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***The Gladius and the Katana: Viewing the Seven Samurai
through the lens of Roman Stoicism***

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors
in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

By

Joseph White

Under the mentorship of Dr. William Eaton

Abstract

This paper examines the concepts of traditional Bushido and Roman Stoicism as they relate to the unique interpretation of Bushido by Akira Kurosawa in the movie the *Seven Samurai*. I explain the main concepts of Bushido and Roman Stoicism, focusing upon the virtues of each, and their connection to Kurosawa's view on how Bushido should be practiced. I then draw similarities between these two ways of life. I examine how the genre of film dealing with samurai deals with this question.

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Bushido is an ethical system that has had many interpretations since its creation. While it is always a system that focuses upon virtue ethics, many authors such as Yamamoto Tsunetomo and Yamada Soko have different interpretations of how it should be carried out. I will be examining how Akira Kurosawa added to this tradition through his own interpretation of Bushido in the film *Seven Samurai*. Looking at the post war era of Japan, we can see how Japanese Samurai films examine this honor code. Focusing upon Akira Kurosawa, I will show how his interpretations of Bushido are influenced by his study of virtue ethics, specifically Roman Stoicism. Bushido and Roman Stoicism are unique in their creation and influences, but there exist some similarities in the ethics that govern how one ought to live. Using the film, I will explore the similarities in thought that each system traditionally possesses and how they influenced Kurosawa's view of virtue ethics, and thus his interpretation of Bushido. I aim to show how each of these systems emphasize the importance of self-discipline and control over one's life and feelings, and the role they play in Kurosawa's personal interpretation of the Bushido code.

Akira Kurosawa is one of the most highly praised Japanese film directors in history. He started his career during WWII as a propaganda maker for the government but found his major success in the 1950s. His influence upon Japanese film making is unparalleled. His film *Rashomon* is credited as the film that opened the Western film market to Japan. CNN and AsianWeek magazine

named him “Asian of the Century”, in the arts and culture category, for how his works helped improve the image and respect for much of Asia around the world.

The *Seven Samurai* is seen not just as Kurosawa’s greatest historical film, but as his greatest film by many people. In a BBC cultural poll wherein, they asked movie critics to vote for the best foreign language film, the *Seven Samurai* took first place with 20 percent of the total vote (Bilson). The story of the *Seven Samurai* is so popular with audiences around the world that it has been retold in different settings many times with movies as recent as 2016 with *The Magnificent Seven*. Beyond films, the *Seven Samurai* has influenced popular television programs such as Disney’s *The Mandalorian*. The cultural impact of this film is felt beyond Japan and continues to modern times.

The *Seven Samurai* as a film shows the influences of traditional Bushido and Roman Stoicism on his new interpretation of Bushido due to its value as both a historical piece of cinema and its ease of doing so. The film was created by Akira Kurosawa with Bushido being a guiding force. Kurosawa came from a traditional military family. His father, Isamu Kurosawa, was a member of a samurai family from the Akita Prefecture and worked as a physical education teacher (Meissner 2022). This heavily influenced Akira Kurosawa’s upbringing and instilled in him traditional ideas of morals and the behavioral codes of the time. These came together to give him a firm grasp of the ideas of Bushido (Meissner 2022). His family encouraged him to live by the values of bushido. When Akira Kurosawa was thirteen years old, his brother, Heigo Kurosawa, brought him to witness the aftermath of the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923. This earthquake left a devastating mark upon the area, and many died. Heigo forced Akira to look at the

corpses of humans and animals alike that were throughout the devastated area. Akira Kurosawa was forced that day to experience firsthand the unpleasantness of the world so that he would be able to face his fears with courage (Kurosawa 1983, 51-52). James Monaco, an American film critic and author, says that this childhood event heavily influenced his film style since he was never shy about showing the unpleasantness of the world. He used values of Bushido that he learned from his family to influence his works, and this is what led him to focus so heavily on the stories of samurai in his films (Meissner 2022). His connection to Roman Stoicism and Western ideas comes from his education. Kurosawa's educational background focused upon the study of Western painting, literature, and Western Political Philosophy (Monaco 1991, 310). His study of Western Political Philosophy introduced him to the ideas of virtue ethics as it has been interpreted by western scholars. In this introduction, he was taught the ideas of Roman stoicism. His understanding of Western thought allowed him to combine his cultural traditions with western influences to produce films that appealed to both cultures.

We know that Kurosawa had a particular interest in ethics and how they are applied by looking at his film's plots and ideas. In the post war era in Japan, the public grappled with ethical and moral dilemmas. These dilemmas came from the uncertainty of truth and the knowledge that anything could be torn down at a moment's notice, due to the existence of atomic bombs. This uncertainty, usually associated with the Post-Modern movement, created the stage for Kurosawa to explore his own ethical ideas in an uncertain world. In many of his works, we can see him exploring the ideas of heroism. His original films usually take place in

times of great uncertainty and fear of both physical and moral death. Whether it is the period of the *Seven Samurai* where war between groups is commonplace and bandits have almost free reign over the countryside, or in the bombed out remains of Tokyo after the Allied bombing campaigns that we see in *Drunken Angel*. These are but two examples, but the common thread between most of them is an examination of the desire to do the right thing. In these scenarios wherein morality can be cast aside for an uncertain chance at survival, the main characters choose to hold on to their morality and attempt to do the right thing for themselves and others (Monaco 1991, 310-311).

The Film's plot centers around a farming village that is in trouble due to an impending raid by a bandit group once their harvest has been completed. A group of the farmers sets out to recruit protectors for the village in the hopes of turning back the bandit attack. He then slowly recruits 7 samurai who are currently Ronin, a samurai without a master to serve. These samurai each have given up on some part of the Bushido code, but still strive to live by what they still uphold. They come together and train the villagers to defend themselves and assist in fighting off the bandits when they come for another attack. This simple plot structure is only works because of the depth of the individual characters and themes that are set forth in the film.

Both Roman Stoicism and Bushido fall under the broad category of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics arises from both the eastern and western traditions of philosophy. Virtue ethics is an ethical system that focuses upon the use of virtues to define ethics. To possess a virtue is to have the trait that is associated, like honor for our current case, that is a defining feature of the person. For someone

who is honorable, the trait is a part of the foundation of their personality. They have worked tirelessly on honing their abilities with this one virtue. For those who do not study virtue but still attempt to live with it, virtues are things that a person has and should practice, but it can be rare for these individuals to have a full grasp of the virtue itself. Someone who is honest may fail at times in specific circumstances, but they are still an honest person. According to Aristotle, it is possible to become virtuous through building virtuous habits. This requires a large amount of work over a long period of time, wherein the person is constantly monitoring themselves to make sure they are choosing the virtuous action. The previous example of the honorable person would not be considered virtuous to Aristotle, since he is being excessive in his pursuit of a single virtue. Aristotle says that the virtuous man is one that seeks to master of the virtues and not just a single one. It is important to note that one of the common features of virtue ethics is the practical nature of it. Most forms of virtue ethics possess features that make them practical to use in everyday life, as opposed to other ethical systems that might be more abstract to people who are not really into the system. There are many different forms of virtue ethics that have formed in both the eastern and western traditions of philosophy, but this overview gives the necessary information to understand the system as whole (Hursthouse and Glen 2022).

Stoicism has its roots in Greece during the Hellenistic period. This school of thought focused upon the detachment from certain emotions such as fear, envy, or passionate love. According to this school of thought, all of these emotions were only possible if the individual had false assumptions. This school

held that it was possible for a person to completely sever themselves from these types of false assumptions. A person who has managed to do this, has achieved moral and intellectual perfection, and they would then gain the title of Sage. There were three heads to Greek Stoicism: the 'founder,' Zeno of Citium in Cyprus (344–262 BCE), Cleanthes (d. 232 BCE) or Chrysippus (d. ca. 206 BCE) (Baltzly 2018). Each of the heads developed the school of thought further, but not much more is known. This is due to the fact that no complete text has survived the ages. Scholars utilize fragments of their text to glean understanding about the origins of the school from their perspective, with Chrysippus's work lasting the longest due to his prolific writing of 165 works. The rest of the information comes from references in other works. These references are rarely favorable and often times find fault with the Stoic beliefs.

Evolving from its Greek roots, Roman Stoicism came to the forefront during the imperial era of Rome. It is from this period that we have recovered full works written by Stoic Philosophers. Roman Stoicism was furthered during this time by three main individuals: Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), Epictetus (c. 55–135) and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180). Most of the works produced by this group all pertain to the ethics of Stoicism. This gives a good idea of how one ought to live while practicing, but it does not give us a good understanding of the original reasoning in some areas. The widespread appeal of Roman Stoicism is best shown through these writers as each came from different walks of life. From the lowly slave Epictetus to the philosopher and scholar Seneca, and all the way up to the emperor of the Roman Empire Marcus Aurelius, Stoicism spread its influence. The works produced in this era focused on emphasizing the previous

Greek beliefs that the sage cannot be affected by misfortune and only requires living a virtuous life to flourish (Baltzly 2018).

The life of a sage, as described by the Stoics, is only possible through rational virtue and detachment from false assumptions. Epictetus gives an example of how a Stoic is supposed to think in order to get rid of their false assumptions saying “Sickness is a hinderance to the body, but not to your ability to choose, unless that is your choice. Lameness is a hinderance to the leg, but not to your ability to choose. Say this to yourself with regard to everything that happens, then you will see such obstacles as hindrances to something else, but not yourself” (Epictetus 1919, 3). In this he emphasizes what the sickness or injury is actually doing. It has the ability to cause him inconvenience, but the reader still retains their ability to choose and thus be rational. The sage is able to be completely happy simply by being a virtuous person due to their detachment. It is important to note that it is possible to be virtuous in Stoicism without being a sage. The sage is special since they do not need anything but virtue itself to be happy. The rationality that the Stoics are characterized by informs their opinions on virtues and what is good. They believed that only things that helped a person be more rational could have the potential to be virtuous. This led them to reject the idea that worldly goods could possess any kind of intrinsic personal goodness since they do not necessarily help someone practice their virtue (Slote 2010, 15).

The concepts and ideals that allowed a person to be virtuous are thus informed by rational thought. The Stoics believed that there were four main categories that virtues could be put into: wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation. Each of these types of virtues are further sub divided. wisdom

contains the sub virtues of good sense, good calculation, quick-wittedness, discretion, and resourcefulness. justice contains piety, honesty, equity, and fair dealing. courage has endurance, confidence, high-mindedness, cheerfulness, and industriousness. Finally, moderation contains good discipline, seemliness, modesty, and self-control. While they maintained these categories as virtuous, they also have subcategories for vice. The main pieces of vice are foolishness, injustice, cowardice, intemperance, and some lesser ones.

The Stoics believed that the virtues are interconnected. A person cannot solely be one of the virtues without having some ability in the others. A person who is a shining example of wisdom will have some skill in the practices of justice, since someone cannot be just without wisdom and vice versa. This means that a person who is virtuous will already have a predisposition to act virtuously when put into a situation according to Stephens. This belief is somewhat unique amongst various systems for virtue ethics and helps separate Roman Stoicism from other virtue ethics systems. Stephens shows us a common analogy that Roman Stoics would use to explain how this interconnectedness worked “Just as someone is both a poet and an orator and a general but is still one individual, so too the virtues are unified by applying to different spheres of action (Stephens 2022).

The modern concept of Bushido stems from several different systems of thought combining, and then several elements being refined. The three systems of thought were Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Each of these three systems influenced different parts of Bushido and thus are partially explored. It is

important to look into certain historical facts that are important to know as to why these came together.

The first belief system to look at is Shintoism. Shintoism is the name for the traditional religion of the Japanese people. This religion historical made up of the different belief systems of the regional cults of Japan. The different regional beliefs ranged from: animist, shamanism, fertility cults, and the worship of nature, ancestors, and heroes. The common object of worship is the kami. The kami are best described as the gods, though most anything of reverence may be referred to as this (Tsunoda 1979, 23-24). It was known for a long time in Japanese history as the official religion, even as it had periods where the practices were not used as frequently.

Buddhism spread amongst the Japanese people, especially the nobility, as early as 525 AD. Zen Buddhism spread the most into Japanese culture (Tsunoda 1979, 236). This type of Buddhism focused upon enlightenment and the freeing of worries of the body. This led to a focus upon the “Search for release from the bonds of this world” (Tsunoda 1979, 307). The Rinzai Sect of Zen Buddhism introduced the basis for using harsh language in their spiritual studies. They would use terms like “dying” and “being killed” as a way to represent psychological disengagement (Cleary 2014, 24).

The final of the three is Confucianism. It is a belief set originally native to China that made its way over to Japan. It focuses upon things such as practical help, social relationships, and wisdom. Part of its focus is upon the studying of human history for insights into political morality and laws of human nature

(Tsunoda 1979, 308). As a part of its beliefs, it contains an extensive ethical system that helps a follower live by its codes.

The mixing of the beliefs systems started after the military reunification of Japan, in the Tokugawa period which began in 1603 (Tsunoda 1979, 307). The current belief system of Buddhism was supplanted by the Shoguns, Military generals who ruled in certain areas, with Confucianism. The Shoguns desired a more secular ideology to help them rule, but Buddhist beliefs lived on, if of lesser importance. Japan took the ideas of Confucianism that the generals wanted and created Neo-Confucianism. The study of history that Neo-Confucianism encouraged led to an emphasis upon loyalty to the monarch and a revival of Shinto into the popular culture. This led to each of the three beliefs being present together at the same time and place in Japan.

The first writer to combine pieces of these belief systems into a form of the honor code known as Bushido today was Yamaga Soko (1622-1685) (Tsunoda 1979, 394). He studied the belief systems alongside military science. During this period, Samurais were not used in roles as warriors often due to the military peace Japan was enjoying. Soko studies led him to have very strong opinions upon the role of the Samurai during peace time (Tsunoda 1979, 395). Without their use in combat, Samurai would have to serve as role models for the rest of the classes. Yoko drew upon the Ethics and terminology of Confucianism, the spiritual beliefs of Buddhism, and pieces of Shintoism, to write his first two works *Bukyo* "The warrior's creed" and *Shido* "The way of the samurai" (Tsunoda 1979, 395). These works focused upon the need for a Samurai to adhere to strict systems of behavior. It emphasized: righteousness, austerity, temperance,

constant self-discipline, readiness to meet death at any time. Departing from other writers of his time, he also put forward that a warrior must practice 'peaceful' arts such as history or letters (Tsunoda 1979, 395).

The form of Bushido that we know today, which has been refined from its original views, has 8 virtues. These virtues were described by Nitobe Inazo, a Japanese author and educator, in his book *Bushido the Soul of Japan*. While there are some objections to the book due to its mishandling of the history of Bushido, its telling of the 8 virtues is still useful. These virtues are righteousness, heroic courage, benevolence or compassion, respect, honesty, honor, duty and loyalty, and lastly self-control (Nitobe 2004).

The medium of film has the ability to view nonverbal communication in ways that are incredibly difficult for a piece of writing, and it can provide many benefits to the education of the viewer (Johnson 2015, 2). Film allows for the viewer to witness micro expressions that cannot be properly conveyed in words. A piece of literature will most often describe a character in a way as to convey what the author wants. This is effective in its medium, but film goes beyond it. A good film will show details of the character through their body movements, that may be unintentional. An actor can convey emotion through a subtle shift in demeanor and how they do actions. This type of shift can be hard for writers to capture while staying concise. An author may need a much longer description of the characters in every scene to properly convey the level of detail a film can give at a glance. This creates a difference in detail between the mediums, wherein film is uniquely suited to give visual details. Some of these benefits are especially good for increasing memory retention pertaining to the subject of the film that is

viewed. This allows for a greater teaching and understanding of both Bushido and Stoicism. Within both of these belief systems, we see that one of their virtues is related to self-control, though it is a sub virtue of stoicism. This is often interpreted to mean both a type of physical self-control and an emotional one. While it can be relatively easy to show the idea of emotional self-control in a textual format, it can be quite different for physical self-control. This is due to the nonverbal nature of most acts of physical self-control. Film provides the chance for the viewer to see the pieces of communication that are lost in a textual format. A good example of this physical self-control would be a person keeping themselves from yawning. In the book of *Hagakure*, which is made up of stories and advice that a Samurai dictated, he takes special note to say, “It is bad taste to yawn in front of people” (Naramoto 1969, 7)

When looking at these two belief systems several similarities can be noticed. This is partly in line with the virtues that they put forward, but there are specific areas that bear a striking similarity. Both call for the practitioner to keep death at the fore front of their minds during the day, though for different reasons. This can be seen in *The Enchiridion* by Epictetus which says, “Let death and exile, and all other things which appear terrible be daily before your eyes, but chiefly death, and you will never entertain any abject thought, nor too eagerly covet anything.” (Epictetus 1919, 5). From *Hagakure* we find the passage “If by setting one’s heart right every morning and evening, one is able to live as though his body were already dead, he pains freedom in the Way. His whole life will be without blame, and he will succeed in his calling” (Naramoto 1969, 2).

These virtues can be connected in some common areas, and this shows their influence upon his new interpretation. This will mainly be accomplished through the use of applying the lens of Roman Stoicism to the film and connecting its virtues, and sub virtues, to the events and characters in the film wherein interesting connections emerge. The film already possesses the elements necessary to show how Bushido is applied with the Samurai. By showing how these different virtues can connect closely to the same situation, the similarities that exist between these belief systems will show through and how they have influenced this new interpretation of Bushido.

I acknowledge that the seven samurai of the movie do not practice all of the virtues present, but some are explored in detail. Except for a few examples, each samurai can be seen as being exemplary at a specific one of the virtues present or they might have multiple. The reason for this is that most of them have the status of ronin, a samurai that for whatever reason does not possess a master. It is seen as a great dishonor for a samurai to live as a ronin. In most cases, a samurai is expected by Bushido to commit Sepuku, a form of ritualistic suicide, if they become a ronin. The samurai in the film are attempting to live on past this point, and thus are lacking in their adherence to the entire way of Bushido. The interesting part of this situation is how they are still attempting to follow what parts of Bushido that they can. This is best seen in their defense of the village. They do it not for profit or glory, but simply because it is the right thing to do. I will be using the scenes from the film to show these virtues in action than connecting them.

The first scene that I would like to examine for this is the dual which introduces Kyūzō. Kyūzō is challenged to a mock dual by a samurai. During this dual he makes no unnecessary movements and does not react in fear to his opponents' movements. His calm shows his courage and bodily control. After winning the dual, his opponent challenges him to a rematch with real swords. Kyūzō tries to warn him to not throw away his life, since Kyūzō knows that his victory this time will mean the death of his opponent. This scene showcases the Bushido virtues of Courage, Self-control, Honesty, and Compassion. Through the lens of Roman Stoicism, we can see that Kyūzō's actions line up with the virtues of justice, courage, and moderation. Specifically, their sub-virtues of honesty, confidence, discipline, and good heartedness (Seven Samurai 1954).

The most important scene for Kyūzō is undoubtedly his solo excursion into the heart of the bandit-controlled area in search of a musket. After the initial attack by the bandits, the Samurai realize that the bandits possess at least 3 muskets. These muskets present a serious problem for their defense of the village due to their power and range. The scene begins with Kambei expressing his worries about the muskets to the group and Richi volunteers to sneak into the bandit camp to get one. Kyūzō rejects Richi's plan outright stating "No, you're looking to die. I'll go." He shows the Bushido virtues of compassion and the Stoic virtue of good heartedness by refusing to allow him to go. He then shows the virtue of heroic courage from Bushido and the virtues, and sub-virtues, of courage with endurance, confidence from Stoicism by charging off into the night into bandit country to retrieve one of the muskets. When he returns, he modestly ignores the praise of surrounding people in favor of getting some rest. Included in

the group praising him is Katsushiro who confesses his great respect for him and his abilities as a samurai. (Seven Samurai 1954).

Looking at these scenes, it is clear that Kyuzo represents the traditional view of what a follower of Bushido should represent, and we can see the connection between the view of Stoics as well. Throughout the film, there are subtle details that help to show this connection that are not immediately obvious to the casual observer. Throughout the film, we see that his appearance is always kept unless something outside of his control acts upon him. This detail shows his dedication to maintaining his appearance even though it is never directly called out in the film. His control of his emotions is also put on display. In several scenes, we see that he is unflappable and does not let his emotions be shown to others or control his actions. Even when the group is mourning the death of their own, he refuses to drink any of the offered sake. He will not allow his emotions to push him into the vice of immoderation. This is not to say that drinking itself would be immoderation, but the act of doing so because of his sadness would be giving up his self-control (7 Samurai 1954). Looking at Roman Stoicism the 15th passage in the *Enchiridion* helps to explain this “Remember that you must behave in life as at a dinner party. Is anything brought around to you? Put out your hand and take your share with moderation. Does it pass by you? Don’t stop it. Is it not yet come? Don’t stretch your desire towards it but wait till it reaches you...” (Epictetus 1919, 4). This passage explains how tempering one’s desire is important.

The next scene that I want to focus on is dealing with Katsushiro, a young samurai who seeks to learn from a worthy master. After successfully recruiting a

couple of samurai who have agreed to help the villagers, they all start eating the rice that the villagers have saved for them as payment. In this scene, the villager in charge of guarding the rice awakens to see it has been stolen from him in the night. This leaves the villagers distraught as they are now both without food for themselves and as payment. Katsushiro witnesses this event and sees how the villagers are trying to pick up individual grains from the ground in an attempt to recoup some of the loss. As they are doing this, Katsushiro tosses them some coins to allow them to get more rice. He rejects their gratitude and warns them to hide the money. In this scene he is practicing the Bushido virtues of benevolence and the Stoic virtues of justice and its sub-virtue of equity with his giving of the coins after the villagers were robbed. He also showed the virtue of moderation and its sub-virtue modesty, when he denied the villagers attempts at gratitude instead of accepting it (Seven Samurai 1954).

In the lead up to the battle, the Samurai prepare the village for the bandit attack. Some focus upon training the villagers for combat, and another group focuses on scouting out the terrain. This group intends to find what areas that they can use for defense and surveys the surrounding areas. This leads Katsushiro to an area containing an abundance of flowers. He demonstrates the virtue of cheerfulness even as they are in what should be a stressful situation, he takes the time to pick flowers and enjoy the beauty of nature. While this is a lesser part of Stoicism, we can see how in the greater context of virtue ethics with Aristotle talk about the mean between extremes. Katsushiro refuses to commit too much of himself to the stressful nature of the situation and finds ways to relieve the stress without completely giving it up. This leads him to split from the group and meet a

strange person who we later know as Shino. After Shino lies to him by stating that she is a man, he tries to force her back to the village to prepare for the attack with the other men but discovers her secret of being a woman (Seven Samurai 1954).

This interaction leads him to form a relationship with Shino. In one of our first looks at them together, he tries to bring her some white rice after partaking of the meals that she would normally eat. This in itself may not be seen as compassion due to his interest in her, but his giving of the rice to the widowed grandma in town does. His meeting is witnessed by Kyuzo who watches from a distance. During the next meal, Kyuzo helps convince the group to show compassion towards the widow by giving her all their leftovers from the meal. He practices the virtue of wisdom by showing discretion in how he knew about the widow. He could have revealed Katsushiro's involvement with Shino and is questioned on why he did not reveal it by Katsushiro himself. Kyuzo reveals that he did not tell the rest about the relationship simply because Katsushiro would not have wanted him to (Seven Samurai 1954).

After Kambei finds Shichiroji, an old friend of his and fellow samurai, he gives orders for the present samurai to find more recruits and to specifically find "hungry samurai" since the villagers can only offer food as payment. Shichiroji finds an old man in his search who claims to have one working for him. The samurai is currently chopping the old man's wood in return for food. Shichiroji goes to see this hungry samurai. He finds Heihachi Hayashida who exemplifies the stoic virtues of endurance, cheerfulness, and industriousness alongside the Bushido virtues of self-control and respect. We see in the scene that even as he is forced to chop wood for food, he never let's go of his cheerful demeanor. His

actual cutting of the logs shows through his body language that he is embodying the virtue of endurance as he does not seem to tire even with the hard work that he is doing in the scene. His self-control, from Bushido, is easy to infer from this scene as well. To accomplish the hard work, he would both need a level of physical control and mental control to complete such a hard task, as we see the pile of wood around is already immense. Kambei describes Shichiroji's main effect on the group as being a morale booster since he could stay cheerful even in the worst of scenarios. Even as other ronin may simply take the supplies or resort to less honorable means of obtaining funds, we see Shichiroji doing hard labor while respecting the commoner who hired him (Seven Samurai 1954).

Kikuchiyo is a farmer turned samurai who lies about his origins when he attempts to join the samurai. Even though he lied about his origins, he is the greatest practitioner of honesty and courage. This is due to his habit of not hiding his emotions no matter the situation.

When the samurai are still preparing for the coming attack, Kikuchiyo notices that a villager has some gear that they must have obtained from scavenging battlefields. He is able to use his good sense to realize that the village must have a supply of these looted goods. He convinces the villagers to give the samurai all the gear that they have scavenged. He is happy about the windfall, but soon finds himself furious with the rest of the samurai. The rest of the samurai almost want to stop their defense of the village as they see this gear as offensive. It must have come from samurai that were hunted down after a battle according to them. Kikuchiyo does not accept this and cannot be dishonest about his feelings. He goes on a righteous tirade about the samurai and their unwillingness

to see their role in the farmer's behavior. He shames them for ignoring how it is the samurai that actively attacked the farmers during the recent wars and forced them to do whatever they needed to survive. This is one of the best scenes to show his courage and honesty as he is shaming the rest of the samurai with the truth while knowing that this action could lead him to be driven off from the group if they take it wrong (Seven Samurai 1954).

His position as a self-made samurai puts him into a special category within the group since he is technically ronin, but he was never raised as a samurai and thus would not have a full understanding of bushido. He acts as he believes a samurai should act when following the Code as Kurosawa shows using the film. In the scene wherein the samurai give the widow their left-over rice, his virtue of honesty is expressed further than what the average person may accept. When another one of the samurai is attempting to console the widow with promises of a better after life, Kikuchiyo is unable to hold himself back from interjecting. He rebukes the samurai for giving the widow false hope, since the samurai has no way of knowing if the afterlife will be better than their current one (Seven Samurai 1954). Some may rightly say that he failed to utilize the virtue of discretion from Stoicism by speaking in this manner when the samurai is trying to comfort the woman. I believe that straddles a fine line in this scene due to the fact that he is not rebuking the idea of an afterlife for the grieving widow, he is simply being blunt in his assertion. He is not trying to harm the woman; he is trying to avoid giving her a false hope that may harm her later. This type of honesty without restraint can lead to problems, but Kurosawa is using it

to show how some situations call for it. A person who clings too much to propriety when speaking may cause more harm than if they are blunt.

The scene that most fully encapsulates the ideals of his courage and honesty, is his sally into the forest to obtain one of the muskets that the bandits are using. After Kyuzo returns from his solo excursion into the bandit territory with a musket, Kikuchiyo finds himself wanting to prove his worth as a samurai. He wants to show his courage to the rest of the group, so he plans to emulate Kyuzo by going on his own solo excursion. His excursion is a success, and he manages to retrieve a musket alongside killing some of the bandits. The problem from a traditional view of Bushido is how his success is founded upon deception. It is only by lying to the enemy and sneaking his way into their area of control that he is able to obtain the musket. On his return he is thrilled and expects to be praised since he showed his courage just like Kyuzo. The samurai that are present are not impressed, however. They chide him for abandoning his post in the name of seeking glory with the leader saying, "There's nothing heroic about selfishly grabbing for glory" (Seven Samurai 1954). This type of behavior shows us that Kurosawa's version of Bushido places importance on success for the right reasons. Kikuchiyo is not chided for his stealth or deception, though it is not shown that the other samurai knew of his methods, he is instead chided for his attempts to gain glory. Due to his background, he sought to embody the virtue of Courage without the full understanding of it. This led to his failure to uphold the virtues of duty and courage.

The connection that the stoics see between the virtues, and vices, can help explain parts of his behavior. We see that he lacks many of the virtues that fall

under moderation and some of wisdom. He can be seen as quite boorish at times with his behavior, such as one seen when he is propositioning some of the village women with inappropriate language. Throughout the film, we see that while he is resourceful, he is seen as the most ignorant of the group and he fails to think through some of his actions properly. This lack of wisdom and moderation feeds into his unvirtuous behavior. It is only his strong attachment to honesty and courage that allows him to resist falling completely into vice.

The samurai in the movie all find themselves in trouble due to the failing of members to uphold these virtues and thus falling to vice. As I explained before, Katsushiro originally practiced the virtue of moderation from Stoicism and self-control from Bushido when dealing with Shino. Through his continued interactions with her, he slowly fell in love. This led him to practice the vice of intemperance when he decided to sleep with her. His sleeping with Shino is what led her father to publicly punish her with beatings. Just like how the Stoics believed that practicing one virtue or vice practices the others, he found himself falling to cowardice and refused to intervene to save the woman that he loved from the beating (*Seven Samurai* 1954). It is through Kikuchiyo's vices when he attempts to gain glory by abandoning his post for glory that the village suffers. His abandonment of his post leaves his part of the village exposed to the bandits and allows them in. This assault leads to the deaths of many villagers and the samurai Gorebei. It is his lacking in the virtue of self which leads to his death. In the final battle for the village, Kyuzo is slain by a musket shot. This causes Kikuchiyo to lose control and enter into a rage. Instead of waiting for a better opportunity to strike, he goes after the gunman immediately. The gunman

manages to mortally wound Kyuzo, but Kyuzo manages to slay him before succumbing to his wounds (Seven Samurai 1954).

Examining the film and its connections up to this point, we can see the ideas that Kurosawa is trying to convey into his own interpretation of Bushido. We see that he places a great deal of importance upon the virtues that involve helping others such as honesty, courage, compassion, good-discipline, and Justice. While all of the virtues from both systems of thought are good and should be strived for, these virtues in particular are important for those who strive to be heroic. We also see how the intentions behind actions are highlighted. Just as Kikuchiyo is chastened for seeking glory with his sally into the bandit-controlled territory, the attempts to be heroic for selfish reasons created problems. A person must strive to do the right thing and be heroic because it is the virtuous thing to do, not because they seek any outside benefit. This area of his interpretation is heavily influenced by the Roman Stoics and their idea of the sage, though it does not go as far as the Stoics did. This allows us to see Kurosawa's main critique of traditional Bushido, and thus his reasons for interpreting it differently. Kurosawa uses Kikuchiyo's speech after finding the armor to show us how samurai culture negatively influenced the practice of Bushido. As the code of Bushido became more of a tradition, most samurai started to follow its tenants because it was what samurai were supposed to do, rather than its ethical value. Samurai, who were supposed to be a class of people with privileges gained by their ethical lives, often fell to their greed. The sheer amount of Ronin in the town wherein the villagers are attempting to recruit samurai shows a fall in their morals. Being a Ronin is not necessarily an indicator of a lack of ethical virtues, since being a

Ronin is dependent merely upon the ability to serve a lord. It is this combined with the refusal of many to help the villagers due to the lack of the ability to pay their usual rates. This can be seen as reasonable by some since the ronin are merely doing their job to support themselves, but this lack of heroism is what Kurosawa is against. The 7 samurai join the defense of the village despite the promise that the pay will not be up to standard because it is the right thing to do even though they are ronin. Kurosawa uses them as an example of how anyone should act, whether they be samurai or ronin.

This criticism that Kurosawa levels at samurai culture is not uncommon amongst post-war directors. Looking at films such as *13 Assassins*, *Twilight Samurai*, and *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, we can see how directors criticized samurai culture's effects on how people followed Bushido. *13 Assassins*, a contemporary remake of Eiichi Kudo's 1963 film, follows a group of samurai and a hunter who are determined to slay the evil brother of the current shogun. The leader, Shimada Shinzaemon, is hired by the minister of justice in secret to carry out the assassination. The samurai know that the brother must be slain before he has a chance to obtain the throne or else he will bring chaos to the region. The samurai understand that to raise their blades against their master's brother would be the height of dishonor, but they are willing to do so if it means preventing the suffering of common people. The main antagonist of the film is Hanbei, the bodyguard of the brother who is his lord. He once trained with the Shinzaemon and meets with him several times in the film. The Hanbei knows of the brother's propensity for senseless violence, even witnessing him use a small child as a target for his bow practice but does not betray him. He sees himself as

bound by the code of Bushido to serve his master beyond all else. He tries his best to protect his lord, but he is undermined at every opportunity by the very lord he serves. His lord often chooses the wrong path or knowingly goes into an ambush simply to sate his own want for violence and to avoid boredom. In the end, the lord forces Hanbei into a trap laid by the Shinzaemon and this trap leads the bodyguard and assassin to dual. After he is defeated in the dual, the lord does not show any deep emotion, and he kicks Hanbei's severed head. This film exemplifies the problems that lay in traditional Bushido's emphasis upon loyalty to the lord. The culture of the samurai can put individuals into situations like Hanbei's wherein they see it as more ethical to follow the will of their lord rather than do what many would be considered ethical, such as protecting innocents from their lord's whims. It also has the hunter character, a commoner named Kiga Koyata, whose presence is used to show and remark upon the arrogance of the samurai class directly. Most samurai developed an arrogance that made them see others as not just lesser, but also not a threat. The hunter directly challenges this idea in both action and speech with his attacks upon the enemy samurai. In his most direct attack upon the arrogance the samurai class developed, he questions outright why the samurai are so arrogant.

The second film is *Twilight Samurai*. This film focuses upon a poor samurai named Hiroyuki Sanada who is trying to raise his daughters and take care of his mother who seems to be suffering from a form of dementia. In this film, Sanada is constantly ridiculed by the villagers and his fellow samurai. This is mainly due to his inability to keep a tidy appearance and go out drinking with them. These things are not a part of the code, but of the culture of samurai. The

Sanada consistently seeks to do what is right by his family, even though it often takes up his time to the point of being unable to even bathe. He tries to be virtuous when he can, and he wants to do the right thing to help others. This creates a conflict with traditional samurai culture which is exemplified in the final battle. When a rogue samurai must be put down, he is called upon for his unique battle style. When he encounters the samurai, the samurai is clearly in distress and mourning. They talk for a time, and Sanada gives the samurai the option of fleeing. He will allow him to go without chase as long as he doesn't come back. The samurai is going to take the option, but Sanada confesses that he does not even have his katana anymore, he was forced to sell it long ago. This enrages the rogue samurai. His pride, that has been built by the samurai culture, will not allow him to let this perceived insult pass. Ultimately this cost him his life as he cannot defeat the main character. This film shows us how the pride and importance placed upon the idea of face puts samurai in the position of doing acts that ultimately cost them their lives.

The final film *Ghost Dog* unique amongst these films due to it being a western samurai film, following a homeless man who has decided to live the life of the samurai and pledged himself to the service of an organized crime boss. Throughout the film, passages from *Hagakure* appear to help explain the way of the samurai. The main character fulfills his roles throughout the film by adhering to the code and does not face any significant ethical problems like the other films. Even in the end when he is slain for his lord, the film portrays it as an honorable act rather than something senseless. This film focuses upon showing how Bushido should be implemented without the influence of traditional samurai

culture. Even as he commits acts that are ethically immoral for his lord, the fact that he is doing so because he believes it is the right thing to do shines through.

Looking at the virtues used by both Bushido and Roman Stoicism, striking similarities can be seen in some areas. Some may take issue with the attempt to show the similarities between such far flung cultures. I acknowledge that the cultural influences that led to the creation of both of these systems are different as well as the intended audience for the virtue system. Roman Stoicism draws upon the rich history of Greek Stoicism and other forms of Greek thought while also combining it with their own. Rome did not have a strict class of people that comprised its military personnel and would recruit from its entire populace. The code of Bushido developed by taking pieces from different ways of thought that existed in Japan at the time such as Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism. Japan had a distinct warrior caste of the samurai which had specific duties and privileges that they enjoyed alongside their military service. While it is true that the recruiting of peasants and others would be done for military purposes, none of these recruits would become a part of the samurai caste without being given such a privilege by a lord. Alongside these cultural differences, the intended audience of these systems are very different. Bushido was intended for use amongst the samurai and only them. It was created and practiced without any intention that any other group in the society would use or benefit from it. This is opposed to Roman Stoicism that meant for everyone in society to use and benefit from. This is clearly seen in how three of the main contributors to Roman Stoicism are: Markus Aralias, the emperor of the Roman Empire; Epictetus, a slave; and Seneca, a scholar.

The differences between the systems are striking and should be noted, but the broader similarities are important to note as well. Both Japan and the Roman Empire share a militaristic spirit about them. Rome was at times for its conquest across the continent of Europe and Japan has a long history of military conflicts, both dealing with outside influences, such as China or Mongolia, and wars amongst the lords of the island. The interesting part of this examination is that these cultures are so different from each other in their influences. Without any contact between them, these two warrior cultures created virtue systems that have striking similarities in their virtues. This is a fascinating turn of events that helps give insight into how Kurosawa was able to combine ideas from disparate cultures into an appealing ethical system.

Exploring the world of virtue ethics can be difficult without references to help understand the various types of virtue ethics. Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* is a wonderful reference to help understand Bushido, especially his own understanding of Bushido which focuses upon heroism, and similar virtue ethics like Roman Stoicism. The medium of film provides us with a unique view of people acting out these virtuous beliefs that many may not be able to find in their day-to-day lives. It shows us the importance of living a virtuous life and the dangers of excess, especially those that can form from the culture one lives in. Honor, Courage, and Honesty are virtues that take years of focused effort to acquire but can promote human flourishing when not taken to excess.

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