Authenticity and the Ascetic Self

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ABSTRACT

What kinds of "selves" are ascetics who seek to purify the "self" of its partial interests? Through practices of obedience, enclosure and silence, monastics open themselves to the transforming work of the Divine, and in the process of doing so, close down their options for self-expression and self-governance, curtailing certain aspects of who they are, like narrativity and personal preference, that contemporary philosophers often construe as important elements of fully developed selves. While this activity of "purifying" the self may seem unlikely to reflect generalizable truths about selves, I identify how ascetic self-emptying finds epistemological parallels in Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein's use of the phenomenological reductions, in personal identity theorists' use of thought experiments, and in cultural anthropologists' use of ethnographic field research. All of these theorists seek to identify, by imaginative loss or variation of parts of the self, which components of selfhood may be "optional" and which "inalienable." However, these inquirers into "what is inalienable" to the self arrive at a variety of different conclusions and many seem to espouse multiple theories of inalienable selfhood even within single pieces of writing. One might argue that this is just because we don't yet have the true story about what is universally inalienable to the self, but I argue by contrast that our motives and methods for thinking about "inalienable selfhood" are importantly constitutive of what we will discover to be inalienable. As Edith Stein indicated in her later writings, what is treated as inalienable to selves will be intimately connected with worldviews and ways of life. For this reason I propose that philosophers take seriously the variety of "inalienable selves" from which people may act and interrogate how these correspond with certain sets of values. Liberal presuppositions about what is inalienable to the fully developed self correspond with a belief in the value of autonomous ways of life. The obedient nun acts according to judgments or preferences indexed to another individual, which in the words of James Stacey Taylor, makes her a "paradigm of heteronomy." On most liberal accounts, however, to call someone heteronomous is to indicate that she lives in a way that fails to respect her true self, which includes capacities for deliberation and self-directed action. However, since we have recognized the variability of the inalienable self, we have recognized that someone might see her own capacity for self-direction as relatively alienable—minimally important to who she is, how she lives, and who she wants to become. I argue that inasmuch as the obedient nun's conformity with the judgments of her Superior reflects the set of values she claims to espouse, her way of life really does honour her "inalienable self." I adopt the label of "authentic" to describe such a life. However, I recognize the vulnerability of this account to a couple of concerns about ways in which living heteronomously may in fact "harm" the self, and may even interfere with the selves that ascetics are trying to become. First, nuns share the intuition that it is wrong to socialize children in ways that will require them to adopt a life of servility and dependence. How can we think about this socialization as a type of harm without a corresponding belief that honouring the "self" requires cultivation of, at least, the capacity for autonomy? Second, I note certain reasons we have for thinking obedient selves may have impaired moral judgment. Ascetics and liberal philosophers alike would agree that good moral judgment is an essential part of self-development. So if valuing obedience hampers the development of such judgment, then we have reasons to be suspicious of the value of heteronomy even for ascetics. I argue that a careful effort to distinguish authentic from inauthentic types of obedience can address these concerns.

ABSTRAIT

Quels types de «sois» cultivent les ascètes, ces gens qui cherchent à purifier leur «soi» de leurs intérêts partiels? Par des pratiques comme l'obéissance, le cloître, et le silence, les moniales s'ouvrent elles-mêmes au travail transformateur du Divin, et en même temps elles s'empêchent de cultiver leur expression de soi et leur gouvernance de soi, entravant certains aspects d'identité, comme la narrativité et la préférence personnelle, que certains philosophes contemporains perçoivent comme des éléments constitutifs d'un soi complètement développé. Bien qu'on pensait que l'activité d'auto-purification du soi ne puisse pas refléter des vérités généralisables sur la constitution du soi, j'identifie comment cette activité ascétique détient des similarités épistémologiques avec les réductions phénoménologiques utilisées par Edmund Husserl et par Edith Stein, ainsi qu'avec l'utilisation des expériences de pensée par des métaphysiciens de l'identité personnelle, et avec l'utilisation de la recherche ethnographique par certains anthropologues culturels. Tous ces théoriciens cherchent à identifier, à travers une perte ou une variation imaginaire dans les parties du soi, quelles sont les composantes du soi qui sont « optionnelles » et celles qui sont « inaliénables ». Cependant, les chercheurs de « ce qui est inaliénable » dans le soi arrivent à une variété de conclusions différentes et plusieurs semblent adhérer à de multiples théories de l'individualité inaliénable même à l'intérieur d'un seul texte. On pourrait en conclure que nous n'avons pas encore trouvé la «véritable version» de ce qui est universellement inaliénable du soi, mais je dirais par contre que nos motivations et les méthodes pour penser «le soi inaliénable» sont crucialement constitutives de ce que nous considérons être inaliénable. Comme Edith Stein l'a indiqué dans ses derniers écrits, ce qui est considéré comme inaliénable de soi est intimement lié aux visions du monde et aux modes de vie. Pour cette raison, je propose que les philosophes prennent au sérieux la variété des «sois inaliénables» qui pourraient servir comme sources d'agentivité et qu'ils interrogent comment celles-ci correspondent à certains ensembles de valeurs. Les présupposés libéraux sur ce qui est inaliénable d'un soi complètement développé sont intimement liés à une foi en la valeur des modes de vie autonomes. Une moniale obéissante agit selon les jugements ou les préférences d'une autre personne. Comme le dit James Stacey Taylor, ce mode de vie fait de la moniale un «paradigme de l'hétéronomie». Dans la majorité de la pensée libérale, qualifier une personne d' «hétéronome» signifie qu'elle vit d'une manière qui ne respecte pas son vrai soi, c'est-à-dire ses capacités de délibération et d'action autodirigée. Cependant, puisque nous avons reconnu la variabilité du soi inaliénable, nous avons reconnu que quelqu'un pourrait traiter sa capacité d'auto-direction comme relativement aliénable—peu importe de qui elle est, comment elle vit, et qui elle veut devenir. Je soutiens que, dans la mesure où la conformité de la moniale obéissant aux jugements de sa supérieure reflète l'ensemble des valeurs qu'elle approuve vraiment, son mode de vie respecte vraiment son «soi inaliénable.» Je caractérise une telle vie comme «authentique». Toutefois, je reconnais la faiblesse de cet compte de l'objection que l'hétéronomie nuise au soi, et pourrait interférer avec les propres buts des ascètes. Premièrement, les moniales ont l'intuition que c'est mal de socialiser les enfants d'une manière qui les obligera à adopter une vie de servitude et de dépendance. Comment pouvons-nous comprendre cela comme un type de mal sans une croyance correspondante qu'un «soi développé» doit avoir au moins une capacité d'autonomie? Deuxièmement, je constate certaines préoccupations selon lesquelles l'obéissance gênerait notre jugement moral. Autant les ascètes que les philosophes libéraux seraient en accord avec l'affirmation qu'un bon jugement moral est un élément

essentiel de l'auto-développement. Donc, si la valorisation de l'obéissance entrave le développement de ce jugement, nous avons raison de mettre en doute la valeur de l'hétéronomie, même pour les ascètes. Je soutiens qu'un effort consciencieux à distinguer les types authentiques des types inauthentiques d'obéissance peut apaiser ces préoccupations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

 On April 4, 2013, I

> stepped out:
> At the bound'ry of spacious fields.
> Of knowledge, lo, I had no more
> Nor found the flock I'd earlier followed.[1]

Unlike most doctoral dissertation in philosophy, mine was interrupted by fourteen months of immersive ethnographic field research.

At the end of this fieldwork, I "stepped out" from a cloister where I had been spending all moments of my daily life and tried to resume a philosophy dissertation I had put on hold in January 2012.

By monastic standards, fourteen months is a very short time to be cloistered, and not at all long enough to be transformative. Nevertheless, I have found the resumption of my philosophical project has been surprisingly disorienting. I did not find "the flock I'd earlier followed." My authors of interest have changed, my knowledge about certain topics I'd begun to write about before leaving has deepened, and perhaps most crucially, in some, albeit limited, sense, I have become a different self—one whose fate is now tied up with the wellbeing of my field community. I can no longer write only for academic audiences, but I am impelled to think carefully about how I am representing the contemplative nuns who trusted me to share fully in every aspect of their lives. It is to them—the sisters at this monastery I've called "The Monastery of the Holy Trinity" [2]—that I extend my deepest gratitude.

For allowing me to take this unusual research path, and trusting that something good would come from it, I owe sincere thanks to my supervisors in the Department of Philosophy, Ian Gold and Alia Al-Saji. They saw possibility in the empirical research I was proposing to undertake, allowed me to put my philosophy dissertation on hold while I ran off to a

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[1] John of the Cross, *Song Between the Soul and the Bridegroom:* 17(26), quoted in Edith Stein, *The Science of the Cross,* trans. Josephine Koeppel, The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Discalced Carmelite, 1891-1942, Vol. 6 (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2002), 226.
[2] This is a pseudonym as are the names assigned to particular sisters.

PREFACE

During my visit to McGill in the winter of 2007, I asked then—Department Chair, Philip Buckley, whether I could make "living with nuns" a condition of my acceptance of the philosophy department's admission offer. My philosophical interest in the limits of "self-transcendence" had, until that time, been focused primarily on understanding the role of the "pure Ego" in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein. However, for some years, I have also had a sense that my effort to engage with "methods" of self-transcendence would be aided by spending time with living ascetics who were endeavouring to flee "the world" and their "natural attitude" within it, emptying "themselves" of "themselves" as far as possible in order to attain a kind of privileged encounter with realities that are otherwise inaccessible.

One of the best-known Christian metaphors for this self-emptying journey was supplied by Teresa of Avila in *The Interior Castle*. This text on prayer by the 16th century foundress of the Discalced Carmelites is an extended metaphor that describes the soul as a type of castle arranged like a "palmito, which has many outer rinds surrounding the savory part within, all of which must be taken away before the centre can be eaten."[3] God dwells at the centre of this castle, the soul, and yet the soul has a difficult time recognizing this and moving inward, into union with its own inmost essence.

> You must note that the light which comes from the palace occupied by the King hardly reaches these first Mansions at all; for, although they are not dark and black, as when the soul is in a state of sin, they are to some extent darkened, so that they cannot be seen (I mean by anyone who is in them); and this not because of anything that is wrong with the room, but rather (I hardly know how to explain myself) because there are so many bad things—snakes and vipers and poisonous creatures—which have come in with the soul that they prevent it from seeing the light … The room itself is light enough, but he cannot enjoy the light because he is prevented from doing so by these wild beasts and animals, which force him to close his eyes to everything but themselves. This seems to me to be the condition of a soul which, though not in a bad state, is so completely absorbed in things of the world and so deeply

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[3] Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers (New York: Image Books, 1961), 37.

immersed, as I have said, in possessions or honors or business, that, although as a matter of fact it would like to gaze at the castle and enjoy its beauty, it is prevented from doing so, and seems quite unable to free itself from all these impediments.[4]

The Carmelite conversion of Edith Stein—whose work had been the focus of my earliest doctoral research in philosophy—reinforced my sense of the significance of the parallel between the phenomenological and ascetic "purifications,"[5] so I was specifically looking to be hosted, for my long-term field research, by Discalced Carmelites.[6]

However, I recognized the need to develop my background in the history and theory of ethnographic research, and to undertake fieldwork with the assistance of scholars for whom this form of research was familiar. Having found inspiring collaborators in the Department of Anthropology at McGill University, I began a second doctorate in cultural anthropology in 2009. Meanwhile, in my search for a long-term host community, and in my efforts to understand the diversity of existing monasteries, I conducted participant observation and interviews with eight communities (six Carmelite, one Benedictine, and one Trappistine) over periods of 3 to 15 days in 2010 and 2011; attended one Carmelite Spirituality seminar which serves as a meeting place for U.S. Carmelite friars and nuns; and engaged in countless email exchanges and phone calls with contemplative nuns and other Catholic religious.

Finally, after many months of anxiety about finding a home for my long-term field research, the Monastery of the Holy Trinity decided to agree to my request. Initially Mother Andjelika suggested twelve months might be preferable to my proposed eighteen, but before long she graciously extended the term of this invitation.

In response to my request to live in a monastery, Buckley had responded sagely, in 2007, "no, you can't live there. But you can visit." In a manner of speaking, his statement was prophetic. I was a visitor in many ways: I was not perceived as being "in training" to become a

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[4]Ibid., 40-41.

[5]I will elaborate on this parallel in Chapter One.

[6]This is certainly not a complete narrative. It omits the crucial human connections and influences that enabled my work to proceed in these directions. See the "Acknowledgements."

nun and ultimately, of course, I left the monastery. And in the interim, in spite of the insights that have emerged from my fieldwork, the basic concerns of this dissertation have remained constant. From the beginning, I have been investigating the limits of self-transcendence—our capacity to be other than we are; or even, perhaps, our capacity to be other-than-selves. This problem has continued to guide my doctoral research, even though, in the process of researching the limits of self-transcendence, I allowed my own "self" to be transformed by what I was studying to such an extent that there are real incongruities between the way this project looked when it began and the way it looks today.

That said, although I was a visitor in these ways, I can say now that I have "lived with nuns" much more fully than I would have anticipated. Apart from a few short trips "to the world" in order to visit my family—a luxury not afforded to these cloistered nuns, except in rare circumstances[7]—my immersive research at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity was quite classically Malinowskian[8]: indeed, it was close to Malinowski's methods in certain ways that many contemporary students of cultural anthropology have rejected on ethical or pragmatic grounds.

> *Proper conditions for ethnographic work.* These, as said, consist mainly in cutting oneself off from the company of other white men, and remaining in as close contact with the natives as possible, which really can only be achieved by camping right in their villages … It is very nice to have a base in a white man's compound for the stores, and to know there is a refuge there in times of sickness and surfeit of native. But it must be far enough away not to become a permanent milieu in which you live and from which you emerge at fixed hours only to "do the village." It should not even be near enough to fly to at any moment for recreation. For the native is not the natural companion for a white man, and after you have been working with him for several hours, seeing how

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[7] Generally-speaking, the only situation that counts as sufficiently serious to warrant "going home" is the death—or imminent death—of a parent.

[8]   [Malinowski] not only spent a longer period than any anthropologist before him, and I think after him also, in a single study of a primitive people, the Trobriand Islanders of Melanesia between 1914 and 1918, but he was also the first anthropologist to conduct his research through the native language, as he was the first to live throughout his work in the centre of native life.

E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "Fieldwork and the Empirical Tradition," in *Social Anthropology and Other Essays* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962): 74.

he does his gardens, or letting him tell you items of folk-lore, or discussing his customs, you will naturally hanker after the company of your own kind. But if you are alone in a village beyond reach of this, you go for a solitary walk for an hour or so, return again and then quite naturally seek out the natives' society, this time as a relief from loneliness, just as you would any other companionship. And by means of this natural intercourse, you learn to know him, and you become familiar with his customs and beliefs far better than when he is a paid, and often bored, informant.

There is all the difference between a sporadic plunging into the company of natives, and being really in contact with them. What does this latter mean? On the ethnographer's side, it means his life in the village, which at first is a strange, sometimes unpleasant, sometimes intensely interesting adventure, soon adopts quite a natural course very much in harmony with his surroundings.[9]

As Malinowksi urged his students to do, I entered a closed society and lived there as an exceptional and physically distinct outsider, for long enough that my own habits and desires for engagement were transformed. I was invited to set up "camp," occupying a cell in the midst of the nuns' own. During these fourteen months, I was fortunate to be afforded the rare privilege of living the life of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity on the "inside," forming whatever kinds of relationships could be cultivated there, listening carefully to what sisters were saying, and participating in monastic work and prayer.

As this is especially unusual for a philosophical programme of study, I should do some work to defend my research methods. Empirical research has re-entered the English language philosophical scene in the 21st century largely thanks to a growing interest in the analytic philosophical tradition in "experimental" testing of philosophical intuitions. The proponents of this empirical turn in analytic philosophy have begun to learn methods for conducting and analyzing questionnaires, largely in order test the intuitions of "naïve" participants with little philosophical training. However, the insights and methods of cultural anthropology have largely remained outside the purview of this research. I believe this is a problematic oversight.

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[9] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1932), 6-7.

First, experimental philosophers have good reason to be interested in ethnographic data. The objective of most experimental philosophers is to ascertain how widely shared certain philosophical intuitions may be. If this really their aim, then experimental philosophers limit themselves unnecessarily when they exclusively investigate the "naïve" intuitions of North Americans and Europeans. English speaking North Americans may have certain philosophical intuitions in common that are not otherwise widely shared: it would be valuable to figure out the extent to which this is the case. And although some experimental philosophers have begun to recognize the need for such "intercultural analyses," these researchers often seem to build simplistic and stereotyped distinctions into their hypotheses, e.g. "Westerners also have a much stronger sense of agency and independence, while East Asians have a much stronger commitment to social harmony."[10] While such statements may be well-intentioned attempts to enlighten Western philosophers about the existence of rival worldviews, they read as sloppy and ill-informed to anthropologists who are privy to the nuancing of these categories. In socio-cultural anthropology there is a century's worth of monographs about conceptual systems that may present genuinely alternative cosmologies and ways of organizing the world. If experimental philosophers are truly concerned about the universality of philosophical intuitions, this seems like important data to explore.

Second, in developing challenges to existing philosophical intuitions, participant observation has certain advantages over survey methods. Granted, immersive ethnographic fieldwork has little claim to scientific objectivity. It is limited in scale, first of all. And interaction biases, misunderstandings between researcher and informants, and transformations in the worldviews of all concerned, are not only common, but these indeed form the richest content of many ethnographies, as Matei Candea reminds us in his 2007 article "Arbitrary Locations: In Defence of the Bounded Field-site."[11] As Candea notes, out of concern for an ideal of scientific objectivity, in recent decades students of cultural anthropology—much like experimental

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[10]Joshua M. Weinberg, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen P. Stich, "Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions," in *Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

[11]Matei Candea, "Arbitrary Locations: In Defence of the Bounded Field-site," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)*13, no. 1 (2007): 167-184, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00419.x.

philosophers—have increasingly begun to seek out plural sites and conduct surveys rather than to "stay put" in one particular place. This multi-sited or survey approach to cultural anthropology is sometimes undertaken due to the belief that "bursting out of our field sites will enable us to provide an account of a totality 'out there.'"[12] And yet what we seem to arrive at, instead, is a superficial overview of many viewpoints that is ultimately structured too heavily by our own sets of research interests to genuinely reveal alternative worldviews. A similar critique could be applied to the surveys of experimental philosophers, as these often endeavour to establish the variety of peoples' philosophical intuitions without doing the work to understand and reconstruct particular intuitions, and their concomitant worldviews, in detail. It is a limitation of surveys that the researcher—who develops questions with a limited range of possible responses—can only be confronted with types of "Otherness" he is already looking for and which he is well prepared to receive.

Many immersive ethnographic studies, by contrast, have been conducted at a depth that affords them some possibility of authentically challenging assumptions that have underpinned Western metaphysics. It is precisely insofar as the ethnographer allows herself to be transformed by her field community that ethnographic fieldwork remains powerful as a means of coming to terms with specific forms of experience. By doing immersive, single-site research she resigns herself to the idea that learning another way of life takes time and personal habituation: she allows that there is a valuable kind of lived knowledge that is slow and painful to acquire, and by nature incomplete.

For this reason, I would apply Candea's insights to experimental philosophers, urging us to think about how it might be valuable to choose "the path of self-limitation rather than the path of expansion"[13] in our empirical research, through long-term efforts to understand worldviews other than those that dominate academic philosophy.

And yet, the passage I quoted above from Malinowski surely seems antiquated to us now. For the sake of promoting respect for difference and indeed, recognition of the humanity

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[12]Ibid., 169.
[13]Ibid., 168.

of the inhabitants of the Pacific Islands, Malinowski seemed to think it was necessary to persuade "white men" to cohabitate with the "natives." Today we can recognize the myriad problems with this form of engagement, seriously questioning—amongst other things—whether natives want white men to live with *them*. We have genuine reservations, now, whether it can ever be non–exploitative to set up one's tent in the middle of someone else's camp. This form of research is regarded, today, as particularly problematic where one's research interests are purely in the service of record-keeping or other forms of academic inquiry that do not stem from the desires and objectives of one's informants. Understandably, then, this form of immersive, single-site research is rapidly exiting the academic scene.

Nevertheless, this is more or less the type of research in which I was engaged. And sisters at my field community still joke with me on occasion, after knowing me for years—and I sense that on some level this is not entirely a joke—about how they had to be on their "best behaviour" when I was living there. To some degree they felt, in other words, under scrutiny and they were not always sure whether they could trust me. And I was not always sure, for that matter, whether or not they could trust me.

5:44 pm, March 8, 2012

Lately, at any mention of "Judas", my conscience troubles me. Right now my relations with these sisters are friendly, but what will I WRITE later? If I am writing for anthropologists, regardless of what I write, the sisters won't like it. I fear becoming the friend-turned-betrayer.

The "evil one, jealous of your flock, struggles unceasingly, wishing to get a meal for himself" is a line from this week's Tropar in the Presanctified Liturgy. And the profession of faith, immediately before the nuns process forward to receive the Eucharist, daily includes the line, "for I will not reveal your mystery to your enemies, nor will I give you a kiss as did Judas."

Judas follows me out of the liturgy, giving me no peace in other areas of the schedule.

Two sisters in the community hold the office of refectory reader: they alternate weeks for reading the assigned book aloud during dinner time. These are relatively senior nuns in the community who have, through long practice, honed their skills of reading aloud in a humble and self-effacing monotone, which—combined with the inoffensive blandness of the assigned books—

typically allows the content of my own thoughts to drown out the content of the readings. But that was not the case, yesterday. Since it's Lent, the refectory reading right now is a book-length literary account of the Passion. And yesterday's dinner reading was entirely consumed by a character description of Judas. As we sat and silently ate our tilapia, my anxiety was mounting. I felt seen, exposed in my guilt. I tried to stab my fish with my fork in a way that appeared natural, but in trying to appear natural I fear I was coming across even more clearly as "Judas." When Mother knocked the butt of her butter knife against the table to stop the reading, her prayer, prior to the start of recreation, was "Lord, help us remember that any one of us has the capacity to fall from faith." Again, I felt guilt crawling up the back of my neck.

This morning at Chapter, Mother cautioned us that God lives in our affect, in love. She said "the devil is pure mind..." and warned us that our intellects are liable to be our downfalls, that we should be especially cautious when we become especially skilled at something. As an intellectual by profession, I couldn't help but ruminate on this for the rest of the day: could my intellect be corrupting my affect? The unacceptable conflict between my friendship with the nuns, and my role as a researcher, continued to gnaw at me.

And finally, last night, my guilty conscience expressed itself in a dream where two sisters had entered my cell while I was out, had discovered this file of my field notes on my computer and were deleting entire sections that they didn't like about themselves.

On waking, I could recognize that this dream expressed certain truths.

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My internal conflict only resolved once I decided that I would value the trust of these sisters more highly than my academic success, if these should ever run at odds. I think this is the sort of thing that silence does to us. In a noisier environment, forced to confront myself less openly, I doubt that I would ever have become quite so worried about the ethical limits of my writing. However, my anthropologist colleagues assure me that this tension between friendship and research is part of our discipline. Lawrence Cohen, in his piece, "M's Book," describes his own experiences with friendship as follows:

Not wanting to repeat the awkwardness of Banaras, I announced my scholarly purpose to all and sundry. I was writing a book: get to know me at your peril. Any offers of care beyond some bare minimum—and in a city with such a cultivated sense of hospitality, these offers were frequent—were met by me at some point by mention of the book. As M made his overtures, gracing me with

the possibility of a trust he seemed seldom to extend, I reminded him of my textual intention. M, I am interviewing you to be in the book. You cannot have *visvas* in me.[14]

In any case, my writing problems aren't over, even after having made my own resolution about the primacy of "trust." In *Relating Narratives*, Adriana Cavarero suggests that getting at a person's specificity via narration can be a way of representing people that responds to their own yearning to be known as individuals. Cavarero suggests that "the verbal response to who someone is always consists in the narration of his or her life-story; that is, in the tale where this someone has used up already her time (at least her time up until now)—the unrepeatable existence of a single insubstitutable being."[15] Adopting Cavarero's theoretical affirmation of the idea that human uniqueness is best captured in the "life-story" would have the benefit of allowing us to believe the "traditional" anthropological project is potentially ethical. Straightforward ethnographic storytelling would not, according to such a "narrative" account of the self, be appropriative of the stories of others; it would not be delimitative of their possibilities, but rather a response to a call issued by their uniqueness.

However, the possibility of ethical story-telling is not so clear in ethnographies of Catholic monasticism, as Michael Angrosino has also had cause to recognize.

> Many of the monks, especially the older ones, are concerned that it would be a sign of pride or presumptuousness or of unseemly individualism to have their words recorded for the future. Some of the older monks were trained as novices to adopt a posture of humility, which includes avoiding making eye contact. Thus even in the case of some participants who were willing to talk and be recorded, it was difficult to maintain a natural conversational flow because the normal cues of body language, gesture, intonation, etc. were being suppressed out of ingrained habit.
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> Research in stratified communities is also often complicated by the fact that "the opinions and beliefs of one stratum are insufficient for an understanding of the whole society" (Berreman 1962:24). Research based on oral history may compensate for this distortion to the extent that representatives of all groups

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[14] Lawrence Cohen, "M's Book," in *Muslim Portraits: Everyday Lives in India*, ed. Mukulika Banerjee (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008).

[15] Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (New York: Routledge, 2000), 73.

are interviewed and encouraged to speak their piece. But there is a concomitant reluctance on the part of members of subordinate groups to go too far in appearing to challenge those in authority (Morris 1973). Although St. Leo is operated quite democratically in some ways, it is not an egalitarian society. The current abbot does not have tyrannical inclinations. But he still has a great deal of canonical authority, and while he may consult with others, he is not obliged to do so in all matters. The monastic community is clearly hierarchical in nature.[16]

What Angrosino neglects to observe here, is that in addition to a felt lack of authority in telling the story of the "community," presenting one's own narrative is discouraged on moral grounds, as being at odds with sisters' goals of purifying or forgetting themselves.

God is in the present moment. You don't have the past. You don't have the future. You've got the present moment. And in that present moment is a window into eternity. That window, you can touch God in. You're not in the past anymore, so you can't touch God in the past.

This quotation is from a transcribed interview with the prioress, Mother Therese,[17] at a conservative Discalced Carmelite community I had visited during my preliminary research. Here, Mother Therese stresses the importance of living in the present moment in order to dedicate oneself to God. The past and future are God's concern, as these are not under the direct control of human beings. Focusing on their own histories, then, could disrupt the nuns' attempts to live fully with God in the present moment. This makes certain kinds of interviewing a way of potentially interfering in the spiritual goals of contemplatives. Far from being a response to their most fundamental selfhood, many contemplative nuns may feel that interviews require them to preoccupy themselves with their "selves" in a way that they reject. However, Mother Therese did indulge me by providing a narrative of her life and her call to Carmel, when I asked her for this two days later. It is only after having lived at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity for fourteen months that I now recognize what a gift this old interview had been, and how unusual it was that I was allowed to hear this, let alone to record it. At the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, by contrast, many sisters only spoke of their pre–monastic selves reluctantly. However, I would be

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[16] Michael V. Angrosino, "Conversations in a Monastery," Oral History Review 19, no. 1/2 (Spring-Autumn 1991): 59, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4495323.

[17] This is also a pseudonym.

allowed to know bits and pieces of each of their histories, as topics came up while working alongside sisters individually. During such work—as I was told during my first visit inside the enclosure in August 2011—speech is permissible "for newcomers," to allow them to get acquainted with the sisters.[18] And indeed, when working in this way, almost all sisters would, at least on occasion, slip into reminiscences about the homes of their families, about the relationships between their siblings, about their past education, about places they had travelled, or wanted to travel, before entering the monastery. But it was clear—from the whispers in which some stories were conveyed; from glances around to make sure no other sisters were in earshot; from requests that I not repeat stories that were by all accounts, completely innocuous; by little self-corrections where sisters exhorted themselves to be more silent—that many sisters had *moral* reservations about talking about the past, even though they may have *enjoyed* doing so.

A novice explained to me one day, when I asked her why she was talking about goats in "Egypt," that as part of their formation, the sisters had been asked to use this place name to stand in for the real location of their pre–monastic homes, to remind them of the resemblance between their sojourn to the monastery and the Israelites' deliverance from slavery. This practice clearly signified that breaking with their past lives was an important part of these nuns' spiritual growth.

At the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, Mother Andjelika herself did encourage the sisters on several occasions, while I was present, that to be loved they must "let themselves be known" by the community. And yet, in allowing themselves to be known, the sisters were clearly not being encouraged to tell their stories to one another: the prioress meant something else when she requested honesty from them. This tension, between *knowing one another* and *keeping silence* arose frequently in Mother's exhortations to the community, and indeed she had raised

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[18]When working alongside multiple sisters, it was usually expected that we would work silently.

the problem with me when we met in the parlour[19] as I arrived for my second preliminary visit

with the community on August 10, 2011:

> *Mother Andjelika remarked that they are thinking about ways to do some*
> *things differently. They want to cultivate more silence like the Trappists, but*
> *she also acknowledges that perhaps the Trappists have had too much silence,*
> *and that the monks don't know each other. Mother wants to avoid this. She*
> *recalled a statement from the Vatican about the way relationships have been*
> *done incorrectly in the religious orders. She wants a more productive form of*
> *recreation—not just everyone sitting around chatting about their animals—*
> *and she is thinking about how to do this.*

However, although the 45 minutes of dinner-time "recreation"[20] during my time with

the community, would in some cases involve Mother ruminating on community affairs, concerns

about the wellbeing of their benefactors, or problems in North American society, it remained

the case for the duration of my visit that the other sisters' recreation contributions were usually

about mundane occurrences at the monastery—what the animals had done, what visitors had

said. On the one hand, these were the few elements of sisters' days that could conceivably be

"novel," and hence they were pieces of news that could be shared with the community. But

additionally, these were "safe" topics that remained close to the "present moment."

Furthermore, even though Mother was concerned that nuns should "know" each other,

any such "knowing" was clearly restricted to the other members of the community: curious

outsiders were viewed—probably correctly—as motivated by excessive curiosity designed to

serve their own questionable ends. The prioress cautioned sisters about this in reference to

people who would call or visit requesting surveys, and she also advised one sister, who was

concerned about an upcoming trip of several days' duration, to politely steer the conversation

in other directions if questioned on personal topics when travelling outside. This repeated

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[19]The parlour or "speak room" was traditionally the area where cloistered nuns would meet with outside visitors. At the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, a grille still separates the nuns' area from the guest area of this room. However, today this grille is "loose": the diamond shapes created by the woodwork are about a hand's length wide; the grille is made of wood rather than iron; and there is no curtain to obstruct one's vision. After Vatican II, many grilles, such as this one, were redesigned to indicate a symbolic separation. These are no longer as forbidding as the grilles recalled by the community foundresses, who remember living behind double grilles with heavy black curtains and long iron spikes facing the visitor's side.

[20] i.e. conversation

emphasis on secrecy again made me wonder what my own responsibilities might be, where "storytelling" about this community was concerned.

While Catholic nuns and monks who endeavour to keep silent *might* wish their stories to be known on some fundamental human level, as Cavarero suggests, ideally they are striving to "die to themselves." Part of their manner of doing this is by electing to be "marginal," deliberately severing their attachments to their past selves, and relinquishing the desire to be known and spoken about by the "world," in an effort to become unified with the eternal.

In addition to silence about "the past" the prioress explained to me, during our early conversations about my field research in August 2011, when we were endeavouring to work out an ethics agreement for my time there, that this community kept strict silence about "the interior life."

> *Mother says that a monastery she knows made a push to be allowed to talk about spiritual things and their priest cautioned them against it.*
>
> *Here, they tried it once, but there was one sister who talked too much and went on at great length. Mother described the experience as "spiritual rape." After that, they went back to not talking about their spiritual lives.*
>
> *Some of the young ones in particular, she suggested, like to please people too much and they will just say what they think sounds best. She noted that some are very poetic, but that these words conceal what's really going on, and so they're of no value. She prefers that I don't ask questions of the young ones because they don't know their own boundaries. They have just begun on their journey so they can't talk about it yet. Those who are many years down the road know more about what the journey has been like.*

This emphasis on the privacy of the "spiritual life" and the need to defend it with silence—the idea that the soul is space of the Bridegroom and hence that it is a space of marital intimacy, not to be shared with others—had been suggested to me through a comparison frequently invoked by Mother Therese in our 2010 recorded interviews as well, as in the following example:

> *A vocation's a mystery. Because God touches that soul, and everything falls away and you find yourself being attracted more and more to the things of God and nothing of the world satisfies you. You're not, you know, you're not*

that interested in getting married. You're not drawn. And you know, you just follow your heart. I always tell them, "follow your heart." God's not gonna come down and talk to you. But He will show you in various ways. Something strikes you. Something strikes your heart. Eucharistic Adoration. A lot of times, they'll just open up, and they'll say, well someone will say, "did you ever think about being a Religious?" "No, I didn't!" "But maybe? Maybe I could do it." A lot.... a lot think, "who ME?" You know, "I'm the last person in the WORLD God would choose." But then they start thinking about it. It's something ... you can't explain it ... it's something in your heart. Just like, you can't explain ... why a young woman is attracted to this boy. My cousin, when I was in high school, she was a year and a half younger than me, we were out playin' tennis one day, and there was a group of boys, and she had never seen this boy before, and she looked and she said, "that's the boy I'm going to marry. I don't know who he is. But I'm going to marry him." And sure enough, she did. She was right, and they're still together to this day. She never saw that, she said, "how can I find out, how to find out, how can I meet that boy?" Now HOW DID SHE KNOW THAT? What was it? Well something clicked. The same thing. You can't explain it. You can't put your hands on it. You can't explain it, even to yourself, you can't explain it. It's a mystery.[21]

Anecdotally, I also know that a close Catholic friend of mine, some years ago when she was discerning a vocation to the religious life, had been cautioned to stop sharing details of her spiritual life with anyone apart from her confessor and her spiritual director. As perhaps the most venerated Discalced Carmelite saint, St. Thérèse of Lisieux described, "some things lose their fragrance when exposed to the air, and so, too, one's inmost thoughts cannot be translated into earthly words without instantly losing their deep and heavenly meaning."[22] So these boundaries about what kind of experience can be spoken about are upheld, certainly, by many vowed Catholic religious and perhaps by Carmelites in particular. The defense of this zone is additionally reinforced by my field community's status as an Eastern Rite Catholic monastery. As Vladimir Lossky notes, Eastern Christian theology tended to regard mystical experience as incomprehensible and unutterable:

> The individual experiences of the greatest mystics of the Orthodox Church more often than not remain unknown to us. Apart from a few rare exceptions the spiritual literature of the Christian East possesses scarcely any

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[21] Transcription of recorded Interview with Mother Therese, OCD, in the parlour at her monastery, June 22, 2010.
[22] Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of the Soul,* trans. Thomas N. Taylor (New York: Cosimo, 2007 [1912]), 59.

autobiographical account dealing with the interior life … The way of mystical union is nearly always a secret between God and the soul concerned, which is never confided to others unless, it may be, to a confessor or to a few disciples.[23]

And yet, while this silence about the interior life and about the past presents a barrier that obstructs certain usual ethnographic paths, what opens up instead is the philosophical problem of what kind of "self" is presupposed, and cultivated, by these practices. Understanding this, and grasping how it can transform what we tend to think is required for human survival and flourishing, will be the project of this dissertation.

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[23]Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1944[1976]), 20.

INTRODUCTION

> *Now let us return to our beautiful and delightful castle and see how we can enter it. I seem rather to be talking nonsense; for, if this castle is the soul, there can clearly be no question of our entering it. For we ourselves are the castle: And it would be absurd to tell someone to enter a room when he was in it already! But you must understand that there are many ways of "being" in a place. Many souls remain in the outer court of the castle, which is the place occupied by the guards; they are not interested in entering it, and have no idea what there is in that wonderful place.*

> Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*

In the Preface, I have described how nuns' practices of silence are a way of trying to lose or forget their past and future in order to dwell fully in the present. In later chapters I will focus on obedience: another aspect of nuns' asceticism, which in this case helps monastics overcome their attachment to self-direction. However, we might be suspicious about whether such ascetic efforts of alienating aspects of the self can have anything to say about the nature of "selfhood" more broadly. Many philosophers and social scientists, for instance, have emphasized in recent years how narrative and personal history are constitutive of what it means to be a "self."[24] Just because nuns try to live in ways that deemphasize their individual histories doesn't mean this aspect of their identities *actually can* become any less significant to their present or future. Surely, like everyone else, nuns are *who they are* because of *who they have been.*

Indeed, Mother Andjelika, at least, did not fail to recognize the salience of personal history. She would often emphasize the importance of family, suggesting that certain kinds of childhoods preclude sisters from ever attaining "emotional maturity." "If you have a good solid table with all of its legs, all you have to do is put a nice tablecloth on it. But if it's missing a leg,

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[24]In addition to Adriana Cavarero on this point, see also: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1981); Catriona Mackenzie, "Personal Identity, Narrative Integration, and Embodiment," Chapter 5 in *Embodiment and Agency*, ed. Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 100-124; Catriona Mackenzie and Kim Atkins, eds., *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

adding a tablecloth won't help," she often observes. Long experience has suggested to the prioress certain limits in sisters' capacities to live in community, and she attributes these limitations to problems in sisters' childhood families. So Mother Andjelika, although she stresses the importance of not *focusing* on the past, is very aware of the importance of individual histories in shaping who nuns can become. Temporality and the concrete circumstances of personal histories of course remain features of monastic selves. However, I would argue that contemplative nuns who attempt to detach from their own personal histories are nevertheless really doing something *to themselves,* and it is this second sense of selfhood that I will be concerned to highlight in this dissertation.

In *The Importance of How We See Ourselves*, Marina Oshana has drawn a distinction between the metaphysical conditions of selfhood and what she calls "self-concepts." She observes that, "how a person conceives of himself and the weight accorded various aspects of his self-image establishes a standpoint around which the person's thoughts and action are oriented."[25] Many conditions may contribute to my existence as a conscious being, and indeed as *this* conscious being; however, my self-concept will have a distinctive role in lending sense and coherence to my actions. In this dissertation I will specifically be concerned to explore this "standpoint around which the person's thoughts and action are oriented" that Oshana has emphasized in her discussion of narrative identity. I am seeking an account of selfhood that can take seriously the project in which ascetics are engaged, enabling us to understand how practices like silence and obedience both reflect, and aim to produce, a particular form of agency. I will argue in this dissertation that attending to monastic selves should lead us to revise our sense of what kinds of identifications can form the "core self" of an authentic and responsible person.

Marina Oshana, in considering the role of self-concepts, is largely trying to establish what kind of overt self-concept I require in order to be "held accountable" for what I do. Her concern is thus primarily with *who I believe I am*, or my reflective self-concepts. By contrast, my

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[25]Marina Oshana, *The Importance of How We See Ourselves: Self-Identity and Responsible Agency* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 36.

primary focus in this dissertation will be on the nature of those *lived* identifications with which my reflective self-concepts are supposed to correspond. Oshana observes:

> There must be some state that it is like to be the self that one is, and which one's self-concept more or less faithfully represents, if a person's self-conception is to function as the filtering device, the standpoint from which a person's intentional behavior makes sense.[26]

When we evaluate the accuracy of someone's conscious self-concept, we have recourse to who that person "really is." We look to someone's patterns of choice and action as evidence for who they really are. This indicates that "who we are" informs our words and behaviours quite apart from our capacity to recognize or accurately articulate "who we are" to others or even to ourselves.

I am interested in knowing how these identifications give shape to experience "from the inside," and in methods people have used in endeavouring to see these lived identifications "as they really are"—to know the truth about themselves. I will emphasize in this dissertation that such clarity is not easy to obtain, and when we do obtain it, it tends to be transitory. When we come to an accurate awareness of "who we are" this may sometimes have the effect of disabling the power of that aspect of our identities over our choices. Asceticism "works" on this principle that self-awareness is the first step of self-transcendence. Furthermore, our reflective ideas about who we "really are" may diverge substantially from the ones others form about us and it is not clear whether I, or others, really have better access to the "truth" of "who I am." For these reasons, I want to set aside consideration of reflective self-concepts for the moment, considering instead the lived reality with which these reflective concepts are supposed to correspond. I think there is something that it's like to live with a particular character or set of attachments. There is something that it's like to be a kind person, or a driven person, or a family-oriented person, even if we fail to recognize these aspects of "who we are." "Who we are" is experientially evident because some things "pull on us" more strongly than others: what takes priority as our principle of action serves to "orient" the self and its choices.

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[26] Oshana, *The Importance of How We See Ourselves,* 55.

I. Chapter Outline

It is the orienting function of "who I really am"—the idea that we have *lived* attachments and identifications—that I will be concerned to lay out in detail in the first chapter. Drawing on concepts developed by William James, Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein, I identify how part of being a "self" is that certain of our identifications are lived out as inalienable to "who we are." In Husserl's and Stein's work, the phenomenological "pure Ego," like James' "spiritual self," was intended to designate these orienting aspects of the "self." To some extent in Husserl's work, the minimal or inalienable self is described as possessing habits of reasoning and persistent opinions. In Stein's work this aspect of the self comes across more strongly, and indeed in her writings as a Carmelite nun she portrays selves as always acting from a certain prioritization of some aspects of their being. I will argue that Stein's late account is in many respects an apt description of the operation of our lived identifications. At the same time, however, I think it's important to pay attention to Stein's changing concepts of what she thinks is "inalienable" to selves in general and to consider how these changes in her descriptions were related to "who she was." In her early career, Stein sought clear insight into the conditions of experience by using the phenomenological reduction and later through ascetic life as a Discalced Carmelite nun. Her account of inalienable selfhood, over the course of this conversion, shifts from one that portrays the pure Ego as the subjective tenor of my stream of consciousness, to one that treats the pure Ego as "undetermined agency," and finally to an account where the "I"-subject is one that is always positioned in a world of objective values that may well differ from what it values as an individual.

I will compare these two methods, used by Stein over the course of her life, for learning "who we are." Christian asceticism and the phenomenological reduction are two methods for trying to catch our lived selves *in the act*—to discover who we "really are" in a way that is supposed to have certain advantages over the kinds of ordinary, reflective, somewhat delusional self-concepts we employ in our normal life. When using either of these methods, proponents discover that there is a core or essence of the self that can't be transcended or overcome. In *The Importance of How We See Ourselves*, Marina Oshana draws a conceptual distinction between the metaphysical conditions of selfhood and the aspects of an individual's

identity that orient her life. However, I argue that our inquiry into the former is nevertheless dogged by *who we are*, and sincerely held conclusions about metaphysically inalienable selfhood will also affect *who we are*. There cannot really be a clean separation between these inquiries. The methods I use in an effort to be transparent to myself, and the conditions I believe underlie the continuity of persons, will be interdependent. The use of these methods will impact what one will discover to be inalienable to oneself in important respects.

For this reason, in the second chapter I will consider whether this "zero-point" operation of my lived sense of inalienable selfhood is really universal. I argue, here, that social constructionists have been correct to identify, in their critiques of the hegemonic Western "self," how any particular vision of the "inalienable self" exists in a feedback loop with a real or idealized form of social life. Indeed, I will argue in this dissertation, the variety of ways in which we have conceptualized the essence of the self has historically made a great deal of difference to: 1) the kinds of changes to ourselves—or the kinds of "self-transcendence"—that we are actually capable of undertaking; 2) the kinds of changes to ourselves that we think are virtuous or ethically valuable; and 3) philosophical and legal judgments about others' degrees of responsibility for their actions, and in some cases also our beliefs about their status as "persons." My position differs from that of anthropologists who reject the intercultural applicability of the concept of the "self" primarily because I want to emphasize that taking into account the social constitution of our lived orientations doesn't require us to approach ethnographic data with the attitude that such lived orientations are unlikely to be found there. There is, certainly, historical and intercultural variability in what we have conceived to be "inalienable" to ourselves, as I will highlight using my monastic fieldwork. However, as long as we don't import too many assumptions about what can potentially be inalienable to selves, thinking about how *some* sense of inalienable selfhood orients different worldviews can facilitate our capacity to understand ethical systems and life choices that differ from our own. Seeking out these lived senses of inalienable selfhood doesn't necessarily reinscribe the liberal individual in places it doesn't belong. So long as we remember that selves may orient themselves not only in relation to some internal faculty, but also in relation to other people,

objective values, or deities, interrogating lived senses of inalienable selfhood should not contaminate ethnographic data with the presuppositions of Western liberal philosophy.

In the third chapter I will advance a concept of "authenticity" that acknowledges the centrality to selves of many kinds of deep identifications, including identifications with desires that are not indexed to one's own person. Many of the sisters at my field community live their vow of obedience in such a way that they are guided not by their own desires or preferences but rather by the judgment of another person who—to them—represents Christ. On a narrow view of the self, this would create problems for understanding to what extent these sisters are governed by attitudes that are truly "their own." However, I argue that her Superior's judgments are these sisters' "own" through identification. I will thus defend Marina Oshana's account of the "obedient monk" as both "authentic" and "heteronomous" against that of David Velleman who would perhaps be more inclined to ascribe "excessive autonomy" (in the sense of self-control) and "inauthenticity" to the nun who conforms her behaviour utterly to the will of her Superior.

In ascribing heteronomy to these sisters, I don't intend the word "heteronomy" to carry pejorative connotations. Oshana holds that global autonomy is a priori valuable, stressing the connection between autonomous lives and the human capacities for creativity and deliberation. However, I think my account of our variable senses of inalienable selfhood should lead us to question this connection. Depending on what our notion of inalienable selfhood is, autonomy may seem like a failure to respect the self's true nature. And furthermore, "autonomous lives" aren't the only ones that draw on human capacities for creativity and deliberation, as we can see that the "obedience" undertaken by ascetics also requires the employment of these capacities.

The heteronomous nun orients her life in response to what she believes to be the will of God, with the result that she relinquishes authority over how she will live her daily life. By contrast, the globally autonomous person, on Oshana's description, orients her life in response to any number of concerns, but with the result that she effectively retains authority over how she lives. In the absence of shared moral commitments, one would be unable to find a common

framework within which to assess the value of heteronomy. However, I do think such dialogue is possible and indeed I note two areas where ascetic endorsement of heteronomy may fall victim to charges of inconsistency with values that are shared by both conservative Catholics and liberal philosophers. First, monastics have the intuition that the oppressive socialization of children is wrong. How can we understand restrictive upbringings as "harmful" if we don't regard at least the "capacity for autonomy" as a value? In response, I identify how obedient nuns may oppose oppressive socialization not by affirming the value of self-direction, but rather due to their concern that children should be able to "discern their true vocations." Conservative monastics, then, will not endorse a wide range of choice for the sake of self-fulfillment or self-expression, but rather because they believe that people need to be uncoerced by others in order to be able hear and respond to their true calling. Hence, nuns' opposition to excessively coercive parenting won't stem from a commitment to the value of autonomy, but rather will originate in the idea that parents might not know how God is calling their children to live. This position on parenting thus is consistent with nuns' response to their own sense of call, which has led them to live heteronomously.

Second, I will consider the concern that obedience may actually hamper the development of moral judgment, which conservative Catholics and liberal philosophers alike would agree is a key component of self-development. In order to address this concern, in the fourth chapter I work out the distinct senses of "inalienable selfhood" that inform two opposed Western understandings of the value of "obedience." I discuss first the contemporary fear that normative obedience alienates the individual from his own will and conscience, potentially generating situations of horrific evil in military and prison environments. I contrast this suspicion of obedience with a discussion of monks' and nuns' moral commitment to obedience. I argue that the obedient monk endeavours to identify totally with "the will of God," and by obeying the dictates of his Superior, to render his own preferences, desires and interests relatively peripheral to his sense of "self." And yet, at least according to Thomas Aquinas, the monk's subjection to "his own counsel" is inalienable, making him ultimately responsible for what he does. There may of course be significant gaps between the selflessness the ideal of obedience is designed to generate, and the kind of obedience we actually find in monasteries.

However, *authentic* endorsement of the ideal of obedience, I argue, should make the obedient monk one who would be less likely than the ordinary person to comply with evil directives. I conclude, for this reason, by affirming the coherence of monastic practices of obedience with their conception of the good. Disputes about the value of such a way of life would require engagement with profound questions about the nature of the universe rather than by appealing to "respect for selfhood" alone, as the lived self-concepts of authentic obedient monastics are such that their way of life best honours what is most fundamental to "who they are."

CHAPTER ONE

What is the Inalienable Self?

Ascetic practices, like silence, enclosure, fasting, abstinence, obedience, and poverty, because they are difficult, alert the nun to her attachments. Monastic life thus teaches the nun "who she is." By recognizing "who she is"—in the sense of recognizing "to what she is attached"—the nun hopes to progressively attain freedom from those attachments and habits that prevent her from loving God more completely.

The attainment of self-awareness through monastic life is an intensified and institutionalized form of what happens to many people over the course of their lives. We learn what is central to who we are often by difficult experiences that cause us to feel existentially destabilized or threatened. And similar to the monastic case, it is possible that in coping with such situations and endeavouring to reconstitute ourselves in light of them, we might relinquish or let go of aspects of "who we are" that were formerly essential. More complete identification with "who we are" is not a necessary outcome of greater self-awareness—sometimes we also let go. While the ideal of selfhood upheld by most of Western culture is the man at the height of his physical and mental strength and energy, the ideal self of monastic subjects is the soul at the hour of her death. She is purified only by losing everything.

In the final months of my father's life with terminal cancer, I watched him cope with the loss of key features of "who he was." His strength, competence, and capacity to do things by himself had long driven him to work hard and rarely to ask for, or accept, help. I think his family members could see his attachment to "doing things himself" and "being useful" better than he could. As his condition deteriorated, the loss of his capacity to go outside and fix farm machinery and to work in the garden was something he found absolutely intolerable. At first, to cope with the loss of his capacities for heavy outdoor work he tried to replace one form of "being useful" with another: when he could no longer work outside, he would do all of the cooking. And two days before he died, although my father could no longer till the garden himself, my brother Ben tells how, to my mother's horror, my father pulled himself down the outside stairs using the handrail, to supervise Ben while he did it.

At an earlier stage of coping with his loss of physical capacities, my father couldn't name

the existential threat he was experiencing. When we would offer to help with work, he often articulated his refusal by complaining that we were trying to take things away from *him.* His lived sense of "who he was" couldn't be reconciled with life in his deteriorating body. To cope, he established new ways to do things himself and he would cling to old ways of doing things himself against medical advice.

Slowly, however, we watched him gain awareness of this aspect of who he was. He started to talk about this experience of feeling useless, and started to articulate to me how hard it was, how he had always taken great pride in being able to work hard and do things himself. "But this would happen to me eventually, even without the cancer," he said about a month before he died. "I'm just getting it a decade or so earlier, but one way or the other, I would have had to experience this." Gradually he grew more peaceful, and I think his sense of self began to change in response to his new reality. It's hard for me to know exactly what happened during his last several days, when he was at his most physically incapacitated, but seeing him a week before he died, I was surprised by how peacefully he was able to ask for help and to allow his family to do things for him—to get his food, to push him around in his wheelchair. It really seemed to me that the loss of these most basic capacities, and hence this total deprivation of autonomy, had required my father to let go of his attachment to "doing things himself" and to reconstitute, in the end, his sense of self around something else—perhaps his loved ones.

Since life experiences are the usual means by which we learn what is really fundamental to "who we are" it is hard to imagine how philosophical methods could begin to generate anything like this kind of truth. However, in this chapter I will first work to develop a conceptual apparatus that I think should, at least, help us to distinguish our lived self-concepts from those that we will generate about ourselves on reflection. In the second half of this chapter, I will begin to examine the interdependence between our worldviews and values, the "methods" we use for attaining clarity about our lived self-concepts, and the actual aspects of the self we will construe as "inalienable."

I. A Note about Words

Note that in this dissertation I will, in some circumstances, use terms—e.g. "pure Ego," "self," "person," "agent," "freedom," "will," "autonomy," etc.—in ways that reflect the

terminological choices of whichever author I happen to be discussing. In such circumstances, I ask the reader to attend to the contextual meaning of these terms: because I engage with a wide variety of conceptual systems in this dissertation, one must not assume that I mean the same thing in both cases, if, for instance, I use the word "self" in my discussion of fifth century Christianity and twenty-first century psychological explanations of military atrocities. Given the breadth of material I will be using in this dissertation, maintaining some degree of terminological fidelity to each author (or to their translators, in some cases) is sometimes the only way to maintain fidelity to their ideas. However, this means that the reappearance of the same term in my discussion of multiple authors does not always indicate that I take one author to be providing a commentary on a concept that aligns strictly with that employed when the same word is used by another author. Similarly, one should not assume that if, for instance, I use the word "person" when engaging with one work, and "self" when engaging with another, that I must mean *different* things by these two terms. It is important to attend to where I explicitly draw connections and distinctions between different authors' terms, rather than assuming that conceptual distinctions will map easily onto linguistic ones.

For the sake of instituting some degree of terminological consistency, however, I will use the terms "self" and "inalienable self" in this initial exposition of the problems I will be addressing in this dissertation. And I will deliberately return to these terms throughout this thesis when I draw conclusions. So what do I mean by "the self" and "the inalienable self"? The "self" to which I will be referring here pertains to anything concerning which anyone (I, or others) might say that it is "mine" in the sense of being part of me.

This meaning of "the self" is loosely derived from William James's description of "the empirical self" in the tenth chapter of his *Principles of Psychology, Volume I*:

> The Empirical Self of each of us is all that he is tempted to call by the name of *me.* But it is clear that between what a man calls *me* and what he simply calls *mine* the line is difficult to draw. We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves. Our fame, our children, the work of our hands, may be as dear to us as our bodies are, and arouse the same feelings and the same acts of reprisal if attacked. And our bodies themselves, are they simply ours, or are they *us*? Certainly men have been ready to disown their very bodies and to regard them as mere vestures, or even as prisons of clay from which they should some day be glad to escape.

> We see then that we are dealing with a fluctuating material. The same object being sometimes treated as a part of me, at other times as simply mine, and then again as if I had nothing to do with it at all. *In its widest possible sense,* however, *a man's Self is the sum total of all that he* CAN *call his*, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down,—not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all.[27]

The "self" I mean to refer to here is, as James says, this "fluctuating material" that "we are tempted to call by the name of me." Its constituents can even include other people, as James notes.

This self is also felt to have "alienable" and "inalienable" parts. The "inalienable self" consists in whatever aspects of this fluctuating material are "non–optional" for one's identity. This "inalienable self" includes whichever features of my "self" I feel I can't be without, or—perhaps more strongly—features of my "self" without which *I* cannot *be*.

When James himself alludes to something like this latter concept of "inalienability," he labels this sense of inalienable selfhood the "spiritual self." For James, the spiritual self (for us, "the inalienable self") is what cannot be altered without a person becoming "alienatus a se"[28]—lost to herself. Creating a short list of these things that "we most seem verily to be," James suggests "our ability to argue and discriminate, … our moral sensibility and conscience, … our indomitable will."[29] Our capacity for rational and moral deliberation and our will are aspects of the self that some might argue cannot be altered without "us" becoming unrecognizable to ourselves. James describes the "inalienability" of the "spiritual self" as follows:

> If the stream as a whole is identified with the Self far more than any outward thing, a *certain portion of the stream abstracted from the rest* is so identified in an altogether peculiar degree, and is felt by all men as a sort of innermost

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[27]William James, *The Principles of Psychology Volume I* (New York: Dover Publications, 1950 [1890]), 291-292.
[28] Ibid., 296
[29] Ibid.

centre within the circle, of sanctuary within the citadel, constituted by the subjective life as a whole. Compared with this element of the stream, the other parts, even of the subjective life, seem transient external possessions, of which each in turn can be disowned, whilst that which disowns them remains. Now, *what is this self of all the other selves?*[30]

James urges us, in considering this inalienable self, to "try to settle for ourselves as definitely as we can, just how this central nucleus of the Self may *feel,* no matter whether it be a spiritual substance or only a delusive word."[31] He then conducts his own introspective experiment, and concludes that this inmost self is not a spiritual faculty at all, but rather, "the 'Self of selves,' when carefully examined, is found to consist mainly of the collection of these peculiar motions in the head or between the head and throat."[32] In other words, for James, *this sense* of having an inalienable self is a genuine part of our experience, but we are misled when we equate it with some "spiritual" faculty. His own conjecture is that the sense of inalienable selfhood simply indicates the bodily felt sense of whatever we happen to be doing at any given moment. In what follows, I will adopt James' idea of the "spiritual" or "inalienable self" without endorsing his conclusion about the bodily felt sense. Throughout this thesis, I will instead maintain James' preliminary suspension of judgment about what the "sanctuary within the citadel" *is*. While James reduces the "spiritual self" to a felt sense of "bodily processes," arguing that most philosophers have been mistaken in their *explanations* of this feeling, he nevertheless describes *this sense of having an inalienable self,* like the other phenomena he describes in Chapter 10, as a *genuine* constituent of what we recognize as conscious life. In this dissertation I will detail various possible aspects of selfhood that may be inalienable to particular individuals. James has helpfully highlighted the diversity of identifications that may be included in my "self" in the broad sense, noting that at times other people seem to be a part of who I am. And perhaps, for some, a loved one may become more than a mere "part," and may in fact be inalienable to who they are. I will argue that we lose a great deal of our capacity to understand different conceptual systems when we consider as "inalienable" to selves only sets of their own

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[30] Ibid., 297.
[31] Ibid., 298.
[32] Ibid., 301.

psychological elements, like their own beliefs or desires.

Additionally I will argue that while we have a felt sense of this "inalienability" that in situations like the one I noted at the beginning of this chapter—where my father lost his capacities to live in the way his inalienable self required—due to the breadth of identifications that make up the "self" in the broad sense, we might discover that we can cope by reconstituting ourselves in a new way, around different fundamental attachments. This doesn't make these surrendered aspects of "who we are" any less central to the person that we have been. However, becoming a fully developed self doesn't require that our manner of identifying with these aspects of "who we are" is by "maintaining them as our principle of action." We may also authentically "let them go," in some circumstances. And if one happens to inhabit a worldview where the pinnacle of human development is not "who we are" at our strongest and most capable, but "who we are" at the moment of our death, then this attitude of "letting go" may well seem to be the proper attitude toward the "self."

How can we get a sense of our self-concepts as they are when we are living in the world, not reflecting explicitly on "who we are"? In the following three sections of this chapter I propose that we read Husserl's and Stein's changing accounts of the "pure Ego" as a developmental history of their attempts to understand (in my terminology) our *lived self-concepts*. Husserl and Stein discover that some sense of "self" is inalienably constitutive of many of our experiences and they draw attention to many situations that reveal to us the inalienability of "who we are." As an account of lived *self-concepts*, however, or the way our habitual attachments and identifications structure our behaviour and choices, an account of this aspect of who we are as "constitutive" of our experience is only elaborated clearly in Stein's late work. However, I trace the history of this idea as it appears initially in Husserl's discovery of the residual "pure Ego" in the *Logical Investigations*. Then I follow his struggles in the *Ideas* to articulate what belonged to the "purity" of this Ego, where Husserl sometimes notes that the Ego is a condition of our selective attention, and of our capacity to form opinions based on new information. We can trace the further transformation of this phenomenology of the "pure Ego" into a phenomenology of our lived, experientially-orienting attachments by following Stein's account of the "pure Ego" during her career as Husserl's assistant and then

ultimately as a Carmelite nun. Husserl in the *Ideas* texts began to develop an idea that we see elaborated more fully by Stein in her late career that the pure Ego takes up a certain position habitually. In Stein's late work this becomes an account of the Ego as always-situated in a world of values. By reading this as a developmental history of the "lived self-concept" we see the pure Ego increasingly articulated not merely as some bare, first-personal quality of my experiences, but as a kind of "zero-point" organization or ordering of the world. The "pure Ego" comes to include for both authors our tendency to filter our experience for "salience" and to form habits of thinking and acting. Additionally, by considering Stein's changing descriptions of what is inalienable to the "self," we see how her own sense of what is most fundamental to selves in general is intimately related to "who she was" at different moments in her life. Her account reflects her conversion.

II. The Pure Ego in James, Husserl and the Kantian Tradition

Edmund Husserl, through his phenomenological reductions, tried to free his inquiry into experience from theoretical prejudices and presuppositions about the nature of the world. And like the Christian ascetic, trying to attain freedom from presuppositions initially seemed to require Husserl to attain freedom from "the self." When he first published the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl held that the Ego or experiencing subject was constituted within experience, rather than being a condition of having any experience whatever. In his fifth *Logical Investigation*, for instance, Husserl demands of Paul Natorp—in relation to Natorp's use of the Kantian "pure Ego" concept—"how can we assert such a 'basic fact of psychology,' if we are unable to think it?"[33] If any ego uncovered on reflection—objectified—is utterly different from the operative, subjective ego, then this latter has no "phenomenal" being. Hence, this idea that there could be an absolute, but unknowable "I," *behind* experience, was initially excluded through Husserl's phenomenological reductions, in which he recommended "bracketing" or suspending anything not capable of being given in direct intuition. The pure experiencing *subject*, as an entity underlying consciousness, seemed to Husserl a mere theoretical postulate that ought to undergo exclusion when inquiring into the conditions of experience.

However, Husserl himself later renounces this earlier critique of the "pure Ego" in a note

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[33] Husserl, *Logical Investigations Volume II*, 91.

to the Second Edition of the *Logical Investigations*, suggesting that his previous critical position on the pure Ego is "an attitude I no longer endorse" and it is, in any event, "irrelevant to the investigations of this volume."[34] He admits, in a footnote, "I have since managed to find [the pure Ego], i.e. have learnt not to be led astray from a pure grasp of the given through corrupt forms of ego-metaphysic."[35]

This "pure Ego" in Husserl's work is something I find compelling as a "discovery" that Husserl felt obliged to acknowledge. This discovery, in Husserl's case, is also a methodological claim that there is a "self" that serves as a limit on the reductions, on our capacity to put "ourselves" in brackets when we seek to understand the operation of consciousness. So when Husserl cedes the reality of the pure Ego in the second edition of the *Logical Investigations*, he agrees with Natorp in this respect: that the "pure Ego," whatever else it might be, is a type of selfhood that cannot be set aside even in thought. But *what is* this inalienable subject that cannot be excluded from "pure experience," and how can it be "grasped" without altering its essentially subjective nature?

I argue that reading the descriptions of the pure Ego in the work of both Husserl and Stein gives us a distinct sense that the pure Ego is not merely an impersonal "I" or a sense of qualitative "mineness"[36] attached to our experience, but the "orienting point" for the self: what makes us an agent with a certain style of reasoning.

However, before I proceed in elaborating this account, some disambiguation is needed in order to avoid conflating different philosophical uses of the term "pure Ego." Husserl and Stein's "pure Ego" is not Kant's pure Ego, and hence Husserl and Stein's pure Ego is also not the "pure Ego" of Natorp that Husserl critiqued in the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*.

Husserl's pure Ego is also not the "pure Ego" that James critiques, when he critiques the Kantian version of this concept. We noted above that William James drew a distinction between the "Empirical Self" and the spiritual self—the "self of all the other selves." Additionally, in

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[34] Ibid., 93.
[35] Ibid., 353n V.I.8.
[36] Dan Zahavi defines this as "the fact that experiences are characterized by first-personal givenness." Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2005), 16.

selecting labels for his concepts, James draws a distinction between his "spiritual self" and the Kantian "pure Ego." James would not use the term "pure Ego" to refer to anything that he thinks genuinely characterizes conscious experience. Indeed, he is concerned to refute the idea that the Kantian "pure Ego"—a term he uses interchangeably with "transcendental Ego"—is a sort of necessary postulate required to explain the unity of experience:

> No mystery would be made lighter by such means … Or does one seriously think he understands better *how* the knower 'connects' its objects, when one calls the former a transcendental Ego and the latter a 'Manifold of Intuition' than when one calls them Thought and Things respectively? Knowing must have a vehicle. Call the vehicle Ego, or call it Thought, Psychosis, Soul, Intelligence, Consciousness, Mind, Reason, Feeling,—what you like—it must know. The best grammatical subject for the verb *know* would, if possible, be one from whose other properties the knowing could be deduced. And if there be no such subject, the best one would be that with the fewest ambiguities and the least pretentious name. By Kant's confession, the transcendental Ego has no properties, and from it nothing can be deduced. Its name is pretentious, and, as we shall presently see, has its meaning ambiguously mixed up with that of the substantial soul. So on every possible account we are excused from using it instead of our own term of the present passing "Thought," as the principle by which the Many is simultaneously known.[37]

The "pure Ego" rejected here by James is empty and unknowable. It is the pure experiencing subject we hypothesize in order to explain the unity and continuity of my experience; but, as "pure subject," it cannot—according to the Kantians—accurately become an "object" of our subjective experience through reflection. While James agrees with Kant that our sense of the unity and continuity of our experience is genuine—he is not a 'bundle' theorist about the self—out of concern for the simplicity and elegance of his explanation, James rejects the idea that a "pure Ego" could provide such a unifying ground. James' critique of the Kantian "pure" or "transcendental" Ego amounts to a pragmatic concern that this Ego does no "work" that cannot be done more simply by the temporal, aggregative and associative life of "Thought."

By highlighting the "purity" of the pure Ego, Husserlian phenomenology suggests that the pure Ego is the perspective within which our real Ego—our psychic and social identity—is

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[37]Ibid., 364.

seen and constituted. And yet, unlike the Kantians—as I will elaborate below—the "essential subjectivity" of the pure Ego does not lead Husserl and Stein to exclude the "pure Ego" from analysis. They regard this subjectivity as something that can be interrogated precisely *as* a constitutive feature of my experience.

Similarly to the "spiritual self"—construed by James as that without which I feel I will no longer be myself—Husserl describes the "pure Ego" as both the orienting point and an inalienable component of my empirical self. Note how James' description of the spiritual self, above, relies on an image of increasingly interior selves. James explicitly likens our experience of the "inalienable" self to the feeling of having a "sanctuary within the citadel"—a description quite like Teresa of Avila's in this dissertation's epigraph. James acknowledges, through his concept of the "spiritual self," that we treat some aspects of ourselves as most central or fundamental, and he treats *this sense* as interesting in itself, even though he ultimately doesn't think that any of the aspects of "self" that we regard as contenders for our essence *will* count as the singular ground of our being. I think this sense of inalienable selfhood is also how Husserl and Stein understand the "pure Ego." However, by contrast with James—who describes the "spiritual self" as the *felt sense* that some aspects of myself are inalienable—Husserl's pure Ego is revealed to be inalienable not primarily by an immediate "feeling," but rather because we recognize reflectively that we are incapable of completely setting aside this Ego when we undertake the reductions. It is "the ultimate subject, the phenomenological one, which can never be bracketed."[38]

And yet, as I noted above, once Husserl cedes the necessity of the "pure Ego," and develops his account in *Ideas II*, the "pure Ego" he does ultimately adopt is—unlike the Kantian "pure Ego"—one that is accessible to reflection. Husserl construes this as a "subject" that can nevertheless become an "object" without essential modifications:

> It consequently pertains … to the essence of the pure Ego that it be able to grasp itself as what it is and in the way it functions and thus make itself into an object. Therefore it is in no way correct to assert that the pure Ego is a subject that can never become an Object, as long as we do not limit the

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[38]Husserl, *Ideas II,* 183.

concept of Object at the very outset and in particular do not limit it to "natural" Objects, to mundane "real" Objects, for if we do the assertion would indeed hold in a good and valid sense ... The pure Ego can be posited as an object by the pure Ego which is identically one with it.[39]

So what is the pure Ego as an "Object" of reflection? This is where problems start to arise for Husserl. This possibility of "being given" rests on an idea of the "pure Ego" as not *merely* conjectural or postulated: it is not an *a priori* ground of my self-recognition, or of the unity of experience. It is really "there" in each cogito, available to be known by us through a change in attention from the objects of our experience to the conditions of our experience. However, Husserl's account of what this "there-ness" *actually consists in* varies considerably between *Ideas I* and *Ideas II*. Sometimes this pure Ego is described as lacking in qualities or characteristic. However, at other moments, the pure Ego appears to be a sort of minimal "agent" with "capacities." Husserl, for instance, sometimes describes the pure Ego as the source of "rays" of attention,[40] i.e. the condition of the attentive, or what he calls the "actional" mode of consciousness, and sometimes he identifies the "pure Ego" as having an inherent tendency to form "opinions" or habitual ways of organizing the world:

> The identity of the pure Ego does not only reside in the fact that I (sc. the pure Ego), with regard to each and every cogito, can grasp myself as the identical Ego of the cogito; rather I am even therein and a priori the same Ego, insofar as I, in taking a position, necessarily exercise consistency in a determinate sense: each "new" position-taking institutes a persistent "opinion."[41]

These passages present a vision of the pure Ego as having a tendency to form habits and opinions, and hence the pure Ego seems temporally extended, much like "Thought" in James'

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[39]Ibid., 107.

[40] Part II, Chapter 2, §37 of *Ideas I*, for instance, is entitled "'The Pure Ego's 'Directedness-to' Within the Cogito and the Heeding Which Seizes Upon." In this section Husserl specifies that, "to the cogito itself there belongs, as immanent in it, a 'regard-to' the Object which, on the other side, wells forth from the 'Ego' which therefore can never be lacking." (75-76) In other words, here the "pure Ego" is described as the source of "heeding" or attending-to. In the case of "valuing," for instance, Husserl specifies that we may either attend to the "mere thing" or the "valuing of the thing": the possibility of this shift in attention belongs to the mode of givenness of Objects, however the "directedness-to" one aspect or the other is itself accomplished by the "Ego."

[41] *Ideas II,* 118.

work. Yet unlike James' "Thought," the "pure Ego" is not described by Husserl as simply identical with the stream of consciousness. Husserl's "pure Ego" rather seems to exist "within" inner temporality, as Husserl observes in the following excerpt from *Ideas II:*

> Our investigation has remained completely within immanent temporality. And to this sphere there belongs also the identical pure Ego. Its identity is an identity throughout this immanent time. I am and I was the same, I who endure and "hold sway" in this or that conscious act, although, on the other hand, I am no real [*reell*] moment of it in the manner of a constituent.[42]

The "pure Ego" *lives* only in the "present" act of consciousness, even if it may recognize itself as the identical subject of its past actions. According to Husserl, the structure of immanent temporality allows me to accurately undertake this kind of reflection, particularly on passing experiences still "retained" as part of the present moment, but this immanent temporality is not identical with the "I" that reflects, according to Husserl in the *Ideas*. Husserl's description of both the emptiness of the pure Ego, and its status as nevertheless "more than an empty pole of experience" in the two *Ideas* texts seems to put him into an uneasy position of trying to decide which aspects of our experience, exactly, we should interpret as pertaining to the "purity" of the Ego, rather than to its constituted aspects (the Real Ego).

A characteristic approach to the "pure Ego," by those who are familiar with Husserl's work in general, but who have not attended to his account of the "pure Ego" in particular, is exemplified in Matheson Russell's textbook *Husserl: A Guide for the Perplexed*, where Russell conflates the "pure Ego" concept elaborated by Husserl in *Ideas II* with Husserl's later concept of the "transcendental ego." Russell construes Husserl's admission of the former concept as straightforwardly indicative of Husserl's conversion to Kantian idealism: "Husserl's change of heart on the matter of the pure ego is of a piece with his Kantian transcendental turn and his journey through Cartesian subjectivism,"[43] Russell suggests. Russell interprets the "corrupt forms of ego-metaphysic" from which Husserl distinguishes his work as the objectifying

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[42] Ibid., 109. Note that Stein also maintains this distinction between the "pure Ego" and the "stream of consciousness" in *On the Problem of Empathy*, while nevertheless emphasizing how the "affiliation of all the stream's experiences with the present, living, pure 'I' constitutes its inviolable unity"(39).

[43] Matheson Russell, *Husserl: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2010), 145*.*

metaphysic of David Hume. However, Investigation V, Chapter 1, §8 of the *Logical Investigations*—the text about which these annotations were made—is clearly a discussion of Paul Natorp's "pure Ego." So Russell's suggestion that Husserl's critique applies to David Hume, who isn't mentioned at all by name in this section, seems unwarranted. Indeed, it is more probable that here the "corrupt" metaphysical account of the ego from which Husserl maintains a distinction, even when he cedes the reality of the "pure Ego," is the unknowable "pure Ego" of Natorp. Furthermore, while Russell claims to be basing his account of Husserl's "pure Ego" on an article of Joseph Kockelmans comparing the Kantian and Husserlian versions of this concept,[44] Kockelmans maintains a much clearer distinction between the Neo-Kantian and Husserlian "pure Ego" in this piece. Kockelmans distinguishes the "pure Ego"—particularly that of *Ideas II*—from the "transcendental Ego" of Husserl's later texts. This leads him to take a moderate, and I think textually better-motivated, position on the status of the "pure Ego" with respect to Husserl's "Idealist turn": he suggests that the "pure Ego" adopted by Husserl was more Cartesian than Kantian, and the use of this concept represents an intermediate point on the way to Husserl's full elaboration of the transcendental ego in the *Cartesian Meditations*.[45]

Kockelmans thus recognizes the tension I have highlighted here between the "emptiness" or "purity" of Husserl's pure Ego and its capacity for habit-formation. His own suggestion is that Husserl "changed his view" about this issue sometime between 1912 and 1915: the "empty" pure ego, incapable of objectification, was endorsed by Husserl from about 1900 to 1913; but, Kockelmans argues, in subsequent years Husserl began to describe the pure Ego as capable of being "grasped intuitively." It is only in the second volume of *Ideas*, Kockelmans suggests, that Husserl began to describe the "pure Ego" as nevertheless an ego that "lives in the different types and modes of our experience in different manners."[46] And yet, the division between Husserl's descriptions of the "empty" and the "qualitatively elaborated" pure Ego is not as neat as the division between the texts of *Ideas I* and *II*. In fact, these texts read as

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[44] Joseph J. Kockelmans, "Husserl and Kant on the Pure Ego," in *Husserl: Expositions and Appraisals*, ed. Frederick A. Elliston and Peter McCormick (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).
[45]Indeed, Kockelmans notes important ways in which Husserl always regards his phenomenology as distinct from Kantian idealism, even in Husserl's later career, due to Husserl's emphasis on the "rigorously scientific methods" of phenomenology (See Kockelmans, "Husserl and Kant on the Pure Ego," 281).
[46] Kockelmans, "Husserl and Kant on the Pure Ego," 272.

internally inconsistent on the subject of what the "pure Ego" is. Even in *Ideas II*, Husserl continues to specify that the pure Ego is, "not to be confused with the Ego as the real person, with the real subject of the real human being. It has no innate or acquired traits of character, no capacities, no dispositions, etc."[47] However, perhaps these apparent internal inconsistencies arise because Husserl and his students continued to revise the *Ideas II* manuscript over the course of many decades, as his position on this matter transformed. Indeed, *Ideas II* was not even published during Husserl's lifetime,[48] so it is difficult to know what his mature position on the "pure Ego" would have been.

The important point here is that Kocklemans confirms that there are significant differences between Husserl's phenomenological "pure Ego" concept and the one Husserl finds in the quotation by Natorp, which "cannot itself be a content, and resembles nothing that could be a content of consciousness" and which "can be no further described, since all descriptive terms we might seek to employ, could be drawn only from the content of consciousness."[49] In "finding" the "pure Ego," through a "pure grasp of the given," Husserl specifically tries to distinguish his concept from that of the idealists: this pure Ego is authentically thinkable; it is phenomenologically accessible. He has "found" the pure Ego: Husserl says, in another second-edition footnote to the *Logical Investigations,* "how can we avoid assuming a pure ego? It is precisely the ego apprehended in *carrying out* a self-evident *cogito*."[50] Husserl hypothesizes that the pure Ego can be "grasped." He does admit that the "pure Ego" becomes an "essentially transformed, intentional Object" through reflection; however, he nevertheless maintains that both the acting, lived "pure Ego" of the original experience, and the "pure Ego" reflected-upon are, as he says, "in truth one and the same."[51] The "subject that can never become object" then, is not what Husserl means by the "pure Ego," once he cedes its reality.

Furthermore, for Husserl, the "pure Ego" is "individuated" in some real, cognizable

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[47] Husserl, *Ideas II,* 110.

[48] Roman Ingarden, "Edith Stein on her Activity as an Assistant of Edmund Husserl," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 23, no. 2 (December 1962): 155-175, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2104910/, 158.

[49] Paul Natorp, qtd.in Husserl, *Logical Investigations II*, 91.

[50] Ibid ,352n6.

[51] *Ideas II*, 108

sense[52] and he contrasts this concept with Kantian transcendental apperception due to its accessibility to reflection. Husserl describes this "pure Ego" as tied intimately to a *particular* "real Ego," the latter of which is replete with qualities, characteristics, commitments, and desires. Thus, the important distinction between the Husserlian phenomenological account and the neo-Kantian, is that for Husserl, the "pure Ego" is not merely a post hoc philosophical abstraction, but rather a constitutive element of lived experience and even a condition of the activity of phenomenological bracketing. My capacity to put aspects of myself at a distance from myself is conditioned by my status as someone who forms opinions and habits of reasoning and who attends to some things rather than others. Our engagement in the reductions reveals to us our inability to cease being individuals in our efforts to arrive at a pure science of experience.

When Husserl does ascribe habits of reasoning to the "pure Ego," I think he is noticing something correct: we cannot cease to be motivated or oriented when we do phenomenology. We are, for instance, only capable of being attentive to certain elements of our experience at any given moment: "selective attention" is a way in which our consciousness is already minimally individuated, characterized as the consciousness *of someone*. However, his assertion that this pure Ego can be given as an object of intuition is puzzling and seems belied by experience, as people are not able to be really "self-aware"—knowing their own habits of reasoning, for instance—without in some respect altering themselves and perhaps even ceasing to have the habits they previously possessed. That said, in terms of the bare fact of having some habits or other, Husserl's assertion about the reflective accessibility of the pure Ego is surely correct. As he is interested in the conditions of experience in general, rather than in "self-knowledge," this recognition that we are habit-bound is probably all that he really intends when he suggests that the "pure Ego" can become an object of phenomenological reflection. Awareness of our own particular habits and attachments is a different matter, however, and I will return to this issue at the end of this chapter in comparing Husserlian methods with those of Christian asceticism.

III. The Pure Ego in the Work of Edith Stein

Edith Stein's descriptions of the "pure Ego" from her work as an academic—*On the*

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[52] The "pure Ego" allows for "real (adequate) self-evidence attaching to the 'I am.'" Ibid.

Problem of Empathy, and *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*—reflect the tension between the "real" and yet "qualityless" pure Ego we find in Husserl's *Ideas II,* while also revealing her own attempts to reconcile Husserl's idealist leanings with her concerns about the constitutive nature of our relations with others and the external world encountered in our senses. We learn from Stein's letters to Roman Ingarden that around 1917—while compiling and editing Husserl's manuscripts of the *Ideen* and simultaneously endeavouring to develop her own doctrine of the "person"[53]—Stein was considerably less committed than was Husserl to his Idealist shift.

Stein's distinction from Husserl in this respect is not, however, revealed by differences in the account of the "pure Ego" that she puts forward in her dissertation, *On the Problem of Empathy*. What she actually says about the pure Ego there resembles Husserl's account in the *Ideas* texts quite closely. Indeed, like Husserl in his moments of idealism, Stein describes the pure Ego as the "otherwise indescribable, qualityless subject of experience."[54] Her distinction from Husserl appears rather in the fact that she pays much less attention to the inalienably Egoic character of our experience than does Husserl, assigning relatively more weight to the ways in which our experience of "ourselves" is in fact importantly constituted by our relations with other individuals and with the "community"; with our sense experiences; with our motivations; with our "past" in the form of commitments I previously made and which continue to retain force in my life; and with desires for possible futures. She only returns to the "I" or "pure Ego" as a way of reminding her audience, in *On the Problem of Empathy,* that empathized experiences are nevertheless primordial experiences with a non-primordial content: in other words, I never experience another's experience, but I always have my own experience of another's emotions. Even in cases where I, for instance, rejoice over what gives you joy and there seems to be no distinction in the content of our experiences—we feel joy due to the

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[53]"Now I imagine that I know pretty well what 'constitution' is—but with a break from Idealism. An absolutely existing physical nature on the one hand, a distinctly structured subjectivity on the other, seem to me to be prerequisites before an intuiting nature can constitute itself. I have not yet had the chance to confess my heresy to the Master…" Edith Stein, "Letter to Roman Ingarden, Freiburg, February 3, 1917," in *Self-Portrait in Letters, 1916-1942*, trans. Josephine Koeppel, ed. L. Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Discalced Carmelite, 1891-1942, Vol. 5. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1993.
[54]Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy,* 38.

arrival of the same circumstance—my experience of this joy is always characterized as "mine," and not yours. Not only the "Other" is revealed in empathy, but also the distinction of myself from that other. The "pure Ego" becomes important for Stein in her first work as that which marks the distinction between my feelings and yours in cases where our emotions are otherwise shared.

In her *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities,* by contrast, Stein returns to the "pure Ego" to remind her readers that in spite of how our actions are largely influenced by "lifepower" that is affected by various internal and external sources, nevertheless the impetus to act always must come from my own volition or "will." This, according to Stein, is best evidenced when I clearly give free assent to act on some motivations rather than on others, or when I make a choice to undertake difficult actions in spite of my exhaustion; however, the undetermined "fiat" is a condition of *all* of my intentional acts,[55] according to Stein. In the *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, then, while she still describes the "pure Ego" as the "quality-less point of radiation of the experiences,"[56] now her "quality-less" "pure Ego" appears in a way that seems to anticipate the Sartrean account of consciousness as "nothingness" or "nihilation."[57] Granted, Sartre thinks it important to distinguish his "consciousness" or the nihilation of the In-itself from "the will." He suggests that the latter, as a faculty, is always understood as opposed to "passion" and hence is conceptually part of "a sort of psychological Manichaeism which is absolutely insupportable."[58] The "will," Sartre argues, and "volitions," are bad-faith presumptions that consciousness is comprised of various different "givens." When the term "will" is used, this is construed as the *only* "free" human faculty which can deliberate and select between given options that exceed my direct control—desires, for instance. Sartre thinks, by contrast, that consciousness is by nature undetermined: in other

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[55]"Intentional" in Husserlian/Brentanian way of speaking about "conscious experiences," rather than "intentional" in the sense of deliberative.

[56]Edith Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities,* trans. Mary Catharine Baseheart and Marianne Sawicki, ed.Marianne Sawicki, The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Discalced Carmelite, 1891-1942, Vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000[1922]),135

[57]See, e.g. "The For-itself, in fact, is nothing but the pure nihilation of the In-itself; it is like a hole in being at the heart of Being." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (Toronto: Washington Square Press, 1992 [1943]), 786.

[58]Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 573.

words, all consciousness is "nihilation of the In-itself" or freedom. This includes my passions or desires, which Sartre suggests are also free acts, instances of "attaining a particular end by a particular means."[59]

However, while this distinction appears on the surface to be a deep, conceptual discrepancy—Sartrean nihilation is not "the will" as a faculty—both Stein and Sartre are prioritizing "undetermined action." The distinction Sartre draws between the freedom of "consciousness"—in his sense of the term—and the "will" is not genuinely an incompatibility, but rather, I would argue, a difference in how far my experiential freedom is understood to extend. Sartre's terminological distinction is intended to make a point about the *scope* of agency: to assert that freedom pertains to consciousness, rather than only to certain actions.

Inasmuch as Stein describes my present consciousness as undetermined by anything that precedes it, or anything which may appear to coerce it, the implications of Stein's "willing ego" are quite close to those of Sartrean freedom. In endeavouring to develop an account of our responsibility for our actions in her *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, Stein in fact declares that the activity of willing *is* the "pure ego":

> The willing ego that we have in view, the subject of the resolve, is the *pure* ego, which Bergson regards as a mere construct of the intellect. All past experiences as well as the present experiences belong to the pure ego, but it does not arise from them. And the powers that the ego deploys out of itself in its free acts do not flow from its past life in to the present. This is precisely why these powers are also completely unpredictable. How any one decision of the will is going to turn out cannot be predicted either on the basis of a thorough survey of the motivational framework or from knowledge of the available lifepower.[60]

The "pure ego" for Stein in this work is the pure spontaneity of the will, undetermined by anything. While Stein does describe the pure Ego as having *some* relationship with its past, this relationship, as it will be for Sartre, seems to be a relation of ownership: the pure Ego *has* a past. Being in some sense undetermined by one's past is essential, Stein thinks, for explaining how it is we can say that people are responsible for what they do: if they had no "pure Ego," no

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[59]Ibid., 574. See also *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002 [1939]).

[60]Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, 96.

fundamental indeterminacy, their present acts would not be "acts," but rather inevitable outcomes of what preceded them. This "spontaneity" is the shape the "pure Ego" takes in the context of Stein's pre-conversion argument for human responsibility.

"Agency" thus is rendered primary by Stein in her second major work. But this is not unique to Stein's phenomenology and Sartrean existentialism: in one guise or another, we find that "agency" is understood as inalienable to selves throughout much of the history of Western philosophy. The current imperative for society and other people to respect and promote our "projects" rests on a view of the human as fundamentally "agential." Certainly, we can think of exceptions to the inalienability of agency—situations where the "agent" seems to be displaced from the body through which we see "actions" emerging, as in cases of dissociation. And yet, the fascination belonging to these examples rests on their ability to trouble[61] our concept of "human nature"; and hence, these "exceptions" *qua "exceptions"* only confirm the strength of our commitment to the inalienability of the "agent."

In any event, it is interesting to reflect on how Stein's account of what is truly "inalienable" to the "self" shifts again in her post-conversion works. While she retains the language of the "pure Ego", her account of this concept becomes somewhat more complicated in *Finite and Eternal Being*.[62] However, while there is a shift in Stein's ontology in this latter text, the idea that we have a core, essential "inner life" becomes only more pronounced in this later work. When Stein endeavours to demonstrate human finitude and dependence in *Finite and Eternal Being*—written as a Carmelite nun, once her own lifestyle and commitments have shifted substantially—she reverses the position that we are, most fundamentally, "agents." Here she argues instead that our capacity to be surprised by joy that wells up "internally"; our conditioning by our past in ways that are inaccessible to us; our motivational opacity to ourselves; etc.; all condition our agency. She thus concludes that we are radically lacking in autonomy and emphasizes the ways in which our acts have a source that extends beyond the

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[61]I am clearly invoking Judith Butler's idea that to "trouble" a concept is to ask "how an epistemological/ontological regime can be called into question." Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (*New York: Routledge, 1999), xxviii.
[62]Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*, trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt, The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Discalced Carmelite, 1891-1942, Vol. 9, ed. L. Gelber and Romaeus Leuven (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2002 [1949]).

present moment. "The conscious life of the ego depends thus by virtue of its contents on a twofold *beyond* [*transcendence* in Husserl's sense of the term], an *external* and an *internal* world both of which manifest themselves in the conscious life of the ego."[63] Life experiences that teach us our own opacity—our own inability to understand our motivations or control our experiences—demonstrate, for Stein in this later work, the "transcendence"[64] of our own internal life. In Stein's later work, then, the pure Ego is not the "innermost" self, nor is it the source of our actions. Indeed, according to this later work our true "inner" grounding is generally speaking lost to our conscious access. Once Stein no longer equates the "core self" with the pure Ego but rather describes this pure Ego as merely the individuation of our experience, a marker of our finite conscious life that is itself rather peripheral to our true "ground," this has the effect of generating an account of a radically dependent self, sustained by something beyond itself.

This idea that God is "within" and transcends us this way (interiorly) that we see appearing overtly in Edith Stein's writings as a Carmelite nun, is an image that resembles the Catholic contemplative relationship to the Virgin Mary, with her bodily containment of God regarded as an exemplar for how the Trinity comes to "dwell in" the purified human soul. Indeed we see this idea of "in-dwelling" also reflected in the texts of Teresa of Avila—whose work was instrumental in Stein's conversion—in her account of the journey "inward" as a journey toward God. This theme was also strongly emphasized in the 19th century writings of another prominent Discalced Carmelite, Elizabeth of the Trinity, who observes for example that, "I need no effort … to enter into the Mystery of God dwelling within the Blessed Virgin; it seems to resemble my usual attitude of soul, and like her, I adore the hidden God within me."[65] The idea that our "inmost" self is "more interior" than the "pure Ego" and that what is most interior is also perhaps an intersubjective ground, shared by all persons, would generate different ways of engaging with human autonomy and the political systems and life choices on which this is

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[63]Ibid., 54.

[64] "Transcendence" in the phenomenological sense of "seeming to impinge on my experience from a source outside of it."

[65]Convent of St. Joseph, *The Praise of Glory: Reminiscences of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, A Carmelite Nun of Dijon*, trans. Benedictines of Stanbrook (London: R&T Washbourne, Ltd., 1914),116. http://ia600204.us.archive.org/9/items/thepraiseofglory00elizuoft/thepraiseofglory00elizuoft.pdf

founded, as I will elaborate in the third chapter. This later work of Stein's does not entail a rejection of the "interiority" of the self then, nor does she suggest we can in any way get away from our status as "agential," but instead she supplements her phenomenological account of the self that cannot be bracketed with a metaphysical account of "interior" experiential sources that transcend "us," that are bigger than "the self." In order to be able to say that what lies "beyond" ourselves is twofold and that one of these beyonds is "interior," however, Stein is clearly still operating with a concept of an inalienable, orienting, core. Stein describes how objects transcend "us," but they do so differently from God, who transcends us "interiorly:" without a sense of the orientation of our "selfhood" or "interior life," there could not be such a dichotomous "beyond." This "twofold" sense remains even though now "the most interior" or most inalienable part of ourselves may no longer be exclusively "mine," in Stein's late work. This metaphor is elaborated upon at length in her final major written work, on the life and writings of St. John of the Cross, *The Science of the Cross:*

> It is important to clarify as much as possible, spiritually and without imagery, what these spatial images express. These images are indispensable. But they are ambiguous and easily misunderstood. What approaches the soul from without belongs to the outer world and by this is meant whatever does not belong to the soul herself …
>
> On the other hand we had to speak, in the soul herself, of an exterior and an interior. For when she is drawn outside, she does not leave herself; she is only farther away from her inmost region and with that, at the same time, devotes herself to the outer world.[66]

This description closely resembles the "interior castle" described by Teresa of Avila. Like Teresa, Edith Stein considers how it is we can both be what I've called "selves" in the fullest sense, with our history and our total set of commitments and values, and yet also be selves that can change our "who we are" by taking up a different position within this world of values. Importantly, for Teresa of Avila, and for Edith Stein at this point in her life, there is a fact of the matter about how this interior space is laid out, and what is genuinely most central to its being:

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[66] Stein, *Science of the Cross,* 159.

> When she is in the deepest and inmost region of this, her inner realm, then she rules over it completely and has the freedom to go to whatever place in it she pleases, without having to leave her place, the place of her rest. The possibility to move within oneself is based on the soul's being formed as an "I." The "I" is that in the soul by which she possesses herself and that which moves within her as in its own *space*. The deepest point is at the same time the place of her freedom: the place at which she can collect her entire being and make decisions about it.[67]

Observe, here that the "I" is now distinct from "the place of her freedom." Stein no longer describes the "I" as essentially free. This is an important change from her *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities.* Now, although the "I" acts, and has the capacity to reflect on and make decisions about the "self," the "I" lacks perfect freedom unless she has learned to dwell in her "deepest and inmost region." Referring to Teresa of Avila's account, Stein observes that God occupies this most intimate space of the soul:

> Every human being is free and is confronted with decisions on a daily and hourly basis. But the inmost region of the soul is the place where God lives "all alone" as long as the soul has not reached the perfect union of love. Holy Mother Teresa calls it the seventh dwelling place that opens for the soul only when the mystical marriage takes place.[68]

However, the soul herself may not be in touch with its "inmost region" and may act with a false or misguided set of priorities. The soul takes up a certain "position" habitually. It acts in ways that reflect a certain set of values and predilections:

> The structure of the soul's being—her greater and lesser depths as well as the inmost region—are hers by nature. Within that structure, again by nature, there exists a possibility of being a basis for the I's mobility within this space. This I sets itself up now here, now there, according to the motivations which appeal to it. But it undertakes its movements from a position it prefers to occupy. This position, now, is not the same in everyone, rather, in the various types of persons it is determined typically. The one who desires sensory delights is mostly engrossed in a sensual satisfaction or preoccupied about gaining such satisfaction; his position is

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[67] Ibid, 159-160.
[68] Ibid., 162.

located very far from his inmost region.[69]

Stein's late view of the "pure Ego" is that although we are still inalienably "I-subjects" and agents, responsible for our actions, our being is "sustained" by someone entirely Other than ourselves—and this too is inalienable, and indeed closer to ourselves than we are. Throughout her career, Stein has been concerned to emphasize the embeddedness of the self in motivational frameworks that transcend it; however, we see in her writings as a contemplative nun that she has extended this view to the point where now she holds that one's deepest selfhood in fact transcends the "self." This locates the moveable "I" in a space of objective values, where union with God must be sought through subordination of the agent to higher moral law. This account of "true" deep selfhood generates very different conclusions about what kind of person society should be set up to protect and promote. Monastic life, with its radical communitarianism and attempt to render the human will utterly obedient to the will of God, will become intelligible as a human ideal, whereas maximizing options and opportunities for self-expression and self-will, will seem to be ways of falling into error—becoming more limited, more closely identified with one's finite being, and hence more alienated from one's true centre; "far from [one's] inmost region" in Stein's terms.

IV. The Pure Ego as Zero-Point

What we see most clearly expressed in Stein's late writings is that as particular individuals, our experiences are "oriented" uniquely. And Husserl also compares this orienting function of the "pure Ego" to our experience of our bodies as unique kinds of objects that are capable of orienting "the world." In his chapter of *Ideas II* entitled "The Pure Ego," Husserl draws an analogy between our body as spatial "center" and the pure Ego as "center" for all of our acts of consciousness, noting how, "the structure of the acts which radiate out from the Ego-Center, or, the Ego itself, is a form which has an analogon in the centralizing of all sense-phenomena in reference to the Body."[70] Thus, the passages of Husserl's and Stein's texts that highlight the role of bodies as "zero-points" that orient the world, do some work to clarify the

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[69]Ibid., 163.
[70]Husserl, *Ideas II,* 112.

parallel operation these authors will assign to the "pure Ego." In order to understand the operation of this metaphor, it will be helpful for us first to understand the role assigned by Husserl and Stein to the bodily "zero-point."

First, note that the "zero-point" is not primarily included by Husserl as part of a description of what it's like to live in any particular body, but rather he invokes the "zero-point" as a way of pointing out how the Body is crucially involved in the constitution of the world. Material objects are always objects "for the Body," as the location, activities and needs of my body provide the "here and now" of all of my perceptions of, and interactions with, the world. If we say something is "to the left," for instance, it is really to the left "of my body." When it comes to describing the relative position of objects, this relation to my body is often unstated (we simply say the chair is "to the left") but understood. The "orientation" of the world is an important part of the way the Body is lived: in emphasizing the "nullpunkt" ("zero-point"), I emphasize the body as a "subject" of my experience of things in the world. This "zero-point" term is employed precisely in order to avoid turning the Body into a qualified, substantive object when we are considering the ways in which my Body constitutes the meaning of external things. Husserl describes this "zero-point" as follows:

> The Body then has, for its particular Ego, the unique distinction of bearing in itself the *zero point* of all these orientations. One of its spatial points, even if not an actually seen one, is always characterized in the mode of the ultimate central here: that is, a here which has no other here outside of itself, in relation to which it would be a "there." It is thus that all things of the surrounding world possess an orientation to the Body, just as, accordingly, all expressions of orientation imply this relation. [71]

In her *On the Problem of Empathy,* Edith Stein—discussing the constitution of the "psycho-physical individual," i.e. our embodied sense of selfhood—identifies how there is, even within this "zero-point" of the Body in relation to its surroundings, a "deeper" "zero-point" that orients my internal sense of my body:

> The various parts of the living body constituted for me in terms of sensation are various distances from me. Thus my torso is nearer to me than my extremities, and it makes good sense to say that I bring my hands near or

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[71]Ibid., 166.

move them away. To speak of distance from "me" is inexact because I cannot really establish an interval from the "I," for it is non-spatial and cannot be localized. But I relate the parts of my living body, together with everything spatial outside of it, to a "zero point of orientation" which my living body surrounds. This zero point is not to be geometrically localized at one point in my physical body; nor is it the same for all data. It is localized in the head for visual data and in mid-body for tactile data. Thus whatever refers to the "I" has no distance from the zero point, and all that is given at a distance from the zero point is also given at a distance from the "I."[72]

Stein goes on to describe how this interior space of the body is incommensurable with the distance of physical objects from my body. Our interior bodily "zero point"—which is thematized when I, for instance, bring my hands towards "myself"—is my proprioceptive world, my ego-oriented field of sensations. As Stein notes, the "zero-point" within this world of sensation—within this internally-experienced lived body—is itself not spatially localisable. Stein has here alluded to how our field of sensations, although organized in relation to a "zero-point," is not precisely in any spatial relationship to "me": "I" am not a 'given' of sensation, she says, and thus "I" am not localized as part of the sensation-space of my body. Whereas objects participate in real, objective space, the internal arrangement of our "lived bodies" is variably and flexibly experienced, a changing interrelationship of parts. And yet, the orientation of my sensation-space according to an internal "zero-point" is in evidence because of how there is a "me" in relation to which I can assess the distance of the parts of my body.

Husserl and Stein speak about the pure Ego analogously. The way the body orients "the world" has an important parallel in the operation of the "pure Ego" as the point of orientation for "the self." Thus, the self is also conceptualized as structured by a kind of internal "space," analogous to the "zero-point" of the lived body. Just as it seems to me that my chest is closer, and my feet are further away, there are components of "who I am" that are more or less central "to me."

This comes across in Husserl's phenomenological reductions, wherein I suspend "my theoretical commitments," "my desires" and "my opinions," putting out of play these aspects of

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[72]Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy,* 3rd rev. ed., trans. Waltraut Stein, The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Discalced Carmelite, 1891-1942, Vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989 [1917]), 42-43.

my usual engagements with the world so that I can more clearly observe their role in constituting Objects. The ἐποχή is already a way of putting aspects of myself at a distance. But additionally, in *Ideas II,* Husserl describes how the reductions apply specifically to the constituted aspects of the self or Ego. I put these selves he considers—the "personal Ego"; the "psychic subject"; the "real Ego"; the "I as Man"—"out of play" in order to consider the manner of their constitution within experience. Yet, while I do this, as we've seen Husserl concede, there is a "pure Ego" that I am, and that I am incapable of setting aside. Like the zero-point of my lived body, the pure Ego is "always here": it orients all these other components of my identity. The "pure Ego" is the vantage point from which I survey this space—a space that includes my existence as a psychological individual with certain character traits. Husserl describes this "zero-point" operation of the "pure Ego" as follows:

> What is mine, what is the pure Ego's, is the whole "world," the surrounding world, the whole world with all it contains that is still unknown to me but is experienceable by me: i.e., things, fellow men, animals, and including that man whom I also designate as I, as Ego, namely I, the man called so and so and characterized as such and such. I as man am part of the content of the real surrounding world of the pure Ego, which, as the center of all intentionality, also accomplishes that intentionality by which is constituted precisely I, the man, and I, the person.[73]

Thus, in Husserl's work, the "pure Ego" is the *experientially real* individuation of all my experiences that cannot be phenomenologically bracketed, and which serves to orient and constitute my reflective self-experience. Husserl states that, "the real Ego includes the pure Ego as its apperceptive nuclear content,"[74] thereby emphasizing how the pure Ego is what orients and unifies my experiences, including my experiences of myself as a person or human being.

And yet, keep in mind, once again, the analogy Husserl has drawn between the "pure Ego" and the "zero-point." Recall that in describing the Body as "zero-point of orientation" we emphasize its function as that which orients the world: in emphasizing the "zero-point," we emphasize the Body-as-subject. However, this doesn't somehow diminish the fundamental importance of a Body that can be ascribed qualities and spoken about as an object of

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[73]Husserl, *Ideas II,* 116.
[74]Ibid., 117.

experience: these features of the Body really characterize the Body, and it is indeed the same Body we describe, when we invoke the lived sense of "zero-point" and the sense of my body as a qualified Object. Similarly, in highlighting the "pure Ego," Husserl emphasizes the experientially-orienting function of the subject. It is for this reason, I think, that the pure Ego described in *Ideas I* begins to sound quite Kantian, as Husserl describes it as "completely empty of essence-components, [having] no explicatable [sic] content, [as] undescribable [sic] in and for itself: it is pure Ego and nothing more."[75] I would argue that in Husserl's case, this inability to describe the pure Ego occurs because inquiry into "what" the pure Ego is, as an entity, just becomes an inquiry into the qualities of the "psychic" or "spiritual" Ego, much as inquiring into *what* the "zero-point of orientation" is, as an entity, is just to ask questions about the objective, rather than the lived, Body. The psychic and the spiritual egos also have their roles in Husserl's phenomenology: these are things we can describe positively, they are constituted within experience in ways that we can investigate, and these are indeed "the other side" of the same ego we denote when we speak about the "pure Ego." However, the "pure Ego" is our lived sense of what grounds or orients our individuated experience, and hence it must be understood by what it *does to my experience*, rather than through an attempt to describe it as an object. Husserl specifically delineates the limits of our consideration of the pure Ego in *Ideas I*, as follows:

> Because of the immediately essential role played by this transcendency in the case of any cogitation, we must not undertake its exclusion; though in many investigations the questions concerning the pure Ego can remain in suspenso. But only in so far as its immediately, evidently ascertainable essential peculiarity and its givenness along with pure consciousness extend do we propose to count the pure ego as a phenomenological datum; all theories about it which exceed those limits undergo exclusion.[76]

Of course, the lived sense of the body and the body-as-Object will be importantly co-constituted, as Catriona Mackenzie[77] has emphasized: how others respond to my body will importantly condition my real capacities for action in the world. And something similar is surely

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[75]Husserl, *Ideas I,* 191.
[76]Husserl, *Ideas I,* 133.
[77]Mackenzie, "Personal Identity, Narrative Integration, and Embodiment."

true about my "lived self-concepts." The manner in which I organize my experience and determine what is important to me will be importantly constrained or enabled by my overt self-concepts and the way others reflect back to me "who I am." This is Charles Taylor's point in emphasizing "recognition":

> Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.[78]

My overt or reflective self-concept may be inextricably linked with how I really organize the world. However, conceptually there is a distinction between "who I am" as lived habits of reasoning that orient my experiences, and "who I am" as an overt concept held by myself or others. We can see this more clearly if we recall that people often "get themselves wrong": we think that they can fail to recognize their own priorities. If this is the case, as I stressed in the Introduction, there must really be something it is like for them to live with a particular set of priorities. There must be a lived organization of my experience with which these overt "self-concepts" are meant to correspond.

In brief, then, we have encountered in Husserl's and Stein's phenomenological accounts three "spaces" in which my orientation of the world can be considered: 1) When I'm talking about the objects in the world around me, my body as a whole functions as a kind of "zero-point" orienting objects in relation to "me," e.g. we would say "the table is two feet to my left" and measure the distance between the table and "myself" simply relative to our closest body part to the table (henceforward "Space 1"); 2) We also have a "sensation-space" in which the "zero-point" serves to orient our field of sensations in relation to an internal "me," as demonstrated by the fact that, for instance, it seems to makes sense for me to talk about bringing my own hands "nearer" (henceforward "Space 2"); 3) And we have the space of my identifications, in which some things are lived out as more important "to me" than others

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[78]Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

("Space 3").

We can already begin to see here how our decisions about what ought to be identified with the "inalienable" or "core" self, will be tied up with, as Charles Taylor describes, our sense of being "oriented in moral space."[79] Identifying either "undetermined action" or "God" for instance—two options we see emerge in Stein's writings—as what is properly inalienable to selves in general will render distinct sets of choices "virtuous."

Because all accounts of the inalienable self will have such implications, I intend to avoid becoming preoccupied with what *should* occupy the position of one's "center" in this dissertation. What we begin to grasp, by noting Stein's shifting descriptions of the "pure Ego" in particular, is that what will contend for status as our "core" will vary depending on the kind of person we are, or are striving to be.

We see how a role for the "pure Ego" or "I"—as indicative of the particular orientation of my life—persists in Stein's late works, even though our moveable "I" is no longer identical with our "true" inmost self in these texts. I think this inalienable, orienting, lived self-concept is something we can inquire into apart from our own judgments about what really ought to be the center of someone's life. Indeed, we can ask instead, when encountering a new set of ideas, "what is there?"—what is being construed as the inalienable component of this person's life?— and thereby "make sense" of moral systems or individual choices we might find disagreeable. So I propose, in thinking about how our self-concepts are lived, that we think about these as the interior "zero-points" of our patterns of action and thought. Any search for particular foundations obscures the fact that a "phenomenological residuum"[80] that underlies all of these discussions, and indeed the phenomenological reduction itself, is *the idea* that the "self" is organized in this way.

V. The Phenomenological Reduction and Purity of Heart

Just as our lived self-concepts are importantly related to our value system and worldview, these will also tend to structure the kinds of methods we use for trying to gain

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[79]Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 28.
[80]Husserl, *Ideas I,* 65. See also *Ideas I* (II.IV.§57), "The Question of the Exclusion of the Pure Ego [Ich],"132-133.

clarity about "who we are." In this section I will compare Husserlian phenomenology and Christian asceticism, the two methods that contributed to Stein's changing position on the nature of the "pure Ego."

First, both asceticism and Husserlian phenomenology are methods of trying to arrive at "truth" by purifying the self of its extraneous elements. And in both cases, "purification" of these elements of the self is not necessarily a loss of these—this is particularly true in the Husserlian case, where in the reductions one's natural attitude is merely "bracketed" rather than renounced—but rather a state in which one's vision is not clouded by attachments to aspects of one's limited existence.[81] From the practices for attaining "purity of heart" advocated in John Cassian's fifth century work, *The Conferences*, to the "negative theology" of later medieval mystics inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius,[82] who sought union with God through the renunciation of the created world and its images,[83] one outcome of ascetic negation is—as in

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[81] See, for example, the following instance of this movement in the work of John of the Cross:

> Of all these forms and kinds of knowledge the soul must strip and void itself, and it must strive to lose the imaginary apprehension of them, so that there may be left in it no kind of impression of knowledge, nor trace of aught soever, but rather the soul must remain barren and bare, as if these forms had never passed through it and in total oblivion and suspension. And this cannot happen unless the memory be annihilated as to all its forms, if it is to be united with God. For it cannot happen save by total separation from all forms which are not God; for God comes beneath no definite form or kind of knowledge whatsoever, as we have said in treating the night of understanding.

John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Wyatt North Publishing, LLC: 2012), 238.

[82] Jean Leclerq, "Influence and noninfluence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works.* Trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem. (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 30.

[83]
> For this I pray; and, Timothy, my friend, my advice to you as you look for a sight of the mysterious things, is to leave behind you everything perceived and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge. By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is.

Pseudo-Dionysius, "The Mystical Theology," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works,* trans. Colm Lubheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 135.

Edith Stein may have recognized the resemblance between Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology and Husserlian phenomenology. In 1941 Edith Stein mailed an article on the "Areopagite's" influential writings to Marvin Farber, which was subsequently translated into English by Rudolf Allers and published in the Thomist in 1946. See Theresia Benedicta A Cruce, "Ways to Know God: The 'Symbolic Theology' of Dionysius the Areopagite and its Factual Presuppositions," trans. Rudolf Allers, *Thomist: a Speculative Quarterly Review* 9 (January 1, 1946): 379-420. Here, however, her focus is not primarily on Dionysius' "negative theology"—which she treats only in passing—but rather his positive theology that inspired

Husserl's pure phenomenology—a purified consciousness, reduced to "no more than what is necessary:" its essential, inalienable being, whatever this may be. And yet, in both the ascetic and the phenomenological methods, these theorists find that *there is* something about their finite, individuated being that is inalienable: their *pure* Ego is nevertheless an *Ego.* John of the Cross illustrates this idea of the leftover, inalienable self that remains at the end of the purification process, by comparing the purified self to a clean window, and God to the light that is able to shine through it:

> And this union comes to pass when God grants the soul this supernatural favour, that all the things of God and the soul are one in participant transformation; and the soul seems to be God rather than a soul, and is indeed God by participation; although it is true that its natural being, though thus transformed, is as distinct from the Being of God as it was before, even as the window has likewise a nature distinct from that of the ray, though the ray gives it brightness.[84]

Here, this father of the Discalced Carmelites reminds us that no matter the degree of purification attained by the soul—no matter how "transparent" it becomes—it remains distinct in being from God. There is a residual or purified self that persists through the Christian ascetic process of purification.

However there are, of course, many important distinctions between the phenomenological project and that of Christian asceticism. The most striking is the "lifestyle" question, as manifested in the difference between "renouncing" one's former way of life and "bracketing" the natural attitude. The monk endeavours to attain "purity of heart" by subduing

Aquinas' "analogia entis," whereby the natural world serves as a revelation of the unseen. Certain symbols and events in the natural order have an uplifting function, and she suggests that this is just one of the "many features" that "are given simultaneously which never can fall into the senses or be attained by sensory perception" (398). She compares this to how we can "see" the inner life of persons in their embodied behaviour, thereby implicitly linking Pseudo-Dionysius' theology of symbols to her former work on the phenomenology of empathy. In her *Finite and Eternal Being*, Pseudo-Dionysius' account of hierarchy and divine mediation is invoked on several occasions, and in her final major work, *The Science of the Cross*, Stein reminds us of the influence that Dionysius' negative theology had on the mystical theology of John of the Cross, in his approach to God shrouded in "night" or "cloud," as obscure and inaccessible to ordinary human knowledge. In any event, it is safe to say that the "Areopagite"'s writings were carefully processed by Stein, in her final years of life, as potential guides in her formerly phenomenological lines of inquiry.

[84]John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 93.

the flesh through fasting and abstinence: the human spirit's capacity for seeing and willing in harmony with the Transcendent occurs only when the monk suspends the influence of appetite over his choices. The Husserlian phenomenologist, by contrast, need only imaginatively distance herself from her presuppositions about the world: she need not change her life in order to become capable of "truth." Indeed, "changing her life"—leaving aside her old theoretical stance on the world, by, for instance, taking on a new set of commitments to different organizations or people—would not, in itself, help the phenomenologist attain knowledge of the operation of these commitments. Only by suspending all commitments—in the sense of observing their work in constituting lived experience—can the phenomenological reduction be accomplished. "In like manner all theories and sciences which relate to this world, no matter how well they may be grounded positivistically or otherwise, shall meet the same fate."[85] However, this "total" suspension only extends as far as the phenomenologist's engagement in the reductions, and hence does not constitute a "renunciation." Indeed, Husserl notes that this "parenthesizing" or "putting out of action" of objects of consciousness, and theories about these objects, is "compatible with the unshaken conviction of [their] truth."[86] Nothing need be renounced or disbelieved in the reductions: one's theories about the world must simply not be "used" when doing phenomenology. Foucault theorizes this transition away from self-renunciation to epistemology in Western history in one of his "Technologies of the Self" lectures as follows:

> This theme of self-renunciation is very important. Throughout Christianity there is a correlation between disclosure of the self, dramatic or verbalized, and the renunciation of self. My hypothesis from looking at these two techniques is that it's the second one, verbalization, which becomes more important. From the eighteenth century to the present, the techniques of verbalization have been reinserted in a different context by the so called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self. To use these techniques without renouncing oneself constitutes a decisive break.[87]

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[85] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 62.

[86] Ibid., 59.

[87] Foucault, Michel, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, 48-49.

Loss of the goal of "self-renunciation" is, according to Foucault, what transforms "ascetic" action upon the self into epistemological concerns about the nature of the self during the Enlightenment. And indeed, we do find that 20th century phenomenologists who sought the "truth" of the self saw no problem with engaging in the reductions as a purely epistemic exercise, divorced from other forms of praxis.

A second, subtler distinction between Christian monastic asceticism and the Husserlian reductions arises because it is a subject of theological contention whether or not monastic asceticism is genuinely comprised of "methods." Foucault finds "method" in John Cassian's *Conferences,* specifically in recommendations made to Cassian by the Desert Fathers concerning the importance of monitoring the stream of thoughts.[88] And in support of Foucault's interpretation, it does seem that the asceticism described by John Cassian—his stress on the importance of fasting, curtailing sleep, staying in one's cell, fleeing from positions of ecclesial office, etc.—like Husserl's reductions, has characteristics of "technique." Indeed, this feature of Cassian's work was regarded with suspicion by his Augustinian contemporaries: Cassian notoriously was accused of heretical "Semi-Pelagianism"[89] by Prosper of Aquitaine[90] for seeming to suggest in his Thirteenth Conference that salvation was a cooperative project between the human soul and God.[91] This "Semi-Pelagian" reading of Cassian is, however,

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[88]Ibid.. 44-49.

[89] "Semi-Pelagianism" was a moderate form of "Pelagianism," the fifth century doctrine—named after Pelagius, one of its most influential proponents—that genuine "human freedom" entails that it must be within the soul's own power to do good; to move itself toward God. Pelagianism was repudiated in the fifth century, although doctrines that opposed Augustine's understanding of grace, and hence seemed to have a somewhat Pelagian emphasis—assigning a significant role to the human will in the conversion of the individual, while nevertheless espousing the doctrine of salvation by grace—were not formally declared unorthodox until the Second Council of Orange in 531, as McKenna tells us. McKenna quotes this council's dogma refuting semi-Pelagianism: "the beginning of faith and the desire to believe is itself a gift of God." McKenna, S.J. "Pelagius and Pelagianism" (60-63) and "Semi-Pelagianism" (899-901). *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. Vol. 11. Detroit: Gale, 2003. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 4 Sept. 2013.

[90]Prosper of Aquitaine, "On Grace and Free Will: Against Cassian the Lecturer," in *Prosper of Aquitaine: Defense of St. Augustine*, trans. P. De Letter (Westminster, MA: The Newman Press, 1963).

[91]i.e. rather than concluding that the monk's ascetic activity had its origin and initiation in divine grace. See Boniface Ramsey, "Thirteenth Conference: The Third Conference of Abba Chaeremon: On God's Protection, Translator's Introduction," *The Conferences* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).

regarded by many commentators today as being a one-sided view of his work.[92]   Cassian's

Twelfth Chapter of the *Institutes*—on the vice of pride—is, in fact, an exhortation on how the

monk's own efforts are insufficient to merit the grace of God.[93] Throughout *The Conferences* we

likewise find Cassian's interlocutors reminding us, particularly where the virtue of chastity is

concerned, that the belief that one has *oneself* conquered certain temptations is spiritually

prideful—and God will tend to remind the monk, by allowing the monk to fail, that God is the

one who had enabled the monk to succeed in his ascetic struggles.[94] There is, for instance, a

prolonged discussion of the necessity of "grace" for successfully attaining perfect chastity in

Cassian's Twelfth Conference, where Abba Chaeremon cautions Cassian and his companion

Germanus as follows:

> Whoever is aware each morning of his integrity should rejoice at the purity
> that has been bestowed upon him and should understand that he has
> acquired it not by his own efforts and vigilance but by the protection of the

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[92] See, e.g., D.J. Macqueen, "John Cassian on Grace and free Will, with Particular Reference to Institutio XII and Collatio XIII*,"* in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 44 (1977): 5-28; A.M.C. Casiday, *Tradition and Theology in St. John Cassian* (New York: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2007), doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199297184.001.0001.

[93] See, e.g., *Inst.* XII.13:

> They say that a person cannot utterly be cleansed of his carnal vices if he does not realize that
> all his efforts and attempts are insufficient in view of the great end of perfection, and if he
> does not recognize that this cannot be grasped apart from the compassion and help of God,
> once he has been taught not so much by a teacher's instruction as by disposition and virtue
> and his own experiences. For however much effort may have been spent in fasting, keeping
> vigil, reading, solitude, and withdrawal for the sake of laying hold of the prizes of purity and
> integrity, which are so magnificent and so lofty, this diligence and toil cannot of itself be
> sufficient to obtain them. For never will a person's own effort and human diligence be equal
> to the divine gift, if it has not been granted by the divine compassion to the one who desires
> it.

John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York: The Newman Press, 2000): 260-261.

[94] See, e.g., *Conf.* V.15.2:

> For the prophet would not have prayed and said: 'O Lord, do not deliver over to the beasts
> the soul that confesses to you,' unless he had known that, because of their pride of heart,
> some would be delivered over again to vices that they had overcome, so that they would be
> humbled.

> Therefore we should be certain from experience and have learned from innumerable
> scriptural texts that we cannot conquer such great enemies by our own strength but only with
> the support of God's help, and that every day we must attribute to him the sum of our victory.

Cassian, *Conf.*, 195-196.

Lord, and he should realize that his body will persevere in this as long as the Lord mercifully permits it.[95]

Thus, while Cassian's recommendations for purifying the self come across as "technique" or "method," and while he routinely invokes the agency and perseverance of the monk as instrumental in his own spiritual advancement, Cassian nevertheless holds that success in this endeavour—particularly where such success requires cooperation of the body's involuntary movements—remains utterly dependent on God's grace.[96]

This makes the ascetic project dependent on an external agent in a way that is not the case with Husserl's phenomenological reductions. By contrast, Husserl makes it clear in *Ideas I* that he thinks God is a transcendency that is only given in a "highly mediated fashion"[97] and hence all theological speculation must be bracketed from the outset. The conceptual significance of the "external agent" facet of monastic ascesis is, it seems, elided by Foucault in his concern to identify how "self-renunciation" emerges as the goal of the ascetic project in early Christianity. Foucault does acknowledge the significance of the ideal of "self-renunciation" that underpins Christian ascetic practice: indeed, he distinguishes Christian asceticism from the Cynic and Stoic varieties on this basis, suggesting that the latter employed disciplinary techniques not in the service of self-renunciation, but rather in an effort to constitute "a full, perfect, and complete relationship of oneself to oneself."[98] Hence, on Foucault's account, the ideal of "self-renunciation" is what was essentially "new" about Christian ascesis, which otherwise closely resembled its Roman precursors. However, in his description of Christian ascetic practices as "technologies" Foucault misses how deep that "self-renunciation" was understood to be. As becomes clear in the controversy over Cassian's doctrine of "grace," by

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[95]Ibid., 438.

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> For it behooves us to believe not only that we cannot possess this perfection by our own toil and effort but that we cannot even bring into play those very things that we use for this end— namely our effort, our exertion, and our labor—without the help of God's protection and his inspiration and without the grace of correction and encouragement, which he is accustomed to pour mercifully into our hearts either through another or by himself, when he visits us.

Cassian, *Institutes*, 262-263.

[97]Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans. F. Kersten (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), 133.

[98] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 320.

the middle of the fifth century, the monk was not even regarded as the agent of his own ascesis: to suggest otherwise would put one's orthodoxy in peril. While Foucault does indeed fittingly identify how "self-renunciation" was the goal of Christian asceticism, then, he neglects to observe that both this goal and its accomplishment were not understood to be the monk's primarily, but rather God's.

While Augustine and others articulated their doctrine of grace, and became concerned to identify how God determines the success or failure of the monastic endeavour, in response to this specific historical situation of the Pelagian heresy,[99] the influence of the responses to this controversy can be felt in medieval, and indeed contemporary, Catholic mystical theology. Ascetic effort was descriptively subordinated to the idea that the passage to the Divine happens by a kind of passive negation of everything created; a pure infusion of grace from "above" that exceeds and transcends the limits of the finite human understanding. This emphasis on the centrality of "grace" can still be felt strongly in later medieval monastic writings, such as in the "dark nights" described by St. John of the Cross in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel*.[100] Asceticism is

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[99]See Augustine's own need to retroactively demonstrate the centrality of "grace" in his earlier writings, in response to this controversy:

> It is the will by which we sin and by which we live rightly, as I explained in these passages. Unless, therefore, the will itself is set free by the grace of God from that slavery by which it has been made a servant of sin, and unless it is given help to overcome its vices, mortal men cannot live upright and devout lives. If this gift of God, by which the will is set free, did not precede the act of the will, it would be given in accordance with the will's merits, and would not be grace which is certainly given as a free gift.

"St. Augustine's Review (A.D. 427) of *The Problem of Free Choice: Retractations* bk.I ch. 9," in *The Problem of Free Choice (De Libero Arbitro),* trans. Mark Pontifex (New York: Newman Press, 1955), 224.

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> For the soul, on account of original sin, is truly as it were a captive in this mortal body, subject to the passions and desires of nature, from bondage and subjection to which it considers its having gone forth without being observed as a 'happy chance'—having gone forth, that is, without being impeded or engulfed by any of them.

John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel,* 74.

> As God comes not within any image or form, neither is contained within any particular kind of intelligence, so the soul, in order to reach God, must likewise come within no distinct form or kind of intelligence.

Ibid., 143.

described by John of the Cross not as a methodological attempt of the soul to purify itself, but rather as God affecting a stripping or paring down of the human subject: true purification or emptying of the self is, on this view, accomplished by the unseen hand of the Divine, rather than by human effort. Perhaps this idea that purification of the self happens via an external agent resembles less closely the Husserlian reductions than the Heideggerian notion that "Being" reveals itself in certain kinds of disruptive encounters that confront, rather than emerging from, Dasein's own projects. This distinction in agency between successful ascetic practice and successful Husserlian phenomenology—i.e. the former affected by God, and the latter primarily by the phenomenologist—in any event may institute a break between ascetic practice and Husserlian phenomenology that runs as deep as the rupture produced by their "lifestyle" differences. Nevertheless, while—in early Christian asceticism—the theology of grace may have supplanted the idea that human ascetic practices were "tools" or "technologies" wielded by the self in its own efforts of purification, largely thanks to Cassian's influence on St. Benedict's Rule we do find that Christian monastic *life* today and for all of these intervening centuries, bears a striking resemblance to the 4th century Christian monastic life described by Cassian. Many of the ancient practices[101] described and promoted by Cassian persist at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, down to minutiae such as the recitation of Psalm 140 at Vespers,[102] to the centrality of bread in the monastic diet.[103] In other words, ascetic practices

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> And thus it is that contemplation, whereby the understanding has the loftiest knowledge of
> God, is called mystical theology, which signifies secret wisdom of God; for it is secret even to
> the understanding that receives it. For that reason Saint Dionysius calls it a ray of darkness.

Ibid., 109.

[101]Given Cassian's influence on monastic development in Europe, these practices remain "ancient" regardless of whether or not Cassian's works are accurate portrayals of the life of 4th century monks living in the Egyptian desert. See Steven David Driver, "The Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture in John Cassian" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1995), ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text (NQ28139).

[102]See: Cassian, "Book III: 'The Canonical Method of the Daytime Prayers and Psalms'" in *The Institutes.*

[103]This is the food Cassian argued was best suited to maintaining both ascetic self-denial and consistency of practice.

From the "Second Conference":

> GERMANUS: "What is the proper measure for abstinence, then, by holding on to which with
> temperate balance we can make our way unharmed by both extremes?"

that *predate* the dogmatic articulation of the centrality of "grace"—and many of which, such as fasting, abstinence, confessional practices and examinations of conscience, could perhaps have been found even earlier, in ancient Greek and Roman practices of "care of the self," as Foucault suggests—are still maintained in monasteries, such that on occasion contemporary Catholic monks and nuns have to engage in theological acrobatics in order to reconcile their asceticism and the corresponding human effort this demands, with the grace that is believed to be the genuine source of their conversion.[104] So, characterizing monastic ascesis as a *method* of drawing closer to God through diminution of the "self"—by attaining "purity of heart" in the terminology of John Cassian—remains an appropriate characterization of ascetic activity, even if we must add the caveat that monks and nuns are unlikely to attribute the success of this method to themselves.

What these "methods" of Christian asceticism and Husserlian phenomenology share most clearly, however, is that purifying the self is a proximate, but nevertheless crucial, goal of their projects. In Cassian's "First Conference," Abba Moses invokes the distinction between "telos" and "scopos," or ultimate and proximate goals, to explain the role of self-emptying, or

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> MOSES: "We know that among our forebears this was a matter of frequent discussion. In speaking about the abstinence of different persons, who lived only on beans or just on vegetables or fruit, they proposed to all of them a meal of bread alone, whose proper measure they fixed at two biscuits—small loaves which certainly hardly weigh a pound." *Conf.* 100-101.
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> "Whoever is always satisfied with the aforesaid amount will never be strong enough … to put off eating his bread until the next day." Ibid., 101.

[104]One cloistered nun I met had written her Master's thesis on precisely this tension between "effort" and "grace" in the letters of St. Paul. In telling me this, she made it clear that she did not think her sisters should know that she had done her Master's degree, so unfortunately I can't cite her work directly. See also Michael Casey, a prominent contemporary monastic theorist:

> To picture monastic life as a process of exaltation clearly emphasizes that it is God who is the active agent; the monk is the one who is lifted up. This offsets the impression that the "ladder of humility" is a spiritual Mount Everest that the diligent monk must climb by personal efforts. Self-transcendence is a meaningless concept so long as the self remains in control of the process. Our blind spots are such that not only are we unable to see them, we cannot even perceive our incapacity. We are not aware of which areas in us cry out to be transcended. We need to be acted upon by others.

Michael Casey, *A Guide to Living in the Truth* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2001), 56.

"purity of heart" in monastic life:

> The end of our profession, as we have said, is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven; but the goal or scopos is purity of heart, without which it is impossible for anyone to reach that end.[105]

Likewise, although Husserl does not set out to "purify the self," he suggests that in the interest of phenomenological inquiry, we should suspend all constituted aspects of conscious life. So, as with Christian asceticism, it is really a particular kind of "truth" that is the goal or telos of Husserlian phenomenology; however, purification of the ego is "scopos," an essential correlate of the phenomenological project. Both the phenomenological and the Christian ascetic methods have, at their basis, a kind of experiment—whether in thought or in practice— of "doing without" certain attachments for the sake of obtaining access to truth. Becoming "purified" selves—while nonetheless remaining "selves"—is a condition of attaining their desired insights.

Life and monastic asceticism confront us with challenges to our self-concepts that teach us what is in alienable "to us" as individuals. Husserlian phenomenology strives for a similar transparency with respect to the "self." Although phenomenologists are interested in the structure of experience in general rather than arriving at knowledge of the attachments of any person in particular, nevertheless, we can see how accounts of what is inalienable to "selves in general" shifts along with the identity of the inquirer. Watching the transformation of Edith Stein's account of the Ego is especially instructive, as we know that over the course of the writings under consideration in this chapter, her own identity shifted from that of a phenomenologist and professional academic to that of a cloistered contemplative nun. As her method for understanding the self shifted from the phenomenological to the ascetic, her conclusions about what was inalienable to the self were also transformed.

By emphasizing this relation between "who we are" and our methods for understanding "who we are," I am, to an extent, calling into question the distinction Marina Oshana has drawn between "questions of practical agency" and the "fundamental ontology or metaphysical

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[105] Cassian, *Conf.,* 43.

conditions that underpin practical agency."[106] Oshana's interest is in the former, and the thinks that the latter question can be debated by others without this making much of a difference for the matters of practical agency with which she is concerned. However, by looking at the changes in Stein's description of what is inalienable to the self, we begin to get a sense that the inquiries in which we are engaged, and the kind of people who we are, are also related to the kinds of conclusions we will draw about our "fundamental ontology."

For further evidence of this interrelation we can turn to Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons.*[107] In his discussion of personal identity, Parfit ultimately questions the importance of the persistence of my first-personal conscious life. However, he does this in a way that emerges from—and then influences—his sense of what is most important to "who he is."

First, Parfit begins his inquiry into personal identity by suggesting that our *strong opinions* about his thought experiment are evidence of the utility of this method of proceeding:

> But these cases arouse in most of us strong beliefs. And these are beliefs, not about our words, but about ourselves. By considering these cases, we discover what we believe to be involved in our own continued existence, or what it is that makes us now and ourselves next year the same people. We discover our beliefs about the nature of personal identity over time. Though our beliefs are revealed most clearly when we consider imaginary cases, these beliefs also cover actual cases, and our own lives.[108]

However, after eliciting our reactions and commitments, he advocates changing these: becoming less concerned about the disruption of our personal identity through death. He says, "as I shall argue later, it makes a great difference which of these we believe to be what matters. If we cease to believe that our identity is what matters, this may affect some of our emotions, such as our attitude to ageing and to death."[109] Although he establishes his own theory using intuition pumps designed to draw out what was already "there" in our ideas about personal identity, Parfit nevertheless arrives at a conclusion that modifies the emotional and moral content of his earlier presuppositions:

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[106] Oshana, *The Importance of How We See Ourselves*, 19.
[107] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), doi: 10.1093/019824908X.001.0001.
[108] Ibid., 200.
[109] Ibid., 215.

> Is the truth depressing? Some may find it so. But I find it liberating, and consoling. When I believed that my existence was a such a [sic.] further fact, I seemed imprisoned in myself. My life seemed like a glass tunnel, through which I was moving faster every year, and at the end of which there was darkness. When I changed my view, the walls of my glass tunnel disappeared. I now live in the open air. There is still a difference between my life and the lives of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others.
>
> When I believed the Non-Reductionist View, I also cared more about my inevitable death. After my death, there will no one living who will be me. I can now redescribe this fact ... Instead of saying, 'I shall be dead', I should say, 'There will be no future experiences that will be related, in certain ways, to these present experiences'. Because it reminds me what this fact involves, this redescription makes this fact less depressing.[110]

Parfit affirms here what a difference his detachment from his "identity" has made *to him*—to his sense of what's important. He is encouraged by the fact that while the "direct relations between my present experiences and future experiences" may be broken through death, that other future experiences will be related to his present experiences—others' memories of him, or his influence on others. However, by speaking about this as a problem that "matters" to how he lives, Parfit somewhat paradoxically describes how much it matters "to the self" (in my sense of the term) what we *think* is inalienable. He describes in this passage how his new conclusions shapes the way he looks at his relations with others and with the world. This shapes *who he is* (in my sense). In realizing that his personal identity is not "what matters," Parfit has implicitly rearranged his sense of "self" so that his own thinking being seems less important. Changes to our beliefs about the "inalienable self" are changes that make a difference to the way we live and how we look at our relationships. So even if one agrees with Parfit that "what we think matters" about our survival "does not matter," it *does matter* in the sense that our beliefs about "what matters" will really affect the kinds of choices we make and how we respond to our own approaching death.

This shows that we can and do presuppose, and even reconstitute, attachments to various aspects of "who we are" when we discuss these questions of fundamental ontology.

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[110] Ibid., 281.

VI. Conclusion

A person's character or set of identifications, from the third-person perspective, is not something we can pin down as an object, but is rather something we see in their behaviour and habits. In thinking about how this character is "lived" from the first-person perspective, in what follows I will encourage us to consider our lived self-concepts as a kind of "zero-point" that orients our life. Most of us seem to have little difficulty, in our interactions with most others, getting a sense of how their behaviour is organized and using our sense of their core characteristics to gauge how to interact with them.

The idea that this characteristic organization of our priorities is a structuring aspect of our lived selfhood is a position that we see clearly articulated in Stein's late writings. While Husserl likewise invokes this comparison of the pure Ego to a "zero-point" of orientation for our psychic life, ascribing habits of reasoning to this pure Ego is something he does inconsistently as this is tempered by his idealism which makes him disinclined to think the "pure Ego" could be quite so thick. Thus the concept of lived self-concepts that I will carry forward into the rest of this dissertation is really closest to Stein's late idea where she has described how the "I" takes up a position habitually, prioritizing a certain set of its identifications. This is, I argue, part of the way the self is "lived" and there is a truth of the matter about what we prioritize or treat as "inalienable." This feature of what it means to be a "self" matters to the way we live in the world, even if we may not always be able to recognize our own specific attachments and hang-ups. My father had been, for as long as I knew him, deeply attached to doing things himself. Although prior to a certain stage in his illness he would not have recognized that this was true about "who he was," this aspect of his lived self-concept had long made a difference to how he lived and the kinds of choices he made. Long before he was forced to recognize this attachment, it was a key source of his identity, as it probably is for many of us.

CHAPTER TWO

Identification and the Inalienable Self

When I test my capacity to "do without" certain of my attributes, as we find in thought experiments about personal identity, the phenomenological reduction, and asceticism, my "sense" of what is inalienable to myself is revealed. In this chapter I will pick up this theme by considering more deeply the variability of the *kinds of identifications* that people might live out as "primary." The influence of society on our self-concepts, and vice versa, exhibits a tendency which Ian Hacking has called "the looping effect of human kinds."[111] Hacking employs this label to indicate how "human" kinds, as opposed to "natural" kinds,[112] lack historical stasis: persons labelled with a category respond to the category of their labelling, and the category in turn evolves to suit the behaviours and experiences of labelled persons. This is particularly evident, Hacking believes, in psychiatric classifications, in which those who are exposed to public narratives about the typical presentation of some condition—e.g. "dissociative identity" or "multiple personality" disorder[113]—and who believe they suffer from the same condition, will shape their personal narratives and medical reports to diagnosticians accordingly. Thus, diagnostic criteria and "standard illness narratives" shape the experiences and self-narratives of patients. And these patients will, in turn, shape diagnostic classification through the commonality of their reports. Regardless of whether we accept Hacking's application of the idea of "looping" to psychiatric disorders—indeed, I think we should be cautious about how we do this, lest we seem to trivialize or question the "reality" of conditions that have very real consequences for those who identify with these—I do think we see something similar occurring in the historical transformation of what aspects of the self we will take as a source of our identity. Our historically variable permutations of this "fluctuating material" of the self quite clearly exist in a feedback loop with our social life. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty has theorized one

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[111]See, e.g., Ian Hacking, "The Looping Effects of Human Kinds," in *Causal Cognition: a Multi-Disciplinary Debate,* ed. Dan Sperber, David Premack and Ann James Premack, Symposia of the Fyssen Foundation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 351-383.

[112]Note that I am skeptical of this distinction.

[113]See Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory (*Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

half of that loop—the influence of social life on our sense of what's important to us—in her

Introduction to *The Identities of Persons*:

> A society's conception of agency is closely linked to the sorts of actions that
> are taken as central because they preserve or enhance that society's
> conception of its proper survival and development. In a society of hunters,
> cripples are thought incapable of action; but in a society of religious ascetics,
> cripples may be thought most capable of the sort of action that defines the
> true person.[114]

Rorty identifies here how material needs and cultural values may influence which of our

characteristics we treat as important. Isaiah Berlin, in his 1958 "Two Concepts of Liberty,"

advanced a slightly more sinister version of the other side of this "looping" effect, suggesting

that the powerful can manipulate the concept of essential selfhood in order to change, for their

own purposes, what it will mean to respect human dignity:

> But the 'positive' conception of freedom as self-mastery, with its suggestion of
> a man divided against himself, has in fact, and as a matter of history, of
> doctrine and of practice, lent itself more easily to this splitting of personality
> into two: the transcendent, dominant controller, and the empirical bundle of
> desires and passions to be disciplined and brought to heel. It is this historical
> fact that has been influential. This demonstrates (if demonstration of so
> obvious a truth is needed) that conceptions of freedom directly derive from
> views of what constitutes a self, a person, a man. Enough manipulation of the
> definition of man, and freedom can be made to mean whatever the
> manipulator wishes. Recent history has made it only too clear that the issue is
> not merely academic.[115]

Each of these theorists supplies one half of the "loop": Rorty offers us the idea that our

fundamental identifications are a consequence of social or economic forms, while Berlin argues

that the notion of a person's "true" or "highest" self can be directly manipulated in order to

convince the populace, or subordinated groups, to accept particular sets of requirements that

conflict with their desires. We did not need the late twentieth century turn toward social

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[114] Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "Introduction," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 5.

[115] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969 [1958]).

constructionism to learn about the interdependence of forms of political life and the form of the "soul," however. In the first weeks of their introductory courses in philosophy, students learn that particular visions of parts of the soul were constituted in conjunction with theories about how to educate citizens and set up ideal modes of governance in the works of Plato[116] and Aristotle.[117]

In this chapter I will consider in detail the variability of the content of our "lived self-concepts," as well as clarifying two different things we might mean when we speak about the true (or inalienable) self, specifying which one I think will be more important as the source of "authenticity"—my concern in Chapter Three. However, it is possible that even the project of looking for lived self-concepts may be less than universally relevant. Perhaps distinct and unified characters or personalities are themselves culturally relative, peculiar formations of the self that shouldn't be assumed to apply cross-culturally. I will consider this objection first.

I. Does everyone have a "lived self-concept"?

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[116] See Plato, *Republic* 430e-431b:

> Yet isn't the expression "self-control" ridiculous? The stronger self that does the controlling is the same as the weaker self that gets controlled, so that only one person is referred to in all such expressions…. Nonetheless, the expression is apparently trying to indicate that, in the soul of that very person, there is a better part and a worse one and that, whenever the naturally better part is in control of the worse, this is expressed by saying that the person is self-controlled or master of himself. At any rate, one praises someone by calling him self-controlled. But when, on the other hand, the smaller and better part is overpowered by the larger, because of bad upbringing or bad company, this is called being self-defeated or licentious and is a reproach…. Take a look at our new city, and you'll find one of these in it. You'll say that it is rightly called self-controlled, if indeed something in which the better rules the worse is properly called moderate and self-controlled.

Trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 106.

[117] "If, then [the child or the appetitive part] is not obedient and subordinate to its rulers, it will go far astray. For when someone lacks understanding, his desire of the pleasant is insatiable and seeks indiscriminate satisfaction." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1119b1-10, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 49. Here, "the child" and "the appetitive part" are described as properly ruled by reason and hence by adults with their greater share of reason. See also 1134a35: "That is why we allow only reason, not a human being, to be ruler." 77. See also Aristotle's *Politics* 1260a6-8:

> Almost all things rule and are ruled according to nature. But the kind of rule differs;—the freeman rules over the slave after another manner from that in which the male rules over the female, or the man over the child; although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature.

Trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 51.
 http://www.archive.org/details/aristotlespoliti00arisiala/.

Recall that in the last chapter I noted that the way I live out my "inalienable self," or my lived self-concept, is analogous to the way my body is lived as a subject or zero-point of its relations with the material world. Thus, it may give us pause to recognize that even "egocentric space" may be lived differently by members of different cultures. Guy Deutscher, in a *New York Times* piece invoking the work of several linguistic anthropologists, including John Haviland, recently popularized the idea that the use of "egocentric" space seems to be culturally contingent when it comes to describing the placement of physical objects and events.[118] Describing Guugu Yimithirr, an Australian aboriginal language, Deutscher notes that, "Guugu Yimithirr doesn't make any use of egocentric coordinates at all." However, Deutscher rejects the stronger claim that this means that Guugu Yimithirr (GY) speakers are incapable of experiencing space egocentrically. Let's examine Haviland's own claim:[119]

> GY makes no use of locational expressions based on a right/left dichotomy. Rather than calculating horizontal angles by reference to a body-centered left/right asymmetry, GY selects for special elaboration four roots for *geocentric* direction. The roots denote roughly the same directions as the English words *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west*."[120]

Haviland here describes how speakers of Guugu Yimithirr (GY) primarily convey instructions, past events, and even the orientation of their own body parts in terms of cardinal directions rather than in relation to their bodily zero-point of orientation (e.g. left or right).[121] Languages like GY locate personal events in "objective space" in ways that seem, to those of us accustomed to orienting the world relative to our own bodies, to require superhuman cognitive powers.

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[118]Guy Deutscher, "Does Your Language Shape How You Think?" *The New York Times Magazine*, August 29, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/29/magazine/29language-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

[119] John Haviland, "Anchoring, Iconicity, and Orientation in Guugu Yimithirr Pointing Gestures," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 3, no. 1(1993): 3-45, doi: 10.1525/jlin.1993.3.1.3, 5.

[120]Ibid., 5.

[121]   GY speakers point a good deal, and they are scrupulous about keeping their points correctly oriented. If one is talking about going to the beach and the beach is east, one points east. At Hopevale, when one draws a map with one's toe in the dust, one keeps north *north* and does not just say, "Let's imagine that this way is north." All locations, even narrated ones, have directions attached, and one maintains cardinal orientation even when one's point of reference moves away from the immediate here and now. Ibid., 12.

However, although GY teaches us that it is not essential to employ "egocentric space" in every circumstance in which English speakers typically take this sense for granted, we should—as both Deutscher and Haviland affirm—be hesitant to draw strong conclusions about the cultural relativity of "egocentric space" on the basis of this study. Haviland himself makes very modest claims in his reflections on this ethno-linguistic work. Rather than concluding that GY speakers don't live in egocentric space, he instead stresses that the "cognitive preconditions" of the kind of cardinal-direction memory possessed by Guugu Yimithirr speakers "are not yet understood."[122] And furthermore, Haviland's own monograph should lead us to reject Deutscher's claim that "Guugu Yimithirr doesn't make any use of egocentric coordinates at all." Haviland notes that Guugu-Yimithirr speakers *do*, in fact, use locative words that make "familiar distinction of proximity to an *origo* (reference point)" such as "a pair of demonstrative roots, *yii* 'here, this' and *nhaa* 'there, that.'"[123] In addition, Haviland observes that, "the contrast between arrival at a goal and setting out from an origin encoded in the verbs *gadaa* 'come' and *thadaa* 'go' frequently fixes the point of reference on the speaker, who also provides an unmarked origo for the deictic *nguundu,* usually translated into Hopevale English as 'this side,' that is, 'toward here.'"[124] So Haviland does not claim that GY *lacks* reference to egocentric space; instead, his evidence suggests that egocentric space is not employed *as often* in storytelling and giving directions as it would be in English, due to Guugu-Yimithirr's use of cardinal directions for these purposes rather than the "right/left dichotomy." Far from making a strong claim about the irrelevance of egocentric space in GY, Haviland in fact stresses that the sense of the speaker as "origo" *is essential* to the use of certain other commonly-used expressions in that language. All we can safely conclude on the basis of Haviland's study, then, is that the egocentric orientation of space is not invoked in the same *conversational circumstances* by speakers of all languages. This modest conclusion seems to be what is genuinely motivated by Haviland's account. While the circumstantial use of egocentric space may be highly variable, we have no strong evidence, at least from this study, that "egocentric space" itself is an optional way in which to experience

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[122]Ibid., 4.
[123]Ibid., 5.
[124]Ibid.

the world—indeed, we seem to have some evidence to the contrary.

Something analogous may be true when we are inquiring "for whom" the idea of orienting, lived self-concepts will be relevant. While the content of our "lived self-concepts" may be culturally determined—perhaps often in ways we fail to recognize—this doesn't mean that having a "lived self-concept," i.e. "having a sense of what matters," is "optional."

Some cultural anthropologists have tried to make this argument, however, by suggesting that an expectation of personal integration and coherence is inappropriate in some contexts. Perhaps a focus on "lived self-concepts" could lead us to expect subjects to exhibit higher degrees of integration or coherence than is consonant with their way of life. This might prevent us from understanding certain kinds of culturally-accepted divisions or multiplications in the self without "pathologizing" them. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock make this point in their 1987 article, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology,"[125] referring to other anthropologists' observations about spirit possession phenomena and self-multiplication,[126] identifying how these can only be understood as "pathological" according to Western concepts of selfhood.

However, we find that Scheper-Hughes and Lock are constrained by the language of "the individual" in their own efforts to articulate the experience of having multiple selves:

> While in the industrialized West there are only pathologized explanations of dissociative states in which **one** experiences more than one self (schizophrenia, multiple personality disorder, borderline, etc.), in many non-Western cultures **individuals** can experience multiple selves through the normative practice of spirit possession and other altered states of consciousness.[127]

Here, locating an "experiencer" of this multiplied selfhood, and construing it as "one" and "individual" may have been a linguistic slip rather than a reflective use of language. But the slippage itself is revelatory and interesting. *Who* experiences the multiplicity of selves exhibited in possession or trance states? *What is it like* to have such experiences? We can ask these

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[125] Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," Medical Anthropology Quarterly, n.s., 1, no. 1 (March 1987): 6-41, http://www.jstor.org/stable/648769.
[126] Ibid., 12.
[127] Ibid., 16. Emphasis mine.

questions just as well in the case of Haitian and Brazilian spirit possession as we do when we consider the locus of selfhood in Dissociative Identity Disorder.[128] Traditional problems of Western metaphysics remain applicable here. The authors write about an "individual" who persists even when she has been replaced by someone else. This is not to say that such a description is correct: it's only to say that we can't eliminate these considerations just by recognizing that non-pathological multiplication of selves might be present in other cultures. We will still want to know what it is like to have such experiences, and what the conditions for being a "self" might be, in light of this multiplication. It is probable, furthermore, that in cases of multiplicity or possession, the distinction between these multiplied selves will be marked by a distinction in how these selves behave and what they think "matters," i.e. when multiplying selves, we may also multiply lived self-concepts.

Another potential criticism of the idea that we can expect to find "lived self-concepts" universally, is that this could seem to reinforce an inapplicable distinction between the private individual or "distinctive character" and the common standards provided by life in community. This type of concern—about how a focus on "selves" can be an importation of Western individualism—can be found in Michelle Rosaldo's account of the selfhood of the Ilongot of the Philippines where she observes the following:

> For us, the attributes of individuals describe the core of what we really are. Ritual actions, things we do "because of" roles and norms, become mere artifice and play; the "masks" that mundane rules provide do not describe subjective life. But our concern with the individuals and with their hidden inner selves may well be features of *our* [Western academic] world of action and belief—itself to be explained and not assumed as the foundation for cross cultural study. [129]

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[128] See, e.g. Kathleen V. Wilkes, *Real People: Personal Identity without Thought Experiments*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[129]Michelle Rosaldo, "Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling," in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, ed. R.A. Shweder and R.A. LeVine, 137-157 (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1986 [1984]), 147.

Rosaldo proceeds in this text to present evidence for why the anthropological disjunction[130] between "the self" as "essence" and source of one's identity; and "the person" as external, contingent, caught up in social relations, and in some sense "optional"; should not be assumed to apply straightforwardly to all contexts. She argues that, by contrast with Western subjects, Ilongot persons don't ask questions about personality, about motivation, or about an individual's real intentions, i.e. questions about the so-called "interior" life. And she suggests that certain transactional or ritual behaviours may institute "deep" changes to persons that should lead us to question the universality of the "interior" self. Rosaldo identifies how Ilongot social relations allow for rituals to touch parts of experience that Westerners tend to assume are robust constituents of our "inner selves," so closely tied to our identity as to be invulnerable to social processes. For instance, she suggests that for the Ilongot, "anger" can be "paid" and thereby left aside entirely, with no lingering resentment and that other changes in behaviour and social relations—e.g. through marriage, through Christian conversion, through "success in headhunting"[131]—are *really* changes in "the self" or "the heart" of Ilongot persons rather than mere transpositions of the same essential individual into new relationships. Thus, Rosaldo seems to question whether relatively stable "lived self-concepts" really are a universal aspect of human experience. Her description here of an entirely contingent, transactional type of selfhood suggests a way in which it is *conceivable* to have selves with a wholly social orientation; selves with no inalienable components; selves who do not conceive of themselves as having fundamental, necessary and inviolable "interior" psycho-spiritual spaces.

I agree with Rosaldo that inasmuch as the "inalienable self" is conceptualized as detached from social life, this version of the "inalienable self" is too limited to understand how many—indeed perhaps most—people organize their lives around social commitments and relationships with others, and change "who they are" in accordance with changes in these circumstantial aspects of their existence. I will in fact argue in this chapter that my concept of

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[130]See Marcel Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind: the Notion of Person; the Notion of Self," trans. W.D. Halls, in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes, 1-25 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985 [1938]).
[131]Rosaldo, "Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling," 146

inalienable selfhood really allows the self to have "other persons" or "social relations" at the core of its being. This does not eliminate the salience, however, of thinking about selves as "organized" with some set of priorities or values.

Furthermore, most anthropological and philosophical critics of the liberal self also end up affirming that some minimal self is humanly universal. Rosaldo—as with Scheper-Hughes and Lock,[132] and Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* (after questioning the universality of "interiority"),[133] amongst a host of others—draws a line in the sand, specifying that she does not want to question the universality of "interiority" in the sense of "first-personal" experience. Rosaldo arrives at the more modest conclusion that the real problem with Western categories is the haste with which theorists think that "selfhood" can be conceptually prised apart from external behaviour, from practice, from emotional expression, etc. And thus, it seems Rosaldo still retains the universality of some most fundamental "lived self." I think it is hard for us to imagine any theorist denying the universality of—at the very least—a bare sense of "first personal" selfhood. It is deeply ingrained in us that questioning that there is *some* inalienable self that pertains universally can only dehumanize the people whose inner life has become a matter of contention. Questioning the inner life of real persons can only come across as horrific, as turning ethnography into a thought experiment about zombies. The consequence of such questioning doesn't seem to be an opening up of Western categories of selfhood, but rather their closing down: a terrifying and arbitrary ethnocentric exclusion of certain subjects

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[132]   We may reasonably assume that all people share at least some intuitive sense of the embodied self as existing apart from other individual bodies (Mauss 1985[1938]). However, the constituent parts of the body—mind, matter, psyche, soul, self, etc.—and their relations to each other, and the ways in which the body is received and experienced in health and sickness are, of course, highly variable.
Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," Medical Anthropology Quarterly, n.s., 1, no. 1 (March 1987): 6-41, http://www.jstor.org/stable/648769, 7.

[133]   When moderns read of, say, shamanistic cultures where they are alleged to believe that the human person has three souls and that one of them can travel outside and even remain there for a time, they find it hard to know what to make of this information. Does it mean that these people don't share our sense of the unity of the person or the link/identity of a person with his or her body, that they don't count persons in the same way as we do? But we don't have to suppose anything so bizarre. We can probably be confident that on one level human beings of all times and places have shared a very similar sense of 'me' and 'mine.'
Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 112.

from full humanity. We can question the universality of every aspect of the "self" except this one—whichever "self," that is, we consider most fundamental. In this case, for many of these theorists who reject the individualism that often seems to accompany the Western focus on the "self," we find that the most fundamental self becomes some basic sense of presence-within-experience or "mineness."[134]

The existence of this line in the sand—the fact that our relativism about structures of "the self" stops somewhere—reveals how theorists continue to uphold some universally applicable notion of lived selfhood, even when they set out to critique the "self." The problem of universal structures of selfhood is clearly not settled by these anthropological accounts in a definitive way, however, and how all of this may relate to the issue of "lived self-concepts" remains an open question. But I would argue that "mineness" is "too thin" a concept of selfhood to explain how people have a characteristic ordering or prioritization of values and commitments. Although many of us may also have a strong attachment to "staying alive" and hence to "mineness" in that sense—Parfit seems to suggest we'd be happier if we could let go of this—it is my attachments and commitments, not mere "mineness," that account for my experience of being "who I am" as a particular person. And it is our sense of others' lived attachments and commitments that allow us to engage tactfully and appropriately with particular others: we know not to talk to certain friends before they've had their morning coffee; we know how to make our ten year old niece laugh; we know how to avoid awkward conversations with relatives who have different political commitments.

We do expect each person to have a way of being in the world, even if we allow that this might be very contingent and flexible. When we engage with people from cultures other than our own, we don't suspend the expectation that they will be differentiated from one another by characters—and if we do, we quickly learn we've been mistaken. I think the presence of such lived self-concepts is something we can—and do—safely assume when approaching others, so long as we are open to the idea that some sets of priorities we may take for granted as

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[134]Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*.

important to "selves" in general, may be attachments that we have acquired through membership in our cultures or families.

II. Two Senses of "Inalienable Selfhood"

The variability of our sense of core selfhood according to our worldview is a conclusion that seems to be confirmed by a recent experimental philosophy study by George E. Newman, Paul Bloom and Joshua Knobe entitled "Value Judgments and the True Self."[135] In this study, the authors tested study participants' intuitions about the role of the "true self" versus the "surface self" using a variety of examples that presented minimal details about changes in the lives of thought experimental persons. They hypothesized—and concluded on the basis of survey responses—that "individual differences in values seem to influence people's beliefs about the nature of the true self."[136] In their first study, they conclude that the true self, rather than the superficial self, was something to which participants were "more likely to attribute morally good changes."[137] The second study predicts—and experimentally seems to confirm—that this means decisions about what counts as the "core" or "true" self will differ between "liberal" and "conservative" participants when they are presented with examples designed to carry distinct moral valences for the two groups.

However, in their test design, the authors restrict what kinds of things will contend for status as "core" and interestingly, they discard some possible "core selves" outright, as in this claim about the peripheral role of certain kinds of preferences:

> To provide a set of "control" vignettes, participants also read about changes along preference dimensions (e.g., preferring dogs to cats). We hypothesized that in these cases, participants would not show an asymmetry in their judgments about the true self because these types of preferences should be seen as too trivial to be diagnostic of the person's underlying essence.[138]

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[135]George E. Newman, Paul Bloom and Joshua Knobe, "Value Judgments and the True Self," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (February 2014), 203-216, doi: 10.1177/0146167213508791.
[136] Newman, Bloom and Knobe, "Value Judgments and the True Self," 212.
[137]Ibid., 206.
[138] Ibid.

This claim that some types of preferences "should be seen as too trivial to be diagnostic of the person's underlying essence" should not be made so quickly, however. While preferring one thing to another—e.g. dogs versus cats—may not have a predictable relationship to one's political commitments or other core values, we do seem to expect that whatever one's preferences might be, they should be relatively enduring features of the self. In other words, even if we agree with the authors that it *doesn't matter* if you prefer dogs to cats, we will nevertheless tend to expect that if you prefer dogs in the morning, you *will continue* to prefer dogs in the afternoon unless something serious occurs in the interim to change your mind.

This highlights a conceptual distinction between two things we may mean by the "core" or "true" self. I think many existing accounts of our lived self-concepts run into problems because they fail to make a distinction between *True Self A:* the set of things we expect to remain "stable" about a person ("the self" in Chapter One); and *True Self B:* the set of things with which a person "identifies" in the sense of allowing them to become "what matters" to who she is and what she does ("the inalienable self" in Chapter One).

Most of us, I think, expect a person's preferences in matters of taste to be "recalcitrant" and part of their core self in sense A, even though we will also allow that these might be "unimportant" or "trivial," as the study authors suggest, and hence not part of the "true self" in sense B. We expect that many aspects of ourselves to which we have no strong attachment will nevertheless persist as aspects of "who we are." We just may not recognize this until we are confronted by someone whose "unimportant" preferences seem to change a bit too quickly and easily.

Consider the following example. During an August 2013 return visit to the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, in the morning, working in the bakery after having just eaten a festal breakfast, Sr. Teresa-Anne expressed her enthusiasm to me about the maple butter I had brought from Montreal. I was relieved to hear she had enjoyed this, because, as I said to her, I was aware that some of the sisters don't like things that are too sweet. Later, during recreation at the midday meal ("dinner"), Mother Andjelika admitted that she hadn't sampled the maple butter and asked the other sisters what it had been like. Sr. Michael described the characteristics of maple

butter to the group, noting—amongst other things—that it was very sweet. Mother reminded us that she doesn't like things that are very sweet.

That afternoon, working again alongside Sr. Teresa-Anne, who had initially commented on how good the maple butter was, she informed me that the maple butter "was really too sweet." This sister didn't explain why her preference in the afternoon was different from the preference she had expressed in the morning, nor did she acknowledge the change. And this was puzzling to me and seemed to demand an explanation—which preference was her true preference?

However, recall that Michelle Rosaldo has given us reasons to question our impulse to interpret such changes in behaviour as "false" or "inauthentic." Rosaldo takes seriously the idea that Ilongot persons may legitimately exchange payment for anger. Similarly, "which preference was her true preference?" is, I think, the wrong question to ask about Sr. Teresa-Anne. I know that respect for the wishes of the prioress is upheld as a core value by these nuns to the point that their own judgment in matters of taste really becomes unimportant. It may be the case that some sisters, after many years of monastic life, simply no longer experience trivial preferences that are "their own"—in the sense of being "mine and not hers." My expectation that there must be a "true" underlying story that differed from this sister's verbal report stems from the fact that *I* expect preferences in matters of taste to be relatively enduring dispositions of persons.

So here is someone for whom her preferences in matters of taste were, as Newman, Bloom and Knobe suggest, not fundamental to who she was, in any sense: not only did she regard these as trivial or unimportant, she also seemed to change them quickly and easily. These sisters make an unusually zealous attempt to harmonize *True Self A* with *True Self B*, striving to allow no action—not even idle words about maple butter—to be motivated by personal preference. In being utterly directed by the will of God, they strive to turn over all other aspects of who they are. They allow God to reform or rework those "persistent" ways of being that may seem innocuous in themselves, but that in being maintained, present obstacles

to their total self-surrender. This parallels on an individual level[139] what Giorgio Agamben has described on the communal level in *The Highest Poverty*, where he takes monasticism as exemplary of "a life that is linked so closely to its form that it proves to be inseparable from it."[140]

When this conformity manifests itself in matters of taste, however, we seem to think this is unusual: it seems to somehow contravene the way we think preferences should work. Experiencing how most sisters in this monastery so readily revised their opinions taught me how *I did* seem to think that trivial preferences should be close to the "core" of a person's self, not in the sense of being "important to me" but in the sense of being "difficult to change." Thus, this serves to illustrate that there are two related, but distinct, things we mean by the "true" or "core" self (or the "inalienable self" in my usage). Harry Frankfurt begins to draw a similar distinction in his "Identification and Externality"[141] where he asks what it means for a "passion" to be "internal" or "external" to the one who experiences it. He concludes the following:

> In rejecting the desire to injure his acquaintance, presuming that this is what he does, the person withdraws himself from it. He places the rejected desire outside the scope of his preferences, so that it is not a candidate for satisfaction at all. Although he may continue to experience the rejected desire as occurring in his mental history, the person brings it about in this way that its occurrence is an external one. The desire is then no longer to be attributed strictly to him, even though it may well persist or recur as an element of his experience.[142]

Frankfurt here identifies the true self with the set of desires I elect to satisfy, and in so doing he distinguishes this from what happens to be part my "mental history." By making this distinction, Frankfurt also implicitly acknowledges that "what I endorse" and "what I experience" are each "the true self" in some sense, and that these may not always be aligned. Not everything about "who I am" in the sense of "what is true about me" is something that I will

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[139] I use this word cautiously, as "individually" is certainly not the way monastic lives are lived.

[140] Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-Of-Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[141] Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality," Chapter 10 in *The Identities of Persons,* 239-251.

[142] Ibid., 250.

live out as fundamental to "who I am" in a motivational sense. Like Frankfurt, my primary philosophical concern is with the latter. However, my distinction is drawn along somewhat different lines from Frankfurt's, as for Frankfurt the "true self" is manifested by my "will" or my efficacious desires—the total set of what I actually do—whereas here I am specifying that some aspects of "True Self A" (the self that endures) may be things I act upon, but just not in matters that I think "say very much" about "who I am." So, for instance, "preferring cats to dogs" may be something that is true about me, and it may be something I make evident to myself and others through a certain range of my choices, but nevertheless these choices may not be ones that anyone regards as "very important."

I suspect that haphazard use, by both participants and authors, of one or the other of these two possible meanings of the "true self" might explain the kinds of results obtained in the studies by Newman, Bloom and Knobe. If the "true self" is "what is important to who I am," for instance, we may want to exclude certain preferences we deem trivial from the "true self." Of course, one might argue that we should be careful about unilaterally excluding "matters of taste" from this sense of the "true self" too. For some people matters of taste may be very important and constitutive of "who they are" even in Sense *B*. Connoisseurs may orient their life around their food and drink preferences. And as for the example described as trivial by the study authors—"preferring dogs to cats"—I certainly know some people whose lives only make sense in relation to their profound love for dogs,[143] although to be fair, they wouldn't necessarily articulate this preference in opposition to a love for cats.

But personally, I'd say that although I prefer cats to dogs my affection for cats is unimportant to who I am, and hence is not part of my "true self" in Sense B. If I were to rank my preferences on a scale where "1" is "things I feel need to motivate my action on a regular basis" and 10 is "things that never need to motivate my action at all," let's say that my affection for cats is about a 9. And maybe my preference for sweet things—as I discussed a moment ago in the case of the maple butter—is about a 5, motivationally.

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[143]Mother Andjelika is one of them, but that's a concern for another thesis.

But yet, both of these preferences *persist* in my mental life. So if we are thinking about the "true self" as "what endures" or even "what is characteristic of who I am" then we will include a different set of identifications in the "true self" and for many of us this second set will include these matters of taste. For me, anyway, my preference for sweet things may not be very important to "who I am," but I am nevertheless sure that I love sweets and I expect that I will continue to love them tomorrow, and it would be difficult—I think you'd have to use some method of psychological conditioning—to make this cease to be true about me. Cases like the one I described above, where the sister seems to change her preference so quickly and easily—managing to align "what is difficult to change about who she is" with "what she thinks 'matters'"—seem strikingly atypical.

Thus, a decision to regard "trivial preferences" as peripheral to the true self, on the part of Newman, et al. presupposes one concept of "true selfhood" where my true self is "what I believe to be important." But I believe the other sense (Sense A) of "true selfhood"—what enduringly characterizes this person I that I am—is implicitly in operation during their third study, and that this may explain the seemingly deviant result the authors obtain there. Here instead of testing how participants' attributions of "core beliefs" correspond to their political intuitions, the authors decide to test whether participants think that "beliefs" or "feelings" are closer to the core of a person's self:

> Given that the distinction between more (less) deliberative thinking seems to be central to previous theorizing about the true self, we wanted to directly contrast the normative effects observed in the previous studies with any potential differences between beliefs versus feelings. To accomplish this, we asked participants to imagine an individual who had a belief that pulled in one direction (e.g., believing that homosexuality is immoral) but a feeling that pulled in an opposite direction (e.g., an attraction toward people of the same sex). We then asked which of these mental states (the belief or the feeling) reflected the agent's "true self." Following the logic of Study 2, we predicted that individual differences in values (e.g., beliefs about the moral acceptability of homosexuality) would predict whether participants saw either the belief or the feeling as part of the agent's true self. Specifically, in this particular case, liberals more so than conservatives should think that the agent's attraction toward the same sex reflects the person's true self because liberals (vs.

conservatives) are more likely to view homosexuality as morally acceptable (e.g., Inbar, Pizarro, & Bloom, 2012).[144]

The results of this third study revealed something the authors had not predicted: while the attributions of "core selfhood" in this study *did* still vary somewhat according to political commitments, on the whole, both liberals and conservatives seemed more inclined to think "desires" rather than "beliefs" were the "true self" in this example, regardless of the moral valence these participants would assign to said desires or beliefs:

> Overall participants reported that feelings … were more consistent with the "true self" compared with beliefs …. This result is consistent with the data from the forced-choice item where people appear to have a general belief that feelings are more representative of the true self. Importantly, however, that tendency appears to be distinct from the normative view to see the true self as virtuous.[145]

The authors are interested in the influence of political beliefs on ideas about the "true self," such that they don't attend closely to the relatively greater weight assigned to "feeling" than to "belief" by a significant proportion of their participants. And yet, if "feeling" is identified with the "true self" significantly more often than "belief"—even, in many cases, when these "core feelings" are ones that study participants would disapprove of—this would seems to run at odds with the authors' earlier conclusion that most people regard the core self as "morally good." I would argue that many participants may have been responding to this third example using the other sense of "true selfhood" (*True Self A*): the "true self" as the elements of "who I am" that "endure" or are "difficult to change." We tend to think of desires and emotions this way—as elements of who I am that I cannot change at will. Rosaldo's example of Ilongot anger, and my example of the maple butter, trouble us for precisely that reason.

Life in a community where sisters conformed their desires to those of the prioress led me to recognize that I expect "matters of taste" to be recalcitrant. I would normally never tell you that I identify strongly with things like my food preferences, nor would I have had cause to believe this was true prior to my time in this monastery. And yet, in a situation where I was

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[144] Ibid, 6.
[145] Ibid, 9.

engaging with these strictly obedient nuns, for whom matters of personal taste were becoming less and less a component of their "true selves," in either sense of this word, I recognized that I do expect matters of taste to be at least somewhat resistant to social change. Rather than simply accepting sisters' changes in preferences or opinions at face value, I couldn't help but believe that "true" or "deep," but concealed, preferences or opinions must have been present for sisters who seemed to "too readily" change these according to the judgments of the prioress. Assuming that most of my readers would probably share this suspicion, I think this reveals something about our conception of the "true self" and our presumed limits of our own capacities to revise our preferences. And, whatever our answer might be about the intractability of matters of taste, this would not line up easily with any kind of moral or political position, nor would it correspond to a feeling that the "true self" only contains things that are especially valuable or important: it doesn't matter, after all, whether one likes sweet things or not. This reinforces the idea that we currently operate with the two senses of "true selfhood" I spoke about here: the true self as "what is important to who I am" and the true self as "what is difficult to change about who I am." These sets of identifications are of course not wholly distinct. In fact I think they will usually be coextensive apart from the range of things that I treat as "enduring but unimportant"—trivial aspects of my identity.

In the third chapter, I will consider how recognizing these two senses of the "core" or "true" self can help clarify certain tensions that arise in current theories about how to attribute authenticity to subjects. At the moment, I think it is helpful to recognize, at least, that for many people these two "inalienable selves," although they may substantially overlap, may comprise somewhat different sets of identifications.

III. What Kinds of Things can be Loci of Strong Identifications?

Rosaldo's research has helped to demonstrate that the identifications that people live out as part of the "true self," in either sense, may not always be what we expect. Her account suggests that some of our strong identifications may be culturally conditioned, and in failing to recognize this, we may falsely universalize them. Individual feelings of resentment or anger, for instance, are arguably established by Rosaldo as something that comes to seem "inalienable"

for many of us because of the way in which our lived self-concepts are conditioned by our cultural expectations around emotions. Indeed, if it really is the case that "anger" may not always have the social resistance we expect, this is good occasion to observe how the persistence of certain emotions may be influenced by our "lived self-concepts" in ways concerning which we may ordinarily be oblivious.

Rosaldo observes, as I've noted above, that Ilongot anger is not part of the "interior self." She means by "interior self" not "what is important" (*True Self B*)—anger is important in this culture and it must be carefully managed by a set of social transactions—but "what endures" (*True Self A*). If emotions are elements of someone's lived experience that are both unimportant and transitory then emotions will not be constitutive of the "true self" for that person, in either sense of the term. But we see that anger *is* important to the Ilongot—it just isn't managed in the way Westerners would expect. And what is "important" to Ilongot persons' sense of "who they are" more generally is, if Rosaldo's point is to be believed, their place in society. How they feel and how they act takes its direction from their current social role.

What does my example with the maple butter say about the kinds of things that may be the loci for what I'm calling "strong identifications"—identifications that make a difference to "who I am" or that form part of the "true self" in Sense B, and which may in some cases be strong enough to influence "what endures" about the self (True Self A)? Does this sister really overcome her own "preferences" and "desires" or should we just understand her as reorienting her preferences and desires in such a way that she consistently prefers the will of another person? Perhaps she orients her life according to a "preference to prefer what her Superior prefers." If this were the case, we could adequately describe what happens in this example using a vocabulary of personal motivations and preferences, even if we acknowledge that "what she prefers" may be something liberal selves would deem unusual.

But the following field example should, I think, make us unwilling to speak in terms of personal preferences when describing what the sisters at this community were doing:

In August 2012, I had spent many days working alongside Sr. Cassian, picking green beans in the garden. One day I asked her about a family member who had been scheduled to visit:

> *Sister said that this relative came to visit "8 years ago, but I didn't want to see him…"*
>
> *"You didn't WANT to see him?" I asked, trying to clarify whether "want" was the word she used. She had been speaking in a whisper.*
>
> *She said "No, it is part of our way of life, we give up these things."*
>
> *"But… you didn't WANT to see him? Would you want to see him now?"*
>
> *"I cannot say "I want" she said, sounding exasperated. "It's not about wanting. We do what we're told to do."*
>
> *"Oh no, that's not what I meant," I said, "I mean …. if he came here and you had permission to see him, WOULD you see him?"*
>
> *"Oh yes, of course," she said.*

Aware that I was pushing the boundaries of permissible conversation topics, I nevertheless had yielded to my curiosity in this instance by trying to figure out how Sr. Cassian *really felt* about her uncle. But, my prying was effectively blocked and in the end, the conversation told me absolutely nothing about whether this sister enjoyed the company of this relative. She would see him if she was told to see him, and she wouldn't see him otherwise. Sr. Cassian made it clear that the vocabulary of "wanting" or "not wanting" to see him was not a way of speaking that she deemed relevant to her current life. By bringing the conversation back to the language of "wants," I was trying to frame her experience in a way that didn't resonate with her values.

It seems important to take Sr. Cassian's rejection of the language of "wants" seriously, rather than simply to redescribe her actions in terms of "wants"—e.g. "I want to do what I am told to do." Monastic ascesis works by facilitating detachment from one's own personal attitudes, as we have seen in our previous discussions of asceticism. And furthermore, this is hypothetical, but it seems to me that if I had been really annoying and pursued my line of

questioning with this particular sister, trying to trace her motivations "all the way down," the conversation would have gone something like this:

> Amy—"Well, why would you see him if you were told to see him?"
> Sr. C—"Because we do what we're told to do."
> Amy—"But why do you do what you're told to do? Why are you obedient?
> Sr. C—"That is our life."
> Amy—"Well why did you choose such a life?"
> Sr. C—"I did not choose such a life. God chose me and I listened."

I think there is no point at which Sr. Cassian's chain of motivations would have terminated in a statement of desire or preference. And to describe her life, from a third person perspective, as oriented this way—in terms of a "desire to be an obedient nun"—would fail to take seriously her rejection of the language of "wants" and the external agency of the monastic process that I emphasized in Chapter One. It seems what we have in the case of nuns who live obedience in this manner is a situation where to be consistent and to operate in ways that cohere with their "core selfhood" is precisely *not* to maintain their own preferences but rather to adapt themselves to their Superior's wishes. Inextricable from Sr. Cassian's practical reasoning about the value of monasticism is the idea that another (God) has initiated this process and brings it to completion through the mediation of Superiors. Sr. Cassian is certainly an agent as well, but her agency is—ideally at least—a form of docility, openness or receptivity to God's work within her.

It is important, then, to recognize the diversity of kinds of identifications that may be regarded as the "core self" rather than reading all relevant identifications in terms of mental states. This will become important in the next chapter, as I think there is little point in assessing the authenticity of other persons' choices by redescribing their lives in accordance with whatever we've decided their core self *ought* to be. As part of living in the world, the self also, in Stein's words, "undertakes its movements from a position it prefers to occupy"[146]—it acts based on certain principles and not others, and it may indeed prioritize something that falls quite outside "the self" in the narrow sense. One may, indeed, take as "core" to oneself the will

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[146] Stein, *The Science of the Cross*, 163.

of God or another person. This way of orienting ourselves in relation to what we love has been aptly described by Harry Frankfurt:

> Our essential natures as individuals are constituted … by what we cannot help caring about. The necessities of love, and their relative order or intensity, define our volitional boundaries. They mark our volitional limits, and thus they delineate our shapes as persons.[147]

What we love gives shape to who we are and what we will do. And my fieldwork suggests that even for members of "Western cultures"[148] there is a considerable array of things that we might love and allow to orient our actions. While in their study Newman et al. helpfully demonstrate that the content of the "true self"—at least, *True Self B*—is value-laden, they are describing the content of the "true self" third-personally, and hence restrict their inquiry to "beliefs" and "desires." In a study of this nature some restrictions are surely necessary, but I think this also reflects certain limits that philosophers have drawn around the "core self." Harry Frankfurt, for instance, earlier in his career described the core self as our "second-order desires."[149] And Laura Waddell Ekstrom speaks about "preferences" as comprising the core self, describing a "preference" as "an appetite, in being a desire; it is a conative rather than cognitive attitude. But it is not a mere impulse, because it is formed by a process of critical evaluation and given a stamp of authenticity by the activity of reflective endorsement."[150] Preferences, on Ekstrom's account, are part of someone's "real self" only if they "cohere with her character system at that time."[151] I think this tendency to describe the orientation of the self in terms of a person's mental states—her own beliefs, desires or preferences—is connected with the fact that these theorists are not speaking about the core self in order to provide a description of

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[147]Harry Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," Chapter 11 in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 138.

[148] To be fair, the attribution of "Western" to this monastery is somewhat reductive. My field community is Western in the sense that it is located in the U.S., English-speaking, and American in many important respects. However, its membership is culturally pluralistic and considers itself to be a monastery that serves the Christian East.

[149]See Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," Chapter 2 in *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays*, 11-25 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[150]Laura Waddell Ekstrom, "Autonomy and Personal Integration," Chapter 6 in *Personal Autonomy*, ed. James Stacey Taylor, 143-161 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 149.

[151]Ibid., 151.

what it's like to have a set of priorities, but rather in an effort to establish that having priorities is a condition of *autonomy*. They are trying to make the case that acting according to mental states I reflectively endorse (or don't repudiate, at least) is something that makes me "self-governing" and so a reflexive reiteration of the "self" at the heart of its own decisions—I act on *my own* desires or *my own* preferences—seems like a condition of trying to make this case.

But recognizing that one acts from a "desire" or a "commitment" requires third-personal description. From a first-personal perspective, living with a set of priorities doesn't look like this. Recall the zero-point, orienting operation of my lived self-concepts that I emphasized in Chapter One. Husserl and Brentano's key insight was that lived experience is always "intentional": my preferences are always *for* something. My beliefs are always *about* something. My commitments are always *to* something. And I would argue that if this "something" is really something to which I am committed, *it* will seem to give shape to *my* life. Just as the zero-point orientation of our bodies is in evidence because of the way we describe the surrounding world, my "lived identifications" are in evidence because of what I do. What I do—and more importantly, what I choose when a conflict of values arises—reveals what pulls on me most strongly: it reveals my real attachments.

In the case of Sr. Teresa-Anne's feelings about maple butter, we can perhaps get a glimpse of the core values at work, shaping the person she is becoming. While it appeared to me that Sr. Teresa-Anne was able to eschew "personal taste" in a way I could not believe was sincere, if we allow it to be the case that what is most fundamental to this sister's sense of selfhood is her love of Christ, and if we know that to Sr. Teresa-Anne, her Superior represents Christ, then we can see her shift in preference not as an inconsistency, but as something that has emerged from a sense of core selfhood that many of us would normally not consider a contender for what can be inalienable to "the self." Notice that the sister in the case of the maple butter does not express her feelings in the form of personal preferences—there is no "I like this" or "I don't like this" or even "Mother doesn't like this and so I don't either"—she describes instead the qualities of the condiment under consideration. Before hearing the Superior's opinion on this subject, she describes the maple butter positively; but later, she

highlights its negative characteristics. Sr. Teresa-Anne isn't, I think, guided in each decision to obey or comply by a preference for obedience or compliance. Through long habituation in being led by another person's judgment, it is simply the case that "the way she sees the world" adapts immediately and unreflectively to how her Superior sees the world.

Similarly, in the second example, Sr. Cassian did not say, "I want to do what I am told to do:" she said "I cannot say 'I want.'" To translate her obedience into the language of personal preference would be to misrepresent the immediate connection between the command and her compliance—immediate in the sense of not mediated by "wants" indexed to the individual. She had not asked herself, in endorsing the Superior's decision not to see her family member, whether this is what she really wanted.

There may have been a point in the past, for the sisters in both examples, where this compliance would have been forced, reflective, and deliberate. But one is considered to have attained a higher level of development in the spiritual life when one is able to comply so easily and without resistance of one's "self" in the narrow sense.

What it means for something to pertain "to the self" is broadened by examples like these: we learn that a sense of ownership and identification *as lived* may have us feel ourselves directed by something quite outside the limits of our individual bodies, including by psychological states indexed to "someone else."

That said, the orientation of our identities around other people is not peculiar to the monastic case, even if monasticism encourages an unusually high degree of identification with the will of another person. William James, as I noted in the first chapter, reminds us of the importance of our loved ones by pointing out—when considering the "Empirical Self"—how "our immediate family is a part of ourselves":

> Our father and mother, our wife and babes, are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. When they die, a part of our very selves is gone. If they do anything wrong, it is our shame. If they are insulted, our anger flashes forth as readily as if we

stood in their place.[152]

And anthropologist Douglas Hollan has similarly demonstrated how Westerners who value their strength and independence in situations of bereavement will nevertheless admit that the loss of loved ones is experienced as the death of "part of themselves."[153] Could it be that my loved ones are more than just *part* of "myself"? Could they be "inalienable" or so closely identified with "me," that without them I am "lost"? Hollan's suggestion is that some of these people may be experienced as "inalienable" to my self—as people who cannot be lost without my sense of identity being dissolved. I might learn in the midst of bereavement how crucial another person was to me: I may learn the centrality of these relationships to this "self" that I have been. Perhaps, in the past, I had regarded these relationships as important, but grief takes this recognition a step further, awakening me to the presence of other people "at the core" of my being. I may learn, in situations of loss, that my entire life was oriented around these relationships, and it may strike me as offensive, or simply false, to admit that any part of me survives the death of another. Judith Butler articulates this well:

> Maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well.[154]

IV. Identification

To some extent this status of others "at the core" of our being will be true for all of us, and to some extent, this will make "what we really want" a confusing sort of question for many of us to ask ourselves when we try to sort out our priorities. Biking home the other evening, for instance, I was confronted by the reality of too many things I need to do in August. I have so

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[152]James, *Principles of Psychology*, 292.

[153] Hollan, "Cross-Cultural Differences in The Self," 283-300.

[154] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006), 22.

many things I need to do in August that I have to make some hard choices.

But I discovered, biking home, that the kinds of questions I could ask myself, when figuring out what I should do in August, could completely change the outcome of my decision-making process. For instance, if I ask myself, "what do I really want?" I discover this generates a degree of existential confusion. Well, I *really want* to join my friends on their canoe trip—the thing that is actually at the bottom of my list of priorities for August, even though it is really what I most *want* to do. Evidently, "wanting" had not entered my mind when I had formed my internal prioritized list for what to do in August. The more social and professional obligations we seem to have, the less the question of "wants" seems relevant. What drives us, instead, are things like "this deadline is the 15th" or "my mother is alone." Like the sister in the previous example, surely many of us could say "it's not about wants." We don't do what we want: we *work towards a deadline*, we *respond to our mother's need*. Realizing that camping is what I *wanted* to do really did have a certain kind of pull with me. I very nearly abandoned every other plan for the sake of going on a canoe trip. This is because my desire to go on such a trip is of a different kind from my "desire to be a good daughter" for instance, or my "desire to submit my thesis on time." The first is truly a "desire," while rendering the deadline or my mother's need in terms of *my* "wants" or "desires" fails to capture the force these things really have with me. I don't do anything because I want to be a good anything. I feel impelled to respond to my mother's need because I have a sense of responsibility to be present for my mother, quite apart from whether I *want* to feel that sense of responsibility. I feel impelled to finish the thesis because I have a sense of responsibility to this project that has been working itself out through me, quite apart from whether I *want* to finish this thesis. "Meeting the deadline" and "going home" are "necessities of love" in Frankfurt's terminology. They seem to come from other beings or projects that transcend me, even while they fundamentally constitute who I am. As "necessities" my will is constrained by them. I can't help but feel their force, even though I may well betray them and decide not to act according to what they require from me.

This does raise the question though of what it means to strongly identify with something, to the point where it constitutes "the inalienable self" (*True Self B*). I would argue that to identify strongly with something is to feel the force of it and find that it guides our

actions. This description resembles Frankfurt's early account of "wholehearted identification" in the sense that we both consider that "identification" marks a key distinction between what "belongs to the self" and what is perceived as alien to it.[155] Additionally, we are both concerned with how this sense of identification motivates my actions.

However there are many important differences between Frankfurt's early account of identification and my own. First, Frankfurt describes identification as an attitude toward desires. I have argued, however—and I take it that in describing the "necessities of love" later on in his career, that Frankfurt does ultimately agree with this position—that desires are only one of the many elements of our "selves," in the broad Jamesian sense, with which I may identify. I may instead place ahead of all my own desires, the wellbeing of another person. From the first-personal perspective, I don't place my "desire to care for this other person" ahead of other conflicting desires: I may place *this person herself* ahead of all my desires.

Consider parents whose lives are oriented in relation to the needs of their children, and who would willingly die if it was necessary to save the life of their child. The "desire to care for his child" perishes when the parent perishes. If his *lived* identification was really with this desire, if he was attached to the *experience* of caring for his child, it would be a toss-up whether to save his own life or the child's. But if we believe that he would sacrifice his life, we think that it is really "the child" with whom he identifies, in the sense of taking her needs as his principle of action.

Second, Frankfurt specifies that "wholehearted identification"—the type of identification he is interested in—is achieved voluntarily, by "[making] up one's mind." On my account although our minds may indeed be "made up," if would be unusual for it to be "ourselves" who made them up. We might, as I've suggested earlier, even be unaware of what genuinely orients our lives until certain kinds of life-altering experiences alert us to what has been central to ourselves. This doesn't make our identifications any less salient in orienting our experience, however, and coherence can occur without us ever having made a decision of this

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[155] See Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," Chapter 12 in *The Importance of What We Care About*, 159-176.

kind. Granted, in highlighting "identification" in his early career, Frankfurt isn't necessarily trying to say that "wholehearted identification" with the desires that motivate our action is *normal*, but rather he is suggesting that this is *requisite* in order for someone to be "autonomous" with respect to those desires. Frankfurt's discussion of wholeheartedness is part of his procedural account of autonomy: he argues that merely acting on desires without wholehearted endorsement of these renders us "to some degree passive with respect to the action we perform."

I am not interested in making this description of our lived identifications into the ground of "autonomous action," however, so I have no problem with the idea that our sense of "identification" as lived, may often come in the form of simply *being affected* by external needs, quite apart from any willingness on our part to be so affected. Again, in recognizing "necessities of love" later in his career, Frankfurt seems to revise his earlier position on "wholehearted identification." Later he argues that "love" is something by which we are affected and that we cannot produce at will. And he acknowledges how this constrains us, observing that, "the fact that a person loves something does imply … that he cannot help caring about its interests and that their importance to him is among the considerations by which he cannot help wanting his choices and his conduct to be guided."[156] In his late career Frankfurt construes this type of constraint as an essential part of having a "volitional nature"—a position with which I agree, even though I will argue in the next chapter that "having a volitional nature" bears no essential relationship with "being autonomous."

So how do I know what I "identify" with? I identify with those values that consistently move me to act in matters that I consider important. This definition incorporates both the identifications relevant to "who I am" in sense A ("the self" from Chapter One)—what enduringly characterizes who I am—and in sense B ("the inalienable self" from Chapter One). When I have to make a choice between actions that would achieve different things I value, what I value more strongly—and hence what is more "inalienable" to "who I am"—becomes evident through what I *actually do*. This is what Oshana also claims:

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[156]Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," 137.

A person's volitional character can be disclosed to its subject when the person is presented with hypothetical questions of the following sort: "What would I do if confronted with circumstances that tested my values, or required me to adjust my values? Which of those characteristics and attachments seemingly vital to my identity would I be willing to abandon even if I were deeply conflicted about doing so? What would I not repudiate insofar as I remain the person I want to be?" The answer a person gives sheds light on the phenomena that constrain his will, and thus identity, because he cares about them.[157]

I would argue though, by contrast with Oshana's description here, that there could well be a difference between "the person I want to be" and "the person I am." Certainly I wish the force of my identifications came from "who I want to be"; but, in reality, "who I am" has an influence that trumps the former. I cannot, for instance, give up my feeling of responsibility to my thesis, even though I want to feel that responsibility less strongly than I do.

V. Conclusion

Internally, "who we are"—as lived self-concept, as volitional character, as inalienable self, as *True Self B*—is a lived standpoint constituted by the feeling of certain demands that in many cases, for many of us, will seem to issue from our situations rather than from "us ourselves." These demands are "internal to the self" in the sense that they orient "who we are"; however, they are in many cases experienced as demands that come to us from sources "external" to our physical bodies.

In this chapter I have argued that, so long as we allow that there can be such wide variation in what might orient peoples' lives, we can safely assume that "lived self-concepts" should be characteristic elements of human consciousness, applicable cross-culturally. While the content of our identifications may vary widely, the "inalienable self" itself remains an important tool for understanding other ways of organizing the world. We seem to need this idea of a "center" in order to think about a "de-centering" of qualities or traits we would usually regard as inalienable. This enables us to recognize, for instance, that the locus of strongest identification in the case of Sr. Teresa-Anne is the will of Christ: through love of Christ, Sr. Teresa-Anne conforms her desires and preferences to those of the Superior she believes to be

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[157]Oshana, *The Importance of How We See Ourselves*, 55-56.

Christ's representative—not because she thinks Christ cares in particular about maple butter, but because this conformity in matters of preferences, in these inconsequential details, is for her a way to abandon herself to God more completely.

I have also worked to establish that there are two things we mean by the "true" or "core" self—both what "enduringly characterizes who I am" (*True Self A*, or just "the self" in Chapter One) and "what is important to who I am" (*True Self B*, or "the inalienable self" in Chapter One). For many of us, the lists of identifications for each of these true selves will be somewhat different. The sisters at my field community were unusual for their attempt to harmonize *True Self A* with *True Self B* and I will argue in the next chapter that as long as this harmonization meets certain conditions, this may mean that these sisters live with a relatively higher degree of authenticity than most of us require from ourselves.

CHAPTER THREE

"The Inalienable Self" in Philosophical Accounts of Autonomy and Authenticity

I will argue in this chapter, that identification can provide a meaningful and significant basis for "authenticity" as a property of selves that merits political respect. But in order for this to be understood correctly, we must recognize the way that our identifications are "lived": "to identify" with something is to feel the force of it and find that it guides our actions. Monastics seek to allow the will of another—Christ—to become the principle from which their action takes direction, while their own judgment, preferences and desires become relatively "alienable." For the sisters at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, in seeing their Superior as embodying the will of God, identification with the will of God leads to identification with their Superiors' desires to an unusually high degree. And yet, it is for this reason—I will argue—that for these sisters, orienting their lives around their Superiors' will can, in fact, be authentic.

I describe in this chapter how James Stacey Taylor[158] and Marina Oshana[159] have invoked a philosophically-idealized version of the "monk" in order to establish the need for a "substantive" or externalist, rather than a "procedural" or internalist, account of autonomy. Although their descriptions of what constitutes "autonomy" differ, they agree that the monk is heteronomous and they also agree that he seems to be "authentic." Taylor, in stressing the non–autonomy of the monk, highlights how the monk cannot be autonomous because he "[subordinates his will] entirely to that of [his abbot]."[160] Oshana, in a similar vein, stresses how even if the choice to become, or to remain, an obedient monk is autonomous that the monk himself is not autonomous insofar as his life is governed by another person "on a practical and daily basis."[161] The monk's decision to become a monk may have been "locally autonomous" or freely made, but in his obedient life as a monk he is not "globally autonomous."

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[158]James Stacey Taylor, "Introduction," in *Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, ed. James Stacey Taylor, 1-29 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[159] Marina Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).
[160]Taylor, "Introduction," 11.
[161]Ibid., 64.

In this chapter, I will defend the heteronomous categorization of the monk by Taylor and Oshana against the accounts of Robert Noggle, Laura Waddell Ekstrom and Andrea Westlund, who invoke parallel cases while arriving at the opposite conclusion: that—due to the endorsement of their way of life, or their capacity to rationally defend it, or the coherence of their choices with their core attitudes, etc.—authentic obedient subjects are "autonomous." To call obedient nuns "autonomous" would attribute to them the endorsement of a value that they themselves believe they have rejected. I will establish this below, but let it suffice to say for the moment that on the rare occasions when "autonomy" is invoked as a value in the monastic setting, it is used to describe monasteries (i.e. as self-governing in certain kinds of affairs). The term is never applied favorably to individual nuns.

I think Oshana's account of global autonomy best captures the value that these nuns renounce. However, Oshana claims that the value of global autonomy is closely connected with respect for human deliberative and creative capacities and she construes the obedient monk as a "truncated person" enjoying an "inferior variety of satisfaction."[162] I argue that as a defense of the value of autonomy, this is unsatisfactory, as the agency of monastic obedience also requires deliberation and creativity. There may be other reasons, however, to regard authentic heteronomy as nevertheless an inferior way of life. We might instead, for instance, appeal to core values shared by liberal philosophers and conservative monastics and demonstrate how heteronomy interferes with the capacity of monastics to live out these values. I consider two such objections in the second half of this chapter and in Chapter Four, defending monastic obedience against these concerns while also elaborating my accounts of authenticity and responsibility.

I. The Authentically Heteronomous Nun

The possibility of authentic heteronomous persons has been emphasized by James Stacey Taylor and Marina Oshana as a reason to regard questions about "authenticity" as distinct from questions about "autonomy." Psychological or procedural accounts of autonomy

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[162]Oshana, *The Importance of How We See Ourselves*, 134.

construe autonomy as a matter of deep endorsement of—or at least non–alienation from—one's own choices. The benefit of such accounts is that they don't specify *what kind of life* one must choose in order to remain autonomous in the sense of being "a competent adult subject." However, the distinction between autonomy and heteronomy becomes problematic for procedural theorists when they try to understand, for instance, how to describe someone with a liberated upbringing who chooses to embrace a life of subservience or obedience after deliberation and reflection. Is this obedient subject autonomous or heteronomous? Gerald Dworkin decides that such subjects are autonomous on his procedural account of autonomy, even though their commitments render them less "substantively independent." He observes that "what is valuable about autonomy is that the commitments and promises a person makes be ones he views as his, as part of the person he wants to be, so that he defines himself via those commitments."[163]

However, while a sense of ownership or endorsement of one's own life commitments may indeed be valuable, I would argue that the value of identifying with one's own commitments is not the same as the value of "autonomy." Taylor and Oshana both argue that it is paradoxical to call a subject "autonomous" if her life is utterly under the direction of other people. The possibility that I can fulfill all the conditions for procedural autonomy—I can fully endorse the motives for my actions and the processes by which I arrive at these motivations, for instance—while nevertheless being other-directed, leads these theorists to conclude that meeting procedural requirements is insufficient for being autonomous.

The obedient monk enters this conversation as one whose behaviour concretely exemplifies the possibility that one can be "authentic" but "heteronomous." James Stacey Taylor takes as a reductio the fact that an obedient monk will fulfill the requirements for autonomy on certain procedural accounts. He uses an example of an "Ignatian monk" who only has the desires "that the abbot instructs him to have"[164] to address the "historical" account of John Christman and the "coherentist" position of Laura Waddell Ekstrom. Taylor observes that

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[163]Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 26.

[164]James Stacey Taylor, "Introduction," in *Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, ed. James Stacey Taylor, 1-29 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.

the obedient monk will be autonomous with respect to his desires, on Christman's account, because he would not repudiate the processes of monastic life that have led to his desires being the way that they are. But the fact that this monk would come out "autonomous" for Christman suggests to Taylor that autonomy "with respect to [his] effective first-order [desires]"[165] is insufficient for the autonomy of the monk, as the external origin of the monk's desires makes him a "paradigm of heteronomy, rather than autonomy."[166] Taylor thinks this critique can also be applied to Laura Waddell Ekstrom's coherentist approach:

> Because the preferences that this monk has through the operation of his abbot's will would (in the ideal situation) cohere (in Ekstrom's sense) with those that constitute this monk's "true or most central self," they will be "authorized" for him—and so when he acts on them, he would, on Ekstrom's account, act autonomously.[167]

Taylor here asserts, again, that the "monk is a paradigm of heteronomy, rather than autonomy,"[168] arguing that this means that something must be lacking in Ekstrom's procedural conditions. That said, at this point Taylor acknowledges that this could just be a dispute about the benefits of extending, versus limiting, the use of the word "autonomy."[169] If autonomous action just *means* not being "alienated" from one's "desires and actions," Taylor admits, then we could say that the monk is autonomous; however, it seems clear from Taylor's description of the monk as a "paradigm of heteronomy" in his critiques of Christman and Ekstrom that he thinks that mere "non–alienation" from one's desires is insufficient to capture what value is emphasized by philosophers who endorse autonomy.

I think many of accounts of "procedural autonomy" can be relabelled as accounts of "authenticity" without diminishing their utility for the latter purpose. In that respect, I think this controversy is semantic—a problem of what label to use. However, I also think that those who uphold the value of autonomy often want to emphasize an ideal of agency that includes concrete types of control over one's own situation, thoughts and actions. This will not be

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[165] Ibid.
[166]Ibid.
[167]Ibid., 15.
[168]Ibid.
[169]Ibid., 16.

recognized as an ideal of agency by those who value religious obedience. So although this is a choice of labels, or a semantic question, it is not for that reason unimportant. I am arguing that we should use the word "autonomy" in a way that can demarcate the distinction between these sets of values.

Marina Oshana shares this intuition, making this claim as follows:

> A person who abdicates his choices is not fully autonomous, even if his choice-making capacity remains intact and even if he has the right to autonomy. The capacity must be exercised or actualized in order for a person to qualify as globally autonomous.[170]

In other words, in order to really be "autonomous" it is important not primarily that a person have certain reflective attitudes toward what she does, but also that she be in control of her own life. This means that an obedient subject, "whose genuine valuing of subservience or unquestioned adherence to religious tradition leads her to live a life of dependency"[171] will not be autonomous:

> It diminishes the concept of autonomy to call such a human being autonomous in these conditions, for human beings are distinguished from other creatures precisely because of their deliberative and creative capacities. We may call such a person autonomous if we mistake well-being for autonomy, but the road to autonomy is not always the road to achieving one's aims. What a person might have reason to do in order to secure autonomy can diverge from what she has reason to do in order to secure what she values, or what comports with her conception of well-being. For example, deeply religious persons might believe that their interests are best served by following, without question, the edicts of their leaders. Such persons will not value or seek autonomy.[172]

Oshana here identifies how people may believe they have good reasons to live under the direction of others, but that the possession of such good reasons does not suffice to make them "autonomous." Oshana and Taylor's identification of certain types of religious conservatism as instances of heteronomy seems appropriate when considering those Catholic monks and nuns

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[170]Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*, 9.
[171]Marina Oshana, "How Much Should We Value Autonomy?" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 20, no. 2 (2003), 99-126. doi: 10.1017/S026505250320204199 , 105.
[172]Ibid.

who embrace lives of strict obedience. "Such persons will not value or seek autonomy," as Oshana suggests.

In my fieldnotes, for instance, I have a record of one of Mother's exhortations to the community, from after First Hour,[173] on January 10th, 2013. Some months previously they had received as a transfer a sister from an active congregation,[174] who had come to discern with the Monastery of the Holy Trinity on the recommendation of a local Bishop. She—Sr. Shaun—was herself persuaded that she was called to the Holy Trinity, but over the months she was present, I watched her struggle with losing autonomy and feeling like a child again: she'd had a great deal of freedom and independence in her previous community. She would often speak to me about the ways she found this upsetting; however, amongst the sisters, she was concerned to keep up an appearance of performing in accordance with expected standards. But her little attempts to take initiative in monastery tasks and to teach the other novices were noticed by the nuns and she ultimately returned to her former community. After Sr. Shaun's departure, Mother reflected on how Sr. Shaun hadn't wanted to ask Mother for help with anything. But Mother said:

> "Finally, at the end, I was able to say something to her." In this last conversation, before Sr. Shaun departed, Mother learned that Sr. Shaun had asked the Bishop to recommend her transfer to the Monastery of the Holy Trinity. This confirmed for Mother that it was right, in the end, for Sr. Shaun to go "back where she was supposed to be." Mother reflected, "it depends on where the initiative comes from," noting that requesting a recommendation from the Bishop is an entirely different thing from the Bishop himself actually recommending a transfer.
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> Mother then told us a story about the community where she had been professed. She said that at one point, conflicts within the community had grown

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[173]At 6:15 am, the nuns gather in the chapel to recite a few scheduled Psalms and sing a hymn. This is the first of the "little Hours" of the daily schedule, and it marks the end of the "Great Silence." However, in spite of the name—"First Hour"—this is not the first time in the daily schedule that the nuns gather for prayer. This office follows Matins (at 4 am), and an hour and a half of lectio divina. After First Hour, Mother would occasionally ruminate on community affairs in a sort of extemporaneous way. Her more formal exhortations on spiritual matters were usually reserved for immediately after Divine Liturgy.

[174]"Active" in this context is usually meant in opposition to "contemplative." Active sisters engage in various kinds of social ministry: teaching, nursing, work with the poor, missionary activity, etc. Contemplatives pray (of course, most also engage in economically productive work. But this work is in support of their life of prayer).

to a level where a Father came to give them a retreat and ended up exploding at them. He told them to go pray in their cells and wait on God's will for how to proceed. But at the time, unbeknownst to the community, a young nun had privately asked the Bishop to recommend that she and another sister make a foundation.[175]

Mother—who was Sr. Angelica-Rose at the time—considered joining the foundation, and her Jesuit spiritual director said, "well, if the Bishop is behind this then it's safe to go do it," but Mother had some reservations and she eventually backed out. Later she learned that the Bishop had been *asked by the nuns* to recommend their foundation. When she realized this, she said to herself, "oh that's why." That's why she had the feeling that this was the wrong thing to do.

Mother then reflected on "delegated authority." Christ has put the Pope in charge and then all the people under him—the bishops have delegated authority, and within a community your Superior has delegated authority, she reminded us.

Legitimate initiative for a transfer or for a foundation needed to come from "above." And Sr. Shaun herself took too much initiative, by this community's standards, to be a good fit. Circumstances like these made it clear to me that individual autonomy was incompatible with the life at this monastery. In so highly valuing obedience, these sisters also were also questioning the value of self-direction and personal initiative—these values so highly prized by liberal society—believing these to be incompatible with true spiritual maturity. I will elaborate further on the value assigned to obedience in the monastic context in Chapter Four, as this is complex and perhaps very foreign to the imagination of those who might read this dissertation. But in any case, I think a good way to capture what nuns have renounced is by using the term "autonomy" in the way Oshana means it—to include effective control over one's own life.

Thus, like Oshana, when I call someone "heteronomous" I am indicating that she is subject to the will of others in how she lives her daily life. In calling someone "autonomous," by contrast, I am indicating that she has the forms of power that Oshana highlights as crucial for autonomy: she has, for instance, economic independence[176] and "authoritative control over, or 'ownership' of, the management of [her] choices, actions, and goals" that is not subject to

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[175]"Make a foundation" means "start a new monastery belonging to the same Order."
[176]Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society*, 87.

being taken away arbitrarily at the will of others.[177] The obedient nun has renounced these things.

Even if the decision to obey on some occasion, or the decision to commit to an authoritarian institution, is made autonomously (is "locally autonomous" in Oshana's terminology) it seems that particularly where a real commitment is involved—where someone puts herself under contract with the military or takes vows in a religious Order, or where a wife promises to "love, serve and obey" her husband—the subject really does "choose heteronomy." Any situational control she may seem to have is, as Oshana suggests, subject to being taken away at the discretion of another person. And the heteronomy of her actions will be enhanced as time progresses and her horizon of alternative choices narrows.

Could we have arrived at the heteronomy of the obedient monk or nun without reference to external or circumstantial conditions like "management of one's own choices" or "economic independence"? Andrea Westlund has tried to do this by appealing to a case of deference that she bases on Virginia Woolf's example of "the Angel in the House":

> Woolf's Angel may wholeheartedly endorse her deference, but what's so striking about her is the way in which her endorsement can serve to reinforce, rather than to alleviate, the impression that autonomy is lacking. Such flawlessly deferential conduct, far from looking like a paradigm case of self-expression in action, seems to bespeak the absence of any distinct self that might be expressed.[178]

Westlund argues here that this perfect housewife's endorsement of her own subservience in no way makes her more autonomous: it rather only serves to reinforce her heteronomy. Hence, Westlund is dissatisfied with Frankfurt's "wholeheartedness" and Bratman's "reason-giving" concepts of identification[179] which she argues construe the Angel as autonomous by virtue of her endorsement of her own life. Westlund, by contrast, proposes that

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[177]Ibid., 75.
[178] Andrea C. Westlund, "Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?" *The Philosophical Review* 112, No. 4 (October 2003), 484.
[179] Ibid, 489.

what is lacking in the Angel or the Deferential Wife[180] is "responsibility for self."[181] She observes that "[the Deferential Wife] falls short of autonomous agency because her deference renders her insusceptible to a special, dialogical form of critical reflectiveness."[182]

I share Westlund's intuition that there is something important about the willingness and capacity to engage seriously with one's own basic values. I was, for instance, very aware in the monastery, that it felt dangerous to question whether or not "obedience" for instance—or any other monastic virtue, for that matter—was really "good." I did do so verbally once though, on a day in the barn when many months of carrying water buckets had me feeling a bit at the end of my own rope. At the time, I was working alongside a young sister who—in response to my grumbling—described how my experiences were normal and tried to sympathize by telling me about the boring things she had to do during her early years there, how she was assigned jobs that she thought children could do. In response to her assertion that this was normal, I turned to her and asked, "yes, but is it GOOD?" She looked surprised at the question, but answered me calmly and reasonably. "Yes … yes I think it is" she said and proceeded to defend the simple tasks given to newcomers as a way of learning who you are and growing in prayer. She commented on how at times when she had relatively more interesting and independent work to do in the monastery, that she actually thinks she grew less than she did when her work assignments were trivial and dry. So the feeling that questioning is dangerous, then, is something I can say did characterize the monastic environment for me. However I was surprised that when I did question the value of obedience, on this occasion in the barn, that I was met with a careful and reasoned response that reflected this sister's own struggles with the value of her way of life.

Westlund begins her article by defining "self-abnegating deference" as "the systematic subordination of oneself to another whose interests, needs, and preferences are treated as pre-emptively decisive in one's own practical reasoning."[183] If Westlund stopped here, at the

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[180] an example she adopts from Thomas Hill Jr.
[181] Ibid., 495.
[182] Ibid., 492.
[183] Ibid., 485.

subordination of an individual's own interests to those of another, the sisters at the Holy Trinity could count as self-abnegatingly deferential and hence as heteronomous. But mere subordination isn't sufficient for heteronomy, on Westlund's account. One's deference is not autonomy-undermining, for Westlund, unless it is accompanied by a certain lack of capacity for reasoned defense of one's deference. Westlund construes the lack of such a capacity as a pathology of agency, arguing that such subjects fail to recognize their own "responsibility for self."[184]

Thus, since the barn sister was capable of defending her deference, on Westlund's account this sister will probably count as autonomous. Her deference will not be autonomy-undermining. However, this seems like an odd place to draw the distinction between autonomous and non–autonomous subjects. I do not think that her capacity to give a defense of her work tasks made the barn sister any less "self-abnegating" or any more "autonomous." The idea that autonomy should consist in "responsibility for self" has required Westlund to distinguish autonomous from non–autonomous deferential wives in terms of their capacity and willingness to defend their own submission in the face of opposition. However, someone who can defend her deference may be just as heteronomous—in the sense of lacking effective control over her situation—as someone who cannot engage in this kind of defense. In the case of the sister who worked with me in the barn, her work, along with all other basic features of her daily life like what she would eat for dinner, was decided by another person. She did not choose these things, except insofar as she had elected to live at the monastery. Furthermore, she did not gain economic independence by working or indeed have any input into the use of community finances. For these reasons, I will advocate transforming Westlund's "responsibility for self" into a marker of authenticity, and separating this from the question of what it means to be autonomous. The barn sister's reasoned deference does not make her life any more autonomous. Wholeheartedly endorsed, or rationally defended, obedience may well have the same impact on *how one lives* as obedience undertaken without reflective endorsement. Someone's internal endorsement of obedience or capacity to give a reasoned defense of it

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[184]Ibid., 502.

"doesn't matter," really, where her actual autonomy is concerned. However, this endorsement does matter a great deal to her "authenticity," as I will argue later in this chapter. Although it does not seem correct to say that the barn sister is more autonomous by virtue of her capacity to give reasons for her deference, it does seem likely that this capacity makes her life *more authentic* than it would be without such a capacity.

Oshana's proposal that we should allow for heteronomous, authentic, subjects helps us understand how sisters were being formed in the monastery. Oshana recognizes that someone is not made more autonomous by having an authentic, deep-level endorsement of someone else's control over her life or because she can provide good reasons for her deference and considers her "self-direction" an acceptable sacrifice in light of the higher goods she seeks. If she does not take her own needs or preferences into account, does not allow her own moral or pragmatic judgment to influence familial or collective decisions, or perhaps modifies all of these—her preferences and judgments—to correspond with the preferences and judgments of her family/collective, then she is not autonomous. The obedient monk or nun, however, may be "authentic." I will elaborate on this possibility in the second section of this chapter.

That said, although until this point my account has tracked Oshana's very closely, I am in significant disagreement concerning the role and value she assigns to global autonomy. When Oshana uses the example of the "The Monk" or "The Taliban Woman"[185] in order to develop a "substantivist" account of autonomy, I do—as I've said—think she is correct to characterize her deliberately idealized/stereotyped individuals as "heteronomous." However, underlying her discussions of these types is the belief that trying to cultivate autonomy *would have been better* than opting to embrace "heteronomy."

She says the following:

> A lack of autonomy results in a truncated person, even if it produces happy people. One may experience contentment as a member of a despotic, endangered society. Absent autonomy, the intensity of pleasure and preference

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satisfaction may even increase … But these people know a different and, I would contend, inferior variety of satisfaction than the contentment that is known by one who is a subject and not just an object, an agent and not a patient. A life absent self-governance is the life of one who is like an object made happy through the activities of others. It is a life that reflects the competences of others, a life marked by projects that bear the imprint of other persons rather than one's self … Healthy persons do not, as a rule, wish simply to reside in the world or be moved through it.[186]

So the problem I see here is not Oshana's attribution of heteronomy to monastics—that, I think, is correct—but rather the fact that a theory about what human beings *essentially are* and *ideally should become* informs her account of heteronomy, making this label pejorative. In this passage she construes authentic heteronomous subjects as "truncated" and "unhealthy," "objects" rather than "subjects."

Inasmuch as Oshana, in upholding autonomy as a value, sees this as intimately connected with the valuation of certain human "traits of character"[187] my account diverges from hers. Oshana claims that "human beings are distinguished from other creatures precisely because of their deliberative and creative capacities."[188] By connecting "autonomous lives" closely with respect for such capacities, Oshana indicates there is something wrong with the choice to be heteronomous. In defending "autonomy" out of respect for deliberation and creativity, a globally autonomous life is construed as the only one that can honor these human potentialities. I don't wish to devote time here to refuting Oshana's claim about the basis of human uniqueness, although I think studies on animals' (apes' and even birds') multi-step tool use for creative problem solving could cast some doubt on the notion that deliberation or creativity are uniquely human. Additionally, it is not clear how the status of some characteristics as "uniquely human"—even if deliberation and creativity were so exclusive—would be sufficient reason to demand that one take these characteristics as one's principles of action. But more importantly, Oshana has neglected to observe that authentic heteronomy *will involve*

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[186]Ibid., 134.
[187]Ibid., 73.
[188] Oshana, "How Much Should we Value Autonomy?", 105.

deliberation and creativity. Kant, in "What is Enlightenment?" likewise makes this mistake, suggesting the following:

> Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why such a large proportion of men, even when nature has long emancipated them from alien guidance … nevertheless gladly remain immature for life. For the same reasons, it is all too easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. It is so convenient to be immature! If I have a book to have understanding in place of me, a spiritual adviser to have a conscience for me, a doctor to judge my diet for me, and so on, I need not make any efforts at all.[189]

The descriptive error here will be evident to anyone who can remember what it's like to try to submit to the judgment of a parent or a boss. Obedience is not a comfortable situation for many of us: it is often profoundly uncomfortable, requiring struggle, thought, and creativity. The barn sister's ability to see the good in her tedious tasks is evidence of genuine efforts to successfully live within the external constraints of her way of life. In this respect, Christian asceticism—which has characterized obedience as mortification, a challenging practice requiring self-control and spiritual discipline—seems to have taken into account facets of the experience of "obedience" that proponents of autonomy have been unwilling or unable to acknowledge. Of course, just because something is difficult, this still doesn't make it *good*, but I will consider this problem in more detail in a moment.

Importantly, Oshana's concept of "autonomy" only proposes to respect the self "narrowly construed" and not the "self" I've been describing in this dissertation, which may indeed have other people at its center. The "self" of a globally autonomous person has effective control over her own life. Oshana regards the value of such a way of life as intrinsic, as something "only a philosopher would question"[190] as though she hadn't herself considered, in her counterexamples, the possibility that certain people might not uphold this value. And certainly in my fieldwork, I met people—not philosophers—who were attempting to become

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[189] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in *Kant: Political Writings,* ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54.
[190] Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society,* 134.

less autonomous and to put themselves utterly under the direction of another person. So contra Oshana, it seems clear to me that not everyone recognizes the value of global autonomy.

That said, although Oshana expresses this strong view about the value of living autonomously, she doesn't use this commitment in order to advocate paternalistic intervention against those who choose to live heteronomously. She argues that this will tend not to be warranted, instead—like Martha Nussbaum—opting for the "provision of options" for the heteronomous. This is what I will also recommend in the following section. This would seem to suggest that Oshana's feeling that heteronomous lives are "truncated" is, at least, harmless. However, although this aspect of her account may be harmless, I don't think it is helpful either. It would certainly alienate any readers who happen to endorse some variety of the "virtue of obedience," preventing them from recognizing that *the conditions* she recommends for "globally autonomous lives" are actually ones they also think should be socially respected.

Furthermore, this aspect of Oshana's account—the a priori value she assigns to "autonomy"—really seems irreconcilable with her admission that autonomy is a "substantive" and not a "procedural" concept. It seems what we cede, when we acknowledge that autonomy is a "substantive" notion, is that respect for autonomy does not follow *automatically* from respect for the self or even respect for free will. Oshana has acknowledged that we can't derive global autonomy from conditions "internal" to the self. If this is the case, we cannot regard the value of autonomy, in the global sense, as intrinsic or in need of no further defense. There may indeed, by contrast, be good reason to acknowledge the value of heteronomy—emphasizing or enhancing the formative role of "others" in who we are becoming. I hope, for this reason, to give an account of "heteronomous but authentic" persons like the monk that—in withholding the label of "autonomous"—does not cast these persons as problematic kinds of agents. However, first we need to develop an account of when persons are "authentic."

III. The Core Self and Authenticity

The attribution of "authenticity" to obedient monastics is not straightforward. Depending on what we think is required for an action, desire, principle, opinion, preference, motivation, etc. to be "one's own"[191] and hence "authentic," sisters' statements may be considered inconsistent and inauthentic when, for instance—as in the example in the previous chapter—they may seem to change their opinion in matters of taste from morning to afternoon, to correspond with what they're supposed to prefer. David Velleman can potentially be seen to make a similar case in relation to D.W. Winnicott's example of the "False Self":

> This person laughs at what he thinks he is supposed to find amusing, shows concern for what he thinks he is supposed to care about, and in general conforms himself to the demands and expectations of others. The motives that his behavior is designed to simulate are motives that he doesn't genuinely have. And the overriding motive that he does have—namely, to satisfy the expectations of others—is hardly a motive that he cannot help endorsing; on the contrary, he doesn't even acknowledge this motive, much less endorse it. Hence neither the motives that he simulates nor the motive on which he thereby acts belong to his essential nature, as Frankfurt conceives it.[192]

Velleman concludes that, as this man adapts his reactions to social expectations, he is inauthentic and that this inauthenticity results from being "all too autonomous"—too much in control of his own behavior.[193] This is a critique of Harry Frankfurt's idea that "wholehearted identification" with the desires that motivate one's action is sufficient for autonomy. Velleman suggests by contrast that authentic selves allow themselves to be complex in their motivations and values: they don't control their own behaviours too tightly.

Velleman's ascription of inauthenticity to the "False Self" could well seem to apply to the sister I described in the previous chapter, who seemed to change her preferences "too easily" to correspond with those of the prioress. Furthermore, as in Velleman's description of Winnicott's "False Self," I am not sure if this particular sister would have admitted—if challenged—that a change in her preference had occurred at all, let alone acknowledged that

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[191]Thanks to Natalie Stoljar for this way of describing what belongs to the "self." See Natalie Stoljar, "Two conceptions of 'one's own:' distinguishing between authenticity and autonomy," paper presented at "Autonomy in Ethical and Political Theory," Darmouth College Philosophy Department, Hanover, NH, November 15, 2013.

[192] Velleman, "Identification and Identity," 97.

[193]Ibid.

her current opinion was the result of obedience. Were she to ascribe the change to obedience, this could indeed undermine the force of her identification with the will of her Superior. Her lived attitude of obedience really means that *what the sister realized* was that the maple butter was *actually too sweet*. Of course, *we* know that she learned the maple butter was too sweet because her Superior reminded us that she doesn't like sweet things, but I am not sure the sister could even admit to herself her own *change* of preference without, in a subtle way, being disobedient. If her Superior's preferences really became her own, then what the sister recognized was that *all along, the maple butter had been too sweet.* Granted, all of that aside, she does identify with the will of her Superior in a way that required a conscious decision at some point in time, unlike Velleman and Winnicott's "False Self," and hence she may not be so likely to be described by Velleman as "inauthentic." "The overriding motive that [she] does have—namely, to satisfy the expectations of others—is hardly a motive that [she] cannot help endorsing; on the contrary, [she] doesn't even acknowledge this motive, much less endorse it." Well, she might not acknowledge that her new preference *arose from obedience*, but she would surely acknowledge that she does value obedience. Insofar as obedience *did* motivate her actions—whether she acknowledges this to herself or not—she may then come out "authentic" if we apply the term "authenticity" the same way Velleman does when he considers Winnicott's example. But if she is authentic on this definition, she is *barely so*: she just *scrapes by* with her authenticity intact. Also note that for Velleman, in spite of this sister's life of obedience she would be described as "all too autonomous" in the sense of "self-controlled." This of course diverges from the way in which I am using "autonomy" in this dissertation (as "global autonomy"), so I need not concern myself here with that point.

In "procedural" accounts of autonomy, acting autonomously and acting "authentically" are understood to be closely connected,[194] or even identical.[195] As most procedural theorists would paradoxically qualify obedient monastics as "autonomous"—in spite of their rejection of

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[194]See, e.g., Robert Noggle, "Autonomy and the Paradox of Self-Creation: Infinite Regresses, Finite Selves, and the Limits of Authenticity," Chapter 3 in *Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, ed. James Stacey Taylor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[195]See, e.g., Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Laura Waddell Ekstrom, "Autonomy and Personal Integration," Chapter 6 in *Personal Autonomy*.

an autonomous way of life—in the previous section I have defended Oshana's use of the term "autonomy" to apply to those with effective control over their own lives. I am electing to use the term "authentic" for those who fulfill procedural conditions like reflective endorsement. What it means to act "authentically" is also a subject of debate; however, it is in all cases clearly an "internalist" requirement[196] that one's actions somehow emerge from, as Velleman has said, one's "true self."

In accounts of authenticity—or procedural autonomy—we find the role of one's "inalienable self" often comes across in descriptions of an "inner citadel"[197]; of "ego-dystonic" and "ego-syntonic" desires or motivations[198]; or through reference to a "core self" with which my desires must be in accord, in order for these to be autonomous. For instance, both Gerald Dworkin and Harry Frankfurt—although they differ in the details of their views and their use of terminology—argue that the autonomy of acting on a particular motivation can be assessed only with respect to the actor's own reflective attitudes toward that motivation, thereby construing higher-level reflective attitudes as "more central" or important to the agent than his or her first-order desires. Similarly, in their contributions to the volume, *Personal Autonomy*, Robert Noggle and Laura Waddell Ekstrom propose "coherentist" accounts of authenticity wherein my actions are authentic if they cohere with my "core" or "deep" self. However, we know from our analysis in the previous chapter that the "core self" can mean more than one thing—it can mean either "what is difficult to change about who I am" (*True Self A*) or "what I strongly identify with" (*True Self B*).

On Ekstrom's description, the "inalienable self" consists in reflectively endorsed, "indeterministically and uncoervicely" formed "preferences,"[199] while Noggle identifies this "inalienable self" as consisting in whatever "core attitudes" one happens to have developed

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[196]These are distinguished from "externalist" requirements, such as those we find in accounts of substantive autonomy, which specify—for example—the social or economic conditions required for autonomy, or the specific content of an autonomous agent's beliefs or desires.

[197]John Christman, "Introduction," In *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy*, ed. John Christman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3.

[198] Ekstrom, "Autonomy and Personal Integration," 157.

[199]Ibid., 149.

during one's childhood formation. Thus, both authors privilege what James somewhat ironically calls "the sanctuary within the citadel"—the "spiritual self," an inviolable and basic element of my individuated being. And yet, while I am interested in highlighting my lived sense of what it's like to have a set of priorities that organize the world, Noggle and Ekstrom, in endeavouring to establish what it means for a person to act autonomously, each give third-personal accounts of what the core self must consist in that create certain difficulties for their accounts.

Robert Noggle in his chapter, "Autonomy and the Paradox of Self-Creation," is trying to explain how we can "pull an authentic rabbit out of an inauthentic hat."[200] He is endeavouring to establish procedural conditions for autonomy in a way that takes seriously the fact that our core selfhood is largely formed during our non-autonomous life as children. He arrives at the idea that our "core attitudes," once they have formed—i.e. once we are adults—are fundamental to who we are. Although these core attitudes are shaped by others, then, once they are established my actions can be said to be autonomous insofar as they emerge from this core structure.

Noggle's description of the "core self" importantly shapes his account of authenticity. Consider this excerpt from Noggle's piece:

> A person's beliefs and desires, I speculate, are **structured around a core** that consists of those beliefs that constitute her most basic cognitive organizing principles and fundamental assumptions and convictions, together with the desires that constitute her **deepest**, most significant goals, concerns, commitments, and values. Taken together, these **core attitudes form a kind of skeleton for the rest of her psychological structure**. In doing so, they form the basis and the ultimate court of appeal for the reflective self-adjustment that allows the self to react and develop in response to changing conditions, improved information, and increasing self-awareness. These **core attitudes** form a relatively stable framework for the agent's psychology; they play a key role in making the person who she is and giving shape to the rest of her psychological elements….

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[200]Noggle, "Autonomy and the Paradox of Self-Creation," 102

> Generally speaking, **the more peripheral a belief is**, the more likely it is to be changed in light of new information, new reasoning, or conflicts with other beliefs. [201]

In this description, the metaphor of core/periphery is used without any clear rendering of what this metaphor is meant to signify. Indeed, we find that the "core self" is circularly defined by the metaphor itself: it consists, amongst other things, in my *deepest* desires, according to Noggle. There is, then, a lack of clarity about which True Self—A or B—is Noggle's real concern here. "Generally speaking, the more peripheral a belief is, the more likely it is to be changed in light of new information," Noggle observes. I suppose one could interpret this sentence simply as stipulative: "when I say 'peripheral' I mean 'likely to be changed.'" However, Noggle does not express this sentence in the form of a definition, and indeed, he says this connection only occurs "generally speaking," as though there may in fact be some "peripheral" beliefs, where their being "peripheral" means something other than their being "malleable." So, is Noggle here operating with the idea of the "core self" as "what is most important to who I am" or with an idea of "core self" as "what is most difficult to change about who I am"? We have seen in the previous chapter that for many of us, these questions yield different lists of identifications.

Ekstrom's account of the core self starts out resembling Frankfurt's "wholeheartedness" approach, which describes desires as "truly mine" only insofar as I endorse them. In other words, she begins to give an account of the "core self" as "what is important to who I am":

> It is precisely the difficult issue of settling which forces are external and which are internal to the agent himself (which are "truly his own") that is at the center of the discussion between Frankfurt and Watson and many others since. A threatening or manipulative person is clearly external, in a spatial sense, to another agent—in being outside of his head—but the desire to binge in a bulimic who hates and feels trapped by her condition seems external to her in a more subtle way …
>
> The problem with regard to autonomous action on which I focus is that certain acts that we intentionally do frustrate rather than express the self, even when we have not been the victim of coercion … Another way to put the difficulty is in terms of personal alienation: One can be distanced from or revolted by the

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[201]Ibid., 100, emphasis mine.

ways in which one acts, even when one acts intentionally and without external manipulation, where this revulsion shows alienation of the self from certain actions or motivations that otherwise might be thought to be internal to the self.[202]

The "core self" here clearly sounds like a "motivationally important" core self rather than simply an "enduringly characteristic" core self. However, later, Ekstrom also expresses the notion that the "core" is whatever aspects of a person we expect to remain the same. Ekstrom observes, "we rely on certain of a person's attitudes remaining relatively constant in our relationship with her, viewing them as central to her identity, but we see other of her attitudes as peripheral."[203]

Which of these core selves is the one that Ekstrom deems relevant to autonomy? Her emphasis on reflective endorsement and her feeling that we would do better to "act on motivations that are well integrated into our personalities" would seem to suggest that she is interested in motivational essences rather than simply "what endures." And indeed it is true to say that our motivational essences do tend to endure, even though there may be many things that also enduringly characterize us, but which are not fundamental to "who we are." As an account of autonomy, we've seen already why this doesn't provide us with what we're looking for—it won't help us make a distinction between obedient and self-directed lives—but does the idea of acting on well-integrated motivations work as an account of *authenticity*?

From a third person perspective, this description comes close, I think. I've stressed repeatedly in this dissertation, however, that *as lived,* our self-concepts or senses of what's important to us lead us to orient ourselves in relation to the felt salience of various goals and projects and values. The "nucleus" or "core" of the self is, let us recall again, really a "standpoint." Velleman aptly describes this as follows:

> Is your visual standpoint an essential part of your visual apparatus? No. Indeed, it isn't a part of your visual apparatus at all. It's just a part of you that always presents a particular aspect to you—the aspect of being visually "here," at the geometric origin of your visual perspective …

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[202]Ekstrom, "Autonomy and Personal Integration," 146.
[203]Ibid., 153.

> If there is a part of your personality with which you necessarily think about things, then it will be your mental standpoint, always presenting a reflexive aspect to your thought. You will be able to think about this part of your personality as "it," but only from a perspective in which it continues to function as the thinking "I."[204]

Since the self is lived as a standpoint, authentic actions will be those that seem to fit with our strongest identifications. Our habitual actions, and our choices in situations where there is a conflict of values, reflect what *is* motivationally important to who we are. This—as I've stressed—may diverge in important ways from who we *believe* ourselves to be. I may believe myself to be a philanthropist, while my actions actually reveal that I am a miser. Although I believe I am most deeply concerned with the wellbeing of others, my bank account reveals that my deeper concern is personal security. The standpoint from which I act may be, however, as I've stressed, the needs or judgment of another person. As Charles Taylor says, because the self is always positioned morally, with a certain set of commitments and goals, "authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands."[205] Acting authentically then, will mean acting in accordance with "who I am"—which will include commitments to things that transcend the self. I also think acting authentically for most of us can include what does not interfere with my ability to be "who I am," because there may be many authentic actions that I will regard as trivial—as neither supporting, nor interfering with, my ability to be the person I am. For example, if someone wishes to act as a responsible and reputable mayor of a major city, his tendency toward excessive drinking and fraternizing with drug dealers may be "inauthentic." These tendencies will prevent him from exercising his office effectively and doing so in a way that will be esteemed by the public. He may be held captive by them, and feel powerless to resist acting on them, in spite of how much he values his public office and commitments. However, if his most fundamental self is that of "an ordinary guy who has a good time and who happens to be the mayor," these other behaviours may be experienced as unproblematic parts of his personality, about which he allows himself to have a sort of motivational ambivalence.

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[204] Velleman, "Identification and Identity," 114.

[205] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 41.

We've seen in the previous chapter how it is characteristic of the monastic life to demand a higher degree of authenticity than this: to demand that "what endures about me" should correspond to "what is most important about who I am." Nuns who live according to the rather strict interpretation of obedience that I've been describing are supposed to value the will of God and to see this as embodied in a special way in the will of her Superiors. For sisters at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, we've seen that evidence of discrepancies between their Superior's will and their own were typically not evident either through their actions or even through their idle words. Thus, we saw in the previous chapter how the sister who seemed too quick to change her opinions about maple butter—coming across as inauthentic—was in fact being highly consistent with a principle with which she strongly identified. Sr. Teresa-Anne's apparent change of preference was actually evidence of her profound fidelity to her Superior. At the beginning of the Preface, I quoted from Stein's translation of John of the Cross' *Spiritual Canticle*—a passage which ended with the line:

> Of knowledge, lo, I had no more
> Nor found the flock I'd earlier followed.[206]

John of the Cross himself explains that the "flock" of the soul on the way to perfection is "some of its desires and petty tastes and other of its imperfections—sometimes natural, sometimes spiritual—after which it goes, endeavouring to pasture them while following them and satisfying them."[207] The soul continues to follow its little flock of desires until it finally "[enters] this inner cellar to drink and lose [its] flock entirely, becoming, as we have said, wholly turned into love."[208] Once the soul enters into this more intimate communion it loses all sense of its "childish likes and dislikes and follies."[209] It is possible, then, that this sister had lost her flock[210]—or if she hadn't, then she was at least endeavouring to lose it. There is no range of

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[206] John of the Cross, quoted in Stein, *The Science of the Cross,* 226.

[207] John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers (Image Books: New York, 1961).

[208] Ibid., 137.

[209] Ibid.

[210] Actually, this sister happens to take care of the monastery's sheep. At the time of this visit, she had in fact recently "lost her flock," as it had been sold with the idea that the monastery was "getting out of sheep." The prioress changed her mind on this issue later, however, and so happily, now the sister in question has a new little flock (of sheep, but perhaps not personal preferences).

"trivial" matters for sisters who lose themselves utterly in order to love in this way, no set of identifications that can be a "source of action" while nevertheless "not mattering." There is no *True Self A* that is allowed to remain distinct from *True Self B*. All of what she does is supposed to cohere with her identifications. If authenticity is coherence of our actions with our strongest identifications—with what is *most important to us*—then, on my account the obedient nun will be authentic.

By contrast, as an anthropologist it is fine if I admit to my preference for sweet things, even when this conflicts with the preferences of the prioress in charge of the field community where I conduct research. Such a preference for sweet things may not be very important to me at all, but at least it does not interfere with my capacity to act according to what is really important to who I am. I can hold onto this preference while remaining "authentic." But Sr. Teresa-Anne, by contrast, may find that her authenticity will only be preserved if she learns to prefer whatever her Superior prefers, and so her authenticity will be relatively greater if she can refrain from acting on, or expressing, differences in matters of taste.

Authenticity, as I'm conceiving of it, may be had in degrees. This is where Westlund's "responsibility for self" can come into play: if my life coheres with my sense of who I am and with my sense of who I wish to be, and if I also can provide reasons for why I wish to be this particular kind of person, it seems safe to say that I am doing very well where "authenticity" is concerned. If, by contrast, I am pretending to espouse values I do not actually have, regarding this pretense as necessary for obtaining certain other ends I do value while feeling alienated from the actions themselves, my life will not be fully authentic. This may be the case, for instance, if a woman feels called to become a nun and finds herself behaving obediently in order to pursue this goal, but without a sense that the "obedience" that characterizes this life is genuinely of value. This may have been the case for Sr. Shaun. Her compliance may still be somewhat authentic, if she does this in good faith that she will learn the value of obedience with time. However, if she lacks any desire to develop a real commitment to obedience, her deferential behaviour will be inauthentic.

Karen Armstrong for instance, a former sister and prominent scholar of comparative religions, struggled with many aspects of her pre-Vatican II religious formation, including the value of obedience:

> The superior represents God to a religious: his commands, his orders—"the least sign of his will," as the rule says—are to be taken as a direct message from God. Ignatius says that "all should give themselves up entirely to their superior as a dead body allows itself to be treated in any manner whatever." I had to make myself into that dead body. And it was so hard.[211]

In Armstrong's account we begin to get a sense that for some persons at some times, performing in accordance with certain sets of commands, their obedience should not in fact be considered authentic as it interferes deeply with who they are, who they wish to become, and which capacities they find most valuable in themselves. By contrast, for someone who truly believes that religious "obedience" is a key part of the death of the self, of allowing oneself to be replaced by Christ or uniting one's will with the Divine will, the same behaviours that were inauthentic for Armstrong may be fully authentic. I will develop this possibility in more detail in the fourth chapter. Let it suffice to say, for the moment, that the "authentic" obedient nun strives to orient all of her own thoughts and feelings in relation to this objective of being replaced by Christ—an objective which is "hers" even though the means for its realization will include the endorsement and execution of commands that are not "her own."

That said, there are no consequences that follow from acknowledging that someone's choices are authentic, unless we decide that "authenticity" is a condition that demands moral respect from other persons. Robert Noggle does draw this conclusion in his account. He argues that although our characters are formed largely by other people that adults with fully-formed characters will have the right to exist as they are, without intervention by others. He argues this point even when considering certain "difficult cases" he labels as "Edgar the Evil" and "Oppressed Olivia":

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[211]Karen Armstrong, *Through the Narrow Gate: A Memoir of Life In and Out of the Convent* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2005 [1981]), 180.

Edgar the Evil is the son of a crime boss who rears him to follow in his footsteps. Using standard child-rearing techniques, he encourages Edgar's more selfish and violent impulses and discourages empathy and compassion. As Edgar reaches adulthood, he is quite thoroughly evil.

Oppressed Olivia has been raised (using standard child-rearing techniques) to abide by and adopt the sexist attitudes of the patriarchal society in which she lives. Consequently, she shapes her ideals, aspirations, and activities in ways that reflect these attitudes. As Olivia reaches adulthood, her convictions include a belief in the naturalness of women's subservient role, and her deepest aspiration is to be a housewife.[212]

While I do think "Oppressed Olivia" at least, should not be subject to paternalistic intervention, my account differs from Noggle's in that recognizing that the "core self" is a "standpoint" allows that the "oppressed" *character* of Olivia's personality need not be *essential* to "who she is" and hence it does not need to be *preserved* by society. Importantly, Olivia's core self, from her perspective, will really *not* be her "character as oppressed." Olivia's core self, to Olivia—much as we saw with Westlund and Hill's Deferential Wife—will probably be the desires and needs of her husband and children, which she allows to direct her actions and desires. So, if Olivia subordinates her preferences and needs to those of her husband and children, this may well be authentic: it may well reflect her deepest aspirations and values. For this reason, I would argue along with Noggle that Olivia's choices merit non–interference.

That said, it is crucial that society and other individuals who may benefit from Olivia's services must never to be complicit in Olivia's self-giving nature to the point where her needs are neglected. Whoever Olivia might be, it is never acceptable for others to treat her as expendable, as a means to their own ends. Furthermore, as an unpaid dependency-worker, as Eva Feder Kittay suggests, there should ideally be state options that Olivia should know about, and which she can avail herself of, to grant her some capacity for independence and to relieve her of some of the burden of her work when she needs it.[213]

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[212]Noggle, "Autonomy and the Paradox of Self-Creation," 102.

[213] Eva Feder Kittay, "Human Dependency and Rawlsian Equality," in *Feminists Rethink the Self,* edited by Diana Tietjens Meyers, 219-266 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

As I will articulate in more detail in the next section, I think we can justify the provision of "options" to Olivia without appealing to a standard of global autonomy that she can't recognize as an ideal for herself. We can do this because Olivia may identify with different things at different points in her life. As I observed in the second chapter, what is "most important to who I am" is not always coextensive with "what enduringly characterizes me": the "self" for most of us is wider than the "inalienable self." Within the horizon of my total set of identifications, my standpoint may change. Life can require me to revise my standpoint: it may introduce new elements into "total set" of identifications, or it may remove old identifications. Olivia's husband may die. Her children may move away. When Olivia survives these events, "who she is" will change as she adapts to her new reality. I am aware that in emphasizing the capacity of the "self" to "take up a different position," it sounds like I am advocating for the revisable, rationalist self that has been critiqued effectively by John Christman.[214] However the coincidence of terms here is superficial. First, unlike in the account Christman criticizes, the revisions to our set of commitments rarely arise due to deliberation. These more commonly are generated by circumstances that awaken us to the importance "to us" of things we had previously rejected or taken for granted; or conversely through circumstances that require us to "let go" of things we had formerly believed were very important. Second, I am certainly not arguing that the capacity to revise our own commitments *is* or *should be* something with which we identify. This capacity to change may characterize selves, however it is not "the essential self" nor is it a characteristic that should necessarily be enhanced or treated as a "principle of action." Recognition that we may experience deep revisions to our motivationally essential selfhood does not entail that we need to be indifferent with respect to the attachments, or relativistic with respect to the values, that we happen to have right now. Indeed, we can even authentically act against our own malleability by demanding rigorous consistency or integrity from ourselves, in so far as the contingencies of life allow us to do this. But the fact that one's values and commitments *can* change—upon death of our loved ones, for instance—is sufficient reason for law to safeguard a certain range of options even for the voluntarily heteronomous, in

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[214]See John Christman, "Liberalism, Autonomy, and Self-Transformation," *Social Theory and Practice* 27, no. 2 (April 2001), 185-206.

recognition that they may not always prioritize the things they currently appear to prioritize. For this reason, Olivia must be safeguarded sufficient social and economic power that she will be able to—but not required to—claim other projects as her own.

Noggle's Edgar the Evil, by contrast, may be authentic, but inasmuch as his authentic actions are truly "evil" —and hence harmful to others—there will be no social respect for his authenticity, as this will be outweighed by others' needs for basic conditions of safety and wellbeing. Although I am affording some measure of social respect to authenticity, then, the respect this value deserves must certainly be limited by something like Mill's harm principle.

Thus far, in this chapter, we have seen that it is coherent to be authentic and heteronomous. I have even argued that obedient nuns who really endeavour to submit their judgment utterly to that of their superior may be "highly authentic." I noted, however, that I would consider the problem of whether or not living heteronomously could be *good.* The notion of *the good* espoused by those who value living heteronomously will differ substantially from that espoused by those who value living autonomously. I think this means that in assessing the value of heteronomy we should appeal to values that will be shared both by those who believe that autonomous lives are more complete and healthier and by those who would undertake a life of monastic obedience. Within these overlapping notions of the good, I can foresee two possible concerns about the value of heteronomy that may arise. The first concern is as follows: if it's valuable to live heteronomously, then why preserve rights and freedoms for anyone? Why provide children with education and opportunities? Why not, instead, set up social constraints that will require people to become more dependent on others? The second concern I will consider emerges from our contemporary fear that obedience may impair moral judgment. I will reserve consideration of this second concern for the fourth chapter; however, I will consider the first problem now, as it builds on the foregoing discussion of authenticity.

III. Heteronomy and Rights

In this section I will consider the following objection: can someone coherently defend the value of rights and freedoms—minimum wage laws, universal suffrage, public education,

etc.—without believing that politically engaged, economically independent and otherwise self-governing lives (i.e. globally autonomous lives) are the kinds of lives everyone should be living?

I will argue in this section that it is coherent for monastics to value human rights while nevertheless endorsing an ideal of agency that involves the renunciation of these rights. *The value of the conditions* Oshana cites as requisite for the development of "global autonomy" need not be justified by appeal to the value of "globally autonomous lives." I think these rights and freedoms *are valuable* and that monastic subjects have conceptual resources for arriving at the similar practical conclusions even with their robust commitment to heteronomy and their very-different vision of the ideal agent.

That said, Mother Andjelika did reject the language of "human rights" on a few occasions while I was living at the monastery, construing this as "not Catholic." This was primarily due to the fact that in the name of "rights," civil law was intervening in Church affairs, and certain liberal members of the ecclesial hierarchy had in the past tried to intervene in the authoritative structure of her community.

After one community discussion about misunderstandings of this nature, toward the end of my immersion at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in March 2013, I watched the sisters clamour to support Mother's continued leadership of their community. A young solemnly professed sister[215]—typically very reticent—even declared, reflecting on how members of a recent visitation had wanted to interview each sister separately about a community decision, "they don't understand that it's okay to be led." This statement was a succinct defense of the virtue of obedience and it spoke to the primacy of this value in the life of this community. Persons concerned to verify that sisters were each making an autonomous decision were construed as disregarding the autonomy of the community. But the importance of the latter, for these nuns, was central to who each of them had become, individually; hence, those who

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[215]Women who are discerning whether to enter a Discalced Carmelite community will typically spend one year as a postulant, and one to three years as a novice. When novices are first invited to make a formal commitment to the community, they publicly make temporary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which last for a period of at least three years. Solemn profession, in which nuns make permanent vows, is only made thereafter. Hence, a solemnly professed nun will have been living with the community of her membership for at least 5 years.

seemed to assert the primacy of individual autonomy over community autonomy, or who questioned the ongoing leadership of their aging foundress, were regarded as a threat to these nuns' way of life.

On other occasions, however, it was clear that it was important to the prioress that sisters be truly called to her community, rather than coerced to join by their conservative families. It is important to the prioress that sisters have exit options if they need to leave the monastery, and she has also demonstrated her concern that young women who enter from backgrounds that she feels are "extremely conservative" be provided with physical and emotional distance from the monastery so that they will have some possibility of discerning a different life path. The nuns occasionally reminisce about one young woman who came to discern a vocation because her mother had wanted her to join, and yet the girl herself was totally miserable. Mother told her, "you don't have to be a nun," and the girl was relieved, as she had never believed it could be otherwise. She wanted to be a chef, and ultimately left to pursue that dream instead.

Although these nuns live under obedience, then, it is very important to them that this way of life isn't forced upon anyone, and Mother laments the oppressive home conditions that lead some young women to the cloister when this is not truly "their vocation." As Martha Nussbaum asserts, a certain level of wellbeing is required before spiritual renunciations can even be considered: "The person with plenty of food may always choose to fast, but there is a great difference between fasting and starving, and it is this difference that I wish to capture."[216] Mother Andjelika seems to agree with this position.

Even for nuns who live under the strict type of obedience found in this community, it will be crucial to distinguish heteronomous lives that are "authentic" from those where this heteronomy has been imposed by force. This dovetails with a statement made by John XXIII to Women Religious. He phrased it like this:

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[216]Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 87.

> The Teaching of the Church on the inalienable rights of the human person is clear and precise. The special gifts of every man must be free to be duly developed in order that each may correspond to the gifts received from God. All this is acquired.
>
> But, if one passes from the respect of the person to the exaltation of the personality and to the affirmation of personalism, the dangers become serious.[217]

John XXIII here affirms the importance of human rights for allowing peoples' special gifts to be "duly developed." However, his objection to "the exaltation of the personality" reminds us, again, that the self-ruling individual is not the only product of such development, and will not be recognized by everyone as an ideal. Such a way of life is not obviously valuable to all persons, in spite of Oshana's assertions to the contrary. The suffering Christ, and Mary as bearer of God, are upheld as ideals instead: human nature rendering itself utterly docile to the will of God and renouncing all "rights" to independence and self-direction.

Importantly, Mother Andjelika does not affirm the value of choice for its own sake or for the sake of self-fulfillment. She is concerned, rather, that children be raised in ways that will allow them to discern their own true vocations. Her belief that certain conditions are required for good discernment brings Mother Andjelika on board with many of the values upheld by the liberal state. However, while this means there may be overlap in the kinds of social policies conservative nuns and liberal citizens will advocate, the prioress' concern about the conditions of "true discernment" is, crucially, *not the same* as the concerns that motivate liberal protection of choice. "Having options" is not valued, for instance, as something that enables self-expression or self-fulfillment. Instead, one's "vocation" or "call" is central and the authentic life, for people who share this worldview, is one that orients itself around a sense of a personal imperative that comes from God: the primary agent of the good life, for these sisters, is not "oneself." However Mother Andjelika does acknowledge that without a certain amount of care

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[217]This excerpt is from a very useful volume I discovered in the monastery library: a collection of writings by popes and theologians on the value of "obedience," compiled around the time of the second Vatican Council. See Daughters of St. Paul, eds. *Obedience—the Greatest Freedom* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1966), 48-49. For the full text, see John XXIII, "Letter of Pope John XXIII 'Il Tempio Massimo' to Women Religious," July 2, 1962. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/letters/documents/hf_j-xxiii_let_19620702_tempio-massimo_en.html/.

and protection from coercion, children will be unable to hear and respond to what God really asks of them. Thus, the prioress gives conservative aspirants opportunities to distance themselves from the monastery for reasons that are, nevertheless, compatible with the idea that some people may be called to live under obedience and that such a way of life would be reflective of their highest capacities.

For this reason, in justifying the value of human rights, it may be more instrumentally useful to appeal to "conditions for authenticity" than to appeal to "capacities for autonomy," as the former value can capture what is shared by both liberal and conservative religious proponents of rights and freedoms. We all recognize that authentic lives may look very different from one another. Nuns also recognize this, because they don't think that everyone is called to be a nun. Nuns and liberals alike will want a society where it is possible for everyone to lead an authentic life, and both groups will think protection of human rights and freedoms is a condition of such authenticity. Granted, there will still be controversy over what range of rights and freedoms "authenticity" requires us to recognize, socially. Appealing to authenticity allows for a shared conversation, but it does not yield easy solutions about what it is good to allow people to do. However, the lack of easy solution does not diminish the utility of this method of proceeding. Promoting the capacity for "authenticity" will be more available to those who view "autonomy" as an antisocial or antireligious ideal. And for this reason, I think my account should lead us to conclude that it is relatively more important for legislators to respect the "authentic self" than to view themselves as promoters of "global autonomy."

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have advocated reserving the term "autonomy" for the "global" or substantive concept endorsed by Marina Oshana. This is, as I have argued, a way of using the term "autonomy" that manages to take seriously one thing that certain monastics believe they have rejected or renounced in undertaking lives of obedience. However, I have also argued that when adopting this definition of autonomy we should not construe autonomous lives as more *properly human*. Further to this point, I have argued that we should also avoid connecting too closely the value of human rights and freedoms and the value of *living autonomously*, as this

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will prevent dialogue around important social issues where there may actually be broad agreement between secular liberals and religious conservatives.

A further concern about allowing "authentic heteronomy" to stand as value alongside autonomy, however, is that "heteronomous" persons may seem to have impaired moral judgment. Monastics and liberals alike would construe the fully developed self as one that is capable of good moral judgment. So if this concern is justified, this could give us another reason to question the value obedience could have *even for monastics*. I respond to this objection in the final chapter of this thesis, "The Virtue of Obedience." Here I contrast monastic obedience with the military variety, and endeavour to establish the difference between the obedience that monks and nuns endorse, and the obedience that may result in evil.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Virtue of Obedience

In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Zygmunt Bauman has suggested that the horror of the Holocaust has made many people—and ought to have made all of us, according to Bauman—suspicious that conforming to social expectations of obedience can transform people into monsters, capable of perpetrating unspeakable atrocities.[218] Since the Holocaust, Bauman argues, now "the most horrifying evil in human memory did not result from the dissipation of order, but from an impeccable, faultless and unchallengeable rule of order."[219] We can surely recognize in Bauman's argument a familiar, widely held opinion about the nature and effects of obedience to authority. The Holocaust was the most profound contemporary awakening to our own potential for evil. Subsequent theorization about the conditions requisite for generating such evil—most particularly the social psychological experiments on "authority" conducted by Stanley Milgram[220] and Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo[221]—have contributed to a widely-held perspective in contemporary Western society, that ordinary individuals, under authoritative command, may readily abandon principles of respect for human dignity. The situationist interpretations of evil advanced by Bauman and Milgram assign responsibility for military atrocities, prison abuses and the Holocaust not to corrupt individuals—what Haney, Banks and

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[218] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000 [1989]).

[219] Ibid., 152.

[220] Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67 (1963): 371-378. Milgram tested to what point of severity subjects would deliver shocks to "another participant" (actually a collaborator) when instructed to do so by the experiment administrator.

[221] Craig Haney, Curtis Banks and Philip Zimbardo, "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," *International Journal of Criminology and Penology* 1 (1973), 69-97. This is the "Stanford Prison Experiment" in which ordinary college student participants were randomly assigned roles of either prison guards or prisoners in a mock prison that ran for a period of days.

Zimbardo have called the "dispositional hypothesis"[222]—but rather to norms of obedience or "absolute compliance with authority" that characterize the military and society more broadly. This situationist rendering of the Holocaust has led "obedience" itself to become invested with horror in the West, including for many vowed religious.

And yet, obedience to something—to a person or title, to an ethical code, to the law, etc.—remains an essential part of contemporary social life, key to the functioning of institutional relationships, even though it is now regarded as so ethically suspect. Furthermore, this sinister cast on "obedience" we often find today stands in marked contrast to the discourse on "obedience" that characterised many early Christian and medieval scholastic treatments of this topic. Catholic and early Christian ascetics did not regard obedience as dangerous for human subjects, and indeed they sometimes, historically, construed it as commendable even when manifested in certain more extreme forms. I will argue in this chapter that "the virtue of obedience" in Christian asceticism, and the contemporary fear that obedience produces monsters, each reflect different ideas of which aspects of the self one can, and should, relinquish.

An account of what happens when subjects are formed as "obedient subjects" is an important part of assessing the meaning of any ethic of obedience. This is what I will endeavour to work out at the beginning of this chapter. What happens to the human subject when he or she becomes obedient? More specifically is it the case that a longstanding commitment to "obedience" can lead to alienation of the individual "will" or its replacement by the "will" of another?

In the second part of this chapter, I will demonstrate the distinction between the kind of "selves" we find described in late 20th century social psychological work on prisons and the military, and the kind of "selves" that are supposed to be generated by the virtue of obedience upheld in conservative monasteries. Noting that this virtue is really an ideal that may well differ from the behaviour of actual individuals, I nevertheless focus on this "virtue" of obedience in this second part in order to help us get clearer on why obedience is believed to be virtuous within the Catholic monastic tradition. From our temporal and historical vantage point where

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[222] Haney, Banks and Zimbardo, "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," 70.

the idea that "obedience" could be "virtuous" is so foreign, this effort at comprehension must form a part of any adequate consideration of monastic obedience, and it has been sorely missing from the literature on "heteronomous monks." Drawing on my field research as well as theological expositions of the virtue of obedience, I show that the idea of the *inalienability* of the will, and the possibility of renouncing or overcoming the "self" (in the sense of "self-interest" or "self-will"), through obedience are both essential to the monastic idea that "obedience" has an ascetic value. By contrast, the concern that the "will" can become alienated from the human being—with "self-interest" regarded as an inalienable—is fundamental to the contemporary fear that expectations of obedience may generate dangerous situations of diminished responsibility. Applying the concepts developed in the third chapter of this dissertation, I will argue that institutional obedience is feared for its capacity to generate inauthentic behaviours that deviate from individuals' deep moral commitments, or otherwise to warp characters and make them capable of evil. We can see from Patristic writings, however, that the obedience upheld in monasteries, *when it is really virtuous,* demands a high degree of authenticity and responsibility from obedient subjects. Monastic obedience has, as its objective, the reorientation of the self around its "true" center, which is conceived to be identical with the locus of moral behaviour.

I. The Horror of Heteronomy

The "situationist" rendering of evil promoted by Milgram, Zimbardo and Bauman has instituted something new in our understanding of what happens to "persons" in authoritarian environments. The idea that there are certain situations that will make even "ordinary people" commit war atrocities is a theory that now seems to rise to the forefront of public consciousness any time the media becomes concerned about the behaviour of Western soldiers. Philip Zimbardo, for instance, having conducted his "Stanford Prison Experiments" forty years previously, reentered the American popular psychology landscape in order to explain the abuses at Abu Ghraib.[223] When considering gross injustices committed by members

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[223]Zimbardo is on the advisory board for popular tv show psychologist Dr. Phil, and he has been featured conducting "experiments" on two episodes of *Dr. Phil* in 2010 and 2011, designed to "demonstrate" for the viewing audience how most people are willing to harm others if commanded to do so by respected authorities. While this is an example of the popularization of the idea that "normative obedience" is responsible for producing

of Western military forces, "diminished responsibility" or loss of control in such situations has become a common explanation of horrific violence.

As presented by Zygmunt Bauman, the Holocaust should be eye-opening: it has the capacity to reveal the dangers of the kinds of indoctrination into structures of authority that we experience throughout our familial, educational and professional lives. Bauman upholds this social explanation of the origins of inhumane behaviour against the interpretation of those such as Adorno, Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford in *The Authoritarian Personality* who attempted to demonstrate that the susceptibility to fascism was tied to the development of a particular kind of pathological character. Bauman construes Adorno and his colleagues as having described, not the "atrocity-producing situation"[224] that turns "normal" individuals into monsters, but rather "the authoritarian type of man"[225] who is, already, dangerously submissive to authority and unfeeling toward his social inferiors.

It is understandable why Bauman and others have been unconvinced by the *pathological personality* interpretation of evil. Appealing to evil or corrupt individuals seems insufficient to account for how people we regard as "ordinary," drafted into the military and placed in situations like the Holocaust and the Vietnam War, managed to carry out atrocities.

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evil, however, I should mention that this "Dr. Phil" version of Zimbardo is a bit ambiguous, for several reasons: 1) the idea that compliance produces monsters was a conclusion more properly derived from Stanley Milgram's experiments. Zimbardo's "Stanford Prison Experiment" drew the subtly different conclusion that given particular situational stressors and a position of authority over others, people will begin to abuse their power and engage in sadistic behaviours *quite apart* from being told to do so by anyone else. While Milgram's and Zimbardo's experiments both might incline us to attribute responsibility for military abuses to "situations," the kinds of situations these two authors have explored differ in important respects. Strangely, it is the Milgram version— "obedience"—that Zimbardo brings to *Dr. Phil*; 2) although the *Dr. Phil* version of Zimbardo finds himself issuing warnings about how not to be susceptible to committing abuses under authoritative command—i.e. how to be a heroic person who resists brainwashing—this recommendation for how to maintain one's agency seems to conflict with the Zimbardo we read in his articles [see, e.g. Philip G. Zimbardo, "A Situationist Perspective on the Psychology of Evil: Understanding How Good People are Transformed into Perpetrators," in *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil*, ed. A.G. Miller, 21-50. (New York: Guilford Press, 2004)], who is a radical situationist, placing blame for generating human evil directly on governments and processes who set up the prison establishment in ways that promote abuses of authority and dehumanization of particular others. In his articles, Zimbardo has been particularly explicit about the idea that "evil" in these contexts should not be attributed to any failure or personality defect on the part of individuals; 3) It is interesting, and paradoxical, that a right-wing mainstream media guru like Dr. Phil would find himself such comfortable bedfellows with Zimbardo, who has been and remains a prominent academic critic of American warfare and prison policy.

[224] Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 425.

[225] See Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality (*New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), ix.

Allan Young[226] points out how the idea that soldiers had lost their autonomy[227] was an important psychiatric component of the stories of those who had committed atrocities in Vietnam. These soldiers' reputations could be rehabilitated as "heroic" in spite of their offenses, precisely because they were able to be construed not primarily as perpetrators of horrific acts of violence, but rather as victims of the state that had forced them into an impossible moral position. Young identifies the organization "Vietnam Veterans Against the War" as having promoted this idea that war atrocities are committed by "ordinary persons" in order to reduce the social stigma afflicting Vietnam veterans on their return home.[228]

Similarly, in 2009, Emma Brockes, writing for *The Guardian,* described the social ostracism faced by Lynndie England, one of the female soldiers identified in the Abu Ghraib prison torture photos, after returning to her community.[229] While Brockes' description often emphasizes moments in the conversation that seemed to suggest England's remorselessness for her actions, the primary function of this report is to convey England's victimhood. She is a victim of poverty[230] and an authoritarian upbringing: "She says her mother once hit her so hard with a table tennis bat that it broke, but considers that normal for West Virginia … A former teacher of England's at Frankfort High said there was only one word to describe her presence in his classroom: 'Invisible.'" She is a victim of military policy:

> It would be the testimony of England, Graner and the five other soldiers identified in the photos that when they arrived at the prison, the abusive practices—keeping inmates naked, making them wear female underwear and crawl on the floor—were already established in some form as part of pre-interrogation "softening up" techniques approved by military intelligence

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[226]Allan Young, "The Self-Traumatized Perpetrator as a 'Transient Mental Illness." *Évolution Psychiatrique* 67, no. 4 (2002):630-650.

[227] In the minimal sense required for "responsibility for one's actions" rather than in the "global" sense of autonomy adopted in the previous chapter.

[228] Young, "The Self-Traumatized Perpetrator," 305.

[229]Emma Brockes, "What happens in war happens," *The Guardian*, January 3, 2009, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jan/03/abu-ghraib-lynndie-england-interview/. Thanks to Michel Xhignesse for directing me to this article.

[230]See also Kelly Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Oliver uses England's case to highlight various issues, like the fascination pertaining to the use of female sexuality as a torture device, that I am not able to explore at any depth in this chapter. However Oliver also starts, at moments, to think about England's "freedom" or "culpability" for her actions, questioning how both gender and poverty constrain women torturers' decisions in ways that make it a real question, "did they jump, or were they pushed?" (147). Oliver ultimately decides, drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva, that this is a false dichotomy.

officers. In the Taguba report, the official inquiry into abuse at Abu Ghraib, Karpinski was criticised for her poor leadership and demoted from brigadier general to colonel, but no officer higher in rank than a sergeant was convicted of wrongdoing.

She is victim of her boyfriend Graner:

> She says he wasn't ever violent, just manipulative. "They said in the trial that authority figures really intimidate me. I always aim to please. They said that one of the reasons Graner easily intimidated me was because I saw him as an authority figure. So I was really compliant."

And indeed this last victimhood was her defense in court:

> Her legal defence, that she was unduly influenced by Specialist Charles Graner, the father of her child and the only soldier still serving time for abuses at Abu Ghraib, was compounded outside the courtroom by assumptions about her background; that she came from a place where people didn't know better.

On her dishonorable discharge, England was unable to find employment or belonging with her family or community. Nevertheless, townspeople seemed to grudgingly recognize that her behaviour was "normal," for war:

> There are two bars, two banks, a fire station, a school and a bookshop—the woman who runs the latter says, "I've no sympathy for what she did, but people behave differently in war than they do in their chairs at home, watching it on TV."

Brockes accompanies her acknowledgement of the constraints imposed by England's situation with a description of England's low intelligence, weak and vulnerable character. This latter calls to mind Hannah Arendt's description of Adolf Eichmann, who Arendt likewise describes as weak-minded and compliant.[231] In conveying the character and words of Adolf Eichmann, Arendt stresses many times that what is most jarring about Eichmann is his "normalcy." The extent to which Eichmann complied with authority figures was certainly absurd and reprehensible, according to Arendt, but not irregular. She says the following:

> As for the base motives, he was perfectly sure that he was not what he called an *innerer Schweinehund*, a dirty bastard in the depths of his heart; and as for

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[231] Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of Evil.* New York: Viking Press, 1964 [1963].

his conscience, he remembered perfectly well that he would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to do—to ship millions of men, women, and children to their death with great zeal and the most meticulous care. This, admittedly, was hard to take. Half a dozen psychiatrists had certified him as "normal."[232]

Arendt's Eichmann is morally weak and puerile. He is highly vulnerable to the opinions of others. In so describing Eichmann, it is clear that Arendt has no respect for this ordinary character; however, in describing him this way, Arendt indeed seems to agree with Eichmann's own claim that he is "not guilty in the sense of the indictment."[233]

The specific situational factor that is regarded as enabling the actions of both England and Eichmann was normative "obedience" or compliance.[234] As relayed by Hannah Arendt, Adolf Eichmann invoked the Kantian categorical imperative at his trial, arguing that he had always endeavoured to live his life such that "the principle of my will must always be such that it can become the principle of general laws."[235] Arendt also notes how Hans Frank had deliberately reformulated a version of the categorical imperative to apply to the Nazi regime which was to "act in such a way that the Führer, if he knew your action, would approve it."[236] Although Arendt, of course, regards both of these as gross misinterpretations of Kant's idea of duty, she follows Eichmann in noting that the "little man" or the householder, tends to walk away from a study of Kant's moral philosophy with a sense that a) the categorical imperative

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[232] Ibid., 25.

[233] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 25.

[234] See also Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary men: reserve police battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); Mika Haritos-Fatouros, "The official torturer: A learning model for obedience to the authority of violence," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18 (1988): 1107-1120; Herbert C. Kelman and V. Lee Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); ———. *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans: Neither Victims nor Executioners* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973); ———. *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China* (New York: Norton, 1961); Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience"; Arthur G. Miller, "Constructions of the Obedience Experiments: A Focus Upon Domains of Relevance," *Journal of Social Issues* 51, no. 3 (1995):33-53; John Sabini and Maury Silver, "Destroying the innocent with a clear conscience: a sociopsychology of the Holocaust," in *Survivors, Victims, and Perpetrators: Essays on the Nazi Holocaust,* ed. J.E. Dimsdale (New York: Hemisphere, 1980); Young, "The Self-Traumatized Perpetrator as a 'Transient Mental Illness.'"

[235] Eichmann qtd in Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 136.

[236] Ibid., 136.

seems to require more than blind obedience to the law; and b) that for Kant, true laws admit of no exceptions.[237] Thus, instead of using Kant's philosophy as a reminder to appeal to practical reason, Arendt argues that the ordinary person uses Kant's philosophy to suggest that one should come to identify one's own will with the will of the existing laws and systems of state authority.

In "The Ethics of Obedience," the fifth chapter of Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*, he locates moral responsibility for the Holocaust in modernity or society at large, expressing concern that we continue to unquestioningly comply with authority. He worries that the situation of social authoritarianism that he believes enabled the Holocaust had not essentially changed by the time he published his book in 1989. The Holocaust was the horrific consequence of our modern valorization of obedience, according to Bauman: it was not a misplaced occurrence that only affected certain people under historically peculiar circumstances, but rather it emerged from the "contemporary" situation, in which we encourage children and adults to regard the compliant citizen as the good citizen.

Thus, Bauman affirms the reading of "how the Holocaust was possible" given by theorists such as Hannah Arendt and Stanley Milgram, who seemed to find empirical confirmation—Arendt in her observation of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, Milgram through his 1960s shock experiments—that "ordinary people" would obey authorities perceived as legitimate even if the commands given by these authorities would cause them to violate their usual moral sensibilities, to kill and torture others.

Indeed, Migram's empirical data seemed to show that individuals would comply with orders to harm other humans even without threats or incentives. In other words, not only would ordinary people commit atrocities, but ordinary people would commit atrocities *just because they were told to do so* by an authority figure, in the absence of any coercive tactics. Milgram designed his experiment in such a way that he promised to pay the individuals administering shocks regardless of how they completed the experiment, i.e. regardless of their

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[237]Ibid., 136-137.

level of compliance with the directives of the experimenter.[238] Thus, only the esteem of the researcher was at stake if subjects failed to comply with orders to administer what they believed to be high-level shocks to the other participant in the experiment. And yet most subjects complied with the commands beyond the expectations of those who watched the experiment unfold through one-way mirrors. Milgram reports that 26 of 40 adult male subjects administered shocks well beyond the "Danger: Severe Shock" range and to the maximum level of 450 volts, labelled on the dial simply as "XXX." This result, according to Milgram, was evidence of the strength of our culture's norms of obedience.

> Subjects have learned from childhood that it is a fundamental breach of moral conduct to hurt another person against his will. Yet, 26 subjects abandon this tenet in following the instructions of an authority who has no special powers to enforce his commands.[239]

As we have seen, Milgram, Arendt, and Bauman stress how the ethical value with which "obedience" is culturally invested in the West has led all other moral values, even seemingly the most fundamental (e.g. our moral proscriptions against killing and torturing), to be outweighed by our feelings of duty toward publicly recognized authorities. The methods of both Milgram and Arendt in making these observations have been heavily criticized[240]; however, my objective here is not to endorse their conclusions, but rather to identify in these popular studies the now mundane view that an "ethic of obedience" produces evil. Fascist levels of compliance are by no means construed by these authors as a necessary product of our upbringing, however. They don't think such compliance is something we are powerless to resist. Indeed all three are writing polemical pieces designed to make individuals take responsibility for their own actions and refuse compliance when appropriate. By identifying individuals who have "resisted" such a tendency toward obedience, these theorists maintain that we have a moral responsibility to oppose authority when it commands us to commit evil. However, the

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[238]Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," 372.

[239] Ibid., 376.

[240]For a review of key criticisms of both authors, see Arthur G. Miller, "Constructions of the Obedience Experiments: A Focus Upon Domains of Relevance," *Journal of Social Issues* 51, no. 3 (Fall 1995):33-53.

implications for "obedience" are clear: if you do happen to uncritically abide by our culture's norms of obedience, you could become a Nazi.

Although Bauman takes pains to distinguish the situational obedience condemned by Arendt and Milgram from the idea of the pathology of evil portrayed by Adorno et al., all of these theories raise similar concerns about the moral implications of "obedience" itself. For Bauman, Milgram and Arendt, "obedience" is construed as having been socially valorized above all other concerns to the point where Fascism has been enabled by this ethic. Similarly, in their chapter on "The Measurement of Implicit Antidemocratic Trends," Sanford, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunskwik and Levinson include "Authoritarian submission" as one of the nine variables that contributed to the content of the "Fascism Scale" (or "F Scale") used to measure the degree of authoritarianism that characterised their test subjects. This of course differs from Milgram's account in that fascist levels of obedience are not "normal" according to these authors, who note the following:

> The attempt was made to formulate the items in such a way that agreement with them would indicate not merely a realistic, balanced respect for valid authority but an exaggerated, all-out, emotional need to submit. This would be indicated, it seemed, by agreement that obedience and respect for authority were the most important virtues that children should learn, that a person should obey without question the decisions of a supernatural power, and so forth. It was considered that here, as in the case of conventionalism, the subservience to external agencies was probably due to some failure in the development of an inner authority, i.e. conscience. Another hypothesis was that authoritarian submission was commonly a way of handling ambivalent feelings toward authority figures: underlying hostile and rebellious impulses, held in check by fear, lead the subject to overdo in the direction of respect, obedience, gratitude, and the like.[241]

The strong endorsement of submission is described here as indicating a failure in moral development characteristic of only certain pathological individuals. And yet, it is clear here that as with Arendt and Milgram, for Adorno et al. strongly valuing "obedience" in this way is dangerous for human wellbeing:

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[241] R. Nevitt Sanford, T.W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, and Daniel J. Levinson, "The Measurement of Implicit Antidemocratic Trends,"Chapter 7 in *The Authoritarian Personality,* 231-232.

It seems clear that authoritarian submission by itself contributes largely to the antidemocratic potential by rendering the individual particularly receptive to manipulation by the strongest external powers.[242]

Although they differ in their accounts of the normalcy and the origins of such compliance, both authors who implicate an "ethic of obedience" and those who implicate an "authoritarian personality" seem to construe this capacity for excessive compliance and the ensuing evil behaviour as integral to the adult psychological makeup of these subjects. They are *authentically obedient*, and this authentic obedience has *disastrous consequences*.

By contrast, Robert Lifton, in *The Nazi Doctors*, criticizes Arendt in particular for regarding the Nazi self as "banal." Instead Lifton argues that inhumanity on the scale of Auschwitz or My Lai was only possible through a kind of internal fragmentation of the perpetrator. Lifton argues that the "selves" of the Nazi doctors who carried out sadistic experiments on inmates in the camps would become "doubled." This would allow for a continued banal existence in the home, where conventional morality remained in play, while an inauthentic second self would form that would be capable of operating within the "atrocity-producing situation" of the camps.[243] Lifton regards this latter situation as a situation of diminished responsibility on the part of the individual torturers.[244] Thus beyond the two possibilities that "obedient" killing and torturing is either "pathological," or a "normal" behaviour in a "pathological situation," we also have the possibility that perhaps "normal" people find themselves behaving as an abnormal or inauthentic second self that can obediently carry out horrific orders in "atrocity-producing situations."

What we find reflected in these works, and in popular opinion, is the idea that obedience or compliance is a tendency that can impair our moral judgment in situations where such judgment and the capacity to resist authority are vital for human wellbeing. Additionally we seem to think the presence of external commands made to persons who are expected to operate within such an "ethic of obedience"—e.g. soldiers—can exonerate those who have

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[242]Ibid., 232.

[243]Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 425.

[244] See also Young, "The Self-Traumatized Perpetrator," 310.

committed evil acts as part of performing their role. In the Abu Ghraib torture charges, for instance, demonstration that US policy seemed to advocate the use of "physical pressures and degradation" led to the prison sentences of England and others being significantly curtailed.[245] This means we seem to expect that soldiers, at least, will act with an external locus of control and that insofar as they are commanded to commit evil, what they do is not entirely their fault. The obedient or heteronomous selves who commit situational evils, however, seem to us to be less morally developed than those in these situations who resisted authority in order to do what was right, e.g. Germans who harboured Jewish refugees during the Holocaust, participants in Milgram's experiment who stopped the test early. Given that we think heroic behaviour in such situations comes only from those who are willing to be non–compliant, this should surely lead us—and monastics—to question whether obedience can really be "good."

II. What is the "Self" of the Atrocity-Producing Situation?

In response, I would ask us first of all to notice that our reactions to Eichmann and England are somewhat ambivalent. If we really believe that they behaved "normally," for war, we should pity and not condemn them. Granted, our tendency toward disgust and condemnation of the situationally-influenced perpetrator may have psychological explanations rather than philosophical ones: it may just be a semi-conscious attempt to distance ourselves from the evil we perceive in others. However, I think this ambivalence also reflects philosophical uncertainty about whether—and in what sense—the various circumstances described in the situationist accounts could really make anyone less responsible for their actions. What type or degree of coercion is required before the act that proceeds through someone's body is no longer her own? Can participation in the "atrocity-producing situation" make someone lose what is fundamental to herself in the sense that she does truly become "not herself?" And how do we explain Milgram's ordinary individual who administers high-level shocks to strangers, without apparently being coerced to do this at all? In this second section, I will try to work out what kinds of strong identifications the situationally-influenced perpetrator is presumed to have.

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[245] Brockes, "What happens in war happens."

Recall that in the first chapter I began to identify, invoking the pre-conversion work of Edith Stein, how "the will" or "volition" is one contender for the residual or inalienable self. Sartre emphasizes this yet more strongly, observing that the agency of my actions is my own, even though as someone acting in the world I must always be effacing this fact. On such an account, where my freedom of action is non–optional, in order to stop participating in an atrocity-producing situation, I should only need recognize that I am the one acting—I am contributing to the situation by my participation—and then make the decision to act differently. My situation cannot brainwash me out of my freedom and cannot remove my responsibility for what I do.

Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, thus conveys a sense of our inalienable responsibility that seems starkly opposed to the situationist accounts. He views consciousness as essentially undetermined by anything we might consider either externally or internally coercive, identifying the agent as the "Nothing" or the "pure freedom" that at all moments transcends its past and its situation while yet being condemned to assign meaning to these. Nothing can motivate my actions, Sartre says, apart from my "original project"—my choice of how to be in the world—through which I take up my situation and decide that elements of this situation will be "motives." Sartre thus, like the idealists, comes to the radical conclusion that "the very worst disadvantages or the worst threats which can endanger my person have meaning only in and through my project; and it is on the ground of the engagement which I am that they appear."[246] For Sartre, the idea of a "threat" only makes sense if there is a "For-itself," and a corresponding arrangement of the world according the projects of this "For-itself": even threats to my life are only meaningful in so far as I have a project of "staying alive." This renders "agency" both primary and inalienable for Sartre and this enworlded sense of primary freedom has consequences for his account of responsibility. War is a central concern for Sartre in his account of our absolute freedom in his section of *Being and Nothingness* on "Freedom and Responsibility," doubtlessly reflecting his own wartime resistance efforts and the circumstances in which his book was composed. Here he is specifically concerned to repudiate a certain

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[246]Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 708.

tendency to assign responsibility for military abuses to higher officials or to oppressive situations. He argues the following:

> If I am mobilized in a war, this war is *my* war; it is in my image and I deserve it. I deserve it first because I could always get out of it by suicide or by desertion; these ultimate possibles are those which must always be present for us when there is a question of envisaging a situation. For lack of getting out of it, I have *chosen* it … If therefore I have preferred war to death or to dishonor, everything takes place as if I bore the entire responsibility for this war. Of course others have declared it, and one might be tempted perhaps to consider me as a simple accomplice. But this notion of complicity has only a juridical sense, and it does not hold here. For it depended on me that for me and by me this war should not exist, and I have decided that it does exist. There was no compulsion here, for the compulsion could have got no hold on a freedom. I did not have any excuse; for as we have said repeatedly in this book, the peculiar character of human-reality is that it is without excuse.[247]

That said, this position about the agent's own ultimate responsibility does not prevent Sartre from assigning culpability to the American government for war crimes committed by soldiers in Vietnam, in his essay "On Genocide" presented as part of the 1967 Russell Tribunal:

> Peter Martinsen, a twenty-three-year-old student who had "interrogated" prisoners for ten months and could scarcely live with his memories, said: "I am a middle-class American. I look like any other student, yet somehow I am a war criminal." And he was right when he added: "Anyone in my place would have acted as I did." His only mistake was to attribute his degrading crimes to the influence of war *in general.*
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> No, it is not war in the abstract: it is the greatest power on earth against a poor peasant people. Those who fight it are *living out* the only possible relationship between an overindustrialized country and an underdeveloped country, that is to say, a genocidal relationship implemented through racialism—the only relationship, short of picking up and pulling out.[248]

How can these two different assignments of responsibility be reconciled? Was Peter Martinsen the victim of his situation; the pawn of bad decisions on the part of the U.S. government? Or was he coerced only in a "juridical sense," as Sartre has suggested in *Being*

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[247] Ibid.*,* 708-709.

[248] Jean-Paul Sartre, "On Genocide," in *On Genocide and a Summary of the Evidence and the Judgments of the International War Crimes Tribunal,* trans. Ramparts Magazine, Inc. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 82.

and Nothingness, while nevertheless being fully responsible for his actions? Sartre would have trouble explaining, on a purely Existentialist model, how anything apart from the individual agent can be "responsible" for an immoral action. And yet he too finds there is some sense in which individual soldiers were not fully to blame for atrocities committed in Vietnam.

While I don't endorse his idea that we should always appeal to "higher-level motivations" in evaluating the rest of an individual's psychology, it nevertheless seems that something like Harry Frankfurt's account of coercion and responsibility can effectively bridge this gap between inalienable agency and situationally-produced evil. In his preface to *The Importance of What We Care About*, Frankfurt, like Sartre, asserts the primacy of agency by arguing that "volition pertains more closely than reason to our experience of ourselves and to the problems in our lives that concern us with the greatest urgency."[249] However, the centrality of volition for Frankfurt, unlike for Sartre, does not mean we always act "freely." And "freedom of will" cannot be assessed exclusively with reference to the agent's external circumstances either, for Frankfurt (his placement in atrocity-producing situations, for instance). Instead Frankfurt aims for a middle ground between absolute and situationally-conditioned freedom, noting that freedom of the will pertains to the agent's ability, within any given situation, to "will what he wants to will."[250] For Frankfurt, someone is "coerced" to do something only if, "he does it *because* of the coercive force exerted against him."[251] Motivations reveal whether or not one was truly "coerced" and the content of these motivations alone forms the basis for whether we should exonerate someone from responsibility for evil actions. Frankfurt suggests that "a threat is only coercive when it causes its victim to perform, from a motive by which he would prefer not to be moved, an action which *complies* with the threat."[252]

Frankfurt's account concerns the problem of when someone's will is "free," which later theorists interpreted as the same as asking whether someone is "autonomous." However, I think we can easily translate Frankfurt's solution into the terms of my own account: I think it

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[249] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About,* viii.
[250] Ibid.*,* 20.
[251] Ibid., 5.
[252] Ibid., 44.

gives us a sense of when the situationally-influenced perpetrator acts authentically. It seems to me that one's behaviour becomes inauthentic if an atrocity-producing situation leads one to act—in conformity with situational demands—on motivations, or in accordance with a value system, etc., that one repudiates. In other words, the truly "doubled" self —the person who has to create a second identity in order to survive in the atrocity-producing situation—may be inauthentic, if that second self does not commit evil simply based on identifications the first self always had anyway. Frankfurt's point is, in order to be "coerced," one must not simply use the atrocity-producing situation as a state-sanctioned outlet for one's hatred for some group, or else one remains fully responsible for one's actions. Within the atrocity-producing situation, it may be the case that one's violent acts are "authentic" to one's usual way of organizing the world, and in the proportion that this is true, we also tend to think the person is blameworthy for what they do.

This description of coercion manages, I think, to account better for the ambiguity of our feelings about England and Eichmann. Inasmuch as their evil actions seem to be consistent with their own fundamental tendencies and values, we think these individuals were not, in fact, coerced, and there is something to condemn in their individual behaviours. We see that England is portrayed as having an established, inordinate desire for the approval of Graner, as well as contempt for "the enemy." Eichmann, similarly, wishes to conform to the expectations of his role at all costs. Inasmuch as these are the values and motivations that contributed to their actions, their abuses could be considered authentic, and—I'm arguing—acts for which they are responsible. Granted, their violent acts may have been merely incidentally connected to their deep desires to please the people who ordered these actions: in other words, the violence might not have itself been considered desirable by either subject. But they are responsible for what they did to the extent that they hated those against whom they committed violent actions, or alternatively, to the extent that they wished to be compliant with the desires of certain people and considered certain other human lives dispensable in achieving this compliance.

On the other hand, insofar as threats or highly undesirable consequences of non–compliance led these individuals to act in ways they detested and that were incapable of being integrated into their value system, psychological structure, etc., Eichmann and England were coerced and we seem to consider them less responsible for their actions. We seem to expect such a failure of integration to be marked by sincere repentance, grief, and mourning. Even Arendt notes that Eichmann no longer took himself to be following the categorical imperative once the "Final Solution" to the Jewish question was enacted in Europe. Even in the case of this figure portrayed by Arendt as maximally weak-minded and compliant, once the orders he was giving became sufficiently horrific, he could no longer regard his obedience as justified, but was compelled instead to begin regarding his actions as outside of his own control. At this point, Eichmann—to preserve his own sense of moral integrity—was required to regard himself not as the author of his own actions but as altogether dispossessed of his own actions. He had to adopt the stance of a victim who was not voluntarily complying with orders, but who was merely a passive instrument of the Führer's will.[253]

Acknowledging Sartre's point, it is hard to imagine that any of my actions could deviate entirely from my own priorities. Under threat, I may just learn that I value my own life more highly than those of other people. There will always be something abhorrent about the choice to commit evil rather than to die. But there are certainly "degrees" to which my actions reflect my set of priorities, and these degrees of authenticity may also correspond to degrees of responsibility, where participation in "atrocity-producing situations" is concerned.

The responsibility for atrocities pertaining to larger bodies—the military, the State—is, I would argue, analogous. Inasmuch as England's actions were consistent with American torture policies, the State bears responsibility. The State bears less responsibility in proportion to how far England's actions deviated from policy. And Eichmann's actions were obviously consistent with those of the Nazi Regime. This responsibility may coexist with individual responsibility: indeed, it would be odd to think that responsibility must come in some fixed amount that must be distributed between parties, rather than as something that potentially pertains to different

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[253]Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 136.

individuals and groups simultaneously. "The State," after all, only puts its military policies into action through individuals like England.

In any event, here we see why "obedience" in particular may have such a bad reputation. Their compliant characters allowed Eichmann and England to do too readily and willingly what we hope no one would do unless someone was holding a gun to their heads. And Milgram's experiments seem to confirm that people will obediently carry out unreasonable or harmful requests even without coercion of any kind. Andrea Westlund describes this kind of compliance exhibited in Milgram's experiments as a way of being "gripped" by the norm of respect for "institutional authority." Westlund argues that their lack of willingness to deeply question the value of respect for authority explains why some participants in Milgram's experiment complied too well with directives:

> These subjects appear to be "gripped" by a form of practical reasoning that accords overriding normative force to the experimenters' institutional authority, in a way that bypasses agential governance and leaves them, too, looking more like loci of forces than like centers of activity. Giving a full account of the link between the governance of action and the governance of relevant practical reasoning is a much larger project than I can take on here. Nonetheless, Milgram-style cases do strongly suggest that such a link exists, and that failing to govern relevant practical reasoning is one way of failing fully to govern what one does.[254]

Westlund's description of how these "gripped" persons seem more like "loci of forces than like centers of activity" is revealing. She, like Oshana, seems to connect "agency" closely with "autonomy" and to construe obedient subjects as "less than agents." Recall, as I noted in the previous chapter, that Westlund views "self-abnegating deference," or deeply-endorsed subservience that the subject cannot defend, as a "pathology of agency." Certainly the participants in Milgram's experiments probably also felt they were "gripped" in this way, and somehow less than responsible for their choices.We do, as I said in the second chapter, feel our identifications as kinds of demands that issue from other people or institutions. The demand to

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[254] Westlund 501.

respect authority really pulls on us this way—it "grips" us, as Westlund describes. However, as I've said previously, that is not essentially different from the way any identification is lived. The real problem here is just that we want the demands of respect for human dignity to *grip us more strongly* than the demands to respect authority. This latter prioritization is really what is *demanded by reason.* And monastics will also recognize this prioritization, as I will argue below. So can a life of obedience really be in service of promoting a high degree of moral development, if we see that even ordinary levels of obedience seem capable of allowing us to suspend morality?

III. The Value of Obedience

Now I will turn and consider more deeply the Catholic articulation of the importance of learning obedience to the will of God, as revealed in the will of one's Superiors. Our abhorrence of "obedience" is so well–established today that at first it might be difficult to recall that there is such a thing as an actively upheld "ethic of obedience" rather than mere noxious social habits of compliance. We are perhaps more accustomed—like Westlund—to think of extreme compliance as a "pathology of agency," such that the idea that obedience could be part of an "ideal" of a perfected self will be difficult for us to grasp.

Furthermore, we understand that ideally, at least, monks and nuns join religious Orders without coercion, but we nevertheless have difficulty explaining this choice without construing the one who makes it as suffering from a condition that makes their choices less than truly free. Erving Goffman, for instance, appears to have struggled with the problem of how monastic forms of discipline and obedience are sought out deliberately by persons, since—he suggests— the deprivations and abuses monks and nuns suffer otherwise closely resemble those involuntarily and miserably imposed on patients confined to asylums. Although the "voluntary" nature of monastic life appears to present some degree of difficulty for Goffman, this does not essentially alter his classification of monasteries as "total institutions," like asylums or prisons, with their practices designed primarily to maintain control amongst the resident population. Ultimately he must explain the "choice" of monastic life by pathologizing it, suggesting that "for

an individual sick with his world or guilt-ridden in it, mortification may bring psychological relief."[255] Goffman interprets the choice to live in this kind of institution as itself evidence of being psychologically unwell. The "voluntary" nature of the monastic project is merely an apparent distinction between monasteries and asylums, according to Goffman: the "choice" of this way of life is only made by subjects who are, in any event, already less than autonomous

Talal Asad takes the voluntary nature of persons' commitments to monastic discipline rather more seriously. He has critiqued the contemporary liberal approach to agency that views individuals as in possession of their own wills only when they act in opposition to others.[256] Treating monastic disciplinary practices in particular, Asad argues that "a remarkable feature of monastic discipline is that it explicitly aims to create, through a programme of communal living, the will to obey."[257] Asad, like Foucault, stresses the "formative" nature of monastic discipline, arguing that since monastic discipline is geared toward the cultivation of virtues, rather than to mere "social control," that this—contra Goffman—marks a significant distinction between monastic disciplinary practices and other, more oppressive ways in which "obedience" is produced. In monastic life, the monk's "will" is not somehow "lost" or "externalized," Asad argues, but he rather cultivates himself to will the same thing as his Superior: "[the monk] is not someone who has 'lost his own will,' as though a man's will could be 'truly' his only when it remained opposed to another's."[258] Asad thus highlights—as we saw with Foucault's "technologies of the self"—how one might submit to another's judgment as part of one's own self-transformation.

The idea of the inalienability of the "agent" emphasized by both Foucault and Asad, and the genuine cooperation of the obedient subject in what she experiences, both are key to understanding the value ascribed to monastic obedience. That said, as I emphasized in my first chapter, we should not go too far in justifying religious obedience by its role in "self-reform" or

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[255] Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Chicago: Aldine Publication Co., 1961), 48.
[256] "On Ritual and Discipline in Medieval Christian Monasticism." *Economy and Society* 16, no. 2 (1987): 159-203.
[257] Ibid., 159.
[258] Ibid.

"self-transformation." This is not what nuns themselves would usually articulate as being "their projects" and it seems important to take the vocabulary of contemplatives seriously here. Although we can see monastic discipline as "transforming the self," the only valid relation to the "self," as articulated by conservative monastics is to "transcend" the self or "die to oneself" and be replaced by Christ. "The self" is understood in this context to be temporal and limited, concerned with its own survival and affairs: religious today articulate the purpose of "obedience" not merely as an attempt to become a "new self" but rather as an attempt to leave "the self" behind. Thus, although "self-transformation" may sound like a correct description of monastic goals to outsiders who try to understand what these persons are doing—and while it might be correct to apply this term if we are using the broad definition of "self" I put forward in Chapter One—I have found that the idea of "self-transformation," to contemplative nuns, tends to suggest a particular interpretation of the monastic project that they are eager to reject.

Mother Andjelika, at an early stage of my project, corrected my description of their goal as "self-transformation." She noted that they are not engaged in a self-help project of personal change, but rather they are engaged in "self-transcendence" or overcoming the self entirely. They should not really be focused on "the self" at all, or they're doing it wrong, becoming narcissistic. To themselves, then, it appears to contemplative nuns today that inasmuch as obedience is "virtuous" it must be a technology for getting outside the self, in the sense of self-interest or "self-will."

In *Genealogies of Religion*, Asad's description of monastic discipline does work to decenter the agency of the monastic project in this way I am trying to emphasize:

> The medieval Christian monk who learns to make the abbot's will into his own learns thereby to desire God's purposes. In an important sense, the meaning of his actions is what it is by virtue of their being part of a transcendent project. (And so, too, the actions of all agents are part of transcendent temporal structures…).[259]

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[259]Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 13.

This helps us begin to see the distinction between monastic obedience and the kind we might find in the military. While the military also demands obedience from competent adult subjects, it requires this obedience for instrumental reasons: because unquestioning submission to authority is essential to the rapid and effective mobilization of large numbers of people.

According to contemporary monastic authors, the "instrumental" value of military obedience is a key distinction between military obedience and the monastic variety:

> Military obedience completely subordinates the individual to the totality so as
> to give more strength and coherence to that totality. Monastic obedience on
> the other hand, does not pursue a social goal but one that is quite individual.
> It clearly is at the service of the ascetic perfection of the individual.[260]

Monastic obedience is understood to contribute to the spiritual development of the individual monk or nun. And as I've emphasized in the previous chapter, it requires *effort* for many people to be obedient, at least in the early stages of monastic life. Thus, I think Asad is correct to stress that "agency" is a key part of asceticism, and I will note in a moment that indeed, the will is construed as inalienable by monastic theology. However, as I have argued in Chapter One and again here, we need to take this effort into account without construing monastic discipline as an "individual project." To do so would neglect to give appropriate weight to the "external agency" of monastic ascesis. Recall that monastic theology views the project of self-transcendence, and its successful accomplishment, as God's rather than that of the individual religious: the monastic agent only acts by opening himself to being worked upon by God, through the mediation of others.

But not only self-transformation—or the renunciation of self-interest—but also the idea that one is obeying an authority who represents Christ, are crucial for Catholics who endorse the virtue of obedience:

> Whether the unbeliever condemns it or admires it, he cannot help but form a
> very misleading idea of it, for "if the Church were only a human society, even

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[260]Pierre Miquel, *La vie monastique selon saint Benoît,* qtd. in (and trans. by) Michael Casey, *A Guide to Living in the Truth*, 99.

though the most venerable and experienced ever known," her demands would not be justified. For his part, the Catholic knows that the Church commands only because she obeys God.[261]

We can see this more clearly if we consider how obedience from self-interest—which I'm interpreting as distinct from monastic obedience—has appeared in Western thought. In Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, for instance, Hobbes argues for the instrumental value of obedience to a singular authority in guaranteeing bodily safety for individuals. Hobbes endorses absolute monarchy and endeavours to establish that compliance even with the arbitrary decisions of one's Sovereign will be the wisest form of social behaviour in most situations, albeit excepting those involving bodily harm or confinement, wherein the conditions for establishing a Sovereign have been violated.

This kind of obedience, justified by "personal safety," renders the individuals and their needs "primary," such that their obedience is merely a "conditional" good. Leo Strauss[262] goes so far as to assert that the way Hobbes grounds authority in individual self-interest entirely undermines the claim that Hobbes endorses "obedience": "Not pride, and still less obedience, but fear of violent death, is according to him the origin of the just intention."[263] As this form of obedience is justified *solely* by appeal to individual needs, this obedience is much less stable than monastic obedience and has none of its sacred inviolability:

> That king whose power is limited is not superior to him or them that have the
> power to limit it; and he that is not superior is not supreme; that is to say, not
> sovereign. The sovereignty therefore was always in that assembly which had
> the right to limit him.[264]

Here, Hobbes has acknowledged the authority of the individual contracting subject, the one who rationally assents to turn over her rights to the Sovereign. Thus, the people are really the Sovereign in the Hobbesian state. Hobbes' acknowledgement, in this section of the *Leviathan*—where he is considering the problem of succession—that "sovereignty" would

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[261] Henri de Lubac, "Obedience in the Splendor of the Catholic Vision," in *Obedience—the Greatest Freedom*, 125.
[262] Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis,* trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Toronto: The University of Chicago Press, 1952[1936]).
[263] Ibid., 25.
[264] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668,* ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1994), 123.

genuinely rest in the hands of any assembly with a right to make decisions about the monarch is an admission that obedience justified purely by self-interest will always be unstable.

The idea that "obedience" is instrumental for achieving personal needs is thus distinct from the "virtue of obedience" that, as we will see in a moment, has been a key component of Catholic tradition. When obedience is justified solely by appeal to the needs of individuals or the collective, rather than demanded by another's intrinsic authority, the sincerity and stability of one's compliance will always be suspect. Although monastic obedience is certainly, then, an individual virtue, it is virtuous partly on condition that authorities are entitled by their Office to the obedience of those in their charge:

> La désignation par les frères et sœurs, dans l'Esprit, et la prière qui monte d'eux tous vers eux, font que [les prieurs et prieures] portent dès lors, malgré leur faiblesse, leur péché, une toute particulière «grâce d'état» et qu'en les écoutant désormais, c'est plus qu'eux qui sera perçu. Reconnais donc en eux ce qu'ils représentent, plus encore que ce qu'ils sont.[265]

Without such a belief that the superior "represents" more than "he is," an ascription to a religious ethics of obedience would be limited by the perceived utility of this authority. He would be ignored whenever monks believed he was interfering with their spiritual development. Or monks would replace the hierarchy altogether with another structure for managing community affairs.

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[265]Delfieux, Pierre-Marie, *Fraternités Monastiques de Jérusalem, Livre de Vie, 6e ed.* (Paris: les éditions du cerf, 2006), 105.

> *Their election by the brothers and sisters, in the Holy Spirit and in the prayer that draws them all together, makes it the case that [priors and prioresses] bear from thenceforward, in spite of their weakness and sinfulness, a unique "grace of state" and that in listening to them from now on, it's more than just themselves who will be heard. Recognize thus in them what they represent, more than what they are.*

This idea of "representing more than what they are" is a useful and succinct statement of the nature of the monastic Superior's authority, which is why I quoted the Rule of this Order in this instance. However, although the mediation of the Church and the importance of Superiors are certainly acknowledged and respected within this Order, in practice these communities live very fraternally and obedience is much more an activity of cooperation and mutual listening than hierarchical deference. Note, additionally, the emphasis here on how it's *their election by the community* that guarantees the priors' and prioresses' grace of state during their term of office.

The monastic virtue of obedience is also distinct from other instrumental kinds of obedience we find in society. Many and diverse kinds of subjects understand themselves to succeed only if they successfully inculcate within themselves changes recommended by some singular dominant authority figure. There has been a great deal of recent sociological work that uses Foucault's idea of "technologies of the self" to talk about contemporary sports training practices, for instance.[266] Successful sports training is believed to require a certain kind of "docility" or capacity to follow the directives of one's trainer. Granted, this does have certain parallels with religious motivations for obedience. Indeed, when Saba Mahmood uses the term "docility" to describe the agency of women in the Egyptian Mosque movement, she draws an analogy between the docility cultivated by these women and the docility expected from those who would—for instance—learn how to play the piano:

> We might consider the example of a virtuoso pianist who submits herself to the, at times painful, regime of disciplinary practice, as well as hierarchical structures of apprenticeship, in order to acquire the ability—the requisite agency—to play the instrument with mastery. Importantly, her agency is predicated upon her ability to be taught, a condition classically referred to as "docility." Although we have come to associate docility with the abandonment of agency, the term literally implies the malleability required of someone in order for her to be instructed in a particular skill or knowledge—a meaning that carries less a sense of passivity than one of struggle, effort, exertion, and achievement.[267]

"Docility" is usually thought in particular in terms of the capacity to learn via authoritative instruction, rather than simply being a capacity to acquire new information from any source whatever. And the virtuousness of docility is extolled by many of the early Christians. Augustine, for instance, notes in his *Confessions* that his mother Monica once beseeched a bishop who was often called upon for such things, to intervene and try to convert Augustine away from Manichaeism. The bishop refused to help, as given Augustine's lack of

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[266]See, ex. Natalie Barker-Ruchti and Richard Tinning, "Foucault in Leotards: Corporeal Discipline in Women's Artistic Gymnastics," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 27, no. 3 (2010).

[267]Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (May 2001): 202-236, doi: 10.1525/can.2001.16.2.202, 210.

docility, he believed that such intervention would only drive Augustine further from Christianity:

> He told her that I was as yet lacking in docility, that I was puffed up by the novelty of that heresy . . . "But let him be," he said. "Only pray to the Lord in his behalf. He will find out by reading what is the character of that error and how great is its impiety."[268]

The need to uncover one's errors independently through reading is, according to this bishop—and according to Augustine himself, as he writes this passage—evidence of a *weakness* in Augustine: at this stage in his life, he is viciously prideful.

Similarly, in the *Life of St. Antony,* St. Athanasius extols the capacities of Antony—a third century Egyptian hermit often depicted besieged by devils in religious art—to submit to the instruction of the authoritative and the wise, in spite of his advancement in asceticism which could have led him to despise legitimate clergy with their comparatively easy ways of life:

> Renowned man that he was, he yet showed the profoundest respect for the Church's ministry and wanted every cleric to be honored above himself. He was not ashamed to bow his head before bishops and priests; and if ever a deacon came to him for help, he conversed with him on what was helpful; but when it came to prayers, he would ask him to lead, not being ashamed to learn himself.[269]

And Athanasius reports how Antony went about to other caves, learning the methods of other ascetics:

> Thus lived Antony and he was loved by all. He, in turn, subjected himself in all sincerity to the pious men whom he visited and made it his endeavor to learn for his own benefit just how each was superior to him in zeal and ascetic practice. He observed the graciousness of one, the earnestness at prayer in another; studied the even temper of one and the kindheartedness of another; fixed his attention on the vigils kept by one and on the studies pursued by another; admired one for his patient endurance, another for his fasting and sleeping on the ground; watched closely this man's meekness and the

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[268]Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1960), 92.
[269]Athanasius, *The Life of St. Antony*, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 10, trans. Robert T. Meyer (New York: Newman Press, 1978), 76-77.

forbearance shown by another; and in one and all alike he marked especially devotion to Christ and the love they had for one another.[270]

Great strength is shown by these men when they overcome pride and attain docility or a true capacity to be shaped by authoritative instruction and to imitate the examples of those they understand to be good. However, we should already be able to see an important distinction here between contemporary pedagogical docility and this kind of religious docility. Pedagogical obedience is usually regarded as a temporary condition appropriate to immature subjects or ones who are learning proficiency in some skill. Catholic obedience, by contrast— and particularly the obedience of professed religious (i.e. monks or nuns)—has typically applied to "mature subjects" whose personhood, competence, and reasonableness were not, historically, in question: it has been regarded as an "end" or part of perfection rather than a mere "means" of achieving perfection. Thomas Aquinas describes this as follows:

> *Reply Obj. 2.* As the Philosopher says (*Ethic.* ii. 1,2), by performing actions we contract certain habits, and when we have acquired the habit we are best able to perform the actions. Accordingly those who have not attained to perfection, acquire perfection by obeying, while those who have already acquired perfection are most ready to obey, not as though they need to be directed to the acquisition of perfection, but as maintaining themselves by this means in that which belongs to perfection.[271]

Religious do not "outgrow" the need for obedience, but instead docility is a disposition that is perfected throughout religious life: the most perfect should also be the most obedient.

IV. The Virtue of Obedience

"Obedience is a moral virtue which makes one's will prompt to carry out the commands of a superior."[272] This describes the virtuous disposition of one whose obedience is perfect. As the monk practices obedience and learns to esteem it, he becomes more "prompt to execute

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[270]Ibid., 21.

[271]Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas IIa-IIae, QQ. 1-189, IIIa, QQ. 1-90*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947-1948), 1976 (Q. 186, art. 5, ad. 2).

[272]Antonio Royo and Jordan Aumann,"The Virtue of Observance," in *Obedience—The Greatest Freedom*, 229.

the will of the superior even before an express command is given."[273] He obeys this human authority with the spirit of submission to God; without internally criticizing his Superior; without manipulating his superior into commanding what he desires.[274] He makes himself totally docile to the will of the one who represents Christ, even though this superior may be rife with faults as an individual and may command things that seem unwise.

The sisters at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity do more or less straightforwardly regard obedience as a virtue and docility as a desirable state of the soul. During one exhortation on the canonical vows, made to the sisters seated around her office, Mother Andjelika urged the nuns that in striving for ecumenism, they should not lose "what is [their] own": the Sacraments, the form of the liturgy, and the fact that "every abbot and Superior derives their authority from Christ."[275] Obedience maintains a primary place as a marker of Catholic identity. Emphasis on the importance of obedience—not merely to "God's will" but also to how this will is revealed through particular human authorities—has a long history in the Western tradition. Catholics trace an unbroken continuity of church leadership from the Apostle Peter to the present day Pope, believing that this head of the Apostles has been entrusted by Christ with ultimate authority over the Church. "Obedience" to authorities instituted by God—particularly those in the ecclesial hierarchy, but political leaders and bosses as well—is a virtue that remains an important part of the Catholic faith.

> The Lord manifests His will by His words through superiors, through events and other ways…
> Manifestations through superiors are the directives of the Church and of civil authorities. In the family, the parish, the school, the factory, the office, the club, the diocese, the community—everywhere we find duly authorized superiors.[276]

While Mother Andjelika can still identify many individual Catholics, and some contemplative monasteries, that maintain practices that are "more conservative" than theirs,

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[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid., 236-238.
[275] Fieldnotes, November 1, 2012.
[276] James Alberione, "Obedience—The Easiest Way to Holiness," in *Obedience—The Greatest Freedom,* compiled by the Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1966), 99.

this conservatism is criticized by the prioress precisely because it is "disobedient." The Vatican II–rejecting conservatives have broken with Papal authority, the prioress says. Out of obedience to the Vatican II and post–Vatican II popes, Mother Andjelika rejects the idea that those who reject the second council are truly "Catholic."

This virtue takes a specific form for religious (e.g. monks and nuns), who pledge "obedience" as one of their profession vows. This binds them to abide by their community's Rule of life, to listen to their brother monks or sister nuns, and to submit their daily lives and selection of their work activities—to whatever degree is expected in the particular type of community in which they live—to the direction of their Superior. Additionally, although I am told that this power is rarely, if ever, used, Superiors are permitted to put their vowed monks or nuns "under obedience" to perform some duty, and if this happens, the individual monk or nun must comply. The consequences of violating an imperative of this nature would be especially grave for the religious, and so it is generally understood that good Superiors will avoid putting anyone in that position.[277]

Monastics, other vowed religious, and theologians have written a great deal on the virtue of obedience, and I can't begin to provide a comprehensive account of it here. What's important now is to get clearer on what virtuous obedience is *supposed* to do to the obedient "self." Note that this is a different question from asking *what actually happens* to people when they live in monasteries where a strict expectation of conformity and obedience is upheld. The socio-psychological question—that with which I began this chapter—is important, but distinct from the one I am asking now, which is really about understanding why certain monastics believe strict conformity or obedience is virtuous in the first place.

Obedience is valorized both because it is regarded as an attitude that gives appropriate recognition to members of the ecclesial hierarchy (i.e. obedience from respect or duty), and

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[277]I heard this description of the seriousness of putting sisters "under obedience" at some point during my 2010 visits; however, I can't recall the circumstances in which I learned this, and I appear not to have written it down. The seriousness of putting someone "under obedience" is common knowledge amongst religious. That said, obedience was so highly valued in the community where I did my long-term research that I never saw anyone object to the prioress' requests with more than a pout. At the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, any refusal to comply with a command given by the prioress—even without the accompaniment of the phrase "I put you under obedience to do x"—would, I believe, have serious consequences.

also for its status as a valuable ascetic practice. Aquinas provides theological justifications for both the "obligatory" and the "ascetic" aspects of obedience in the second part of Part II of the *Summa Theologica*. With regard to the former, we find that Aquinas—drawing on Augustine's theory of justice, and implicitly also echoing Aristotle's account of hierarchical relationships in Book I of his *Politics*—identifies how obedience is a special virtue pertaining to one's relationship to one's Superior. Obedience is due to one's superior as part of the "observance" appropriate to his role: because he represents Christ. Likewise in Question 105 "Of Disobedience," Aquinas is concerned to show how the degree of sinfulness pertaining to "disobedience" depends not primarily on one's own internal attitudes but rather on the degree of respect due to the one who has been disobeyed—it is more serious to disobey the Pope than a parish priest, for instance.

However, Question 104 on obedience has a decidedly different tone to the discussions of "duty" that precede and follow it. While it is also the case that here Aquinas is classifying obedience as part of "justice" and hence a virtue with respect to other people, in his Question 104 it becomes clear that obedience is regarded as good *for the soul of the one who obeys*. He will develop this topic later in his treatment specifically of monastic obedience in Question 186. However, even in Question 104 where Aquinas' concern is Christian virtue—rather than the supererogatory practices undertaken by monastics—he stresses that obedience is valuable for its capacity to help the individual soul "adhere to God."[278] In Question 104, Aquinas does not advocate obedience for merely conditional, political reasons or for the sake of the social good, but rather for the sake of the spiritual development of the obedient soul.

This idea that obedience is part of becoming ideally moral is markedly opposed to Arendt and Brockes' journalistic descriptions of the "weak," obedient characters of those who perpetrated horrific forms of violence, and from the contemporary notion that only autonomous behaviour reflects the full expression of human capacities. However, while I have labelled the endorsement of living autonomously as "contemporary," Aquinas himself is aware of, and responds to, an objection that obedience cannot be a virtue because God has "left

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[278]Aquinas, *ST,* 1643 (II-II, Q. 104, art. III, s.c).

[man] in the hand of his own counsel."[279] He considers the argument that to advocate "obedience" would be an offense against human nature and hence against God who created it: we are created essentially as free, self-governing beings, so why should we subordinate our judgment to that of another human being who has the same limited nature as we do?

Aquinas responds to this objection by accepting its premise, that indeed due to our "nature" we are confined to our own counsel in all things. But he turns this objection on its head: because we are essentially free, we cannot help but follow our own counsel, Aquinas concludes, and indeed we do so even when we choose to obey our Superior rather than following our own desires. In a sense, Aquinas is presenting here the view that it is coherent to "choose heteronomy." He is clear, here, that while our volition *is* part of our nature, that this is never actually lost through obedience; and presumably he agrees with his interlocutor that *if* the will were to be lost—if one were to be deprived of one's own counsel—through obedience, this would indeed be an offense against human nature. Thus Aquinas decouples "agency" from "autonomy." Respect for human nature, or even for our "deliberative and creative capacities" in Oshana's terminology, does not require substantive autonomy. As Asad and Mahmood have stressed, we can deliberately and creatively obey.

And yet, Aquinas' assertion that we are confined to our own counsel does not mean that he believes "obedience" is without impact on the obedient self. Indeed, as I have suggested already, in Q. 104 Aquinas is quite interested to stress the ascetic value of "obedience": the idea that obedience works to purify the self. And so, Aquinas makes this claim about invariably following our own counsel while noting (quoting Gregory the Great) that "when we humbly give way to another's voice, we overcome ourselves in our own hearts."[280] Clearly Aquinas does not regard acting on one's own counsel and overcoming one's "self" as fundamentally opposed activities. In deciding to obey human superiors out of love for God, one retains one's status as a rational, deliberating human who has made the choice to obey; however, one overcomes "oneself." Thomas À Kempis would express this idea of "overcoming

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[279]Ibid., 1641 (II-II, Q. 104, art. I, arg. 1).
[280]Ibid. (II-II, Q. 104, art. I, ad 1).

the self" in the 15th century, suggesting that failure to cultivate obedience was evidence of spiritual immaturity and self-love:

> If a man does not submit to his superior gladly and willingly, it is a sign that his old nature has not yet learned complete obedience, but is kicking and murmuring still… You must learn a real indifference to self if you want to win the victory over flesh and blood. It is because your self-love is undisciplined that you are afraid to abandon yourself to the will of others.[281]

Often in Mother's exhortations to her community, and in the words of the sisters' favorite monastic authors, the vice to be overcome through obedience was labelled not as "self" but rather "self-will." Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange explains this term as follows:

> Obedience delivers us from a two-fold slavery: that of self-will and that of our own judgment.
>
> Obedience to God, to His spiritual and temporal representatives, daily assures the conformity of our will with the divine will. It thus delivers us from self-will, that is from a will which is not conformed to that of God, and which through pride goes astray, acting contrary to the current of grace and refusing to act in the true direction.
>
> Self-will thus defined is the source of every sin. For this reason St. Bernard says: "Take away self-will, and there will no longer be any hell." Self-will is particularly dangerous because it can corrupt everything. Even what is best in man becomes evil when self-will enters in, for it takes itself as its end instead of subordinating itself to God. If the Lord sees that it inspires a fast, a penance, a sacrifice, He rejects them as pharisaical works accomplished through pride in order to make oneself esteemed. Without going that far, we must admit that we cling greatly to our own will. Occasionally we hold to our way of doing good more than to the good itself; we wish it to be done, but by ourselves and in our way.[282]

Note that Garrigou-Lagrange here specifies that the will should "conform" to the divine will. He does not describe the will as "dying" or "being replaced by" the divine will. As we've seen Aquinas and Asad stress, the will is not "lost" by conforming but rather it is purified: directed away from "self-interest" and toward the

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[281]Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Betty I. Knott (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), 131.
[282] R. Garrigou-Lagrange, "The Grandeur of Obedience," in *Obedience—The Greatest Freedom*, 173-174.

greater good which may be mysterious or unknown to individuals. This brings the monk into closer union with God who dwells at the centre of his soul: through obedience he is no longer acting from self-interest but now according to the interests of the one who sustains him. Quite unlike Robert Lifton's "double" who finds himself fragmented by his obedient participation in atrocities, monastic obedience encourages the monk to act with a very high degree of integrity and authenticity precisely *by* allowing himself to be led by another person.

> In submitting our will, we yield and unite to God all the other faculties which are under its sway; hence, we yield and unite until Him our whole soul, which by degrees conforms itself to the will and wishes of the Master.[283]

In this quotation by Adolphe Tanquerey, the integrity sought through obedience is stressed: by submission to his Superior, the monk endeavours to redirect his will and the faculties under its direction to conform with the Divine will. Michael Casey expresses this relationship between "obedience" and "intimacy with God" as follows:

> Christian obedience is more than buckling under an authoritarian regime—be it ever so sanctified. The Gospels remind us often enough that obedience is the concrete expression of filiation. Following the example of Christ, followers of Benedict demonstrate that they are God's children by obeying. Obedience is the foundation of a richer relationship. In a state of disobedience no intimacy is possible. To express the same truth more positively, the medieval mystics remind us that it is conformity to the will of God that leads, after many humdrum years, to our transformation. What begins as obedience ends in our being possessed by love in the experience of contemplation.[284]

Obedience, as Michael Casey expresses here, is part of unifying oneself with God. Thus, when Aquinas and Gregory the Great describe how through obedience we "overcome ourselves," and when Thomas À Kempis stresses the importance of learning "indifference to self," it is clear that the "self" being described here is the "self" of the narrow definition which acts based on preferences or wishes indexed to her own individual person—purposes which may be out of harmony with the divine will or the good of others. What is sought through

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[283] Adolphe Tanquerey, "The Virtue of Obedience," in *Obedience—The Greatest Freedom*, 255.
[284] Casey, *A Guide to Living in the Truth*, 89.

obedience is union with, or transformation by, love: the directedness of the will toward purposes that transcend the individual and which reflect the highest good of everyone.

In the variant which labels this vice to be conquered by obedience not as "self," but as "self-will", the implications are the same: as Garrigou-Lagrange has described in the quotation above, self-will "takes itself as its end instead of subordinating itself to God." I take it that this idea that one retains, but purifies, one's will through monastic obedience remains fundamental to any contemporary endeavour to argue that monastic obedience is "virtuous." False, self-interested, flattering behaviour that masquerades as "obedience" while seeking its own advantage is, by contrast, condemned by many monastic authors: mere compliance, or compliance for personal advantage, is not virtuous. This marks a clear break between monastic obedience and the kind we find with Eichmann, England, and the participants in Milgram's experiments. These latter "obedient" individuals were interested in maintaining a good image in the eyes of particular authorities, to the point where they were willing to commit evil. Monastic obedience, by contrast, is only virtuous when it involves "letting go" of a need to seek one's own reputation. This isn't to say that that flattering, self-interested obedience never arises in monastic contexts; however, when it does, if it is recognized as such, it will not be identified as "the virtue of obedience." "If the Lord sees that [self-will] inspires a fast, a penance, a sacrifice, He rejects them as pharisaical works accomplished through pride in order to make oneself esteemed."[285] Mere compliance, without the renunciation of self-will, is not virtuous obedience. Virtuous obedience is in service of renouncing all forms of self-seeking, including concern for the esteem of others.

V. Monastic Obedience after the Holocaust

In the early 20th century, Cuthbert Butler explained that what is supposed to distinguish Benedictine monastic obedience "from military or naval" compliance[286] was the idea that true religious obedience should involve "interior obedience" or full cognitive and spiritual acquiescence to the will of one's Superior who stands as representative of Christ. In other

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[285]Garrigou-Lagrange, "The Grandeur of Obedience," 173-174.
[286]Cuthbert Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule,* 2nd ed. (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1924), 140.

words, in the early 20th century Butler was able to compare military obedience with monastic obedience without needing to add any caveats, as both were more readily interpreted as virtuous. It was even the case that Butler was able to articulate the difference between monastic and military obedience as simply one of degree: "monastic obedience" involved a deeper form of compliance, a more complete, internal acceptance of the will of one's Superior. *The Rule of St. Benedict*, to which all vowed Benedictines pledge obedience, expresses this idea as follows:

> Orders should be carried out cheerfully, for "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). God will not be pleased by the monk who obeys grudgingly, not only murmuring in words but even in his heart. For even if he should fulfill the command, his performance would not be pleasing to God who listens to his complainings.[287]

Likewise, the Basilian Rule—precursor to the Rule of St. Benedict—expresses the commitment to obedience unequivocally: "Never do what you will."[288]

While these accounts describe the virtuousness of obedience rather unapologetically, this is no longer possible in contemporary monastic discourse. When speaking with nuns at several contemplative communities in 2010 without any clear research agenda yet in mind, I found that "obedience" arose frequently in conversation. Sisters were particularly concerned to explain —in many cases, without me specifically asking about this—how their communities had rejected "infantile" forms of obedience. This rejection meant different things, depending on the community. A Trappistine guest mistress with whom I spoke in 2010 suggested that more dialogue is allowed now when commands are given, although ultimately the sister must still do "what is asked." In visits to monasteries belonging to the most liberal association of Carmelite communities (the CCA), nuns would tell me how community decisions were made today in more egalitarian ways than in the past, e.g. by consensus or vote, and how certain traditions of deference to the prioress had been suspended in favour of greater equality.

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[287]Benedictus, Saint, Abbot of Monte Cassino, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Anthony C. Meisel and M.L del Mastro (New York: Image Books, 1975), 55.
[288]Qtd. in Adalbert de Vogüe, *The Rule of St. Benedict: A Doctrinal and Spiritual Commentary, t*rans. John Baptist Hasbrouck (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 91.

Because of the evident concern many nuns had with this aspect of their lives, I had decided to make "obedience" the focus of my dissertation research in anthropology. However, during the one summer in 2011, when "The Ethics of Obedience" was the title on my ethics forms I quickly discovered that this focus was alarming for the communities I spoke with. In spite of sisters' apparent concern with this aspect of religious life, that season my work suddenly ground to a halt.

First, I was shut out of a Benedictine community: although I was welcomed and encouraged to visit, once I arrived at the monastery it became apparent that most nuns were taking pains to avoid interacting with me. They delegated the lay volunteer to show me around the monastery and otherwise tried to keep out of my way. I spent most of my time there agonizing over what to do about the situation and was informed later, by the volunteer, that the nuns had been hurt by writers in the past—journalists—and hence, most members of the community did not trust me. Although the concern, as reported by this volunteer, was not about my focus on "obedience" per se, nevertheless, I wondered whether this proposed topic contributed to the community's mistrust of my project.

Additionally, however, many of the nuns at this community were highly educated and—as reported by this volunteer—they, very understandably, seemed to resent how most writers portrayed them as "cute"; as curiosities. The two nuns I did interview at this community both had obtained graduate degrees prior to entering religious life. One of these sisters, during a conversation where I specifically probed her thoughts on "obedience," reflected on how obedience is not something "our culture" understands. She said it's "a Catholic thing," and affirmed, when I asked—knowing that she had been raised by liberal university professors, only becoming Catholic rather late in life—that accepting the value of "obedience" was very hard for her at first. This sister added, however—in defense of monastic obedience—that the "monastic tradition never meant obedience to be like military obedience." And another sister (or "Mother," as all professed nuns are called in the Benedictine Order), as she drove me around in her white SUV on a tour of the lands surrounding the monastery, distinguished Benedictines from Carmelites on their understanding of obedience, observing that "unlike Carmelites we don't do blind obedience. We're too American for that." She reminded me that here, they were

on the whole highly educated and that the abbess at their founding community had been "enlightened," which meant that all of these sisters had always known the reasons for things they were asked to do. "There was no 'scrub the floor and if you don't do it right, scrub it again,'" she said, "we didn't have time for those things." Nevertheless, this Mother did reflect—somewhat nostalgically—on the loss of the value of "obedience" from our culture: she expressed regretfully how teachers are now too afraid to discipline their students. But on the whole, she seemed eager to stress that my expectations about "obedience" would not apply to their particular community. She also expressed concern that by focusing on "obedience" rather than seeking to understand the overarching goals of communities—within which "obedience" plays a supporting role—that I would be missing the bigger picture.

I tried my "Ethics of Obedience" research proposal one more time, in approaching a treatment center for mentally ill clergy and religious. An initially-approved research plan was rejected after a change in leadership at that facility and a long, telephone cross-examination by the new CEO of the organization, who could not believe that my focus on "obedience" had no ulterior motives. A professed sister herself, she was concerned that as someone studying "obedience," I needed to acquaint myself with the degree to which individual religious, congregations and Orders since Vatican II had critically reevaluated the centrality of this concept, and she pointed me to relevant literature on this subject while firmly refusing to allow me to visit the mental health institution.

It's hard to know what was really going on in these interactions. However, as I was confronted by suspicion and hostility *only* during the season when "obedience" was in my project title, I tend to think these things must be related. With "obedience" on the table, as an academic outsider, it was perhaps feared that I would be taking a critical stance toward this aspect of religious life and its effects on individual agency. It was clearly presumed by both the Benedictines and the CEO that I would have a rather medieval understanding of how nuns engaged with "obedience" and that I would be ignorant of dialogue around, and revisions to, practices of obedience that had been made in recent decades.

I mention all of this because I think it's important to acknowledge the multiplicity of Catholic voices on this topic, and indeed to emphasize how a critical and dialogical approach to obedience was the *primary* perspective I encountered from nuns during my preliminary research. Sandra M. Schneiders, a scholar and IHM sister, writes about pre–Vatican II obedience in a way that clearly indicates a perceived distance between former norms and the present religious reality:

> Religious Life, prior to the Council, was not only authoritarian but institutionally totalitarian. Religious, both individually and corporately, felt bound to give unquestioned obedience, including intellectual assent, volitional submission, and prompt execution, to Church authority, making little distinction within the hierarchy of truths or among office-holders.[289]

Many "liberal" contemplative communities in the United States have in fact largely critically revised their internal organization to reflect values of dialogue, critique, and community participation in decision making. The undercurrent of suspicion about obedience that I perceived through these early research interactions reflected uncertainty within contemporary Catholic religious life about how, and in what situations, and to what degree, "obedience" is virtuous. This story, I think, became much more complicated for religious in the middle of the last century, and the second Vatican Council did a great deal to mitigate some former expressions of obedience and to nuance religious understandings of this virtue. One liberal Carmelite sister in particular took pains to articulate the purpose and meaning of obedience by explicitly contrasting the monastic type of obedience with that of Nazi Germany, while others, as I said, had spoken about the distinction between monastic obedience and the kind in the military, or the pre–Vatican II "infantilizing" type. That the nuns felt the need to make these distinctions spoke, I think, to the total transformation of the meaning of "obedience" in the North American psyche and reflected genuine anxiety about what happens to "the self" through obedience to authority. This makes Bauman's interpretation of the origins of our suspicion of "obedience" seem quite plausible: perhaps the operation of "obedience" on "the self" was relatively uncontroversial in monastic contexts prior to the sociological and social

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[289]Sandra M. Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context,* Religious Life in a New Millenium, Vol. 1 (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 186.

psychological work on "evil" and the dangers of normative obedience that emerged in the 1960s. Although Protestant and secular traditions had been critical of the ethical and epistemic *value* of obedience to authority since the Reformation, it may be the case that no example of *dangerously* excessive obedience would have readily presented itself to the Western monastic imagination before the Second World War.

If we return to John Cassian's 5th century descriptions of monasticism, by contrast, we find fewer "limits" assigned to virtuous obedience. Particularly in his *Institutes*, Cassian describes "obedience" as the chief virtue that all other monastic practices are designed to cultivate, observing that "the good of obedience … holds the first place among the other virtues."[290] He further observes:

> It is [obedience] that they prefer not only to manual labor or to reading or to the peace and quiet of their cells but even to all other virtues, such that they judge everything else as negligible in comparison with it and are content to undergo any loss whatsoever as long as they do not violate this good in any respect.[291]

Seeing that obedience is rendered "primary" in this way would surely raise alarms today for those concerned either about the wellbeing of the obedient, or about their capacity to make ethical choices that deviate from the norms of their community when necessary. Would Eichmann have been the perfect monk, if history had placed him in a different situation? If so, doesn't that suggest there's something deeply wrong with a value system that would regard obedience as indicative of a high level of spiritual development?

All monastic authors and theologians who comment on this subject, of course remind us it is never acceptable to obey commands contrary to the moral law, such that gravely immoral actions or those opposed to Catholic doctrine should never be performed under obedience.

> Religious profess obedience as to the regular mode of life, in respect of which they are subject to their superiors: wherefore they are bound to obey in those matters only which may belong to the regular mode of life, and this obedience suffices for salvation. If they be willing to obey even in other matters, this will belong to the superabundance of perfection; provided, however, such things

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[290] Cassian, *Institutes*, 94.
[291] Ibid., 84.

> be not contrary to God or to the rule they profess, for obedience in this case would be unlawful.
>
> Accordingly we may distinguish a threefold obedience; one, sufficient for salvation, and consisting in obeying when one is bound to obey: secondly, perfect obedience, which obeys in all things lawful: thirdly, indiscreet obedience, which obeys even in matters unlawful.[292]

This caution against indiscretion should, at least, prevent obedience from generating gross abuses of the kind found in the military or in prisons. However, the lives of many saints speak to the fact that the primacy of respect for the moral law has not always been sufficient to prevent violence against members perceived as deviant. See, for example, Stein's description of how John of the Cross was treated by his brother monks:

> At first every evening, later three times a week, and finally, only sometimes on Fridays, the prisoner was brought to the refectory where, seated on the floor, he ate his meal—bread and water. He was also given the discipline in the refectory. He knelt, naked to the waist, with bowed head; all the friars passed by him and struck him with the switch. And since he bore everything "with patience and love" he was dubbed "the coward."[293]

Subtler forms of violence like neglect of medical needs or ostracism of a member who has fallen out of favour with the prioress were occasionally confided to me by sisters at communities I visited during my preliminary research, usually when speaking about communities they had subsequently left. I would suspect that both of these are rather commonplace, although as "ostracism" at least is a typical problem arising in human groups—characteristic of schools and workplaces, for instance—I'm not sure it's fair to blame this on specifically monastic norms of conformity or obedience, and the victimized sisters themselves would not make this attribution.[294] That said, the painful intensity of these experiences is surely magnified in enclosure.

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[292]Aquinas, *ST,* 1645-1646 (II-II, Q. 104, art. V, ad. 3).

[293] Stein, *The Science of the Cross,* 28.

[294]In one case, a sister attributed neglect of her medical needs at a previous community to an otherwise good prioress who happened to distrust doctors. Generally speaking, sisters who reported problems of this kind attributed them to personality conflicts or vices of particular individuals and not to "the life."

In any event, canonically certainly "conformity in hostility" is not recommended. The extent of obedience due to monastic Superiors is limited to that which is included in the Rule of the community. Michael Casey, drawing on St. Benedict's Rule, makes the argument that not only should the Superior not command anything *contrary* to the moral law and the Rule of the community, but the Superior must not command in any matters that lie *outside* the purview of the moral law and the Rule:

> Unlike the contemporary civil rulers, the abbot described in the Rule operates within constitutional limits. His task is not to impose his own will or to dominate others but to be a spokesman for Christ (RB 2.2), his authority is curtailed by the Rule (RB 1.2, 3.11, 64.20) and by the injunction that he "is not to teach, establish as policy, or to give orders outside the Lord's precept, *extra praeceptum Domini*" (RB 2.3). Note the use of the word *extra*. Not merely *contra*, which would have signified anything opposed to the Lord's word.[295]

But although there are clear limits to the areas in which Superiors have jurisdiction, these limits in the life of the individual may be difficult to discern, given the strong sense in conservative monasteries, as well as in the historical literature, that one should obey promptly and without reservation. Some even caution against the type of obedience that always has an eye out for whether the Superior is overstepping the bounds of his authority:

> *Legal obedience*—the obedience of the person who is constantly referring to a law or rule, in order to know how far his obedience extends, or to check lest the superior exceed his authority in commanding. Such persons are pharisaical, and very often lack the generosity of spirit which should prompt them to obey out of love.[296]

Furthermore, the virtuousness of one's obedience seems to increase in proportion to how disagreeable one finds the action which one consents, under obedience, to perform. As part of his discussion of "obedience," Aquinas considers the suggestion of Gregory the Great that greater obedience to God's will is shown in situations of adversity than in situations of prosperity. Applied by Aquinas to "obedience," this would seem to suggest that an individual is most likely to be acting from virtuous obedience, rather than from his base desires, when that individual willingly obeys a command to do something which he finds unpalatable, or which is

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[295] Casey, *A Guide to Living in the Truth*, 99.
[296] Royo and Aumann, "The Virtue of Observance," 236.

at least not to his own advantage. Now, Aquinas is willing to allow that obedience to precepts that happen to be appealing or personally advantageous, if enacted earnestly and *for the sake of obedience*, may be as virtuous as acts performed from obedience which lack these concomitant benefits. However, it is clear that the desirability of what one is commanded to do is a factor which could potentially only render obedience in these situations *less* virtuous for Aquinas rather than more. This would make it difficult to know when to insist on one's need for medical treatment, for instance: it surely has seemed to many monks and nuns more virtuous to suffer silently.

Note that to actively endorse the content of what one's Superior commands does not make an act *more* virtuous according to Aquinas: agreement with the content of a command does not add moral or spiritual value to one's obedience and may in fact diminish it. Traditionally, virtuous obedience has been enacted from love of God and faith in his earthly representatives alone, and no virtue has been superadded by one's approbation of the contents of what one is commanded to do. This may cause concern amongst those with contemporary fears of the dangers of excessive obedience, as one would tend to think that compliance even with what we find disagreeable would be the most dangerous form of obedience; the least virtuous. In other words, we tend to think, post–Holocaust, and in the wake of Milgram and Zimbardo's popularization of their social psychological work on institutions, that if one fundamentally disagrees with a command that it is particularly important *not to* obey in these cases. For Aquinas, by contrast, the content of one's own will does not affect whether or not one's obedience is virtuous, except inasmuch as one ought to learn to will "whatever one's superior wills."

Aquinas stops well short of recommending obedience to immoral commands, as we've seen above. He is quick to assert that there are some sorts of good which "nowise ought to be omitted for obedience" such as "to love God."[297] And as I've said, he has assured us that authorities have their proper areas of jurisdiction over one's life, e.g. a commanding officer has jurisdiction over a soldier "in matters of war" but not in concerns about marriage.[298] Thus, it

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[297]Aquinas, *ST*, 1644 (II-II, 104, art. III, ad. 3).
[298]Ibid, 1645 (II-II, 104, art. V, ad. 1-3).

seems safe to conclude on the basis of Aquinas' discussion of "obedience," that one's obedience is no less virtuous (and indeed may be more virtuous) if one finds one's superior's commands to be *unpleasant*. However if one's superior demands that one commit an *immoral* act, or if these commands otherwise extend beyond the bounds of the Superior's authority, obedience is not lawful or virtuous in these circumstances.

So, the monk must still discern whether or not a request is immoral. But it seems to me that this doesn't put the monk in any worse position than anyone else: *everyone* is required to recognize when they are being asked to do something harmful and refrain from doing it. And as the monk's life is supposed to be dedicated to God, whose precepts are taken to be revealed in the moral law, it seems the monk should have an easier time deciding not to commit evil when commanded to do so than a soldier might, for instance. As "harming some humans under the direction of others" is often part of a soldier's legitimate business, discerning the limits of this harm would be more difficult in his case.

However, there remains some ambiguity concerning how far a monk should comply, because Aquinas also suggests in Q. 104 that "God can command nothing contrary to virtue:"[299] this would seem at first glance to extend this proscription against obeying immoral commands even to the commands of God. God too must only be obeyed if His commands are morally good. Or rather, since God is by nature good, commands are genuinely "of God" only in the event that they do not require immoral acts. However, this isn't what Aquinas means. When he explains that "God can command nothing contrary to virtue," he uses the example of the command given to Abraham to sacrifice his son, arguing that since "God is the author of life and death" it was not unjust for God to request such a thing of Abraham, and that Abraham did indeed have a duty to obey. In other words, Aquinas does not suggest here that the extent of virtuous obedience can be measured by conventional morality, but rather he suggests we should trust that God will command what is in accordance with virtue, even if it may appear to us otherwise.

Aquinas suggests that God is not subject to the laws which he sets for humans and can justly command us to do anything. And since Catholic doctrine upholds the authority of persons

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[299]Ibid., 1644 (II-II, 104, art. IV, ad. 2).

holding ecclesial Offices to convey the will of God, it becomes unclear whether the individuals under their command are authorized to make judgments about the justice of their Superior's wishes. In spite of Aquinas' distinction between the unlimited obedience due to God's will and the limited obedience due to human wills, a belief in the inaccessibility of God outside of the Church and its authorities could make discernment of the "virtuous" extent of obedience very challenging for those endeavouring to use Aquinas' theory to understand the appropriate extent of their obedience in particular interactions with members of the church hierarchy.

This risk is not merely speculative. Cassian in his *Institutes*, for instance, sometimes praises types of obedience to human authority we would now regard as lacking in virtue and in one case even as immoral. As for the latter, a monk particularly praised by Cassian in *Institutes* VI. XXVII—a section entitled "The humility and obedience of Abba Patermutus which he did not hesitate to perfect by throwing his little son into a river at the order of an elder"—demonstrates his obedience by making Abraham's sacrifice when it is requested of him by a Superior:

> XXVII.1 … Now I shall recall a deed of Abba Patermutus that is worthy of remembrance. He, desiring to renounce this world, persisted in keeping watch outside the monastery until, thanks to his unwavering perseverance and against every custom of the cenobia, he was called and received along with his young son, who was about eight years old. And when at last they were taken in, they were at once not only handed over to different superiors but even made to live in separate cells, lest the father think, from constantly seeing the lad, that, of all the goods and carnal feelings of his that he had renounced and cast aside, at least his son was still his …
> 2. In order to find out more clearly whether he [the father] made more of his feeling for his kindred and of his own heart's love or of obedience and mortification in Christ .. the little boy was purposely neglected, clothed in rags rather than garments, and so covered over and marred with filth as to shock rather than delight his father whenever he would see him… 3. And although the child was treated this way under his eyes day after day, the father's heart nonetheless remained ever stern and unmoved out of love for Christ and by the virtue of obedience … The elder of the cenobium, on noticing the steadfastness of his mind and his unmoving sternness, and with a view to testing his strength of mind to the utmost, made believe that he was upset with the child when one day he saw him crying, and he ordered his father to take him and throw him into the river. 4. Thereupon, as if he had been ordered to do so by the Lord, he immediately ran, took his son in his own

arms and brought him to the edge of the river, intending to hurl him in. Given the fervor of his faith and obedience this would certainly have been brought to a bitter end were there not brothers purposely stationed by the bank of the river, carefully watching, who somehow snatched the child from the current when he had been thrown in and prevented the command, which had been fulfilled by the obedient devotion of the father, from being carried out with all its consequences.

XXVIII. The man's faith and devotion were so acceptable to God that they were immediately confirmed by divine testimony. For it was straightaway revealed to the elder that by this obedience he had performed the deed of the patriarch Abraham.[300]

Here a child is neglected by monks and then ultimately thrown into the river by his father. One could hardly expect the 8 year old to take all of this in stride, as merely a test of his father's devotion rather than "real harm" and I don't want to make excuses for why this example of obedience *is* actually virtuous. However, I do want to draw our attention to how important it would have been, for those who could have interpreted this example as virtuous, that the one who was so mistreated by the monks and Patermutus was Patermutus' child. It is presumed, in assigning virtue to this example, that this is someone this father would love, want to protect, and view as an extension of himself. This was not violence against some stranger, and I presume that if it had been, it would have been straightforwardly immoral to comply—or rather, it wouldn't have been commanded to begin with. In the case of both Abraham and Patermutus, what was requested was willingness to relinquish their "strongest identification" in service of uniting themselves more fully with God. This was not violence out of hatred, then, but a test of their love of God against their most profound human attachment. "Now then, let us also place God before all those we love,"[301] says Ambrose of Milan, reflecting on Abraham's sacrifice. The moral duty to respect these children in their own right is, evidently, not taken into account when ancient authors praised the virtue of these examples. It seems children are, at this point in history, construed as extensions of their parents rather than as independent beings with inviolable dignity. Abba Patermutus' act would, I'm sure, never seem virtuous to religious

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[300]Cassian, *The Institutes,* 92-93.
[301]St Ambrose, in *Obedience—The Greatest Freedom,* 263.

today, because the perspective of the boy involved and our moral duty not to harm him would seem to overshadow everything else.

It's interesting to observe here that in some respects this example echoes closely a certain species of "autonomy" critiqued by feminists: for the sake of what is highest, I abandon my attachments and my relatives, and my capacity to do this is evidence of my strength and virtue. And yet, in all other respects the life described by Cassian is the very antithesis of autonomy, in the "global" sense I adopted from Oshana in Chapter Three. Here we find that adult men living out the extreme forms of obedience described by Cassian demonstrate their strength precisely by relinquishing their authority in all things, never doing anything according to their own judgment. See Cassian's *Institutes* IV.X:

> Along with this such a great observance is maintained, thanks to the rule of obedience, that the young men do not even presume to attend to their common and natural necessities on their own authority, to say nothing of daring to leave their cells, without the knowledge and permission of their superior. They so strive to accomplish everything that has been ordered by him, without discussion and as if it were ordained from heaven by God, that they sometimes take on themselves even impossible commands with such faith and devotion that they strain with all their energy and without any inner hesitation to fulfill them and see them through and, out of reverence for their elder, do not fear even the impossibility of an order.[302]

The total, all–encompassing nature of obedience is conveyed here most strongly. Obedience as an ascetic practice was understood by Cassian to ideally extend even to the minute necessities of daily existence.

VI. Obedience and Self-Transcendence

I think, by now, we should have some sense of the distinction between the kind of agency that monastic obedience is supposed to cultivate, and the kind of agency that we fear military obedience may cultivate. However, until now my discussion has proceeded by considering cases which for us may not have much intuitive accessibility. This emphasis may be appropriate for a philosopher trying to work out the moral implications of "obedience," and in

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[302] Cassian, *The Institutes,* 83.

my defense, the argumentative construction of this chapter—contrasting military with monastic obedience—was established more than a year before I commenced my immersive fieldwork. However, as an anthropologist, my job was really very different: I was to attend to everyday life. And in daily life in the monastery, these dilemmas—to kill or to disobey?—never, in fact, arise (thank God). And so instead of exclusively dwelling on these exceptional cases, I should spend more time speaking about what obedience in my field community was really like, most of the time.

It is impossible, first of all, to separate "obedience" from "the life" at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity. The rhythms of the day, the week, and the year, are lived according to the common schedule, and what happens within that schedule has evolved gradually through small decisions made by the prioress and her council in her effort to adapt the community's Rule to their natural environment and economic conditions, to address their various memberships in larger bodies within the Church, and to arrive at an asceticism in matters of food and sleep that will challenge sisters sufficiently without hindering their work and prayer. Sisters rise each day at 3:30 and gather for Matins in the chapel at 4, which is said according to a set programme that varies slightly depending on the day of the week and the season in the liturgical calendar. Then they pray together silently in the Oratory until 5:30, afterward returning to their cells to continue prayer until 6 and then prepare for the day. At 6:15 they gather for First Hour in the chapel. Breakfast is always bread and coffee, with slight modifications for feasts and fasts, taken in the refectory when sisters have a spare moment, at least an hour before Divine Liturgy.[303] Sisters meet again for Divine Liturgy mid-morning, then for the midday Office around 1 pm, after which they proceed to dinner. They then resume their work until Vespers at 4:20, followed by a light supper, more work, Compline, and then an hour of lectio divina before retiring.

At 6:30 am, when the work day officially commences—although some sisters' tasks require them to start earlier (e.g. the "cow sisters" who need to start their milking before 6)—

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[303]Divine Liturgy is the term used in this Eastern rite Catholic monastery for the Eucharistic celebration (i.e. "Mass" in the Roman Catholic Church).

solemnly professed sisters go about their assigned work usually without receiving explicit daily directions. Postulants, novices, and the anthropologist, by contrast, have their daily work assignments given to them each morning. After some months and growing familiarity with the way that work assignments change throughout the year, one begins to be able to anticipate what one will be assigned to do, but in the early days I found this daily assignment, the lack of ability to brace myself for specific tasks in advance, and having my work dictated to me by another person, very difficult. This is, I suspect, exactly the point of the "daily assignment": to encourage the newcomer to stop thinking several steps ahead, and entrust herself to the discernment of her Superiors. "But sorting raisins again? Oh Lord…" I know I didn't manage to conceal my disappointment, particularly in the first few months. And I often thought, "if only I knew whether or not I would be sorting raisins tomorrow, it wouldn't be so bad."

Conformity to the schedule, where eating, sleeping and prayer were concerned, I think I managed to do without much more resistance than anyone else. I found the prayer and liturgical schedule pleasant and even though I've been a haphazard and disorganized person for most of my life, I loved the routine and never grew bored with it. The Psalms form a key component of each of the Hours of the Office. Some of these repeat on an 11 day cycle, but others are recited daily. Because of the constant repetition, these latter quickly and easily became part of my own mental fabric, along with the Divine Liturgy, Vespers, Compline, and the prayers said at the end of each of the little Hours. In the beginning, I was navigating my way through an incomprehensible array of liturgy books, but through the patient instruction of Sr. Theodora—my "angel" during my time in the monastery—and the daily repetition, by the end I only needed books for the "moveable" parts of the Office. I find it immensely comforting to still be able to close my eyes and mentally recite many of these things. And each time I return to the Monastery of the Holy Trinity now, I am surprised by how I can pick up the liturgy and other embodied habits of how to live in the monastery as though I never left.

But I can recognize now the ways in which I was very bad at "obedience" where work was concerned. As someone who was incorporated into daily life and the work schedule, "obedience" in daily tasks became part of my life; however, I was—I'm aware—permitted many

more lapses in my attitude toward assigned work than a novice or postulant would have been allowed. Often, I can recognize now, sisters were gritting their teeth and tolerating behaviour from me that they would have corrected in a young sister. My primary hang-up, which I didn't even recognize was a problem for the first few months, was a tendency to look around, see what else I could be doing, and offer to help. In the beginning especially, I tended to think the jobs I was assigned were not especially necessary or useful, and during long hours of working alone at tedious tasks, I would think about where else I could be better used. But then, slowly, I was forced to recognize that I wasn't just trying to be considerate of community needs. If my offer to help in those areas was accepted, I would feel satisfaction about my new useful job for a day. But the subsequent day, when I was *told* to do the same thing, I would do it only resentfully, with my feet dragging. The work hadn't changed: the only thing that had changed was that in one case I offered to do something, and in the second case I was told to do it. I learned, this way, that actually I seemed to be *irrationally* attached to the self-direction of my work.

I can recognize, now, that the kinds of resistance I was feeling about work were not responses to the truth of my situation. Much of the time, I was experiencing inconsistent and distorted projections of imagined intentions that really reflected my own deep-seated attachments to work, and worries about my personal value. And slowly, through life in this structure, I began to recognize these attachments and projections, observe that they were unreasonable in many cases, and let them go.

I've come out of the monastery much more docile than I went into it, and I can only say in my case that this has been a positive development. Obedience, even in the limited form I experienced it as an anthropologist, led me to greater clarity and self-awareness. This aspect of monastic life "worked" on me. Now, perhaps someone who is naturally docile—prone to be compliant even in circumstances where compliance could be harmful—would not have found greater clarity through obedience. But I am not naturally docile. Probably no philosopher is naturally docile: it's a precondition of our profession to be suspicious of other views and prepared to defend our own arguments, even when everyone else can usually recognize it's

time for us to let them go. And my insubordinate nature has been recognized for my entire life. At the age of seven, I used to give my piano teacher migraines because I'd always demand the reasons for exercises she asked me to do, rather than just trusting her judgment. Fifteen years later, I had a similar complaint from a canoeing instructor, who found himself saying things like, "listen, I think this approach probably works very well for you in some areas of your life, but you have to realize that I know more than you do about this."

In the monastery, I was able to recognize that I had an attachment to self-direction "for its own sake" and I began to question the value of such an attachment. Around August, 2012—about six months into my immersion—I can really say that my sense of self "shifted." I went "deeper" in Stein's sense. I became happier to do what I was asked to do, and this was possible because I no longer saw work as the primary vehicle for expression and fulfilment of "myself."

So my capacity to suggest that our sense of fundamental, inalienable selfhood shifts along with worldview, values, and circumstances that awaken us to our attachments, is one to which I can attest on a personal level. Through obedience, I did "let work go" in the monastery in a way that has meant the "self" I am now does not require much in particular, by way of "self-directed work activities," in order to feel like a valuable human being. For this reason, autonomy now seems to me really optional as an ideal of agency, and indeed I think there are certain kinds of self-awareness that we can't obtain if our adult lives are very independent.

Monastic obedience, as a practice, is virtuous when it prompts us to recognize where we oppose others irrationally. Having recognized this attachment to having our own way—in opposition to others—we can let go of it and move deeper. Recognizing this should enable us to understand why Cassian's more extreme examples of obedience could be understood as virtuous. According to a view where the most virtuous person is one who only wants God's will and not their own, obedience in all things—even one's "natural necessities"—would indicate that one had wholly identified oneself with the will of God and let go of one's individual attachments.

VII. Conclusion

With this case of monastic obedience, we have begun to see how "respect for human nature" and even "respect for human agency" does not necessarily entail the cultivation of greater autonomy, in Oshana's global sense which requires "substantive independence." We have found that Aquinas endorses the view that one inalienably acts on "one's own counsel," while nevertheless regarding this essential freedom as compatible with—and indeed even enhanced by—a situation of "heteronomy" or obedience to human authority. Christian asceticism has regarded our "volition" as an inalienable, even if sometimes lamentable, condition of our finite humanity, the freedom of which is enhanced not through the acquisition of concrete avenues for action in the world, but rather through acts involving sacrifice and limitation of the "self" in the narrow sense, including through "obedience" to human authority.

This is, I think, an important intervention in the literature on autonomy. Contemporary Western thinkers who argue for the centrality of human volition typically don't then go and suggest that the inalienability of volition means that compliance can be virtuous for mature subjects. With the threat of totalitarianism clearly in view, the idea that one could give oneself over, without reservation, to a hierarchical structure, has seemed like a threat to the development of moral personhood rather than a potential aide in this pursuit. As Westlund has described, it seems that ordinary people can be "gripped" by norms of compliance in such a way that their responsibility for what they do under obedience is compromised. And yet, we can see how this suspicion of compliance has been a relatively recent development in the West and how even today we have a parallel tradition that maintains the spiritual value of obedience, albeit often cautiously and with an effort to respond to contemporary fears that obedience is dangerous. As I've argued here, there is more than mere "norms of compliance" at work in military and prisons, creating the evil that can arise there: in the cases of both England and Eichmann, for instance, we also find a cultivated hatred of the groups in subordination. Furthermore, in situations where soldiers are exonerated for evil committed under obedience, it is understood that soldiers are expected to kill and "interrogate" as part of their roles. This makes their discernment about the ethical limits of sanctioned violence very complicated. It is "normal" for soldiers to comply with commands to do harm.

Aquinas suggested that our wills are, in fact, essential to our humanity, but that this is not essentially compromised through obedience. We have seen Talal Asad stress this point as well. The "self," in the narrow sense however—consisting in states, qualities, capacities, etc. indexed to my individual person—is understood in the monastic context as something that should properly be overcome. As the locus of desire for esteem and praise, the "self" or "self-will" is equivalent to "self-interest" or "selfishness." The "will" purified of this narrow self can endeavour to love God and one's neighbour and to abide more perfectly by the moral law. Thus, transcending the "self" through obedience, for monastics of the past—and indeed I would argue for the nuns at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and at other conservative monasteries today—would not seem to imply that one would lose one's moral compass. This latter is, instead, supposed to be refined, perfected and purified of self-interest through obedience. In alienating one's "self" or overcoming "self-will"—allowing oneself to be replaced by Christ—it would only appear to religious that one should become more capable of distinguishing virtuous obedience from the vicious varieties.

CONCLUSION

Isaiah Berlin, in his "Two Concepts of Liberty," pejoratively describes the kind of freedom sought by ascetics as a retreat into an "inner citadel."[304] The belief that my "true self" is inviolable, above all determination, is construed by Berlin as a retreat from my attachments to my body and my circumstances. Berlin suggests this is merely a cowardly attempt to prevent myself from being hurt, rather than a genuine attainment of freedom:

> All political isolationism, all economic autarky, every form of autonomy, has in it some element of this attitude. I eliminate the obstacles in my path by abandoning the path; I retreat into my own sect, my own planned economy, my own deliberately insulated territory, where no voices from outside need be listened to, and no external forces can have effect. This is a form of the search for security; but it has also been called the search for personal or national freedom or independence.
>
> From this doctrine, as it applies to individuals, it is no very great distance to the conceptions of those who, like Kant, identify freedom not indeed with the elimination of desires, but with resistance to them, and control over them. I identify myself with the controller and escape the slavery of the controlled.[305]

Berlin rejects this idea of detachment as "freedom," and curiously makes his rejection by continuing this spatial analogy:

> Ascetic self-denial may be a source of integrity or serenity and spiritual strength, but it is difficult to see how it can be called an enlargement of liberty. If I save myself from an adversary by retreating indoors and locking every entrance and exit, I may remain freer than if I had been captured by him, but am I freer than if I had defeated or captured him? If I go too far, contract myself into too small a space, I shall suffocate and die. The logical culmination of the process of destroying everything through which I can possibly be wounded is suicide.[306]

Berlin identifies the narrow self, with its desires and aspirations, as "inalienable" to the self. Losing one's own desires and aspirations is tantamount to suicide, according to Berlin. Ascetics, by contrast, see attaining unity with the Divine will that transcends them "interiorly"

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[304] Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 135.
[305] Ibid., 136.
[306] Ibid., 140.

as the only way to be freed from the limited, partial interests that close them off to other people and to the needs of the world. We have seen how "obedience" and other means of limiting or constraining the actions of the "self"—like the norms of silence discussed in the Introduction—are ways ascetics move "inward," into union with their inmost essence.

I have emphasized, in this dissertation, how we should think about selves as occupying some standpoint within a world of values. We know "where we stand" because we feel the force of our identifications. Having recognized how different strong identifications or commitments shape "who we are," lending different configurations to the "self," we can understand "authenticity" as action in accordance with "who we are."

This notion of authenticity, as we've seen, may be quite distinct from autonomy, if we use this latter label for Oshana's global concept that includes effective control over one's own life. However, my account diverges from Oshana's in that she argues that respect for "global autonomy" can be derived from our status as agents with capacities for deliberation and creativity. Monastic obedience, however—as we've seen particularly in the fourth chapter— also requires "agency," deliberation and creativity. Autonomy is not always recommended by those who are committed to the idea that our "wills" are inalienable. Theological obedience, by contrast, tended to uphold the idea that persons should transcend or overcome the self or self-will, even though they could never overcome the will as the principle of action that makes people ultimately responsible for what they do. The nun who lives under obedience "chooses heteronomy" as a way of opening herself to the transformative potential of others who represent the same God who sustains her interiorly.

Thus I have argued, in these last two chapters, that it is coherent to value both agency and heteronomy. I have also argued, against possible objections to this view, that the monastic commitment to heteronomy is not incompatible with a concern for the preservation of rights and freedoms, and with a concern that the monastic environment should be one that is capable of helping nuns develop good moral judgment. Although we confront the idea of normative obedience with horror today, as it seems like it could generate a kind of Fascist character with an utterly alienated "will," the idea of "overcoming the self" toward which monastic obedience

is oriented means that a *really virtuous* "obedient monk" would be less compliant with evil commands than an ordinary person. By ousting states indexed to the "narrow self" from the centre of his being—e.g. "his own" preferences, reputation, etc.—he ought to become less concerned about human praise and more discerning about the good.

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