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The Ethical Leadership of Katniss Everdeen

Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* stood out to me for this paper because she inspires an entire movement, even though she never set out to be a leader. *The Hunger Games* takes place in a dystopian society ruled by the Capitol, where each district is forced to send children to fight to the death in the Hunger Games. Katniss begins as a teenager simply trying to protect her sister and survive, but her bravery gradually turns her into the symbolic leader of the rebellion, known as the Mockingjay. She becomes a key symbol of resistance and hope for the people of Panem, even though she never held an official position of authority.

Katniss shows a lot of leadership qualities throughout the movies. In my opinion, the most impactful is her courage and willingness to self-sacrifice. She shows this from the very beginning when she volunteers to take her sister Prim's place in the Hunger Games. She knew that she could die in the games, and still volunteered anyway. Another key trait she has is empathy, which allows her to connect with others even in the terrible circumstances she gets put in. Her alliance with Rue in the Games shows her compassion, and honoring Rue after her death moves both the other tributes and the audience watching across Panem. This moment reflects what W. D. Ross described as "crystal-clear intuitions" about duty (MacKinnon & Fiala, 2018, p. 8). Katniss recognizes her moral duty to treat Rue with dignity, even though it gains her nothing strategically. Her treating Rue like that is where most people agreed that the rebellion was

sparked. Lastly, Katniss displays integrity when she refuses to compromise her values even under pressure from the Capitol. She resists being used as a pawn and instead makes choices that align with her sense of justice, which ultimately inspires others to fight for freedom.

A main example of Katniss's ethical leadership is at the end of the first movie. The Capitol comes over the intercom during the games and says that only one tribute may survive. This forces Katniss and Peeta into a moral dilemma, one must kill the other to live. Instead of listening to the Capitol, Katniss chooses a path that aligns with her morals by suggesting they both eat the poisonous nightlock berries. Basically threatening to die together rather than betray each other. This decision reflects her integrity, as she refuses to compromise her values for survival. It also demonstrates courage, because openly defying the Capitol risks severe punishment and death. Her choice does more than save their own lives, it sparks hope across Panem. Showing others that the Capitol's power is not as strong as the people think it is and that courageous choices can spark action. This moment shows how Katniss leads through ethical decision-making. She acts in line with her values, protects others, and motivates change without seeking power for herself. This connects to objectivism, the view that "values have an objective reality—that they are objects available for knowledge" (MacKinnon & Fiala, 2018, p. 8). Katniss's refusal to kill an innocent person and care for others reflects more than her personal feelings, it points to a universal moral truth about the value of human life.

Another moment that shows Katniss's ethical leadership is when she agrees to take on the role of the Mockingjay, the symbol of the rebellion against the Capitol. At first, she is hesitant to take on the role because she doesn't want to appear as if she is being controlled by anyone. If she comes across as that, then people might be skeptical and believe that she is falling into the trap of the Capitol. However, she realizes that her image and actions give people across Panem the hope

they need to fight back against the Capitol. She only accepts this role under certain conditions, protection for Peeta and the other victors, and ensuring that her voice and her choices are respected. This shows her integrity and her commitment to others, since she places their safety above her own comfort. By taking on the Mockingjay role on her own terms, Katniss inspires courage throughout the districts and proves that true leadership means standing firm in one's values while using influence to uplift others. The emotional impact of Katniss as the Mockingjay reflects emotivism, which explains that moral judgments often express approval or disapproval. As the book puts it, to call something good is like saying "self-sacrifice—yay!" (MacKinnon & Fiala, 2018, p. 8). Katniss's courage and selflessness evoke exactly that kind of response, stirring emotional approval in others and motivating the districts to rise up. Her actions also demonstrate consequentialist ethics, which is, "those theories that base moral judgments on consequences... actions are then judged in terms of the promotion of human happiness" (MacKinnon & Fiala, 2018, p. 13). She knows her leadership can inspire hope and rebellion, showing that ethical decisions can involve thinking about both what is right and the impact it has on people.

In conclusion, Katniss Everdeen shows that ethical leadership isn't about wanting power, but about making the right choices even when it's hard. From volunteering for Prim, to honoring Rue, to standing up to the Capitol with the nightlock berries, she acts based on courage, empathy, and integrity. Taking on the Mockingjay role also shows how she leads in a way that protects others and inspires hope, not just herself. Her actions connect to ethical ideas like intuitionism and objectivism. Even though she never planned to be a leader, her choices show how sticking to your values and thinking about what's right can make a real difference, which is what makes her such a strong example of ethical leadership.

Works Cited

Fiala, A., & MacKinnon, B. (2018). *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*. Cengage.