined or genteel until the revelation of Magwitch as his true benefactor, as well as other epiphanies, affect the acquisition of true wisdom in him. The path to wisdom is not comprised, as Pip believes until the reappearance
of Magwitch, of the higher status that allures most humans. The possession of wealth does not assume the possession of wisdom, yet many persons in any era of time falsely assume that wealthy persons are smart or wise, if they even make a distinction between the two qualities. Pip’s concern with status is an indication that he is becoming class-conscious, which demonstrates that his “great expectations” amount to worldlier ambitions that do not necessarily equate with virtue. If Pip had really meant that he intended to acquire wisdom, the narrative would have revealed it in his ruminations prior to coming into his “great expectations,” which it does not. Pip’s concern with wisdom amounts to a proclivity for learnedness more as a matter of “polish” or affectation than something vitally important to his life and happiness. In the end, however, Pip does learn from his failures and acquires true wisdom, albeit inadvertently, but only after moving painfully through the growth process of aspiring to, experiencing, and finally abandoning his worldly ambitions.

Pip learns to want status because of the influence of the selfish persons who surround him (status being comprised of wealth, power, and prestige). Pursuing higher status for itself and not for truly higher moral aims erodes a person’s virtue. The status and other lies with which the world tempts all persons as a putative condition of better living is a chimera sold to persons such as Pip beginning at a young age before one can understand the deceptive power of riches, the false allure of power itself, and a perverse glorification of sex. This means that unwise persons marry attractive mates because they mistakenly believe that having a more attractive mate will bring greater happiness. The
association of “good looks” and happiness is tied to sexual desire. Few persons find the wisdom to see wealth, power, prestige, and sex in their correct perspective. Poor Pip, an unsuspecting youth, is ambushed by the world, an attack that few youths are equipped to withstand. The attack is mounted primarily by the novel’s emissaries of the world: Mrs. Joe, Pumblechook, the Hubbles, the Wopsles, Estella, and Miss Havisham. Once Pip accepts Estella’s evaluation of him as “coarse and common, he is convinced he must get “out” of his current life and seek status as a means to happiness.

Another reason motivating Pip’s desire for a new life, or an “out,” is his inner confusion or conflict, especially with regard to his actions relating to Magwitch. Pip the narrator confesses concerning his helping Magwitch “I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid doing what I knew to be wrong” (Dickens, Great Expectations 42). Pip feels cowardly for weakening under Magwitch’s threat—“You fail [to bring the file and vittles] … and your heart and liver shall be tore out, roasted, and ate”—and for consequently providing Magwitch with the pork pie (Dickens, Great Expectations 6). But Pip feels guilty perhaps for not having turned Magwitch into the authorities. Pip narrates: “Conscience is a dreadful thing when it accuses man or boy … it is (as I can testify) a great punishment” (Dickens, Great Expectations 13). The “cowardly” comes into Pip’s mind as conscience which the world imposes upon undiscerning Pip. Really, though, Pip does not feel cowardly, he feels guilty because he speaks also of the “guilty knowledge” he had of stealing
food from Mrs. Joe to help Magwitch and also of this act as his “wicked secret” (Dickens, Great Expectations 13, 24).

The conflict arises because Pip knows what he should feel, that is, according to the world—namely, that Magwitch ought not to be fed and ought to be apprehended—and because Pip the sentient, kindhearted youth enacts his charity, despite what he “should” feel, because his original virtue directs him to obey a higher moral law that demands that kindness be showed to all of God’s creatures and that suffering (in this case, starvation) ought to be alleviated. We know what Pip “should” feel, that is, according to the way of seeing things consistent with the worldly majority of persons, because the worldly-adherent Mrs. Joe, upon Pip’s query, condemns convicts without trial by asserting that they are put in prison ships “because they murder, and because they rob, and forge, and do all sorts of bad; and they always begin by asking questions” (Dickens, Great Expectations 15). Pip’s conscience is pricked by Mrs. Joe’s comment because he has robbed her for a convict and he has asked questions which Mrs. Joe has prefaced with the warning “Ask no questions, and you’ll be told no lies” (Dickens, Great Expectations 14). The reader knows that in the case of Magwitch, he was brought up to be “a warmint” and that Compeyson had a significant role in Magwitch’s criminality. Magwitch conveys to Pip “that that man [Compeyson] got [him] into such nets as made [him] his black slave. I was always in debt to him, always under his thumb, always a-working, always a-getting into danger” (Dickens, Great Expectations 334, 355). In addition, seemingly through economic circumstances no fault of his own Magwitch “got the
name of being hardened.” For these reasons and because upon his return to England Magwitch demonstrates his reform by having become a legitimate, successful businessman in Australia, the reader knows that Mrs. Joe’s characterization of the convict, in a roundabout way, is a lie, too (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 351).

The conflict arises in youthful Pip as an early awareness of the sometime conflict between law and virtue, which is to say that not all laws are just. Many laws merely enforce disparity in wealth or its distribution. A rationalizing rhetoric accompanies the world at any time, such that appearances become more powerful than unseen realities. Persons accept appearances, conveniently denoted by lingual labels, as reality, either because they lack the insight to discern the invisible qualities of persons or because they’re too afraid or lazy to attain to such a level of discernment. A case in point occurs when the topic of escaped convicts is broached, and the tag name, “convict,” is predictably enough for the world adherents Mrs. Joe, Pumblechook, et al. to deduce from paradigmatic, societal views just what sort of reprehensible persons Magwitch or Compeyson must be, without ever knowing either man. *Paradigm*, as discussed in the introductory chapter to this thesis, refers both to the way that the societal puppet-masters shape the way that reality is interpreted, most especially as a justification of the unfair disparity in the distribution of societal wealth and resources. *Paradigm* may loosely be equated with the view of things known as “the world.”
The selfish persons’ views on Magwitch and Compeyson deduced from paradigmatic, societal views in general turn out to be half-right: Compeyson is a charlatan, but because he enjoys the identity of an educated gentleman he is never suspected by the likes of Miss Havisham (before her jilting by Compeyson) of moral depravity. Because Magwitch by novel’s end demonstrates his inner nobility, we know additionally that Compeyson is, in fact, the lesser man because on the marshes Magwitch, as a matter of foreshadowing, indicates “There’s a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am an angel” (Dickens, Great Expectations 6). The “young man hid with me” is, of course, Compeyson. The “upside downness” in Magwitch and Compeyson’s reputations, versus their actual characters, points to the unreliability of associating the smartness or wisdom discussed earlier with status. Magwitch early in the novel is a destitute convict. Compeyson, the charlatan, is an educated “gentleman.”

The problem is that of the “upside-downness” of worldly lies which provide the unthinking common person with convenient but inaccurate and unjust stereotypes of persons that are based upon class. The enactment of this injustice punishes poor or criminal persons via means of labels, which are often unfairly appended without regard for a person’s actual character, nature, or virtue. The novel’s end proves the “upside-downness” of society’s quick and unfair labeling process as Magwitch turns out to be a kind and noble man, and the white-collar criminal Compeyson a rapscallion. Judging by all-too-easily construed appearances, though, Magwitch is the meaner man.
The unfair game of judging by appearances and labels confuses simple, youthful Pip and creates inner-conflict. First, Pip’s originally virtuous kindheartedness compels him to help Magwitch, but then the worldly denunciatory designation, “convict,” intervenes to create within him guilt about breaking the law by stealing the pork pie for Magwitch. Then Joe’s sympathetic words to the convict, “We don’t know what you have done, but we wouldn’t have you starved to death for it … Would us, Pip” only confuses Pip even more (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 41). The dialectic of higher virtue, on the one hand, and unfair worldly “virtue” (that is, the “dictates of reason, religion, and morality”) on the other, functions like a pair of scissors cutting Pip’s heart and mind. Pip escapes the maelstrom only years later after he has acquired the wisdom to discern the difference between false, worldly wisdom and the true sort of wisdom that goes hand in hand with virtue.

However, before Pip acquires substantial wisdom, the anguish caused by the contradictory forces only forces him to seek an “out.” The “out” Pip chooses, that is, worldly ambition and Estella’s beauty, is a false out, meaning that money and physical beauty cannot reconcile the contradictions of the world and of higher morality raging within him. Again, Pip’s conflict centers around understanding why he naturally felt compelled to help Magwitch, why helping “such a man” is bad (in all the selfish persons’ eyes, or the eyes of the world), and how Magwitch is bad when Magwitch kindly and deliberately “covers” for Pip’s theft of stolen food for Magwitch, prestidigitating: “I took some wittles … from the blacksmith’s” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 40-41). Since Pip does not
understand that some things in the world are turned upside-down by worldly rhetoric, he is certainly and thoroughly confused.

Undue browbeating also accompanies the selfish mistreatment Pip suffers at the hands of the selfish persons, his self-assessed moral “betters.” The Christmas dinner gathering best exemplifies the sort of browbeating Pip endures throughout his youth, as well as the hypocritical selfishness of those who assert their moral superiority by way of tone or spirit, inference, condescension, etc. On the surface, the discussion appears to center around an appropriate topic of childhood instruction, that is, the one component of wisdom known as gratitude. Mrs. Joe and Uncle Pumblechook take the helm at what amounts to a Christmas dinner Inquisition. Pip is not allowed to speak at the meal. Uncle Pumblechook greets Pip with an insult, referring to him as “sixpen-north of halfpence,” in effect belittling Pip for his failure to grasp Pumblechook’s surprise challenges in arithmetic (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 25). Once all are assembled, the adults suspiciously “point the conversation” at Pip (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 26). Pip, like a scapegoat, is humiliated, disparaged, and vilified by all of the selfish, dinner-attending adults. Mrs. Hubble, for examples, asks pointedly, “Why is that the young are never grateful” and Mr. Hubble provides the answer by saying “Naterally wicious” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 26)? Yet, contrary to Mrs. Hubble’s insinuating query, Pip is, as I have already demonstrated, an originally virtuous being. The mental drubbing Pip endures proves not only how selfish, but also how unenlightened, morally-confused, comfortable, hypocritical, self-satisfied and self-righteous the attending adults are. Pip’s “instruction” is a cover
for a perverse sort of browbeating involving morally (and hence guilt)-laden injunctions about gratitude, while the Inquisitors themselves exhibit little gratitude throughout the whole novel.

Pip’s reaction to the Inquisition demonstrates further Pip’s original virtue: Pip remains silent and meek. But with the browbeating he undergoes, Pip’s original virtue is being slowly eroded by the world or adherents of worldly notions. Pip feels the malice more than he understands it. He comes away from the symbolic experience knowing that he is somehow deficient and should feel guilty about his deficiency when, really, he is the victim of the worldly objectives of the selfish persons. The objectives include, as stated, Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe’s aim of reaping monetary benefit from Pip association with Miss Havisham, as well as the insecure need to reaffirm their identities as enlightened and/or morally better. With the instance of Pumblechook, for example, Pip comes to understand Pumblechook’s “true colors” by novel’s end as “a spectacle of imbecility only to be equaled by himself” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 99). Pip denigrates the man alternatively as “That ass, Pumblechook” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 99), “That abject hypocrite” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 106), and “Windy donkey as he was” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 485). In addition to Pumblechook’s other bad qualities, he also is a shameless artificer. Once Pip comes into his “great expectations,” for instance, Pumblechook pretends to be the founder of Pip’s fortunes and Pip’s great (and obsequious) friend. Fair-weather “friend” Pumblechook even dares, after Pip’s loss of fortune at novel’s end, to insult Pip with the words “What else could be expected!” (Dickens, *Great
Expectations 483). Pumblechook conveniently represents in one personality much of what is wrong with adherents to worldly beliefs: a tendency toward unabashed self-aggrandizement, moral failure and inconsistency, and hypocrisy and outright lies; and though perhaps not of the same degree, Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook are of the same kind. Mrs. Joe, for instance, demonstrates her worldly way of condemning persons, as has been seen in the case of convicts and/or Magwitch, by appealing to convenient but inaccurate labels without knowing anyone personally. The problem is that such convenient labeling perverts justice because, as the novel later demonstrates, Magwitch, despite his upbringing and unfair social influences, is a kind and noble man.

The point in demonstrating Pip’s browbeating, the injustice of the Christmas dinner Inquisition, and the selfish persons’—especially Pumblechook’s—exceptionally poor character is to explain why Pip feels “It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home,” and why Pip says, “Home had never been a very pleasant place to me” (Dickens, Great Expectations 109). Pip sees the ugliness of greed, selfishness, and uncaring in the persons around him and, yet, seeks a new life centered around money but which he believes can be more honorable than Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook’s way of self-seeking. Money, though, never makes even an honorable snob happy. Another mistake Pip makes is to associate his mistreatment in a poor “social environment” with the environment or locale of “home” or the lowly world of the forge. “Home” becomes Pip’s enemy when Estella implies by calling Pip “coarse and common” that Pip’s existence in general is lowly, unworthy, or undignified. Estella’s estimation
implies that in addition to the message implicit in Pip’s browbeating by the selfish persons, that Pip is insufficient, that he must change to be an acceptable person in society. Estella’s impudent insults initiate within Pip’s consciousness an awareness of socioeconomic status. Once Pip fastens upon that awareness, he believes he must leave his locale, become a wealthy gentleman, and woo beautiful Estella all as minimum requirements of happiness. Given Pip’s experiences, he cannot be expected to feel any different, especially since he lacks the wisdom, as most youths do, to see beyond the illusion of “high urban living” (involving wealth, cosmopolitan affectation, and the attractive bride) as a situation that will bring him contentment. Living in London, “enjoying” (actually suffering) wealth, and enduring the misery associated with being in Estella’s proximity all bring Pip decided unhappiness.

Once Estella denounces Pip effectively as an undesirable, he is far along in accepting worldly views of life that will never bring him happiness. The real problem Pip does not understand until novel’s end, though, is that happiness is more a matter of finding community and love in people or personalities and not a matter of finding a better place or being prosperous. Pip learns this most acutely when his money runs out and he returns to his hometown. Pumblechook’s “What else could be expected!” demonstrates that with false friends when the money runs out, the selfish persons’ dubious wisdom and false admiration runs out, too (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 483).

Pip does have in life, as a counterpoint to Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook, wonderful, loving, and faithful Joe, and, to a lesser extent, Biddy. However,
though Joe is wise in heart, he is an inadequate mentor because of his lack of assertiveness, especially in his failure to stand up to Mrs. Joe, Pumblechook, and the other selfish persons. For instance, at the Christmas dinner, Joe cowers before Mrs. Joe and never chides her for her shrewish temper, nor Pumblechook for his domineering arrogance. Pip’s early estimations of Joe, whom Pip “treated as a larger species of child, and as no more than my equal” garner some merit (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 9). Pip the narrator remarks, “Joe’s station and influence were something feebler (if possible) when there was company than when there was none” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 26). The sheer number of selfish persons in Pip’s life amounts to a tyranny of the majority which Joe cannot overcome because he cowers and defers to Mrs. Joe, because he is not assertive.

If only Joe had been more interpersonally strong, Pip’s life may have been much different and much less painful. But the failure is also a matter of Pip failing to respect what Joe does represent. For instance, Pip does with time seemingly begin to respect Joe, expressing, for example, his “fear of losing Joe’s confidence” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 42). Shortly later, Pip finds himself “looking up to Joe in [his] heart” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 51), but it seems a shallow sort of appreciation. For instance, when Pip recognizes in one of Joe’s prognostications, “There was some hope in this piece of wisdom” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 73), a tone of doubt or surprise is communicated in Pip’s rumination. Though Pip recognizes something of value in Joe, he utterly and disastrously, as the plot demonstrates, fails to comprehend the great wealth of
Joe’s wisdom and to heed it. The case with Biddy is analogous. Pip narrates, again in retrospect: “I was clear that Biddy was immeasurably better than Estella, and that the plain honest working life to which I was born had nothing in it to be ashamed of, but offered me sufficient means of self-respect and happiness” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 136). Pip recognizes something aboveboard in Biddy, but fails to appreciate, value, or emulate it. For example, though Pip acknowledges “I began to think her [Biddy] rather an extraordinary girl” and, after a “lunatic confession” to Biddy about his aspirations, that “Biddy was the wisest of girls,” Pip even chides himself, “I said to myself, 'Pip, what a fool you are!’” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 129, 133, 134). Perhaps, it is more correctly said that even though Pip has an iota of wisdom, he fails to heed it, at least in his youth. Pip does acquire wisdom as he ages. This is partly the outcome of reflecting upon his experiences with (imperfect) intellectual integrity. More so, however, Pip acquires wisdom through a series of realizations or epiphanies, most notably the revelation of Magwitch as his actual benefactor, which challenge and overturn the basic assumptions about life he has acquired while adhering to a worldly perception of life. After Pip has gained the wisdom acquired through his the worldly detour, including the revelations, Pip is able to narrate retrospectively about and with wisdom.

**Pip’s Capitulation to the Allures of the World**

The specific circumstances of Pip’s unhappiness which cause him to seek an “out” of his existence prepare the soil in which the seeds of his worldly
desires grow. Again, the specific circumstances include: Pip’ being surrounded and used by selfish persons; Pip’s misunderstanding about what true wisdom is; Pip’s learning to want status because of the influence of the selfish persons who surround him; Pip’s inner-conflict or confusion; and, finally, the undue browbeating that accompanies the selfish persons’ mistreatment of Pip.

Estella’s estimation of Pip upon his first visit Satis House only nourish that desire. Said another way, Estella’s insulting remarks to Pip “push him over the edge” by making him succumb wholesale to the false vision of “the good life” which the world offers. After being derided by Estella, Pip understands, “I was a common laboring-boy; that my hands were coarse; that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling jacks knaves; that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night; and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 67). Pip, a defenseless rube, who is “humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 64), can only be crushed in the face of such power and conclude that Estella must be correct because Estella’s deceptive beauty represents to him the perfect visage of the world he wishes to become a part of, that is, something better, something he desires, something worthy of pursuit, in certain contrast to his quintessentially termagant caretaker, Mrs. Joe. Pip is readily persuaded by Estella’s beauty. Accepting her denigrating estimation of himself is a demeaning and necessary term in the “contract” which offers him, he believes, a better life.
Pip is wholly unprepared for Estella’s estimation of himself which, as Walter Allen says in his introduction to the Perennial Classic edition of *Great Expectations*, says “robs him [Pip] of his innocence” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* xiii). Because of Pip’s misunderstanding of the source of his unhappiness, and because of the low self-esteem he suffers due to the browbeating, selfish adults, Pip is perfectly prepared to succumb to Estella’s low and insulting estimation of himself and also ultimately to succumb to worldly views about life. Again, those views can be conveniently summarized by the notion of *status*, meaning that wealth, power, and prestige, plus, in Pip’s case, the winning of a physically beautiful young lady who has contempt for him will make him happy. What Pip has done is to exchange the world’s view of himself, as represented and expressed by the seductive Estella and the wealth of Satis House, for the promise Estella’s beauty represents.

G. Robert Stange in “Pip’s Moral Journey,” a chapter in editor Lawrence Kappel’s book, *Readings on Great Expectations*, concisely summarizes the primary effect of Pip’s transaction with the world and Estella’s beauty in the following manner: “Pip becomes morally confused” (Stange 113). Pip’s retrospective narration about his traumatic Satis House experience conveys the degree of his confusion:

How much of my ungracious condition of mind may have been my own fault, how much Miss Havisham’s, how much my sister’s, is now of no moment to me or to any one. The change was made in me; the thing was done. Well or ill done, excusably or inexcusably, it was done. (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 109)
In other words, Pip has capitulated to the world. With the force of the circumstances of unhappiness acting upon him to seek an “out” in his life, Pip makes a psychological trade of placing his heart in the promise of becoming a London gentleman—because that is to what his capitulation logically leads—over what could pan out to be a humble and a happy life at the forge. Because the confusion is overwhelming, Pip the older narrator confesses his helplessness in the experience: “What,” he says, “could I become with these surroundings [Satis House]? How could my character fail to be influenced by them” (Dickens, Great Expectations 98)? The confused, insecure, and unwise Pip who has suffered what I have termed the specific circumstances of his unhappiness which cause him to seek an “out” of his existence is simply not strong enough to withstand the assault of wealth and beauty’s estimation of himself. Pip cannot escape the conviction that Estella must be right and that he must aspire to gentility to be a worthy and happy man, and that he must pursue the symbol of this better life—Estella—with all that he can muster.

Pip’s misperceptions results from a dearth of wisdom. Because he lacks wisdom, Pip thus gives his heart to Estella’s beauty, but must in return “take” from Estella the misevaluation of him that she offers, associated with the distant hope (that is, before Pip’s dubiously miraculous realization of his “great expectations”) that he might become a gentleman worthy of her. Pip’s dramatic behavior of pulling his hair out while bawling outside the dilapidated mansion demonstrate that he has accepted Estella’s evaluation of him and indicate the great degree of internal pain caused by the pernicious, external worldly forces
acting upon his inner self. Pip explains in narration how the capitulation was accomplished (or forced): “Truly it was impossible to dissociate her presence [Estella] from all those wretched hankerings after money and gentility that had disturbed my boyhood—from all those ill-regulated aspirations that had first made me ashamed of home and Joe” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 240). First, Pip, a growing young man, is enchanted by Estella's beauty and is also psychologically hooked by her “infectious” contempt of him (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 62). Second, he is overwhelmed by the absurd world of the reclusive Miss Havisham, as he is awed by her wealth and authoritarian personality.

With decided understatement, Pip remarks: “That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 74). Pip comes away from the day at the mansion, “more than ever dissatisfied with my home and with my trade and with everything” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 119). His reasoning having been influenced by his growing prurient instincts, Pip is cheated into believing that the new world of Satis House—with its wealth, farce, and, most especially, Estella’s beauty—represents, as Pip says, “a rich attractive mystery, of which I [Pip] was the hero. Estella was the inspiration of it, and the heart of it, of course” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 236).

Pip’s capitulation is understandable. In addition to the specific circumstances which cause Pip to seek his “out,” perhaps man’s greatest motivation—the pursuit of the female—forms in Pip the following devotion to Estella: “I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be” (Dickens,
Great Expectations 237). The quote calls to mind Pip’s having been born “in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality” (Dickens, Great Expectations 24). Here, however, correct standards become muddled. Given Pip’s admission of his fatal attraction to Estella, it must be said, Pip does not only capitulate to worldly views, he also capitulates to Estella, as an emissary of that ideology.

Pip is banking big on the promise of Estella’s beauty, especially in spite of her contempt of him. It is a large gamble, and one only by which Pip painfully acquires wisdom. Pip later narrates about this poor choice, thus: “All other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self-swindlers, and with … pretences did I cheat myself” (Dickens, Great Expectations 230). The “cheating” means that Pip lacks the wisdom to defend a compromise of his heart, which means in effect the sublimation of his virtue. The “cheating” also means that Pip is partially cognizant of his gamble of sublimating his virtue for worldly ambitions. Pip laments in retrospect “If I could have … been but half as fond of the forge as I was when I was little, I know it would have been much better for me” (Dickens, Great Expectations 131).

Faced with the Satis House realizations, Pip is at a crossroads: he must either accept worldly views to win the fair damsel and also deny or abandon the “poor man’s ideology” as represented by Joe, or vice versa. Considering the specific circumstances of Pip’s unhappiness, as well as Pip’s very limited, naïve experience of the world, the reader can sympathize with Pip’s capitulation. For example, Pip only commits his worst misdeed of neglecting Joe because the
of a better life he opts into truly seems better to him. After Pip comes into his “great expectations” and painfully learns that what seemed better—wealth, refinement, big city living in London, and pursuing Estella—was actually not better but worse because Pip is decidedly unhappier with his worldly pursuits even than he was in the company of the selfish persons. At least in Pip’s hometown, he had had the true community and consolation of genuine persons such as Joe and Biddy. But neglecting Joe and Biddy is an unwritten term in Pip’s opting into a worldly view of life because the world views Joe and Biddy, just as it had once viewed Pip before coming into his “great expectations,” as “coarse and common.” Here, the worldly activity of heeding class distinctions makes Joe and Biddy unworthy of the association of a person of higher status such as the later Pip. Neglecting Joe and Biddy becomes an implicit term in Pip’s agreement to pursue the world, Estella, wealth, gentility. Pip understands this for many reasons, one example being Pip’s observation upon his visit with Joe to Miss Havisham’s that Estella’s “eyes laughed mischievously” at Joe (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 103).

Pip does not fully understand the implications of his capitulation. In his own naïve way, he has only chosen an attractive potential mate and better material circumstances, both of which a majority of persons would advise him as smart choices. Pip only semi-consciously knows he must accept the world’s misperceptions in order to woo Estella, and this knowledge spawns his new ambitions to become an educated gentleman worthy of wooing her. Thus begins Pip’s sublimation of his virtue, his conveyance down the road to snobdom, and,
as he understands more the implications of his choices and actions, self-denial about them. The self-denial causes Pip pain which stands in contrast to the false promises of the world. In contrast to the vision of the world Pip is gambling on to bring him satisfaction, the lesson to the reader is that happiness is found in love, humility, wisdom, and community, and that the possession of wealth, the condition of being honored with prestige, or living in different locales—where the “grass is always greener”—are illusory sources of happiness. Pip does learn from his venturing out and failing. But it’s possible that he could have remained at the forge and acquired humility and wisdom, just as Joe has.

As it happens in the plot, fate operates as a Deus ex Machina when Jaggers, in one sense very unfortunately for Pip, announces Pip’s “great expectations.” Most immediately for Pip this is not the great boon it may seem because it changes his relation to society in relation to status. On one hand, because he now has money, Pip no longer feels at home among poor and common Joe and Biddy. On the other hand, though, because Pip has the wealth associated with gentility he becomes a common country boy who does not fit in with or feel at home with persons of refinement. Pip’s “great expectations” alienate him from both poor, rural life and the London upper-class.

Because of Pip’s hope to seek an “out” and because of his hope to acquire Estella, the announcement of Pip’s “great expectations” only further deludes the unwise Pip by convincing him that his new identity as a worldly person is a matter of fate. As Edmund Wilson indicates in The Wound and the Bow, after Pip’s turn of fortune, “He straightway turns into a mean little snob”
What has been ingrained in Pip in his youth to make distinctions between “good people” and “bad people,” between “worthy persons” and “unworthy persons” now blooms into an entire weltanschauung in which the poor and the criminal are “lesser” and the wealthy, beautiful, or educated are “more.” Pip has, at least in part, chosen his fate.

Pip, however, never fully makes the transition, that is, his virtue remains latently intact. In other words, Pip does not completely “sell out to the world” because he retains the original virtue with which either he is born or that all youths retain as relative innocence. Yet, to accomplish the feat of sublimation while pursuing the road to snobdom, Pip must straddle both worlds. He must attempt to remain humble, plain, and virtuous and a snob. The conflict of this “straddling” brings conflict and remorse into Pip’s heart. For instance, after Pip’s rise to gentility (that is, his coming into “great expectations”), he expresses remorse concerning Joe in the following manner: “Joe had brought tears into my eyes; they had soon dried—God forgive me! soon dried” (Dickens, Great Expectations 249). Pip’s remorse indicates that his virtue, though now sublimated or latent, is in some way intact. For example, Pip confesses his awareness of his treatment of Joe, for instance, narrating, “I lived in a chronic state of uneasiness respecting my behavior to Joe” (Dickens, Great Expectations 277). It seems that Pip has crossed some metaphysical line of moral conduct, most strikingly because he does little to make amends for his neglect of Joe, except, rather pathetically, in order to alleviate his own guilt, to send Joe “a penitential codfish and barrel of oysters” (Dickens, Great Expectations 252).
Until Pip acquires the wisdom to see that none of his ambitions can make him happy (none of them ever do), he suffers, instead of the anguish of desiring the “out” of his childhood, the “labyrinth” of the realm of worldly living which cannot even deliver him a fair damsel in whose company he is always miserable. Through the acquisition of wisdom, Pip is able to navigate his way out of his labyrinth. Part of the learning process for Pip is to play mental games with he and Herbert that justify their prodigal spending and to brood about Estella who openly admits she to Pip “You must know that I have no heart” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 242). Pip’s use of the term in narration, “labyrinth,” indicates his feelings of stifling confinement and despair within the new view of the world he has accepted. Wealth and pursuing the love of Estella which is not reciprocating only cause Pip a vacuous unhappiness. All the while, he is acutely aware that he belongs back at the forge living a humble but—he does not know it—a fulfilled life.

In the meanwhile, confused Pip rebuffs Joe and Biddy and feels guilty, confused, and conflicted about it all. Said another way, Pip’s feels the effects of the sublimation of his virtue and it causes profound unhappiness. Pip tries hard to be a worldly person, but it’s just not in his heart because he is blessed with a sublimated but enduring virtue. Thus it can be seen that even prior to Magwitch’s return, Pip, though in some way a snob, is not a through-and-through snob, and, more importantly, even as a snob, he is on his way, perhaps this time by actual fate, to wisdom and living virtuously.
Magwitch’s reappearance ends Pip “expectations.” But the cardinal virtues—for Pip, at least—of Magwitch’s return to England and the consequent revelation of him as Pip’s actual benefactor are that they dispel Pip’s illusions and fully turn him to true knowledge or wisdom. Pip’s learning process begins with Magwitch’s initial declaration that he is the source of Pip’s great expectations which to the now snobbish Pip amounts to a slap in the face, an, as it were, indignity. Christopher Ricks in his essay, “Great Expectations,” contained within John J. Gross and Gabriel Pearson’s book, *Dickens and the Twentieth-Century*, summarizes Pip’s early path in life and his eventual turnaround, thus: “A boy is corrupted by great expectations into becoming an ungrateful snob … [he] …is eventually saved by his love for the convict who had been his unknown patron” (199). Stange corroborates this view, adding, “The last stage of Pip’s progression is reached when he learns to love the criminal [Magwitch]” (Stange 118).

Pip, in retrospect, cannot fail to recognize the revelation of Magwitch as his benefactor as “the turning point of [his] life” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 306). However, the transformation of Pip from “ungrateful snob” to a mature version of the kind boy who had aided Magwitch on the marshes takes some time, and entails a painful process, again of inner-conflict resolution, for Pip. First, Magwitch has jeopardized his life by returning to England just to inform Pip of the joyous news that he has made Pip the gentleman that Pip has become.
Magwitch says to Pip “I was sent for life. It’s death to come back [to England]” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 329). A teary-eyed Magwitch declares in honor of Pip’s childhood good deed of providing file and vittles: “You acted nobly, my boy. Noble Pip! And I never forgot it!” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 323). Magwitch touches Pip’s heart with his admission: “I lived rough, that you might live smooth; I worked hard that you should be above work” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 326).

After Magwitch has lavished praise upon Pip, the young snob “could not bring [him]self to bear the sight of him” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 334). Pip is frankly repulsed by the convict, confessing his immediate feelings about Magwitch “The abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him could not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 326). Pip finds that he “could not bring [him]self to bear the sight” of Magwitch (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 334). Pip observes of Magwitch while the latter was eating: “all his actions were uncouth, noisy, and greedy” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 335). Pip is “repelled from [Magwitch] by an insurmountable aversion” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 335). Pip experiences “complete discomfiture” in Magwitch’s presence (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 359). Pip observes that “there was convict in every grain of the man” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 342).

“Convict” ties back to the poor estimation the selfish persons at the Christmas dinner make of the escaped convicts whom they have not met. Yet, the man whom Pip had known as “convict” has become a reformed and wealthy
businessman abroad. Magwitch informs Pip “I’ve done wonderful well” as a “sheep-farmer, stock-breeder, and other trades” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 324). Magwitch’s reform demonstrates that, just as Pip becomes reformed through Magwitch’s genuine love for him and through learning in turn to love Magwitch, Pip can also become reformed. The disparity between Pip’s kindness to Magwitch on the marshes as young boy and the mature Pip’s now discriminatory, class-based evaluation of poor persons or criminals demonstrates the degree to which Pip has succumbed to worldly views. Pip experiences this as the inner-conflict which results from his adoption of worldly views of people that are “lesser than” and his inherent, though latent, instincts about all persons being equally deserving of love, dignity, honor, etc.

Love is a teacher and, despite Pip’s inner-conflict, Magwitch’s very own “infectious” fidelity, love, and general goodness which serve as a foil to Estella’s “infectious contempt” slowly win over the stunned Pip, and it is through Magwitch’s genuine love for Pip that Pip relearns the true love for other persons he exhibited as a youth, especially to Magwitch. Pangs of conscience assist in Pip’s convalescence back into a person of feeling and disregard for Magwitch’s social status. For example, when Pip learns that Magwitch has risked his life by returning to England specifically to see him, Pip no longer sees a “wretched man” but the man who “had risked his life to come to [him]” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 329). The gravity of Magwitch’s decision to return to England just to see Pip is compelling to Pip, and helps him to understand just how incredible a person’s righteous love can be. In another instance, Pip expresses the guilt he
experiences about not regarding Magwitch with humanity when he identifies the “repugnance towards the man who had done so much for [him]” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 345).

Pip’s respect and love grow for Magwitch as Magwitch merely behaves like the decent man he is. Pip finally confesses in narration:

I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously towards me with great constancy ... I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe. (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 454)

The “clincher” is Pip’s recognition, which he relates to Herbert, that Magwitch “is attached to [him], strongly attached to [Pip]” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 347). Pip now sees the once repugnant Magwitch as on par with the moral exemplars, Joe and Biddy. A complete turnaround of Pip’s moral views has been accomplished. Pip now fully empathizes with the Magwitch who fears being apprehended. In determining to help Magwitch (now, alias “Provis”) escape England, Pip demonstrates in action his de facto renunciation of worldly views which inhumanely categorize humans as mere numbered rungs on a socioeconomic ladder. We see the reemergence of Pip’s latent virtue in the following of his narrations:

For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted wounded shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe. (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 454)

The once recalcitrant Pip now feels it his duty to help Magwitch escape, and even briefly considers staying with Magwitch after Magwitch’s
escape from England. Pip pledges, while nursing the detained ailing man, complete loyalty to Magwitch, thus: “I will never stir from your side, when I am suffered to be near you. Please God, I will be as true to you as you have been to me!” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 455). Pip’s pledge of loyalty to Magwitch sounds strikingly like a confession to a lover, an indication that Pip has transferred his “love” for Estella to the “warmint” Magwitch. The love Pip discovers is, in actuality, the wisdom of the heart, that is, applying in thought the very virtue Pip possesses in his heart to humans, as opposed to his fantastic expectations about what a life of wealth and refinement offers, but, in fact, never does nor can deliver. At Magwitch’s demise, Pip, in all humanity, prays for his benefactor: “I knew there were no better words that I could say beside his bed than ‘O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner!’” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 469). Pip, now illuminated on the nature of true wealth, that is, wealth of the heart or spirit, whispers on Magwitch’s deathbed, “O God bless him! O God bless this gentle Christian man!” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 472). As Robin Gilmour states in his essay “Examining the Role of Magwitch,” contained within editor Lawrence Kappel’s book, *Readings on Great Expectations*, the Magwitch who has been “the embodiment of everything Pip has tried to free himself from” is now the model which Pip strives to become (Gilmour 86). Pip’s conversion amounts not only to learning to love Magwitch specifically, but also learning to love “coarse and common” persons generally, and, perhaps, to love himself as well.
Pip’s growth process, or acquisition of wisdom, involves the resolution of inner-conflict and, thus, pain. The pain stems from having to renounce false beliefs and the immoral values associated with worldly views for the higher, better value of wisdom, the latter constituted of love for all persons without regard for status. The “sharpest and deepest pain of all” for Pip is his understanding that he “had deserted Joe” for worthless pursuits, and, as Pip says, that “[he] could never, never, never undo what [he] had done [to Joe]” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 330). Woefully, Pip understands, “the fault of it was all mine” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 479). Further remorse, that is, beyond Pip’s treatment of Magwitch, ensues as Pip comprehends the extent of his foolishness. Pip experiences “the perception of [his] wretchedness” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 331). He confesses in narration, “I would far rather have worked at the forge all the days of my life than I would ever have come to this!” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 348). Stange elaborates on this point in connection with Pip, thus: “He finally recognizes his selfishness as a symptom of a diseased soul” (Stange 113). Pip is now earnestly remorseful, and consequently repentant, sure signs that he has acquired wisdom. Hitting “rock bottom” by realizing the extent of his depravity affords Pip the opportunity for his rebirth, also expressed as a type of return to his childhood (relative) purity, or, as Stange says, a “moral reawakening” (Stange 113).

This awakening stands in direct opposition to the moral dimension of the world or worldly views. Pip instinctively knows he must return “home,” the latter term indicating locale but also as much of Pip’s original virtue to which he
can return. For example, despite his great anguish in relation to her, Pip still musters the virtue to love Estella, demonstrated by his impassioned plea: “O God bless you, God forgive you!” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 370). Pip also complies with Miss Havisham’s own passionate hope “Take the pencil and write under my name, 'I forgive her!'” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 410). This act of forgiveness follows the most painful of a few additional revelations which affect wisdom in Pip, also. Pip expresses the painful epiphany tersely: “Miss Havisham’s intentions towards me, all a mere dream; Estella was not designed for me” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 330). Estella, the reader knows, will now be lost to Bentley Drummle. Pip experiences another epiphany while at Jaggers’ home, when he realizes of Jagger’s servant, Molly: “I felt absolutely certain this woman was Estella’s mother” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 397). Later, after some reasoning between Pip and Herbert, Pip concludes “And the man we have in hiding down the river is Estella’s father” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 414). “The man … in hiding” is, of course, Magwitch/Provis. Though Pip draws his conclusion calmly, the realization confounds further Pip’s notions of a “higher” gentility and a “lower” class of coarse persons: Estella is actually, in terms of the world’s notion of social hierarchy, of “lower birth” than Pip. As a corollary, Pip has also earlier learned from Provis that “Compeyson is the man who professed to be Miss Havisham’s lover” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 358). Magwitch characterizes Compeyson, the man who jilted Miss Havisham, thus, “He’d no more heart than an iron file” (Dickens, *Great Expectations* 353). Compeyson appears a gentleman but his dearth of ethics nullify any claim to higher status.
Pip's epiphanies have set in motion a much-needed revolution of ideas and corresponding values in order to turn the upside-down world within Pip’s mind back to right-side up. In the process, Pip wisely sheds his concern for social class, as something which vain and rich persons use to congratulate themselves on as a matter of status, and which has, in fact, little bearing on the reality of one’s actual degree of virtue. Pip “returns home,” then, as Stange phrases it, as Pip “returns to his birthplace, abandons his false expectations, accepts the limitations of his condition, and achieves a partial synthesis of the virtue of his innocent youth and the melancholy insights of his later experience” (Stange 114). Upon Pip’s return to his childhood locale and in fairytale fashion at a teary-eyed moment for the reader, Joe exclaims, “God knows as I forgive you, if I have anything to forgive!” (Dickens, Great Expectations 489). Biddy follows up: “And God knows I do!” (Dickens, Great Expectations 489). Pip has now become a wonderful and wise adult person among other wonderful persons.

The wisdom Pip acquires from the Magwitch-as-benefactor revelation is that things are not as they seem, that life on the earth is turned upside down by false, worldly beliefs. Only Pip’s original and enduring virtue, though the latter suffers sublimation, brings Pip to the wisdom that all persons are equals, whether they are aristocrats or convicts. Pip and the reader come to understand that neither does the possession of wealth indicate virtue nor does poverty preclude it. Socially-determined circumstances beyond the individual’s control make persons wealthy and impoverished and neither material circumstance indicates virtue or a dearth of virtue.
Dickens’s novels leave the reader with many issues about which to ruminate. The benefit the twenty-first century reader gets from Dickens’s themes and concerns derive from their timeless aspect. Richard Dunn, in fact, devotes an entire chapter to this characteristic of *Oliver Twist* (his chapter is entitled, “*Oliver Twist*’s Timely Timelessness.”) It is upon the timeless lessons of *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* which bring relevance to the contemporary reader that I now wish to ponder.

Dickens’s novels address many philosophical issues, including the nature of man, the world or society, and morality. As Orwell avers, Dickens “is always preaching” about something (457). The first “sermon” concerns the nature of man which broaches the issue of original virtue versus original sin, as well as the corollary to original virtue, enduring virtue. Dickens’s opinions here, as deduced from *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*, are either paradoxical or plainly contradictory. For instance, if persons are born originally virtuous, then why is Monks (in *Oliver Twist*), “from [his] cradle … gall and bitterness to [his] own father’s heart, and in whom all evil passions, vice, and profligacy festered”
(Oliver Twist 439)? And if, as Benet’s Reader’s Encyclopedia indicates, “poverty breeds crime,” and, thus, poverty also breeds moral depravity, then how does Nancy (in Oliver Twist), who has dwelt in the world of crime for years, muster the virtue to sacrifice her own life for Oliver’s (Murphy 754)? If, as my analysis of the corrupting power of money and paradigm indicate, then how does wealthy Brownlow remain virtuous? How is it that originally virtuous Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook exhibit, in the case of Mrs. Joe, shrewishness, and, in the case of Pumblechook, outright deceit and abundant hypocrisy? Why is an originally virtuous Miss Havisham unable to endure her jilting and remain a woman who would not design to inflict punishment upon the male species through Estella? J. Hillis Miller, as quoted in Chapter One of this thesis, says that in Dickens’s literature all persons “come[s] pure and good from the hand of God” (67). If Miller is correct, then how does a world of originally virtuous persons become a world with at least a number of corrupt persons who in turn corrupt others? It seems to me that only the doctrine of original sin can explain these anomalies or contradictions. In addition, original sin absolves persons of the culpability of their sin because it makes their sin at least partially no fault of their own. There seems more hope for persons under original sin than under original virtue. Given the contradictions, it seems that Dickens employs various ideas of original virtue, enduring virtue, and original sin pell-mell. The concept of determinism explains more than original virtue because it indicates why some persons are born either just plumb good or, like Monks, plumb bad. Bumble, in a moment of likely unintended clarity, speaks sagaciously by simply saying to Mrs. Corney “we are
all weak creeturs” (even though weakness is not tolerated in any of the hapless orphans) (Oliver Twist 243).

In the meantime, one can discern the morality of a person, at least in part, from the person’s “fruits.” Purposely starving orphan children in “charitable” workhouses certainly catches the attention of virtuous persons. I believe that we are born originally sinful but that through faith in Jesus Christ we can grow closer to the ultimate standard or being of righteousness, the very person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Problems can ensue because of this belief. For one, in connection with the idea of the ability to discern a person’s virtue “by their fruits,” people often associate poverty with moral deficiency and prosperity with moral betterness. Max Weber’s The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism catalogues this set of assumptions. In this view, economic success becomes a sign of God’s favor and poverty the consequence of laziness, and, thus, God’s disfavor.

Whether you think Dickens was a (true) Christian or not, you must acknowledge what Allen asserts about Dickens’s work, that it “deals with … the corrupting influence of money, literally dirty money at that, as the basis of Victorian society” (Great Expectations Allen xiii). Paradigm comes into view as one understands that the power of money is not a natural relation among persons in a society. Hierarchical, class-structured societies do not arise out of thin air. Society and the distribution of its material benefits result from calculated plans. Paradigm is the pernicious force which propagates injustice in society and it relies upon the sort of assessment of persons described by Weber. For moral
reasons, poverty becomes criminal, thus begging and indebtedness became imprisonable offences. Persons who cannot find employment become moral failures. Wealthy persons become moral exemplars.

On the contrary, however, as chronicled in *Oliver Twist*, the orphan pauper Oliver exhibits more virtue than any of the “respectable” workhouse employees or board members. In *Great Expectations*, Pip the proto-aristocrat exhibits much less virtue than the economically “lesser” paragons of virtue, Joe and Biddy. Yet wealthy Brownlow is a noble man; practical Wemmick enjoys middleclass prosperity also while exhibiting virtue. The lesson is that poverty does not indicate depravity and that wealth does not preclude virtue. An oversimplified picture of either the wealthy or the poor as virtuous or the wealthy or the poor as depraved fails to comprehend the complexity of virtue in relation to material advantage and moral fiber.

Whether we are born with that original virtue or we seek it as righteousness-imparted Christians, the biography of virtuous persons intersects with the historical conditions of class struggle; in other words, it accounts for one difficult aspect of the world. Every person encounters his “intersection” in a hostile, Hobbesean world in which life is “a War of every man against every man” (*Leviathan*, chapter 13). The cause of this arrangement are the plans of the puppet masters concentrated contemporaneously in centers of power which include but are not limited to Wall Street, Madison Avenue, Detroit, Silicon Valley, Hollywood, Washington, D.C., etc. The centers of power are inherently deceitful because their sole primary motivation is profit. In the case of the exceedingly
profitable, larger corporations, ethics or morality take a back seat to virtue. The similarity in behaviors, values, and creeds of the “legitimate” and criminal worlds discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three of the thesis points to the actual rampant corruption in the “legitimate” business world. One can understand this best when one realizes that corporations are legally obligated to make a profit. Also, since the 1800’s the United States of America, states of the confederation, and municipalities have become the “United States of American, Incorporated,” the “State of California, Incorporated,” and the “City of San Francisco, Incorporated.” This legal-monetary arrangement is very telling.

The same greed and hypocrisy in *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* addressed in Chapters Two and Chapter Three of the thesis operate in our world today. If nineteenth-century “charitable” workhouse employees had the inhumanity to purposely starve children and if Victorian England could co-opt an originally virtuous Pip into worldly views involving being a snob towards his socioeconomic “lessers,” then how might one imagine the degree of moral corruption among twenty-first century multinational corporations with billions of dollars at stake which they would lose if they were to behave morally? One instance of centers of power influencing the public at large is the popularity of “conspicuous consumption” (a notion described by Thorstein Veblen in his 1899 book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*) prevalent in the early 1900’s. The issue with this notion is that people proudly flaunted their wealth, while in the meantime the poor begged for crumbs. Only a perverse historical paradigm could affect the
popularization of boasting of wealth while masses of persons labored all day long for a bare subsistence income.

Unfortunately, because of human nature, that is, because, even as Dickens would agree, most humans, unlike Oliver and Pip, are not originally virtuous or virtuous at all, the eradication of greed and hypocrisy is impossible. The obligation for the virtuous person is to live up to the Golden Rule which entails sharing, sacrifice, tithing or charity, temperance in all things, demonstrating gentleness and courage, overcoming one’s weaknesses, fighting injustice, and being brutally but tactfully honest. This is a high order but, in addition to these injunctions, one must also pay homage to his/her Creator. To summarize the obligations, one must have compassion for his/her fellow being and to seek social justice. One must also be weary of “unrealistic expectations” or the allures of the world. One can see that being virtuous or doing the right thing is not an easy path to pursue but it is the only path worth endeavoring upon.

In this convoluted, abstracted contemporary world, Orwell’s indication that “All [Dickens] can finally say is, ‘Behave decently’ … is not necessarily so shallow as it sounds” (Collected Essays, “Charles Dickens” (London: Secker and Warburg), 83-84) seems distant or inaccessible to the average reader. The reason for this difficulty is that the centers of power which promulgate the controlling paradigm do not want persons to think clearly or to questions things. In fact, they don’t want people to think at all. The contemporary version of the unjust world of Oliver Twist and the tempting world of Great Expectations have
become greatly more confusing, the authors of confusion have become more powerful, and the centers of power have become larger and more concentrated. It is now more of a challenge to “behave decently” than it was in the past. The paradigm or its designers only want persons to learn from the unreal world of TV that TV is reality and, most of all, they want the little people to consume as many products as possible and they proffer this behavior as a means to happiness. It is a false formula. Happiness, Dickens would concur, consists, in the least, of communion among good friends who do not regard each other’s status and of genuine gratitude, as Dickens says in the penultimate paragraph of *Oliver Twist* “to that Being whose code is Mercy, and whose great attribute is Benevolence to all things that breathe, [without which] happiness can never be attained” (*Oliver Twist* 479).

In any interpretation, the wise person understands the nature of true wealth, that being comprised of love for all persons without respect to their status and the never-ending pursuit of wisdom in the heart and mind, as well as righteousness. These age-old prescriptions are the main pillars of happiness and, thus, constitute true wealth greater than any material wealth can satisfy a person. The constituents of true wealth motivate persons to charitableness. That charitableness, as Dennis Walder avers of Dickens’s ultimate writing purposes, “operates on the assumption of original virtue” (59). Dickens’s central concern with original (and enduring) virtue can thus be understood as foundational to his attempt to change the world, individual by individual. Given what we see in today’s world, can we say that the comparatively lesser injustice of Dickens’s
time is inaccurate? No, and hence the well-justified reason for what Miller
denotes as “the intimate center of Dickens’ apprehension of the world” (250).
Wisdom leads the reader to this same apprehension. It is a healthy apprehension
and it is a necessary attribute of the soldier of virtue (righteousness) who wishes
to fight the injustice extant, unfortunately, in any epoch of history.
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