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BASIL MARKESINIS

# The Duality of Genius

*Shades, blemishes and vices in the lives of great achievers*



 Jan Sramek Verlag

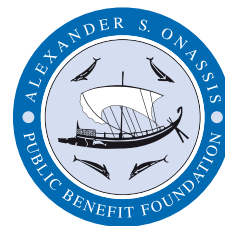
Sir Basil Markesinis: **The Duality of Genius**  
*Shades, blemishes and vices in the lives of great achievers*

XVI, 456 pages

Hardbound with over 90 illustrations

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Uncover the gripping story and shaded sides of some of the greatest achievers, artists & politicians in western history.

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- ▶ Two lives into one – the strange case of *Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde*
- ▶ The Force of Circumstance

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Mozart, Goethe, Bernini, Talleyrand, Jaques L  
Holmes – here are some of the great ac

But few know much about their extraordinary lives; fewer still, realize that alongside their grand public persona there was a darker, less attractive one that is reflected in their work. Why have such factors been ignored or underplayed? Deliberate concealment? Difficulty in discovering them? Or a misguided belief that great achievers must be left standing, shining on their pedestals. Modern psychobiography doubts the last reason but accepts the difficulties and dangers that accompany the collation and assessment of relevant information. This book attempts a candid narrative, ‘warts and all’ of the lives of some great figures from the worlds of painting, sculpture, politics, philosophy,





## Louis David, Henry Clay Frick, Oliver Wendell Believers that most people have heard of.

law, and business but does so also by placing their lives in the context of their times. The result, a series of essay/ portraits built around themes close to the lives of those described and brought into greater relief by the inclusion of over ninety beautifully reproduced colour illustrations. The aim is to allow the general, educated reader to learn more about the genius of creation. Those interested in history, biography, psychobiography, and the arts, and also believe in the need of a broader culture in times of excessive specialization, will enjoy this candid and wide-ranging book written by a widely travelled and acclaimed author. For further details please refer to our website.



## About the Author

**Sir Basil Markesinis** was born into a family that, from his father's side, was for over ten generations involved in politics, law, and the world of letters, first in Venice and later in Greece. He holds a Doctor Juris from the University of Athens, a Ph.D. and LL.D. from the University of Cambridge, and a DCL from the University of Oxford.



He is an honorary doctor of the Sorbonne as well as of the Universities of Ghent, Athens and Munich and has held tenured posts at the Universities of Cambridge, London, and Oxford. He currently holds the Jamail Regents Chair at the University of Texas.

As a scholar, Sir Basil has authored (or co-authored) thirty-three books and over one hundred and twenty articles. He has also written political articles for the Financial Times and The Guardian. He has given individual lectures or held seminars in over 25 Universities on three Continents.

His scholarly work has been recognized by his election as Fellow of the British Academy, a Foreign Fellow of the Accademia dei Lincei of Rome, the Royal Belgian Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, and as Corresponding Member of the Institute de France as well as the Academy of Athens. He is also a Member of the American Law Institute and a Bencher of Gray's Inn. He was Knighted by H. M. the Queen and has received many high civic honours from the Presidents of France, Germany, Greece, and Italy, most recently the Insignia of Knight Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of France.

end of the myth (described by the first title) but its beginning. The result was *The Oath of the Horatii*, now in the Louvre, a painting full of neo-classical symbolism that marked the official end of the Rococo style. Its ideas and style were not to be challenged until the Romantic school of Delacroix gripped the French imagination some fifty years later.

In this canvas, two sets of three protagonists are framed by a simple Doric setting of three columns. With the painting's strong rectilinear lines, attention is drawn to the perfectly formed, well-trained, masculine bodies in the centre of the picture. There, the father is handing his sons the instruments of death, also the means of bringing honour to Rome. For they have agreed to solve a dispute with neighbouring Alba through a duel with its own three champions, the Curatii, and thus avoid an all-out war that would be costly to both sides. It all sounded eminently sensible except that the impending duel presented a further moral dilemma. For one of the Horatii sisters, Cornelia, was betrothed to a young Curatii, while another of the Curatii boys was already married to a Horatii sister. In the event, the Curatii kill all but the older Horatius brother, who then slays them all in turn. When back in Rome, he is confronted by Cornelia, who is furious at the slaying of her future husband. Horatius gets angry with her and runs her through with his sword. It was the 'defence' of the father of his victorious son (but killer of his daughter Cornelia) which was the iconic scene David was originally asked to paint. Whichever part of this story one chooses to paint, the fact is that life cannot get more dramatic than that. No wonder that Corneille had chosen to make a play of this family drama.

The tragic story has come down to us by Titus Livius. But the sermon scene, depicted on canvas, was David's invention. He was, in other words, following the precedent set in the *Hector* canvas and offering his own creative interpretation of the story. And, of course, by depicting on the right of the canvass the women distressed and crying – Cornelia is at the far right, while Horatius is the brother closest to the viewer on the left – David is symbolizing the model of antiquity, especially ancient Rome: men strong and

devoted to duty, unmoved by the personal pain this may entail; women weak, human to be sure, suited for motherhood but, in political terms, peripheral to the main action. This, then, was a scene depicting human will, irrespective of the consequences that will flow from it.

The painting was exhibited first in Rome (1784) and then at the Salon in Paris in 1785. Beyond condemning Rococo as a decadent art and laying the roots of neo-classicism, David also used it to defy the Royal Academy and its rules about the proper canvass size – another example of the Academy's rigidity but also of his own rebellious nature. Henceforth, his duel with the Academy was to take up an enormous amount of his time and make him an open rebel against the kind of rules and strictures that the Academy, part of the high establishment, liked to impose. This vengefulness, which we shall also find in other great achievers,<sup>15</sup> took however a considerable psychological toll on the man.

Recognition was now a matter of time, yet the post of Director of the French Academy in Rome eluded him. The official explanation that he was still young may have been partly convincing, but his tempestuous character and his tendency to ignore the Academy's rules made the opening of doors more difficult. His quarrelsome, rebellious, and mercurial character was developing into a big handicap.

Three years later came "The Death of Socrates",<sup>16</sup> Well-formed bodies again surround the aging Socrates, painted in idealized ugliness (a habit David would follow in his later portraits of the assassinated *Le Pelletier* and *Marat*) as he is courageously about to drink the hemlock. This is effectively communicated by showing him discarding while calmly stretching out his right hand to take the cup. The idea here is, of course, taken from Plato's *Phaedo*, where Socrates is portrayed talking about the immortality of the soul and showing no fear of death.<sup>17</sup> Socrates' bravery, which stems from conviction, contrasts with the nervous or crying disciples who surround him. Calm remains only Crito, who is clinging to the master's left leg, and an aging and pensive Plato, who we know was not present, sitting at the end of Socrates' bed. Socrates' wife Xanthippi is



20 The Assassination of Marat. Jacques-Louis David

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