**Human Flourishing and Martyrdom as Blurring the Distinction Between Secular and Religious Cores: Reason and Passion in 4 Maccabees**

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Enduring questions evoke inquiry, analysis and assessment of issues basic to human existence. They evoke complex perspectives that both draw and blur lines between religious and secular stances. An enduring question invites participation in an inquiry, but does not privilege one response over another. However, it also provides the opportunity to articulate both religious and secular responses. Predetermined divisions between secular and religious may hinder our understanding and appreciation of the ways that respondents draw and blur those lines or, at least, draw them in ways quite different than our own. The enduring question itself can blur lines between religious and secular in the process of asking. Responding to open-ended question draws lines and uncovers similarities and differences. This paper will address the question of whether martyrdom, the giving up of ones life, has a role in human flourishing. This question will serve as an example of the way that lines between secular and religious may take unexpected turns. The core will be used as an example how responses to open-ended questions both blur and affirm boundaries between the secular and religious.

IV Maccabees includes a lengthy set of dialogues between Jewish protagonists facing martyrdom and the antagonist, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, over adherence to the Jewish law not to eat certain meat and Antiochus' demand that they eat it or die. The problem is established in an historical digression:

For when he was warring against Ptolemy in Egypt, he heard that a rumor of his death had spread and that the people of Jerusalem had rejoiced greatly. He speedily marched against them, and after he had plundered them he issued a decree that if any of them were found observing the ancestral law they should die. When, by means of his decrees, he had not been able in any way to put an end to the people's observance of the law, but saw that all his threats and punishments were being disregarded —even to the extent that women, because they had circumcised their sons, were thrown headlong from heights along with their infants, though they had known beforehand that they would suffer this— when, I say, his decrees were despised by the people, he himself tried through torture to compel everyone in the nation to eat defiling foods and to renounce Judaism. (4 Macc. 4:22-26 NRSV w/ Apocrypha)

The author states that foundation of the animosity was Antiochus' bruised ego when the Jews rejoiced at his rumored death. Their joy was at the perceived demise of the one who had made changes to their religious practices. The attempt to turn the Jews from their law by means of torture, rather than only slaughtering them, provides the author with the occasion to present philosophical arguments that include consideration of reason, passions, law, and human well-being.

The task set forth in IV Maccabees is "whether devout reason is absolute master of the passions" (εἰ αὐτοδέσποτός ἐστι τῶν παθῶν ὁ εὐσεβὴς λογισμός) (1:1). The writing purports to be a philosophical presentation on the occasion of the anniversary commemorating the martyrs. The setting would suggest an encomium, but it carries the features of a political deliberative argument about the advantage gained by particular actions. Political deliberation, according to the *Ad Herennium*, would normally include arguments about advantages gained from security or honor (3.2.3). The text guides the reader through an argument on behalf of reason that is characterized by εὐσεβὴς, which is variously translated as religious, pious, or devout. I will use the "devout" for reasons that will become clearer below. Devout reason leads one to give up security of life itself for the sake of honor and as the most advantageous way to live. The argument uses both philosophical arguments and dialogues between protagonists who are facing martyrdom and represent devout reason, and the main antagonist, who fails to see the reasonableness and benefit of ὁ εὐσεβὴς λογισμός, or at least their version of it. The debate is framed around the nature of the passions, which are this-worldly, mundane concerns. The stakes of the debate are raised as the seemingly inconsequential mundane topic of ritual food purity laws are placed into the framework of self-preservation from the threat of martyrdom. Given the weightier concern of self-preservation, the antagonists cannot fathom the insistence of protagonists in their devoted adherence to the food laws.

When nature has granted it to us, why should you abhor eating the very excellent meat of this animal? It is senseless not to enjoy delicious things that are not shameful, and wrong to spurn the gifts of nature. It seems to me that you will do something even more senseless if, by holding a vain opinion concerning the truth, you continue to despise me to your own hurt. (5:8-10)

The protagonists bring the questions of food and self-preservation under the common umbrella of "the passions" and argue that ὁ εὐσεβὴς λογισμός religious reason is indeed the absolute master (αὐτοδέσποτός) of all passions, whether seemingly inconsequential food issues, or life and death issues. The journey through the repetitious dialogues, tortures, and martyrdoms of the old man Eleazar, seven brothers, and their mother invites the reader to move beyond an abstract philosophical discussion into the passionate devotion and devout reasoning of soon-to-be martyrs.

The basic structure of the argument is established in an opening set of proofs from logic, which is set out as the following in 1:15-27:

* Reason is the mind that prefers the life of wisdom.
* Wisdom is the knowledge of divine and human matters, their causes, and use to human advantage.
* Knowledge of divine and human matters is acquired from the Law.
* Knowledge derived from divine law becomes wisdom that takes shape in the form of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance
* These virtues will control the passions related to both pleasure and pain.

In brief, reason is preference for the law that gives knowledge that guides prudence, justice, courage, and temperance for human advantage. The longest part of the argument concerns temperance in 3:19-17:6, as can be seen in the following outline of the writing.

1.1-12 Statement

1:13-1:30 Proofs from Logic: Definition of Terms

1:31-3:19 Proofs: Temperance and Justice

2:21-23 Foundation of Thesis

2:24-3:18 Objection

3:19-17:6 Proof: Temperance

17:7-18:24 Epilogue: Praise and Exhortation

The account of the nine martyrs runs from 5:1-17:6. Eleazar repeats the author's argument to Antiochus, including the belief in that the law is divine, but allows one curious hypothetical condition that potentially breaks down the barrier between religious and secular.

18 *Even if*, as you suppose, our law were not truly divine and we had wrongly held it to be divine, not even so would it be right for us to invalidate our reputation for piety. 19 Therefore do not suppose that it would be a petty sin if we were to eat defiling food; 20 to transgress the law in matters either small or great is of equal seriousness, 21 for in either case the law is equally despised. 22 You scoff at our philosophy as though living by it were irrational, 23 but it teaches us self-control, so that we master all pleasures and desires, and it also trains us in courage, so that we endure any suffering willingly; 24 it instructs us in justice, so that in all our dealings we act impartially, and it teaches us piety, so that with proper reverence we worship the only living God.

Eleazar maintains that the law, whether divine or not, teaches appropriate virtue. Adherence to virtue, regardless of the origin, appears tantamount to religious devotion. If Antiochus were to adhere to his own secular virtues, the same virtues as espoused here by the Jews, then he too would be following the one God. Antiochus is not granted an overtly religious voice, if by that we mean statements about devotion to one or more gods. Historically, that runs counter to his violation of the temple in Jerusalem by offering sacrifices to Zeus there. His actions were, in part, religiously motivated. This author, however, portrays him not only without reference to his gods, but also as irreligious because he is not virtuous. This tactic works if the virtues of the Jews and Greeks are identified as the same. There is also not a discussion of which religion is right or wrong, since the author apparently assumes that virtue would be reverence for the one and only God. This is a remarkable argument that religions that are virtuous are all the same. When a religious position is threatened it is not an unusual tactic to deny the religion of the other, making them irreligious, or to claim that they are the same. The identification and clarification that specific actions as virtuous, or not, is a primary task. Antiochus' unwillingness to accept the power and reasonableness of the argument maintains the antagonism and leads him to use the power of torture and death (the passions) to accomplish his ends.

Eleazar represents devout reason triumphing over pleasure (the food) and over pain (the torture). The question is then raised whether the same can be said of young men as of the old (7:16-23). The deaths of the brothers in succession are meant to demonstrate that youth too can stand firm in devout reason (7:24-14:10). The love of the mother for her sons and the temptation to act to save them from torment is also considered, as is her own grief in her loss of loved ones and of future descendants (14:11-17:6).

Having reached the end of the argument in the core text, let us return to the argument of this paper that addressing open-ended enduing questions, like whether martyrdom can have a role in human flourishing, both draws and blurs the lines between the secular and religious. The examples of these martyrdoms involve core familial relationships that are simultaneously religious and secular. They are a group of people who have normal family connections and passions, contain both aged and youth, males and females. The challenge they faced to control passions of desire and pain is heightened because of the familial connections that bind them together emotionally.

The story involves adherence to law that is viewed as having divine origin, but the situation itself is not uniquely religious, if by that one means a reference to deity. Certainly this is a religious family and the problem is being posed from a set of religious convictions about this particular law. However, controlling the passions by reason is the root of the argument. The religious, particularly through identification of Jewish law, and the secular, as identified by virtues held in common, are merged as well as distinct. The knowledge that controls the passions could be attributed to religious or secular origins in this text. Similar arguments could be made on the basis that the law is older, that is grounded in self-evident truths, or that it is based on rigorous observations and testing.

The analysis of the political deliberative rhetoric reveals common assumptions about how the argument should be constructed. Again, an illustration from the *Ad Herennium* reveals commonalities with IV Maccabees.

III. We shall be using the topics of **Wisdom** if we compare advantages and disadvantages, counselling the pursuit of the one and the avoidance of the other; if we urge a course in a field in which we have a technical knowledge of the ways and means whereby each detail should be carried out; or if we recommend some policy in a matter whose history we can recall either from direct experience or hearsay--in this instance we can easily persuade our hearers to the course we wish by adducing the precedent.

We shall be using the topics of **Justice** if we say that we ought to pity innocent persons and suppliants; if we know that it is proper to repay the well-deserving with gratitude; if we explain that we ought to punish the guilty; if we urge that faith ought zealously to be kept; if we say that the laws and customs of the state ought especially to be preserved; if we contend that alliances and friendships should scrupulously be honoured; if we make it clear that the duty imposed by nature toward parents, gods and fatherland must be religiously observed; if we maintain that the ties of hospitality, clientage, kinship, and relationship by marriage must inviolably be cherished; if we show that neither reward nor favour nor peril nor animosity ought to lead us astray from the right path; if we say that in all cases a principle of dealing alike with all should be established. With these and like topics of Justice we shall demonstrate that an action of which we are sponsors in Assembly or council is just, and by their contraries we shall demonstrate that an action is unjust. As a result we shall be provided with the same commonplaces for both persuasion and dissuasion.

When we invoke as motive for a course of action steadfastness in **Courage**, we shall make it clear that men ought to follow and strive after noble and lofty actions, and that, by the same token, actions base and unworthy of the brave ought therefore to be despised by brave men and considered as beneath their dignity. Again, from an honourable act no peril or toil, however great, should divert us; death ought to be preferred to disgrace; no pain should force an abandonment of duty; no man's enmity should be feared in defence of truth; for country, for parents, guest-friends, intimates, and for the things justice commands us to respect, it behooves us to brave any peril and endure any toil.

We shall be using the topics of **Temperance** if we censure the inordinate desire for office, money, or the like; if we restrict each thing to its definite natural bounds; if we show how much is enough in each case, advise against going too far, and set the due limit to every matter (3.3.4-5).

It is important to recognize the similarities and difference in the way arguments are constructed in order to guide discussions in fruitful directions. An example might be to note that the argument is martyrdom is more advantageous to human flourishing because it is honorable and right and guided by these four virtues. It is *not* an argument about advantage through security. This could hardly be, since martyrdom is the loss of security in the sense of loss of life. The *Ad Herennium* (4.43.55-4.58) provides another lengthy example, provided as an appendix below, about the construction of an argument. This passage parallels IV Maccabees in both form and content. In form it uses the theme, the reason, expression of the theme in a new form, reasons again, argument from the contrary, argument by comparison, the historical example, the example, testimony from antiquity, and a conclusion. In terms of content, the employment of the theme of martyrdom on the topic of loyalty is strikingly similar to IV Maccabees. The masterful combination of dialogue and narration, martyrdom and loyalty is an indication that IV Maccabees draws from a tradition familiar with the premises of *Ad Herennium*. In each text one must ask what advantage is gained. It should be noted that the author of 4 Maccabees does move disadvantage and advantage into the afterlife in the forms of judgment (18:22) and of immortal souls (18:23). This is not insignificant, but neither is it built into the main body of the argument. This would be a productive point of conversation about the religious and the secular. Is it possible to have advantage in life by means of death, or must it be measured in terms of afterlife? What are the ways that security (in life and after life) and honor (also in life and after life) intersect and diverge?

Miroslav Volf, in the 2014 Payton Lectures at Fuller Seminary, proposed six markers of world religions. Three of these concern the relationship of the transcendent and the mundane.

* Two-worlds account of reality: transcendent (unseen) and mundane (seen)
* There are goods beyond normal human flourishing
* Transformation of mundane realities. Quarrel with life of way life ought to be. Primacy given to transcendent over the mundane.

If we use this language, then 4 Maccabees does include the religious dichotomy between the mundane and the transcendent, including life now and the afterlife. His second point can be seen in the argument that devout reason considers goods beyond immediate satisfaction of the passions (pleasure and pain). 4 Maccabees does not have a primarily teleological argument about mundane actions in relation to advantage in the afterlife. Rather it radically transforms mundane realities into the way life ought to be under the control of devout reason. The argument is rather this-worldly. It is devout reason guided by law that is transcendent. If reason then is primarily about transforming the mundane order where passions threaten to create disadvantageous ways of living (including cruelly torturing entire families), are their forms of reason not connected with deities that might also be labeled as devout reason, i.e., reason devoted to a greater cause? I posit that there are, in fact, many forms, including nationalism, patriotism, heroism, and any other mindset that controls the passions of self-service and even self-preservation. In each of these there is honor that is gained as an advantage over a life of dishonor. The argument of 4 Maccabees is that honor is granted by the deity, but for many people it is also granted by the state or other cultural forms. Losing one's life, in some manner, in doing what is right, brings honor, which is a value that yields human flourishing.

A core text like 4 Maccabees can easily become part of a religious or secular core course or program that asks questions about human flourishing. It could be paired with classic philosophical texts, such as Plato's Republic, sacred texts from Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or other religions, or with secular texts of military patriotism, heroism, and other forms of lives of service. There are several stories of productive dialogues on our campus, which is from a Mennonite peace church tradition, between people who serve others in non-military ways at great cost to themselves and veterans who have served alongside others who have lost their lives in military action. Sharing and seeking to understand one another's stories of sacrifice and devotion has led to newfound respect and has opened new and complex ways of thinking about being devoted to something.

Devout reasoning, ὁ εὐσεβὴς λογισμός, is both religious and secular reasoning. It is reasoning about the purpose of life and what one should live for, or give one's life for. Those devotions lead to regulating all other passions towards those ends. Martyrdom is a crucial part of the discussion about human flourishing because it forces consideration of what is worth living and dying for.

**APPENDIX A**

**Outline of IV Maccabees**

1.1-12 Statement

1:1-4 Thesis

1:5-6 Objection

1:7-12 Historical Example

1:13-1:30 Proofs from Logic: Definition of Terms

1:13 Thesis restated

1:14 Task to define reason, passion, forms of passion, reason as lord over forms of passions

1:15-19 Reason

1:20-28 Passion

1:29-30 Thesis restated

1:31-3:19 Proofs: Temperance and Justice

1:31-2:6 Temperance

2:6b-14 Justice

2:15-20 Temperance over Malicious Passions

2:21-23 Foundation of Thesis

2:24-3:18 Objection

3:19-17:6 Proof: Temperance

3:19 Topic announced

3:20-21 Summary

4:1-26 Historical Digression

5:1-7:23 Example: Antiochus and Eleazar

8:1-12:19 Example: Seven young brothers (amplification)

13:6-14:10 Praise of Seven Brothers

14:11-17:6 Example of the Mother of the Seven Brothers

17:7-18:24 Epilogue: Praise and Exhortation

17:7-24 Praise the conduct of the martyrs

18:1-2 Parenesis

18:3-5 Examples summarized: Martyrs and Antiochus

18:6-19 Speech: mother's exhortation

18:20-23 Argument from Contrast

**APPENDIX B**

**Ad Herennium (4.43.55-4.58)**

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XLIII. Dialogue- which I shall soon more fully discuss in its place and shall now touch upon briefly as far as may be sufficient for the present purpose consists in rutting in the mouth of some person language in keeping with his character, as follows (for the sake of greater clarity, to continue the same theme as above: "The wise man will think that for the common weal we ought to undergo every peril. Often he will say to himself: 'Not for self alone was I born, but also, and much more, for the fatherland. Above all, let me spend my life, which I owe to fate, for the salvation of my country. She has nourished me. She has in safety and honour reared me even to this time of life. She has protected my interests by good laws, the best of customs, and a most honourable training. How can I adequately repay her from whom I have received these blessings?' Accordingly the wise man often says this to himself, when the republic is in danger, he on his part will shun no danger."

Again, the idea is changed by the treatment by means of a transfer to the form of Arousal, when not only we ourselves seem to speak under emotion, but we also stir the hearer, thus "Who is possessed of reasoning power so feeble, whose soul is bound in such straits of envy, that he would not heap eager praise upon this man and judge him most wise, a man who for the salvation of the fatherland, the security of the state, and the prosperity of the republic eagerly undertakes and gladly undergoes any danger, no matter how great or terrible? For my part, my desire to praise this man adequately is greater than my power to do so, and I am sure that this feeling of inadequacy is shared by all of you."

The theme, then, will be varied in speaking in these three ways: in the words, in the delivery, in the treatment. In the treatment we shall vary the theme by two means: by Dialogue and by Arousal.

But when we descant upon the same theme, we shall use a great many variations. Indeed, after having expressed the theme simply, we can subjoin the Reason, and then express the theme in another form, with or without the Reasons; next we can present the Contrary (all this I have discussed under Figures of Diction); then a Comparison and an Example (about these I shall say more in their place); XLIV. and finally the Conclusion (the essential details of which are discussed in Book II, when I showed how one should bring arguments to a close; in this Book I have explained the nature of that figure of diction which is called Conclusion). A Refinement of this sort, which will consist of numerous figures of diction and of thought, can therefore be exceedingly ornate.

The following, then, will illustrate a treatment in seven parts - to continue the use of the same theme for my example, in order that you may know how easily, by the precepts of rhetoric, a simple idea is developed in a multiple manner:

"(Theme) The wise man will, on the republic's behalf, shun no peril, (Reasons) because it may often happen that if a man has been loath to perish for his country it will be necessary for him to perish with her. Further, since it is from our country that we receive all our advantages, no disadvantage incurred on her behalf is to be regarded as severe.

"(Theme in new form) I say, then, that they who flee from the peril to be undergone on behalf of the republic ad foolishly, (Reasons) for they cannot avoid the disadvantages, and are found guilty of ingratitude towards the state.

(Argument from the Contrary) But on the other hand they who, with peril to themselves, confront the perils of the fatherland, are to be considered wise, since they render to their country the homage due her, and prefer to die for many of their fellow citizens instead of with them. For it is extremely unjust to give back to nature, when she compels, the life you have received from nature, and not to give to your country, when she calls for it, the life you have preserved thanks to your country; (Argument by Comparison) and When you can die for fatherland with the great manliness and honour, to prefer to live in disgrace and cowardice; and when you are willing to face danger for friends and parents and your other kin, to refuse to run the risk for the republic, which embraces all these and that most holy name of fatherland as well.

"He who in a voyage prefers his own to his vessel's security, deserves contempt. No less blameworthy is he who in a crisis of the republic consults in his own preference to the common safety. For from the wreck of a ship many of those on board escape unharmed, but from the wreck of the fatherland no one can swim to safety.

"(Argument from Example, testimony of antiquity) It is that, in my opinion, Decius well understood, who is said to have devoted himself to death, and, in order to save his legions, to have plunged into the midst of the enemy. He gave up his life, but did not throw it away; for the cost of a very cheap good he redeemed a sure good, of a small good the greatest good. he gave his life, and received his country in exchange. He lost his life, and gained glory, which, transmitted with highest praise, shines more and more every day as time goes on.

"(Conclusion) But if reason is shown and illustration confirmed that it is fitting to confront danger in defence of the republic, they are to be esteemed wise who do not shrink from any peril when the security of the fatherland is at stake."

It is of these types, then, that Refining consists. I have been led to discuss it at rather great length because it not only gives force and distinction to the speech when we plead a cause, but it is by far our most important means of training for skill in style. It will be advantageous therefore to practise the principles of Refining in exercises divorced from a real cause, and in actual pleading to put them to use in the Embellishment of an argument, which I discussed in Book II.