

Jack as the Protagonist

A Moral Perspective on 'Lord of the Flies'

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William Golding's novel "Lord of the Flies" is traditionally viewed through the lens of Ralph's attempts to maintain order and civilization amidst the chaos that ensues among the boys stranded on the island. However, an alternative reading of the text presents Jack Merridew not only as the protagonist but also as the moral compass whose actions, when examined under the harsh light of survival and leadership, reveal a different kind of morality, arguably more fitting to the circumstances in which the boys find themselves.

The conventional definition of a protagonist is not absolute; it centers around the primary character whose journey and decisions drive the narrative forward. In "Lord of the Flies," Jack fulfills this role through his dynamic leadership and active engagement in shaping the group's fate. Morality under extreme conditions, like being stranded without adult guidance, diverges significantly from the structured ethics of civilized society. It is important to judge Jack's actions within the context of primal survival, rather than through the lens of societal norms.

From the outset, Jack exhibits qualities that are crucial for leadership in dire circumstances: decisiveness, assertiveness, and the ability to rally others. Jack's approach contrasts starkly with Ralph's democratic leadership, which, though idealistic and rooted in order, proves inefficient in responding to the raw, immediate demands of survival. Jack understands the necessity of hunting for sustenance, which he executes with focus, thereby ensuring the boys' physical survival. His hunting expeditions are more than the mere pursuit of food; they are acts of sustaining the group, ensuring its continuity.

Jack's actions can be construed as moral when considering the broader implications of survival. The killing of pigs for meat, though violent, becomes a moral act when framed as protecting the boys from starvation. This utilitarian perspective—actions are deemed moral when they result in the greatest good for the greatest number—vindicates Jack's prioritization of immediate survival over abstract ideas of civilization.

The fear of the "beast" manifests as a critical psychological challenge on the island. Jack addresses this fear head-on, attempting to conquer it rather than be paralyzed by it. His rituals and the eventual hunt for the beast, while seemingly savage, serve a deeper purpose of offering the boys a means of coping with their fears, thus stabilizing the group's psyche.

While Ralph's logical approach to the beast results in further confusion and helplessness, Jack provides a tangible course of action—this bolsters morale and presents a coping mechanism, making Jack's methods morally significant within the context of psychological survival.

Many readers interpret Jack's rule as a descent into tyranny. Conversely, one might argue that his authoritative leadership is a necessary adaptation to the anarchic environment. In a situation where swift decisions and collective action are paramount, Jack's centralized command prevents the disintegration of group cohesion. While Ralph's attempts at collaboration lead to splintering and inefficiency, Jack's hierarchical structure enforces discipline and ensures that the group functions with a clear, unified purpose.

Leaders in extreme environments must often make hard choices that, under normal circumstances, would be deemed ruthless. Jack's willingness to embrace this necessity underscores his commitment to the group's survival, even if it comes at the cost of perceived cruelty. For instance, the enforcement of obedience through punishment can be interpreted as a harsh, yet pragmatic approach to maintaining order.

Golding's novel fundamentally explores human nature. The descent into savagery that all the boys experience suggests that civilization's veneer is thin. Jack's moral actions, when reexamined, align more closely with the natural instincts for survival inherent within human nature. The stripping away of societal norms allows for a reevaluation of morality based on instinctual imperatives.

Indeed, Jack's decisions are guided by the essential morality of ensuring survival—a core aspect of human existence. While his methods are brutal, they resonate with an evolutionary moral framework prioritizing the continuation of life over abstract ethical codes ill-suited to the island's harsh reality.

Reconsidering Jack Merridew as the protagonist of "Lord of the Flies" necessitates a shift in perspective—one that views morality through the lens of survival and leadership in extreme conditions. His actions, often judged harshly against the backdrop of societal ethics, reveal a deeper moral alignment with the imperatives of survival, psychological stability, and group cohesion. Jack's controversial decisions and his authoritative rule, while seemingly tyrannical, ensure the survival of the boys amid chaos, making him not only a complex protagonist but also a moral force in a world stripped of civilization's false comforts.