

I am sure if I asked every Knight in this room: “Do you want to be a real man? Or would you rather be a puppet?” The answer would be “a real man; of course.”

But what does that mean, man or puppet?

Let’s start by consulting the literature. If there ever was an expert on real person versus being a puppet, Walt Disney’s Pinocchio would be the definitive classic. Of course, the tale of Pinocchio was written many years ago by Carlo Collodi; but that’s another story.

Let’s look here on page thirteen. The Blue Fairy, talking to the puppet Pinocchio says:

“If you can prove that you are brave, unselfish and able to tell right from wrong, you will become a real live boy.”

These are the qualities of being a real person; a “*mensch*.” A real man:

Bravery

Unselfishness

Being able to tell right from wrong.

That latter function we commonly call conscience. Jiminy Cricket was charged to be the conscience of Pinocchio until he became a real boy. He would not make Pinocchio feel guilty. Rather, he would whisper (sometimes loudly) what was the right thing to do in Pinocchio’s ear.

We’ve heard it before many times: “let your conscience be your guide.” Listening to a well-formed conscience is a cornerstone of our Catholic faith.

But, ah, there’s a problem. You see, a conscience is not that simple.

Let me tell you about a man named Konrad Lorenz. He was an experimental psychologist who performed some very interesting experiments awhile ago.

He was fascinated by animal behavior. Lorenz found, while experimenting with geese, that if he made himself available to them when they were very young, they thought that he was their mother. There are famous pictures of Lorenz walking through a farm in boots with a line of young geese following him. In fact, I was told the story when I was in residency training that Lorenz once took a young duckling and placed it in a brood of baby chicks and the chicks' mother. The young duck grew up and followed the Mama Chicken around wherever she went with her young chicks. It believed it was a chicken.

In fact, Lorenz was said to have paraded the duckling's biological mother and siblings in front of it. Since it was sure it was a chicken and not a duck, the little duckling stayed with the Mama Chicken and chicks and did not follow the mother duck.

Lorenz coined the term IMPRINTING. At a critical young age, a young thing is particularly open to impressions around it. These impressions become deeply ingrained and are perceived as "natural" when, in fact, the imprinting can involve a distortion: witness "I think I'm a chicken" when in fact the little guy was actually a duck. What is imprinted feels right, but in reality it can be quite wrong.

Which brings me to my Aunt Rosie. When I was a young boy my Aunt Rose babysat for me many times. She often took it upon herself to try to teach me right from wrong. We lived in a residential area that had cars occasionally going by in front of our home. I can remember my Aunt telling me:

"Charles; **never ever** cross the street in the middle. Always go down to the corner where there is a crosswalk if you want to get to the other side." I was imprinted. To this day if I cross in the middle of a block I get a faint feeling of doing something wrong. A mild guilty feeling.

Of course, it isn't always wrong to cross in the middle of the street. What my Aunt Rose meant by her rule was "Until you grow up and can effectively judge if there are any cars coming that might endanger you, it is always best to cross at the crosswalk at the end of the street." Of course saying that to a six year old

would have been silly. So she rephrased it as “**never ever** cross in the middle of the street.” It was for my own good, but it wasn’t **really totally true** and now it ends up that I get this mild “bad boy” feeling when I do it.

Freud gave a name to that part in us that stores those dictums that were taught to us by important people. He called it the Superego.

To make matters worse, the Superego contains rules that were never taught to us but rather rules that we THOUGHT were being taught. That is, we introjected even our distortion of the rules that those important people in our young life were trying to teach us. And, to make it worse yet, the Superego is over-demanding and over- punitive: hanging judge, jury and executioner all in one.

So when one hears the term Conscience, we have to make a distinction as to what is truly conscience and what may be distortions or no-longer-operative-rules that were “imprinted” long ago on our brain. This is not such an easy task.

St. Thomas taught that true conscience was a function of mature JUDGMENT. If FEELINGS are involved, that would seem to indicate something more likely in the realm of Superego. The latter is sometimes right and sometimes wrong whereas true conscience is always correct.

Following true conscience, not superego, makes us real men and not puppets.

We need to be brave, unselfish and know right from wrong. If we really have difficulty discerning right from wrong, we might be quiet and just listen. We might just hear the voice of Jiminy Cricket.