

CHAPTER 2

THIS SEARCH GOES ON Christian, Warrior, Buddhist

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Because they are restless seekers, not content to think and sound the same, Metallica has changed, James Hetfield has changed, not just musically but personally. As the lead singer, chief riff writer, and main lyricist, Hetfield is the band member fans most readily identify with. His struggle is our struggle, his virtues and vices our own.

Virtues are character traits that make a person a good person. We typically think of patience, self-control, and honesty as virtues, but power, well-placed aggression, and even manipulation can be virtues, according to some accounts.¹ Hetfield's lyrics and biography suggest that he has journeyed through three different sets of virtues.² The journey—the search—begins in Hetfield's youth with the rejection of

¹ In the history of western philosophy, the concept of virtue can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle. See Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999). For a more recent account of the importance of the virtuous life, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1981). Plato, Aristotle, and MacIntyre view virtue in the more traditional “goody two-shoes” way; however, as we will see, there are alternate accounts of the virtuous life given by thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Thomas Hobbes, and Niccolò Machiavelli.

² I recognize that the narrators of Hetfield's songs cannot always be identified with their lyricist, but still they often provide a glimpse of his psyche. Also, let's note that these different sets of virtues overlap to some extent. For our purposes, though, we'll focus on their differences.

Christian virtues enforced by family. In their place come warrior virtues adopted in adolescence and adulthood, which—fueled by alcohol—finally failed. The result is, perhaps unwittingly, the acceptance of Buddhist virtues.

The God That Failed: Rejecting Christian Virtues

Pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth are the Seven Deadly Sins. To get a sense of Christian virtues, consider the opposites of the Seven Deadly Sins: humility, benevolence, temperance, chastity, kindness, generosity, and diligence. Also, think of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–7:28), which highlights such Christian virtues as meekness, mercy, love of enemies, peacemaking, acceptance of persecution, refusal to judge, and forgiveness (“turn the other cheek”).³

Christian virtues constitute part of what the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) called the *slave morality*—a world-denying morality for those too timid to grab life by the balls. Not meant to liberate a person from earthly suffering, Christian virtues merely help a person endure it. Such virtues thus appeal to the downtrodden, to people who lack worldly power, who are willing to inject what Karl Marx (1818–83) called the *opium of the masses* (aka religion).

In rejecting the slave morality, Nietzsche famously proclaimed that “God is dead.” Not so much a statement of atheism as a diagnosis of disease, this declaration means that belief in the God of Christianity has become worn out, practically impossible, dead—like a party with only three frat boys and some stale beer. Christian virtues have no transcendental home (they're not written in stone in some heavenly realm because there is *no such thing* as a heavenly realm), and they

³ Christianity, specifically Catholicism, espouses Four Cardinal Virtues (wisdom, fortitude, temperance, and justice), Three Theological Virtues (faith, hope, and charity), and Five Intellectual Virtues (wisdom, science, understanding, prudence, and art). While these are certainly all important Christian virtues, a better sense of the set of Christian virtues can be gleaned from considering the Sermon on the Mount and the opposites of the Seven Deadly Sins.

benefit only the weak. Though it will be difficult and painful, we are better off burying “the God that Failed” and moving on.

Of course, the young James Hetfield could identify with this sentiment even if he never read Nietzsche or Marx. Hetfield was raised in the tradition of the Church of Christ, Scientist (also known as the Christian Science church), which, in addition to preaching traditional Christian virtues, forbids the practice of medicine. Bizarrely, in Christian Science medicine is forbidden because it wouldn’t do any good in healing the body anyway. According to this church’s doctrines, the body is really an illusory cage for the soul and, if someone is sick, all one can do is pray that God will heal the sick person. Whether a person lives or dies—sick or not—is totally in the hands of God. Add to this the idea that what is most important is your soul and what will happen to it in the life to come, and we can see why the Church of Christ, Scientist would seem dogmatic and world-denying. It’s no wonder that Hetfield rejected the religion of his upbringing and, with it, many of the virtues it held dear.⁴

“So gather ’round young warriors now . . .”

But where do you turn once you’ve rejected the Christian virtues of your upbringing? One possibility is to adopt warrior virtues. Historically, warrior virtues arise out of warrior castes and classes and are most often associated with ancient civilizations and nomadic tribes.⁵ Before Christianity, the Greeks and Romans looked upon their warriors with great admiration for their display of virtues such as courage, strength, and honor. Think of Achilles from Homer’s *Iliad*,

⁴ For an explanation of the theology and philosophy behind Christian Science, complete with criticisms, see Linda Kramer, *The Religion That Kills: Christian Science: Abuse, Neglect, and Mind Control* (Louisville, KY: Huntington House Publishers, 2000).

⁵ A very different set of warrior virtues is espoused in the *Bhagavad Gita*, chapter 2. In this Hindu sacred text, obedience and conformity to duty are seen as virtues of the warrior. See *Bhagavad Gita*, trans. by Stephen Mitchell (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000). Another prominent warrior code in the East is that of the Samurai. The Samurai are closer to the western ideal of the warrior than is the ideal offered in the *Bhagavad Gita*. See, for example, Yamamoto Tsunetomo, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. by William Scott Wilson (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002).

played by Brad Pitt in *Troy*. Think of Schwarzenegger’s Conan the Barbarian, who offers us a glimpse at a life governed by unrefined warrior virtues. Asked what is best in life, Conan responds: “To crush your enemies, to see them driven before you, and to hear the lamentation of their women.” Here Conan echoes a quote attributed to the great conqueror Genghis Khan (ca. 1162–1227): “The greatest pleasure is to vanquish your enemies and chase them before you, to rob them of their wealth and see those dear to them bathed in tears, to ride their horses and clasp to your bosom their wives and daughters.”

Although the word *virtue* can have a rather feminine connotation these days, as it is readily associated with such Christian virtues as meekness and chastity, the English word *virtue* is rooted in the warrior, coming from the Latin word *virtus*, meaning “manliness” (from the root word *vir*, man, as in “virile”).⁶ Surely this fits Hetfield, who hunts with Ted Nugent, watches old Western movies, and gets greasy with classic cars and custom bikes. He’s indisputably a man’s man, a warrior—not some pretty boy, politically correct rock star.

The warrior virtues get plenty of play in Metallica’s music. Consider these: *courage* (“bloody, but never cry submission”), *hardness of heart* (“No remorse is the one command”), *self-sufficiency* (“by myself but not alone / I ask no one”), *proper pride* (“I have stripped of all but pride / so in her I do confide / and she keeps me satisfied / gives me all I need”), *aggressiveness* (“pounding out aggression”), *physical strength and health* (“move swift all senses clean”), *individuality* (“following our instinct, not a trend / go against the grain until the end”), *perseverance and endurance* (“We will never stop / we will never quit / ’cause we are Metallica”), *honor* (“dying on your feet for honesty”), *loyalty* (“We are as one as we all are the same / fighting for one cause”), and *emotional control* (“I adapt to the unknown”). But it’s not just the lyrics; the music itself reinforces the warrior virtues, particularly aggressiveness and individuality.

⁶ Consider the manly warrior kinds of virtues associated with the Brothers Grimm fairy tale entitled “Iron John.” See Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). On the topic of manliness, see also Harvey Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006) and Judith Grant, “Bring the Noise: Hypermasculinity in Heavy Metal and Rap,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 27 (1996), pp. 5–30.

With songs including “Metal Militia,” “Phantom Lord,” “No Remorse,” “Seek and Destroy,” and “The Four Horsemen,” *Kill 'Em All* is a pure celebration of warrior virtues. Using the imagery of the warrior to represent adolescent, existential crisis and rebellion, the message is clear: life is war, “war without end.” Life is a struggle with no God or guardian angel looking out for you (“I know I’m my best friend”). Only the strong survive. For Metallica, like-minded individuals can choose—not be forced—to join together in a “metal militia.” And they can un-choose that membership as well. There are no uniforms, just “your leathers and your spikes.” The causes are not noble, just doing a little senseless destruction in the kill-or-be-killed world in which life, as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) said, is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”⁷

The struggle is not to be taken literally of course. *Kill 'Em All* was unparalleled in its appeal to angry, alienated, suburban, white teenage males (like myself) for whom life was a struggle despite having no real war to fight and dwelling in seemingly comfortable circumstances. Rather than simply accept that life sucks and fade to black, we took up the fight against whoever, whatever. As we saw it, war is hell, and life itself is war.

The kill 'em all lifestyle calls to mind Nietzsche’s “transvaluation of all values.” Declaring that “God is dead” and finding the virtues of Christianity poisonous, Nietzsche advocated a new morality. Our new resolution and commandment, as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra puts it, is “Stay true to the earth.”⁸ For Nietzsche, an action is good if it is done out of strength and bad if it is done out of weakness. So “scanning the scene in the city tonight / looking for you to start up the fight” is good if it is done out of strength, a feeling of power. “Remorse for the helpless one” is bad because it arises out of weakness. The warrior must be emotionally tough, immune to feelings of pity and remorse.

⁷ See Hobbes’ account of the state of nature in *Leviathan*, ed. by C.B. MacPherson (New York: Penguin, 1982). Hobbes’ conception of virtue is similar to Nietzsche’s in many ways, as both thinkers view deception, craftiness, and power as qualities a person must cultivate so as to survive and flourish in this world.

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: Penguin, 1966), p. 13. Here I have altered Walter Kaufmann’s translation. Interestingly, in *Zarathustra* Nietzsche details three stages of life—not unlike the three sets of virtues we are discussing—the camel, the lion, and the child.

Life, as Nietzsche sees it, is governed by the “will to power,” the innate drive to gain and express power. Getting shit-faced and causing some senseless destruction is one, unrefined, way to exercise the will to power, but ultimately a more fulfilling way might be to rule a country, make billions like Bill Gates, become a movie star, or even make music that unites musicians and listeners. The aggressive thrash of *Kill 'Em All* is nothing if not an expression of power, a creative act to be shared with an audience, “when our fans start screaming / it’s right.”⁹

But while one’s own power is to be expressed and celebrated, the power of others is to be watched and suspected. And so beginning with *Ride the Lightning* and *Master of Puppets* the lyrics become at times critical of literal war, reflecting on the abuse of the individual warrior by those in power. “For Whom the Bell Tolls” and “Disposable Heroes” portray individuals who are pawns in the games played by powerful war pigs. In a war he did not choose to fight the warrior kills for reasons he is not privy to. “Shouting gun, on they run through the endless gray / On the fight, for they are right, yes, but who’s to say? / For a hill men would kill, why? They do not know.” The warrior obeys the commands of those who care not for him—“Back to the front / you will do what I say, when I say / Back to the front / you will die when I say, you must die”—and to whom his death matters not—“Soldier boy, made of clay / now an empty shell / twenty-one, only son / but he served us well.” Still worse, “One” from the *Justice* album, shows the unfortunate results of a soldier not lucky enough to die in battle, whose catastrophic injuries and disabilities leave him as nothing but “a wartime novelty.”

Metallica’s warrior virtues have a kinship with Stallone’s Rambo, who justifies his actions by the principle of “first blood.” The other side drew first blood and so retaliation is justified: “never begins it, never, but once engaged . . . / never surrenders, showing the fangs of rage.” (If two wrongs don’t make a right, what does?) Rambo was misused as a soldier. After fighting an unjust war in Vietnam he returned to be mistreated as a veteran. Rambo remains a warrior in his virtues, though opposed to unjust wars and suspicious of the government. Similarly, Metallica consistently espouse warrior virtues

⁹ See Rachael Sotos, “Metallica’s Existential Freedom: From We to I and Back Again,” chapter 8 in this volume.

even while being highly critical of the loss of life and liberty due to the abuse of military and governmental power.

Still, Metallica are not whiney rock stars, wearing their convictions on their sleeves and shouting them from the stage.¹⁰ And most of their anti-war songs are not overtly political. “Fight Fire with Fire,” for example, features no holier-than-thou criticism of those making the decisions that lead to tragedy. Rather, the sad outcome simply seems the inevitable result of the warrior virtue of revenge in an absurd world. “Do unto others as they have done unto you / But what the hell is this world coming to? / Blow the universe into nothingness / Nuclear warfare shall lay us to rest.”

“Blackened” is most often interpreted as a song about environmental abuse, but certain lines—“winter it will send”; “millions of our years in minutes disappear”—suggest themes of nuclear fear, echoing “Fight Fire with Fire.” Indeed, “Fire to begin whipping dance of the dead” readily suggests helpless hordes fleeing the fallout of a nuclear winter. While conveying horror and disapproval, Metallica nonetheless makes something tragic sound cool. The only condemnation is of “the outcome of hypocrisy,” a fault for sure, but one we are all guilty of to varying degrees. The nuclear “fire” is perhaps just the inevitable result of the warrior virtues, which Metallica, after all, share with the warlords.

Despite discussion of literal war, Metallica’s emphasis has remained on the metaphorical battle, the struggle within. It’s better to choose your own war—to be a vigilante member of the metal militia or Damage, Inc.—than to be the victim of someone else’s. We need to be on guard and ready to fight in the defense of personal liberty. As “Don’t Tread on Me” instructs, “To secure peace is to prepare for war.”¹¹

¹⁰ Unlike many rock stars and celebrities, Hetfield wisely has avoided public declarations on particular wars, and on social issues in general. Although he has said it was sad and absurd to subject Iraqi prisoners of war to listen to Metallica, during a radio interview with NPR’s Terry Gross of *Fresh Air*, Hetfield managed to joke about it, saying: “We’ve been punishing our parents, our wives, our loved ones with this music forever . . . Why should the Iraqis be any different?” See the newspaper article written by Lane DeGregory, “Iraq ’n Roll,” *St. Petersburg Times*, November 21, 2004.

¹¹ “Don’t Tread on Me” is not a pro-war anthem, and its writing preceded and was in no way related to the first Gulf War. Rather, the song celebrates the warrior virtues of honor, courage, freedom, and perseverance symbolized by the flag of the Minutemen of Culpepper County, Virginia.

Still, we shouldn’t too quickly conclude that Metallica accepts and embodies *all* of the warrior virtues. “Man should be educated for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior; all else is folly” (*Zarathustra*, p. 66). Thus speaks Nietzsche’s character, Zarathustra. Indeed, sexual potency is often classed among the warrior virtues, but, because it is a rock and roll cliché, it gets little play by Metallica. Only the Nick Cave cover-song “Loverman” expresses it. While James and Lars have been known to frequent strip clubs, Metallica’s lyrics are completely without the usual bullshit about fast women and fast cars (except “Fuel”). Metallica is noteworthy among metal bands for their lack of sleaziness and misogyny, recognizing that in life’s war, as in Plato’s *Republic*, men and women alike must wield the blade. Neither Plato nor Metallica are overt feminists, but both recognize that women too can “kick some ass tonight.”

And kicking ass means facing the enemy head on. Craftiness—the trickery and deceit of one’s enemies that Nicolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) advocated—is often classed among the warrior virtues.¹² Think of the Trojan horse trick by which the Greeks finally penetrated the walls of Troy. But craftiness is not a virtue Metallica endorses. Instead, they stand for a kind of death before dishonor, “dying on your feet for honesty.” For Metallica at least, honesty is a warrior virtue. Indeed, “Honesty is my only excuse” and “When a man lies he murders / some part of the world.”¹³

Metallica also lacks a further warrior virtue (particularly prior to *St. Anger*): emotional control. In western culture this virtue is most associated with stoicism, the philosophy that counsels self-control, detachment, and acceptance of one’s fate. Clearly, there’s not much stoicism in Metallica.¹⁴ Instead, there’s a lot of acting out of emotion; the warrior pounds out his aggression. But with *Load/Re-Load* Hetfield’s lyrics become introspective and critical of an inability to

¹² Machiavelli’s most famous work is a kind of rulebook for craftiness, *The Prince*, trans. by William Connell (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2004).

¹³ Apropos of our warrior theme, this line is actually lifted from the movie *Excalibur* in which Merlin says it to King Arthur.

¹⁴ Stoicism in western philosophy can be traced back to Zeno of Citium in Cyprus (344–262 BCE). For discussions of the philosophy of Stoicism, see Brad Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Metallica has fleeting moments of stoicism in songs like “Escape” and “Wherever I May Roam.”

manage emotions.¹⁵ Consider “King Nothing’s” self-destructive desire for control and the pointlessness of feeling bad for “Poor Old Twisted Me.” Consider too the dawning realization of the futility of warrior virtues expressed by the sentiment “won’t waste my hate on you.”

Warrior virtues can only succeed with a healthy dose of stoicism, and stoicism itself will fail without a deep trust in fate. Yet stoicism and trust in fate are precisely what Metallica lack. Hetfield and company are driven by engaged emotions, not detached reason and spiritual acceptance. Without stoicism the life of the warrior virtues leads to nihilism—a belief in nothing anchored nowhere—and the inability to relieve one’s own suffering or the suffering of others.¹⁶ Looking outward for a fight is just a distraction. The warrior virtues don’t relieve the suffering within. The lyrics on *St. Anger* reflect this defeat, this inability to overcome suffering. Consider these lines from “Frantic”: “I’ve worn out always being afraid / An endless stream of fear that I’ve made / Treading water full of worry / This frantic tick tick talk of hurry.” And these lines from “The Unnamed Feeling”: “I just wanna get the fuck away from me / I rage, I glaze, I hurt, I hate / I wanna hate it all away.”

The warrior lives by the code of an eye for an eye, which eventually leaves everyone blind. Just consider the outcome of “Fight Fire with Fire.” Warrior virtues are adopted to fill the void, the emptiness inside, but warriors who don’t die young eventually find the void swallows them whole. “My lifestyle determines my deathstyle.” With time, the mental and emotional pain that comes from “dealing out the agony within” is too much to bear. The warrior virtues lead to self-destruction in the forms of addiction, madness, and despair. Sad but true.

¹⁵ The “life is war” metaphor largely drops out for the loads. But “Where the Wild Things Are” with its “toy soldiers off to war” wonders whether the fate of a child will be “life is war,” whether this earth will “keep you clean or stained through.” Its military drum beat and cry of “never surrender” add to the martial mood.

¹⁶ I leave it an open question whether the life of the warrior virtues can succeed if it is supplemented with stoicism. For further consideration, see Nancy Sherman, *Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy Behind the Military Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Karmas Burning

If you’re Hetfield what do you do at this point? You’ve taken two extreme paths. The life of the warrior virtues has taken its toll on you, and you can’t go home again to Christian virtues. Christianity had you on your knees, and St. Anger choked you. Where to go? The good news is that the Buddha can remove the thorn within. Buddhism counsels taking the “middle way” with all things. And the middle way in this case is the mean between the extremes of the Christian and warrior virtues. Buddhist virtues include wisdom, kindness, compassion, and freedom from suffering.¹⁷

Although Kirk Hammett meditates and reads eastern philosophy, I’m not suggesting that Metallica have become Buddhists, no more than I’m suggesting that in the past they were actual warriors or devoted readers of Nietzsche.¹⁸ Buddhism shares much in common with stoicism and its disciplining of the emotions. But as Hetfield’s lyrics have gradually moved with maturity from the raging *reaction* of the warrior to the introspective *reflection* of the Buddhist, the search for emotional control is now paired better with Buddhist virtues than with the stoicism of warrior virtues.

There have been some surface-level Metalli-Buddha connections from early on. Consider a too-little-known fact: Buddha denied the existence of the gods and the soul. In opposition to the Hinduism of his day, which believed in many gods and taught that enlightenment could be achieved only after several lifetimes through reincarnation, Buddha instead offered a teaching for achieving enlightenment, nirvana, in this life. Similarly, Metallica has looked to this life and stayed true to the earth. For some of their peers—notably Venom, Slayer, and Exodus—rejection of Christian virtues took the form of a cartoonish advocacy of Satanic virtues. Metallica, though, despite one campy invitation to jump in the fire, stayed true to the earth while avoiding the silly satanic spirituality of the occult.

Believe it or not, Buddhists are instructed, “if you see the Buddha on the road, kill the Buddha.” The message is simple. The historical

¹⁷ Traditionally, the four primary Buddhist virtues are love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and impartiality.

¹⁸ See The Metallica Interview in *Playboy*, April 2001, pp. 67–80, 164–5.

Buddha was not a god, just an example of what we all can be. So the place to look for the Buddha is not outside, not “on the road” or at some shrine. The Buddha is within.¹⁹ You too can achieve nirvana. Similarly, early on at least, Metallica were not gods, not rock stars. They were heavy metal fans playing in a heavy metal band. The punk mantra “fuck your heroes” comes pretty close to suiting them.²⁰ On stage and off, Metallica wore the same clothes as their fans: jeans, concert t-shirts, denim and leather jackets. They refused to make videos for MTV; their music was a gift to fans they considered family. They were not to be worshipped. In other words, if you see the rock star on the stage, kill the rock star.²¹

The first noble truth of Buddhism is that “all life is suffering,” something Metallica has been painfully aware of from its earliest days. “Life in the fast lane is just how it seems / hard and it is heavy / dirty and mean.” The second noble truth, that desire (or craving) is the cause of suffering, is something Metallica were dimly—but not fully—aware of early on.²² Certainly, there was the anti-materialist mentality of doing things on their own terms. They would not bow to MTV or commercial radio to make a buck. They stood against “halls of justice painted green / money talking.” But sadly they did eventually become rock stars with fast cars, Lear jets, and expensive houses and divorces. Although Hetfield had once sung “Do you want what I want? / Desire not a thing,” desire had in fact become the master of puppets. On *Load* the connection between suffering and desire began to dawn, and it became an issue of real concern on *St. Anger*, where there is more recognition of the need to detach from the self and from desire.

¹⁹ See the chapter on Buddhism in Robert Ellwood and Barbara McGraw, *Many People, Many Faiths: Women and Men in the World's Religions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2004).

²⁰ David F. Smydra, Jr., “Zen and the Art of Slam Dancing: Buddhist Punks Find Enlightenment in the Pit,” *Boston Globe*, September 19, 2004, www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/09/19/zen_and_the_art_of_slam_dancing?

²¹ Again, not literally, of course. May Dimebag Darrell rest in peace.

²² There are four noble truths. The third noble truth is that we can be liberated from suffering. The fourth noble truth is that liberation requires following the eightfold path: 1. right views 2. right thoughts 3. right speech 4. right action 5. right livelihood 6. right effort 7. right mindfulness and 8. right concentration.

Compassion, ego deflation, and acceptance can potentially bring freedom from suffering. These Buddhist virtues are also the virtues of recovery, as Hetfield has learned. Ego deflation and acceptance begin to manifest in the lyrics of *St. Anger*. Consider the “Frantic” mention of “karmas burning” and the realization that “My lifestyle determines my deathstyle.” This wisdom was gained through painful experience. Hetfield is aware of his unhealthy tendency to play the tripartite role of judge, jury, and executioner (too) in “Dirty Window,” a song that also displays an awareness of suffering from a false self-image—surely an occupational hazard. “All Within My Hands” presents a self-mocking look at Hetfield’s need to control people and situations: “Love is control / I’ll die if I let go . . . All within my hands / Squeeze it in, crush it down / All within my hands / Hold it dear, hold it suffocate.” “I will only let you breathe / My air that you receive / Then we’ll see if I let you love me.” If he is wise and fortunate, the warrior turned Buddhist learns that life is not a war (not even metaphorically) and paradoxically you must surrender to win. You can’t swim against the current of the universe without being pulled under.

We’ve seen wisdom and freedom from suffering develop on *St. Anger*, but compassion and kindness are clearly undeveloped. Such virtues involve more than just renouncing the “no remorse” approach to life. They involve actively reaching out to alleviate the suffering of others. In his personal life since *St. Anger* Hetfield shows signs of developing in compassion and kindness, moving towards the Buddhist ideal, the Bodhisattva, who, having eliminated his own suffering, seeks to ease and eliminate the suffering of others. While Hetfield, like all of us, is far from perfect and surely no Mother Teresa, his work with other recovering alcoholics and addicts displays admirable compassion. On May 12, 2006 Hetfield received the Stevie Ray Vaughn Award for his “dedication and support of the MusiCares MAP Fund and his devotion to helping other addicts with recovery process.” It’s tough to imagine the warrior Hetfield of *Kill ‘Em All* being honored for his service to others. But the Hetfield of today has moved from causing the suffering of others—most clearly his family—to alleviating the suffering of others.

So *St. Anger* begins to display some of the Buddhist virtues, and if Hetfield sticks with his recovery, future albums will likely display other Buddhist virtues as well. In “St. Anger” Hetfield sings “I want

my anger to be healthy . . .” Of course, it would be better to have no anger at all, but handling anger in a constructive way is at least a step in the right direction. The warrior is not yet dead, as the “shoot me again” mentality demonstrates, but Buddhism, like recovery, is a matter of progress not perfection.

Practicing warrior virtues does not necessarily make one a warrior, of course, no more than practicing Christian virtues necessarily makes one a Christian. And so adopting Buddhist virtues does not necessarily make Hetfield a Buddhist. Though Kirk becomes one with the wave while surfing, reads Buddhist philosophy, and practices meditation, we shouldn’t hold our breath waiting for Hetfield to start contemplating his navel and chanting OM. As much as we identify with him, Hetfield is no saint and surely he faces future challenges. Still, for many of us, his journey is our journey. His life and lyrics speak for our experience.

A Common Search?

While the journey from Christian, to warrior, to Buddhist makes sense, there is nothing inevitable about it. One set of virtues does not necessarily lead to the next, and I don’t mean to suggest that Hetfield fits neatly into the categories. But this progression is one way of interpreting his journey, and Metallica’s, and one that is common to many of us. Ultimately, I confess, Christian-Warrior-Buddhist is my story too, a life-cycle I’ve lived and am living, a search that goes on.²³

²³ Metalli-thanks to Candice Alaimo, Rob Arp, Joanna Corwin, Jeff Dean, Robert Delfino, Jason Eberl, Bart Engelen, Peter Fosl, Rebecca Housel, Kyle Johnson, Megan Lloyd, J.R. Lombardo, Thomas Nys, Rachael Sotos, Eileen Sweeney, and Mark White.